

## **Paul Preusse**

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**Paul A. Preusse** is the Response Operations Division Director for Region V of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) in Chicago. Encompassing the states of Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio and Wisconsin, he is responsible for coordinating the federal government's response to natural and man-made disasters.



Since joining FEMA in 2007, Preusse has directed numerous Regional Response Coordination Center activations, including the presidentially declared Midwest floods of 2008 where five of the region's six states were impacted simultaneously at historic levels, and the record flooding along the Red River of the North in 2009 and 2010.

Prior to taking this assignment, Preusse served with the U.S. Coast Guard. His tours of duty spanned 30 years of various operational and managerial postings including more than three years at The White House serving in both the Bush and Clinton Administrations. Nearly one third of his military career was spent in command positions where he oversaw Coast Guard law enforcement, search and rescue, environmental protection, disaster relief and homeland security missions.

Receiving his Bachelor of Science degree in Management and Economics from the U.S. Coast Guard Academy in 1978, Preusse spent his initial years afloat serving in the Coast Guard's largest domestic icebreaker MACKINAW. He later attended the University of Tennessee, earning his Masters of Science degree in Communications. Additionally, he is a graduate of the University of Michigan's Executive Program in Human Resources.

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### **Mega City/Mega Disaster Reduction**

Responding to and recovering from the socio-economic impacts of a catastrophic or extreme event in major metropolitan areas requires comprehensive efforts ranging from developing citizen preparedness and involving all regional stakeholders in rigorous planning, to adopting more stringent building codes and increasing the capacity to respond effectively. These are difficult and expensive challenges that will be driven largely by the real and perceived risk.

As is often the case, however, the high consequence, low probability event confronting most mega cities today will not elicit the sense of urgency or purpose needed to affect real change. Perhaps then, the greatest challenge to mega disaster reduction is to create the interest, involvement and leadership at all levels of government and non-government prompting the development of comprehensive action plans, and then maintaining the momentum required to implement the plan.

To enable such regional planning efforts it is essential to create collaborative consortia that bring together the key stakeholders from all segments of government, non-profits, business, academe and the community. Gaining everyone's involvement is necessary to establish an enabling rapport and trust among the participants that will foster information sharing and coordination. These regional consortia are also essential to identifying and assessing preparedness shortfalls, endorsing the activities chosen for implementation, and undertaking individual and collective solutions to address the gaps.

Beyond constructing the planning framework that addresses catastrophic events on a regional basis, perhaps more importantly, is the need to maintain the momentum that will ensure enduring advancement of the planning efforts. This becomes especially difficult as key stakeholders come and go, budgets ebb and flow and the once catalytic events that precipitated planning efforts grow more distant in the public psyche.

Stakeholders, whether government or non-government, are typically professionals in demanding managerial positions who engage in preparedness activities on a part-time or volunteer basis, or who move on to other activities after a short period of time. As a result, meaningful progress toward a culture of preparedness will ultimately depend on the willingness of these key regional stakeholders to aggressively take on communal planning and implementation, and to set up a systemic means of collaboration required to ensure ongoing success in propagating disaster resilience.