



**Remarks by Mr. Leon Fuerth* at the
National Emergency Management Association
Annual Meeting in Washington, DC
February 29, 2000**

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for the privilege of addressing you today. And it is a privilege, because over these past several years of working to bring our Federal government to support an information infrastructure for emergency management, I've come to *appreciate* that it is you who are in the forefront in protecting our population, our property and our economic and social processes from the devastation of natural and technological hazards.

Two years ago Dr. Baker of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) stood before you and introduced the idea of a Global Disaster Information Network. The goal of the GDIN initiative is to bring to bear to emergency management advanced, science-based information and communications technology. Our objective is to support your decision making, planning and execution processes through mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery.

GDIN was born of a recognition of the value of providing synthesized, on-demand, accurate, and relevant information in a readily useable format for emergency managers. It is enabled through uninterrupted communications from first responders through and to local, state and federal organizations. The premise of GDIN is that natural hazards know no geographic or political boundaries or authorities; that while emergencies are local, their consequences can be national and even global; and that as in any successful enterprise, information is key to good management. You recognized the value of GDIN and passed a resolution endorsing the effort.

Since that time the nation and the world have suffered great catastrophes of nature. And, as if nature needed any help, these catastrophes have come to include human induced threats, including terrorism, to our civil populations and way of life. In the past few years alone we have experienced devastating hurricanes, floods, fires, ice storms, earthquakes, and tornadoes. Compounding these events are such occurrences as chemical spills, animal and human waste contamination of water supplies, and, finally, disease. Timely information products are critical to all phases of management of these events.

Since the passage of your resolution of support for the GDIN, we've worked with our federal agencies and states on information products and organizational processes that validate and enable information infrastructure for emergency management. Our GDIN Team worked with the State of Florida developing a webbased decision support tool used in a hurricane simulation exercise. That tool was designed so that it can be implemented by other states if desired. The Team also supported the Red River of the North flood effort by developing a baseline data set for flood mitigation analysis for use by Minnesota, Wisconsin, the Dakotas and Canada. We've worked with the State of Hawaii's Pacific Disaster Center to test models for earthquakes, hurricanes, flash floods, and tsunami inundation. All of these efforts have associated with them a

training package. Training is key to understanding and utilizing these new technologies. We've enlisted the good offices of our interagency Senior Steering Group to support worthy efforts such as the Western Disaster Center in California. We've coordinated federal support to foreign disasters also, providing a central point of contact for comprehensive information support especially during times of crisis. But, it is the governmental organizational processes that are the challenge and not technology and operations. In that regard we have developed a draft Presidential Executive Order that would bring economies, efficiencies and effectiveness to the process of federal support to state emergency management infrastructures.

We've proceeded within these guidelines:

First:

Emergency management is a State responsibility and federal information coordinating activities must defer to State requirements.

Second:

Work within the parameters of the individual states. Many states have and are developing their own information systems.

Third:

Support the coordination and development of communications and information standards among localities, states and federal organizations. Interoperability is critical to good command and control of emergency management resources.

Forth:

Support State's emerging efforts in building information infrastructures. Over the past five years, numerous initiatives have revealed the potential for excessive cost by not taking advantage of economies of scale through cooperative ventures.

And Fifth:

Support the development of a public-private partnership to manage GDIN. The goal is to develop products and processes among federal, state, local and international entities that provide timely, accurate and meaningful information that support good decision making prior to, during and after disasters.

Ladies and gentlemen we can build a GDIN as a Federal/State team. Federal and State venues being what they are, I'm here today to let you know how close we are to having a GDIN and to ask for your continued guidance to include all states and for your active support. Our federal GDIN team and your State emergency management teams can usher in a revolution in environmental security. We can make our planet a

