



New York State Association of Fire Chiefs

May 11 2011

Hon. Barack Obama, President
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington DC 20500

Dear President Obama

We write to you today on behalf of our nearly 12,000 members, from career and volunteer departments alike, regarding Presidential Policy Directive number 8 dealing with National Preparedness. Our concern is that under the National Response Framework, the Emergency Support Functions Coordinator for Emergency Support Functions #4 – Firefighting, is the US Department of Agriculture.

In this capacity the USDA is responsible for coordinating resource support to rural and urban firefighting operations. The USDA, unfortunately, has absolutely no expertise in rural or urban structural firefighting or fire department emergency operations. Additionally the USDA has little understanding of the needs or capabilities of rural or urban Fire Departments. Clearly the US Forest Service/Department of Agriculture is the expert on wild land fires but has no expertise in rural and urban structural firefighting or fire department emergency operations such as; building collapse, technical rescue, hazardous materials response or WMD incidents. These shortcomings take away Federal credibility from the above agencies' proposed roles.

We are, in fact, fortunate that there is a Federal agency that local fire departments do believe to be experts in rural and urban structural firefighting and fire department emergency operations. That agency is the United States Fire Administration. For this reason alone the US Fire Administration must be part of the decision making process when planning the national response to disasters or WMD incidents.

“Providing Service To Those Who Serve”

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It has been almost 10 years since the terror attacks of September 11th and we still do not have a National Fire Response Plan for natural or manmade disasters or WMD incidents.

We feel compelled to remind everyone that every major terrorist attack in America involved fire and, except for the Pennsylvania plane crash, also involved building collapse. It is also clear that implementation of best practices learned from Hurricane Katrina or the Attacks of September 11th about responding to a national disaster have not been implemented in the fire service by the US Department of Agriculture.

With almost 1.2 million firefighters and 30,000 fire departments in the United States it is time to develop a National Fire Response Plan that includes standardization, mutual aid, regionalization and interstate response. Only the US Fire Administration has both the resources and experience in the field to be capable of developing such a plan.

We respectfully request that the review process directed by PPD-8 include an evaluation of the Fire Service to determine its capabilities and needs in order for it to be able to respond quickly and efficiently to national disasters or WMD incidents. It seems clear that the US Fire Administration has both the ability and credibility to be placed in charge of such an effort.

It is for all the above reasons that the NYS Association of Fire Chiefs respectfully requests that the US Fire Administration be assigned as the Emergency Support Functions Coordinator for Emergency Support Functions #4 - Firefighting.

Sincerely,

Alfonso J. Varlaro
President

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