STATEMENT OF

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COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC WORKS

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Introduction

Good morning, Madam Chairman and members of the Committee. My name is Richard Greene. I serve as the Regional Administrator at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Region 6, in Dallas, Texas. I appreciate the opportunity to provide you with an update on EPA's response to Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

The magnitude of the damage from these hurricanes presented significant challenges for EPA and our partners at the Federal, State, and local levels. EPA has long-standing and positive relationships with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), the U.S. Coast Guard and other Federal agencies, as well as our partners in State and local governments. As with other Federal agencies, our involvement is facilitated through the National Response Plan (NRP). We believe that these relationships provided the basis for an effective response to the most destructive natural disaster in the history of the United States.

Early Response for Hurricane Katrina

Beginning on August 25, 2005, EPA sent emergency response managers to the FEMA National Response Coordination Center and State Emergency Operations Centers to prepare for Hurricane Katrina to make landfall. When EPA arrived in New Orleans, it was clear that saving lives was the first priority. EPA responded to FEMA's request for assistance and helped rescue approximately 800 evacuees. EPA sent additional response personnel to the affected areas as soon as travel into the region was possible. At the peak of activities, the number of EPA employees and contractors assisting with recovery efforts exceeded 1,400 in Louisiana. We joined responders in addressing urgent rescue needs by putting over sixty environmental monitoring watercrafts to work as search and rescue vessels. Our field employees and contractors, mostly environmental experts equipped to address oil and hazardous substances releases, joined fire fighters, police, and other first responders and rescued nearly 800 people in Louisiana.

EPA Role in Federal Response

Under the NRP, EPA is the Coordinator and Primary Agency for the Emergency Support Function (ESF) #10, which addresses oil and hazardous materials. Specifically, our primary activities under this support function include: efforts to detect, identify, contain, clean up or dispose of oil or hazardous materials; removal of drums and other bulk containers; collection of hazardous materials from households; monitoring of debris disposal; air and water quality monitoring and sampling; and protection of natural resources.

USACE is the lead Federal agency for the ESF #3, which addresses public works and engineering, including solid waste debris removal. EPA helped support the USACE by assisting in the location of disposal sites, providing safety guidance for areas affected by hazardous

materials, assisting in the management of contaminated debris, and by coordinating or providing assessments, data, expertise, technical assistance, and monitoring. As prescribed by the NRP, EPA also provides support to other agencies for a number of other Emergency Support functions.

Hazardous Materials

EPA's primary responsibility was the collection and proper handling of hazardous materials. EPA provided technical advice and assistance, facilitated the recycling of more than 940,000 electronic goods. EPA carried out a highly effective program, in conjunction with the USACE, the States, and the local communities to collect and properly dispose of over five million containers of household hazardous materials in Regions 4 and 6. We also assisted in the proper handling and recycling of more than 380,000 large appliances. As part of this effort, EPA assisted the USACE by separating hazardous materials from non-hazardous debris for proper disposal.

Demolition and Solid Waste

FEMA is the primary agency for assistance under the Stafford Act Public Assistance Program which provides supplemental Federal disaster grant assistance for debris removal and disposal. The USACE offers state and local governments support in contracting for these services and for demolition services after local authorities have obtained any required waivers and clearances. To assist the FEMA and the USACE, EPA provided training for local parishes in Louisiana and contractors on Federal asbestos clean-up requirements. EPA also assisted by monitoring activities at over 2,300 demolition sites to help the State ensure compliance with the regulations.

Under Federal law, the permitting and regulation of solid waste is primarily a State responsibility. EPA has promulgated criteria to assist States in defining safe solid waste management and disposal practices. During the response, EPA worked closely with Louisiana to develop "best practices" and protocols for solid waste landfills to screen out hazardous materials, and route them to appropriately designed and permitted hazardous waste landfills for proper disposal. To assist the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality (LDEQ), EPA provided observers to monitor solid waste landfills around New Orleans to ensure that disposal practices conformed to the established protocols. EPA also established temporary air monitoring locations to replace the State's damaged air monitoring network.

Sampling and Monitoring Analyses and Activities

In addition to our efforts related to the disposal and/or recycling of hazardous and solid wastes, EPA used a remote sensing aircraft, known as ASPECT, to locate chemical spills that needed emergency response to protect water quality, and air quality. Additionally, EPA's mobile laboratory, known as the Trace Atmospheric Gas Analyzer (TAGA), conducted real-time air sampling in neighborhoods and near known spills. EPA also conducted more than 400,000 laboratory analyses of water, floodwater, sediment, and air samples. The analyses were made available on the Internet along with an interpretation of the results and recommendations.

To help ensure that drinking water and wastewater systems were properly functioning, EPA assessed over 4000 water systems; provided technical and engineering assistance in evaluating damaged infrastructure for both drinking and wastewater systems; distributed testing kits to private well owners and helped them evaluate the condition of their drinking water wells; and reviewed over 100 restoration projects proposed by parish governments. To further help

communities, EPA assisted in emergency efforts to bring clean drinking water back to the affected areas through monitoring of about 3,500 potable water trucks.

To address floodwaters and sediment, EPA assisted in collecting and evaluating more than 400 floodwater samples; 1,600 sediment samples; and almost 700 soil samples which were sent to the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) for analysis. The plans for sampling flood water and sediments underwent an extensive peer review process, including a review by EPA's Science Advisory Board (SAB). The SAB agreed that the sampling could help determine the potential for acute effects from short-term exposure to flood water and sediment. Sampling data were provided to ATSDR and to State and local health officials who used them to make decisions and issue advisories to the public, response workers and other Federal and State agencies.

Oil Spills and Hazardous Releases

With respect to oil spills and hazardous releases, EPA responded to 70 emergency situations that presented an immediate threat to human health and the environment, including chemical spills, fires, and other situations. EPA, and the LDEQ, with assistance by the U.S. Coast Guard, conducted assessments at hundreds of chemical and petrochemical facilities and more than 900 public and private schools to determine damage by the hurricane. As a result of these assessments, EPA identified six major spills in the New Orleans area resulting in releases of over seven million gallons of oil. The largest inland spill occurred at Murphy Oil in St. Bernard Parish, where a 10.5 million-gallon storage tank had moved off its platform and spilled about one million gallons of oil that affected over a 3 to 5 square mile area. Murphy Oil is now conducting a clean up of the area with EPA and LDEQ providing oversight. Over 2,700 houses

and businesses have been cleaned of oil on the exterior and more than 1,200 houses have had oil cleaned from the interior.

To further track potential hazardous releases, EPA, working together with state health and environmental agencies, conducted assessments of the seventeen Superfund sites located in Louisiana that were potentially affected by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita to ensure that the remedies remained protective.

Environmental Justice and Community Outreach

To address the unique needs of New Orleans, EPA reached out to assist diverse communities devastated by the impacts of the hurricanes. EPA met with the United Houma Nation and local community groups; facilitated meetings between State officials and members of the Vietnamese Community near the Chef Menteur landfill; created an Environmental Justice Interagency Taskforce (EJIT) to bring together local, state, and federal agencies, universities, and community groups, to exchange information and to address community concerns; and identified full-time staff to address community concerns.

EPA also convened the National Environmental Justice Advisory Council (NEJAC) to provide recommendations on how EPA can better respond to environmental justice concerns related to natural disasters. EPA is implementing several recommendations of the EJIT and NEJAC, such as adding to the Liaison Officer position in the Incident Command structure the responsibility to identify, highlight, and address environmental justice issues and concerns.

Throughout the response, EPA shared information and sampling results with the community through press releases, radio public service announcements, handouts and flyers, and electronically on EPA's web site. EPA also attended community meetings, visited churches and employers, dropped off flyers at post offices, municipal buildings, and local retailers - and stood

at check points delivering information to returning residents. In total, EPA distributed over 3.8 million flyers to people living and working in Louisiana.

Cooperative Projects

EPA is assisting the State of Louisiana through the Coastal Wetlands Planning, Protection, and Restoration Act (CWPPRA) program, EPA has a long history of successful coastal restoration projects, including barrier island restoration in coastal Louisiana. Barrier islands are the first line of defense against hurricane storm surge. The $13 million Timbalier Island restoration project was completed in June 2005 and provided over 273 acres of vegetated dune and marsh, which withstood the Katrina and Rita storm surges. The $10 million New Cut Dune and Marsh Project to rebuild another barrier island is underway.

Conclusion

As the State of Louisiana moves forward in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, EPA will continue to assist the State by conducting air monitoring, collecting hazardous materials from households, observing landfill and demolition activities, overseeing the Murphy Oil cleanup; and assisting with drinking water and wastewater issues. EPA will continue to work with our Federal, State, and local government partners to address the nation's preparedness for future catastrophic events, such as Hurricane Katrina.

At this time, I welcome any questions you may have.