



S A T O P

SPACE ALLIANCE TECHNOLOGY OUTREACH PROGRAM

News release

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FEMA's Administrator Paulison meets with Bay Area mayors

BAY AREA HOUSTON, TEXAS – “I need to hear what your issues are. That’s why I’m here,” FEMA Administrator R. David Paulison told a standing-room-only gathering of Bay Area mayors and other officials during a special meeting held in the conference room of the Bay Area Houston Economic Partnership on Nov. 6. Harris County Judge Ed Emmett had recommended to Paulison that he meet with the mayors of the cities on the Gulf side of Houston that suffered the most damage due to the impact of Hurricane Ike.

Gabriel Vasquez from Emmett’s office contacted Bob Mitchell, BAHEP president, to assist in facilitating the meeting. The partnership is a member-driven organization that includes more than 270 investor companies, business professionals, local governments, and educational institutions in southeast Texas. Its members include the cities of Clear Lake Shores, Dickinson, El Lago, Friendswood, Houston, Kemah, La Porte, League City, Nassau Bay, Pasadena, Seabrook, Taylor Lake Village, and Webster as well as Harris and Galveston counties. Mitchell commented, “I cannot overstate the importance of having Administrator Paulison meet with us here in the Bay Area. It provided our mayors the opportunity to relate their concerns directly to FEMA’s top executive. I certainly appreciate Judge Emmett’s effort in making this meeting possible.”

Several representatives from FEMA, Harris County, the City of Houston, and state and federal lawmakers joined the region’s mayors and city officials to meet with Paulison. He relayed to them, “Right now our number one priority is housing. I could not in good conscience put people back in travel trailers with the amount of formaldehyde we’re finding in them. Using mobile homes is much more complicated. We got a slow start. No question about it. But, we have 850 mobile homes on the ground now, and over 500 are occupied. The rest should be occupied this weekend.” He explained that the Army Corps of Engineers will be breaking ground on two group sites that will be used as trailer parks. Architects are designing the sites, which should be completed around Thanksgiving. He firmly stated, “I’m committed to stay on top of this personally until we get it done.”

Paulison then invited the mayors to tell him about their issues. He let them know that he wants to focus on the smaller cities that have not received the attention that they should have received. “I have 1,600 people on the ground now, and we’re going to bring in more. Our community relations people are going door-to-door to find those who are in trouble. If you have ideas, lay them out, and we’ll work with them,” Paulison offered.

The cities' mayors then entered into a discussion about the many difficulties they are facing. Checks from FEMA have been in short supply. Citizens are paying rent and trying to keep up with mortgage payments as well. Cash flow is a huge problem on both a personal and municipal level throughout the area. Paulison replied in part, "I know what you're going through. Having been born and raised in Miami, I've been through hurricanes. We're not going to be able to resolve everything, but I will resolve everything that I possibly can and do it as quickly as I can." He told the group that Secretary Michael Chertoff of the Department of Homeland Security will be coming to the Bay Area to address their needs.

Matt Campbell, national coordinator for FEMA's ESF #14, also spoke to those gathered about his services. ESF #14 provides a framework to promote successful long-term recovery for communities suffering significant damages, where local capacity is limited as in smaller cities. ESF #14 provides support during the formative phases of long-term recovery, usually for the first three to nine months. Campbell said, "Small communities struggle with reconstruction and redevelopment. They have high damages and small staff. We are here to identify communities that are particularly challenged, and we'll be working with Gabe (Vasquez) in this regard." The mayors in attendance immediately welcomed this type of program, and BAHEP will assist Campbell in initiating it with its member cities.

Paulison commented on the rebuilding process saying, "The money is going to come. The question is – How do you rebuild your city? How do you make it better than it was before? A lot of opportunities come with disaster to do some pretty neat things with the money that is going to come down the road."

Vasquez offered a plan where the mayors could meet with FEMA leadership every two to three weeks on a regular basis to increase communication and coordination efforts to work on long-term recovery. He stated, "The county works through BAHEP, since it is more local, and the cities interact with them on a daily basis. We'll work with them to plan the meetings and get them started."

Before closing, Paulison said to everyone, "I appreciate what you're doing, and I appreciate your professionalism today, too."



FEMA Administrator R. David Paulison, sitting at the head of the table, spoke with Bay Area mayors and other officials during a special meeting held Nov. 6 at the Bay Area Houston Economic Partnership. Shown to the right of Paulison is Bob Mitchell, BAHEP president.



A standing-room-only gathering of Bay Area mayors, FEMA personnel, and other interested parties filled the conference room of the Bay Area Houston Economic Partnership on Nov. 6 to share their concerns with FEMA Administrator R. David Paulison, seated at the far end of the table.

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