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## Mu+ual Aid

A FIRE CHIEF BLOG

### How FEMA Applied its Lessons Learned to Sandy

by Lisa Allegretti in Mutual Aid

Nov. 1, 2012  
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Michael Brown told a Denver newspaper recently that he believed the Obama administration moved too quickly in its response to [Superstorm Sandy](#). The president held his first press conference to address the storm on Sunday, before peak devastation.

"My guess is, he wants to get ahead of it — he doesn't want anybody to accuse him of not being on top of it or not paying attention," Brown told the *Denver Westward*.

Yes, this is the same Michael Brown who resigned as [FEMA](#) administrator after being accused of responding too slowly to Hurricane Katrina in 2005. Fortunately, FEMA seems to have learned its lessons from Hurricane Katrina, even if Brown has not.

"Better to be fast than to be late," current FEMA Administrator Craig Fugate [told NPR](#) in response.

It's too early to fully appreciate the damage from Sandy. As of this writing, the storm has been blamed for 88 deaths in the U.S., 44 of them in New York City, and numbers are expected to climb. The storm also is estimated to incur losses between \$30 billion and \$50 billion, according to the forecasting firm Eqecat, thanks to widespread electric outages, the lack of subway service in New York City, and blocked roadways.

But while those numbers represent huge losses, they don't come close to Katrina's 1,833 deaths and \$108 billion in losses, according to NOAA.

The sharp differences in losses can be attributed to the fact that the nation was better prepared after Katrina. The president signed federal emergency declarations — at the request of governors — in advance of the storm for Connecticut, Delaware, District of Columbia, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania and Rhode Island. Early declarations enabled evacuations and continuous response. Currently, this response continues:

- Federal, state, tribal and local partners continue rescue operations, assessing damage, and

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restoring electric power.

- The U.S. Coast Guard and nine FEMA US&R taskforces are staged along the East Coast, some deployed into affected areas, and the others waiting for state requests. Six additional taskforces are on alert.
- The Department of Health and Human Services deployed two, 50-person disaster medical assistance teams to provide triage and basic care in shelters in New Jersey. Additional medical teams are on alert. HHS also has personnel supporting 350 ambulances in New York City.
- FEMA is working to get people in need of shelter into hotels and motels and also assessing who will need longer-term rental assistance. FEMA already sent out more than \$1 million for those programs as of yesterday.

"The role of the federal government is to support the states when the disaster exceeds their capabilities," Fugate told NPR. "And when it's this bad, we work as one team."

And in its response to Sandy, it looks like FEMA did did a heck of a job.

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