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Integrating port and regional risk management strategies

In March, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) released Port Risk Management (GAO-07-412), which provided a series of findings on the challenges our nation's port and maritime communities are experiencing with respect to all-hazards planning. The investigators of this report outlined "interagency coordination" as one of several challenges requiring remedy.

Historically, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) sequesters funding for states, urban areas, ports and mass transit as well as other types of public and private entities. The funding silos of DHS — meant to manage and mitigate outstanding security challenges — have become roadblocks in the path to multijurisdictional planning for all-hazards events.

These silos do little to provide incentives for state and local stakeholders to collectively work through the DHS National Preparedness Goal (Goal) to leverage each institution's assets in the event of a catastrophic incident. Without these approaches, the national capacity for withstanding and responding to major events is weakened, causing concern and confusion much like

that witnessed during Hurricane Andrew and echoed during the national struggle with Hurricane Katrina.

In 2005, the Office for Domestic Preparedness constituted a shift in the way it was going to distribute the hundreds of millions of dollars for state and urban area programs. This shift was a result of the successful institution of an enterprise approach, which was applied to the port security grant program in the previous year.

This shift included two major adjustments. The first included a more refined manner for which DHS would rank the relative risk of one region or state versus another. Some regions are at greater risk from different types of events, such as terrorism, while other communities may be at higher risk of hurricanes or seismic activity. The product of this national (terrorism) risk ranking would then be applied to the manner for which a region or state would justify its "wish list" of projects by following the overarching doctrine of the Goal. This second adjustment, the "Investment Justification," while a promising step into the discipline of regional or statewide enterprise risk management, fell short of the desired outcome.

However, it has witnessed some promise in the 2007 Homeland Security Grant Program.

The nation's port maritime community has jumped well ahead of their neighboring partners by accepting the virtues of risk management as the principles for conducting their respective mission. By ports endeavoring toward an enterprise risk management construct, they realized the boundaries of their systems (both good and bad) as an asset for planning all forms of response and recovery operations.

Compliments should be provided to the leadership of the Port of Los Angeles, which is no longer waiting for its neighbors. Rather, it's going to apply a proactive approach to multijurisdictional planning as a means for which the Port of Los Angeles may appropriately serve its neighbors or make sure it does not inappropriately hinder its neighbors in the event of an incident.

While great progress has been made in the manner in which homeland security policy and doctrine support the maritime communities, much remains to be accomplished to fully realize how ports and all critical infrastructures may shore up our capabilities to respond to and recover from all types of

catastrophic events.

Ports and mass transit systems are a unique capability often overlooked as more of a vulnerability as opposed to a response mechanism. To empower these assets more fittingly into the response and recovery disciplines will only be strengthening the national tapestry of cities', regions' and states' capabilities to absorb and reconstitute commerce, and realize normalcy.

DHS leadership should look to ports and their enterprise view of managing all risks across their domain. These risks do not end at the fence line or regional boundary, but rather travel the expansive complicated processes of international movement of goods and people.

As ports further evolve their enterprise risk management as a function of business continuity and reconstitution, it's important that their neighboring jurisdictions share in the practice of appreciating that the management, mitigation strategies and risk transfer options do not end at the fence line or funding boundary.

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