

PRESS STATEMENT

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

NEMA a Big Bust in Grand Bahama

During the years of the Christie Administration the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) was a vibrant and thriving organization on the move to full autonomy. The Bahamas joined forces with The State of Rhode Island Emergency Management Agency (REMA) to accelerate the proper development of a national emergency plan, which covered every area of disaster management including Tourism. All Family Island Administrators, Local Government Chief Councilors / Chairman, selected individuals from all relevant government, individuals from other Non Governmental Agencies (NGO's), and other selected individuals from throughout the country were all a part of the program.

Some of the training programs conducted during those years where IDA (Initial Damage Assessment), DANA (Damage Assessment Needs Analysis), CERT (Community Emergency Response Team), Building Disaster Plans using Emergency Support Functions (ESF), CEDERA (Caribbean Emergency Disaster Response Association), Shelter Management, Oil Spill and Chemical Control, and a few others. When one considers the range and scope of the national training done as indicated above, it is clear to appreciate the level of national focus and commitment of the Christie Administration toward disaster preparedness and Emergency Management.

The State of Affairs with NEMA today.

- Mr. Carl Smith who was the interim director and man leading the charge with a passion was sent out of the country without a proper hand-over to sustain the program.
- No National training has been conducted since May 2nd, 2007
- There has been no meeting or attempt to bring the previously trained individuals together to discuss the position of the agency.
- There is no official NEMA office present in any of the Family Islands including Grand Bahama, not even a direct phone line for the lone receptionist working out of the Administrator's office in Freeport.
- Grand Bahama Meteorology operation was closed on December 31st 2009.
- The National Emergency Plan is managed simply by a small group of people in NEMA's office in Nassau. Therefore, there is no National Plan. Each island, each community, and even each family should know and understand the plan.
 - **NEMA is running on fumes, there is no gas in the tank!**

Tornados in Grand Bahama

Several tornados ravaged the island of Grand Bahama on Monday March 29th, 2010 leaving 3 dead in its wake. The major container port was badly damaged; a hotel was seriously damaged; large apartment complexes and homes were destroyed in an upscale community; homes were destroyed in the tranquil community of Hepburn Town Eight Mile Rock; the Port Lucaya Market Place was damaged; the Reef Golf Course was severely damaged; and buildings in the Midshipmen area of Lucaya were also damaged.

As a result of the state of affairs at NEMA on the island the following SOP (Standard Operating Procedures) never took place.

- Even though Meteorologists in Florida had issued a severe Thunder Storm warning for the South Florida Area as well as areas including Grand Bahama from around 2:00 am Monday Morning, upgrading the warning to a Tornado watch around 4:00 am followed by a tornado warning which was to remain in effect until 12 mid-day with Grand Bahama in the possible danger zone, absolutely no warning was issued from any local officials on the island.
- An official emergency bulletin should have been posted on all the local radio stations advising accordingly.
- Schools should have been automatically canceled for the day, taking children, their parents, and other transportation operators out of harms-way
- Immediately following the incident an IC (Incident Commander) should have been named to avoid chaos.
- Immediately following the event, and initial search and rescue exercise should have been conducted in the affected areas.
- An immediate initial damage assessment exercise should have been conducted.
- **A damage assessment needs analysis exercise should have been conducted jointly with such agencies as Social Services, Red Cross, Police, Utilities, Local Government, Ministry of Public Works, Ministry of Tourism, and the Ministry of Housing.**
- A Hot line should have been set-up to provide basic answers to concern local as well as residents living abroad or on other islands.
- A PIC (Public Information Center) should have been set-up to provide the media with regular updates.
- A Government counseling center should have been put in operation within 24 hours for all, including school children and tourist alike.
- A crisis information center specially designed to address the concerns of all on-island tourists should have been established with at least a news flyer briefing sent out to each hotel.

As a result of this Government's petty partisan policies and its commitment to destroy "Christie Programs", NEMA was a total failure to the people of Grand Bahama during their hour of need. A day later the above mentioned SOP's have still not been done or even started; this is indeed a classic case of a disaster within a disaster.

It is noteworthy that the responsibility for NEMA falls within the portfolio of the Rt. Hon. Prime Minister Hubert Ingraham. Make no mistake about it, the root cause of the loss of life, injury, chaos and misinformation in the tornado's aftermath is an abject failure in leadership at the highest level.

The people of Grand Bahama must hold Prime Minister Hubert Ingraham the FNM Government accountable for its failure to provide all the safety mechanisms to ensure mitigation against lost of life, property and unnecessary grief and suffering.