

# Q & A for NHC



## Matthew Green

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MANAGER**

**FEMA**

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### **How did an on-site FEMA liaison come about at NHC?**

For about two decades, there has been a partnership between FEMA and the National Hurricane Center (NHC) to develop storm surge zones, perform hurricane evacuation studies, and conduct training for emergency managers here at NHC.

The idea of placing someone from FEMA at NHC for an actual storm occurred during the 1995 hurricane season. It was so successful that, in the following year, then Florida Governor, Lawton Chiles, requested that FEMA codify a team and make it official. So 1996 is when FEMA along with the state of Florida started sending folks down here when a storm threatened.

### **But it was not a year round thing, just during an event?**

It was only on an as-needed basis. The NHC director would request the FEMA support to bring people here.

### **What would be their role?**

The role of the Hurricane Liaison Team is to augment communications. The team assists emergency managers along the coast when facing the threat of a hurricane. We supply further guidance on the forecast of the storm, assist in understanding the confidence in the forecast, and assist in evacuation decisions.

### **When did it evolve into having someone at NHC year round?**

During National Hurricane Preparedness Week in 2003, the head of FEMA's Response Division (now called the Disaster Operations Directorate), was at NHC and discussed with then NHC Director, Max Mayfield, about having a permanent FEMA position at NHC.

### **So, you're the first?**

I arrived on the job in July 2004.

### **You have a background in meteorology, right?**

Yes, I have a Bachelor of Science in Meteorology from McGill University in Montreal, Canada, and a Masters in Meteorology from Florida State University.

### **Is the meteorology degree a plus in this position?**

Oh, yes. Before I took this job, I was the State Meteorologist for the Florida Division of Emergency Management. The meteorology absolutely helps in this job because the responsibility here is to speak to both the emergency managers and meteorologists in terms they understand. Being a meteorologist and understanding what the hurricane forecasters are talking about and having professional experience with emergency managers provides the ability to communicate between the two.

Craig Fugate, who was my boss with the State of Florida and is now the FEMA Administrator, used to say that he liked to hire meteorologists because they are already critical thinkers and can be taught emergency management.

### **There is a misnomer that NHC orders the evacuations when a hurricane is approaching.**

Evacuations across the country are conducted by many jurisdictions. In some states, the governor calls for evacuations, others it's the county government, and in some places it is home rule. Every town, every city, it is up to them to make the decision. So there is no "one size fits all".

### **How does everyone stay at the same page?**

One of the main functions of the Hurricane Liaison Team is to provide a video-teleconference (VTC) briefing from the National Hurricane Center during a major response. The VTC is coordinated by FEMA's National Response Coordination Center and we have all of the threatened states, the federal government and the White House on the call where the NHC Director can brief all of the parties. This is highly effective because everyone hears the same information at the same time, and they share their issues, limitations, plans and timelines. In addition, most states now have state conference calls with their affected communities and their local National Weather Service offices and discuss their issues at that level.

### **Are you involved in the state calls as well?**

Usually I am not, but there are some jurisdictions I am involved, namely Florida. Florida is fairly unique. Usually NHC will provide the 50 thousand foot view on these national and state level calls, and local forecast office is responsible for providing what the actual impacts are. It is the impacts that people are really preparing for and responding to.

### **You mentioned public response. What's your greatest challenge in here when it comes to that?**

In this office, we are not working directly with the public; we are working with the emergency managers. Our job is to provide emergency managers with the support, information and tools they need so that they can make clear and confident decisions.

### **And that's not an easy job for them.**

No, it's not. One of the things that is incredibly important is for elected officials and emergency managers to feel confident in the decisions being made so that their communication with the public is calm, clear and direct. We try to assist them any way that we can.

### **What do you like best about the job here?**

It may sound cheesy, but ever since I was a little kid, I wanted to work at the National Hurricane Center. I remember my Dad taking me to meet one of the local TV meteorologists and I told him I wanted to work at NHC. He said that is great, but do you realize you will be in college for four years, graduate school for another three years, and another three plus years for a Ph.D. before you start working at the hurricane center. I was like, wow! The moral of the story is that I think it's pretty awesome that I'm working at NHC. Now, it's not what I anticipated doing, but it's pretty exciting, nonetheless. I really enjoy my job.

**So, you saw yourself as a forecaster?**

I always thought I would, I did not have any concept that I would be working for FEMA. I didn't even know what FEMA was when I was a kid.

**Is there a downside to the job?**

Well, there is no window in my office.

**Where would you like to go from here?**

I'd always thought that I would be in (Washington) DC sometime, but I have to say I really like what I do, so I am not in a rush to leave NHC.

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