

Video Script: “A Message from the Inspector General: Review of the Department of Justice’s Preparedness to Respond to Critical Incidents Under Emergency Support Function 13,” February 2020

Hello, I’m Michael Horowitz, Inspector General for the U.S. Department of Justice.

When the United States experiences a natural or manmade disaster, such as hurricanes or terrorist attacks, the Federal Emergency Management Agency can activate a response mechanism, known as Emergency Support Function 13, or ESF-13, to provide federal public safety and security assistance to state, local, tribal, territorial, and other governmental organizations overwhelmed by the results of the disaster.

Background image: ATF Special Agents provide force protection for an ESF-13 Federal Operational Support mission.

Today, my office released a report examining the Justice Department’s preparedness to respond to critical incidents as part of ESF-13. We found that the DOJ has taken steps in recent years to improve its readiness; but we also identified several areas in need of further improvement.

One such area is the need for coordination between different components of the Justice Department. For example, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives, or ATF, serves as the lead coordinating agency for ESF-13.

Background image: ESF-13 personnel support with aid of a high water vehicle.

Background image: Mobile command center vans.

However, the Attorney General can simultaneously designate another official, called the Senior Federal Law Enforcement Official, to oversee emergency responses by law enforcement agencies.

Background image: FBI Special Agent provides force protection.

Background image: BOP logistics personnel.

Historically, this Official has come from the FBI, rather than ATF. Despite the clear potential for overlap, as initially occurred in the response to Hurricane Harvey, our review found that there is no DOJ policy specifying the Senior Federal Law Enforcement Official’s role and mission, or how this official should coordinate with the ESF-13 response when both are activated.

Our report makes several other findings and recommendations related to ESF-13, including that the DOJ should take steps to ensure that federal law enforcement officers are fully aware of the hazards they may face and the scope of their legal authority when deployed.

To read the report and all of our findings, visit our website, oig.justice.gov, or go to oversight.gov.

Thank you for joining me today.

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