

**Statement of
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Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department**

**Before the
Committee on Foreign Affairs
Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific
United States House of Representatives**

May 24, 2011

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Faleomavaega, and Members of the Committee, thank you for inviting me to testify today at this very important hearing. I will focus my testimony today on our rescue efforts and the level of devastation in the aftermath of the tragic earthquake and tsunami.

First, I would like to extend my deepest condolences to those who lost loved ones, homes and livelihoods in the affected areas.

On March 11 at 1446 hours in Japan, a magnitude 9.0 earthquake—the fifth largest in the world since 1900—occurred near the east coast of Honshu, at a depth of approximately 15 miles. According to the U.S. Geological Survey, the epicenter of the earthquake was located 80 miles east of Sendai, the capital of Miyagi Prefecture, and 231 miles northeast of Tokyo.

The earthquake generated a large tsunami that struck Fukushima Prefecture, resulting in additional fatalities and damage. At the time, media reports indicated that the earthquake and tsunami resulted in at least 300 deaths and hundreds of injuries.

USAID maintains agreements with two FEMA-certified domestic USAR teams – Los Angeles County in California and Fairfax County in Virginia. The teams maintain twenty-four/seven readiness to deploy to international disasters when requested by the affected country and the U.S. chief of mission.

Within three hours of the earthquake, the U.S. Agency for International Development’s Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance gave an “Alert” to begin preparing for a possible USAR deployment to Japan. This alert allows us to begin bringing in our team’s command and general staff and preparing our equipment for deployment.

USAID requested two USAR teams – one from each fire department. The two teams were composed of 148 personnel trained in search, rescue, and medical services and 12 live rescue search canines like Atticus, who is here today with his handler Jennifer Massey. Working under the direction of experienced handlers like Jennifer, our live search canines are able to locate live victims in the rubble.

Along with personnel and canines, we also bring with us a great deal of search and rescue equipment for operating in any type of construction and structure. Each team has the capacity for physical, canine, and electronic searches or what the average person often refers to as looking, sniffing and listening.

We also bring with us a vast emergency medical capacity, which allows for the treatment of injured team members and victims encountered during operations. Other highly-trained specialists on our teams are able to assess damage, determine needs, provide feedback to local officials, and conduct hazardous materials surveys and evaluations of affected areas. The teams that deployed to Japan also had a water-rescue capacity, which was anticipated to be in demand due to the presence of heavily flooded areas.

USAID deployed two “heavy” teams to Japan – one from Fairfax and one from Los Angeles. This means the teams have the highest classification provided under the UN-sponsored International Search and Rescue Advisory Group (INSARAG) and designates the ability to search in any type of building collapse, including reinforced concrete.

The two U.S. teams arrived in Misawa, Japan on March 13th. We landed on a U.S. military airbase. The military greeted, housed, and fed us. Our 60-ton equipment cache was transported on trucks operated by U.S. airmen, all of whom had experienced the quake and were very happy to see us.

After an initial inbrief by local officials, we were immediately dispatched to Ofunato City – one of the most-affected areas in Iwate Prefecture in northeastern Japan. With the Japanese Ministry of Defense transporting a portion of our equipment from Misawa Air Force Base, we established a base of operations at Setamai school in Sumita. We had had readiness meetings with local authorities to establish operational assignments, search criteria, and incident objectives. At first light on March 15, the teams headed out to begin search and rescue operations alongside the Japanese and international search and rescue teams.

Our two U.S. teams searched with teams from the United Kingdom, China, and with many of our brothers from Osaka and Ofunato fire departments. House by house and building by building, we scoured the debris ravaged remains of Ofunato looking for survivors.

There were heavy losses in the once thriving community. Large boats and ships were scattered throughout the area, with many resting between buildings. Vehicles were all over rooftops, but the majority of buildings in the low-lying areas were simply gone. Some people had lost everything: family, friends, their homes and businesses. And yet we were greeted with an outpouring of kindness that none of us will soon forget.

After searching in Ofunato city, we were unable to locate any survivors. Local officials asked that we then move our search location to Kamaishi, north of Ofunato. Much like in our previous search, the wall of water generated by the enormous quake destroyed the area surrounding the bay. Houses and buildings were unrecognizable, and debris was everywhere.

As a rescuer combing through the rubble, we are always searching for voids. Even the smallest void space could provide enough room for someone to possibly survive. The Fairfax and Los Angeles County USAR teams were deployed in the aftermath of the January 2010 earthquake in Haiti, where the U.S. teams were able to make an unprecedented 47 live rescues. Some of these rescues were made in void spaces so small and precarious that I still can't fathom how one survived.

But in Japan, we were also searching in areas where the tsunami had utterly washed over and through nearly every possible void space. So if one might have survived the earthquake in a void, they then had to beat the odds a second time when the tsunami struck. Compound this with the fact that the weather was below freezing, and we knew the likelihood of finding someone alive was very slim. And yet the U.S. teams and our partners never gave up hope as we searched every inch of our assigned locations.

We demobilized and returned home on March 20th after searching all locations assigned to us by the Japanese government. It was difficult to accept that we were unable to find survivors, but we were honored to have been deployed to help the Japanese people in their time of need. Everywhere we went in Japan, we were warmly greeted by a resilient population that extended their arms to embrace our rescue teams, even in the face of such utter tragedy.

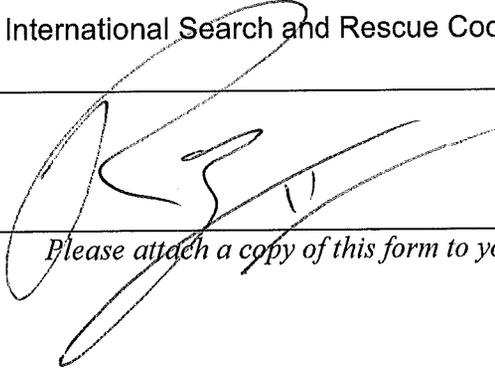
On behalf of the USAR teams in Los Angeles and Fairfax, I would like to thank the government of Japan for inviting us and the U.S. Government for deploying us to assist in the aftermath of this tragic disaster. I would also like to thank the Board of Supervisors in Fairfax and Los Angeles counties for their unwavering support of our international search and rescue efforts.

I am happy to take any questions you may have.

**United States House of Representatives
Committee on Foreign Affairs**

“TRUTH IN TESTIMONY” DISCLOSURE FORM

Clause 2(g) of rule XI of the Rules of the House of Representatives and the Rules of the Committee require the disclosure of the following information. A copy of this form should be attached to your written testimony and will be made publicly available in electronic format, per House Rules.

1. Name:	2. Organization or organizations you are representing:
Robert J. Zoldos II	Fairfax County Urban Search and Rescue
3. Date of Committee hearing:	
May 24, 2011	
4. Have <u>you</u> received any Federal grants or contracts (including any subgrants and subcontracts) since October 1, 2008 related to the subject on which you have been invited to testify?	5. Have any of the <u>organizations you are representing</u> received any Federal grants or contracts (including any subgrants and subcontracts) since October 1, 2008 related to the subject on which you have been invited to testify?
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
6. If you answered yes to either item 4 or 5, please list the source and amount of each grant or contract, and indicate whether the recipient of such grant was you or the organization(s) you are representing. You may list additional grants or contracts on additional sheets.	
DHS/FEMA National Urban Search and Rescue Readiness Cooperative Agreement \$3,160,839 DHS/FEMA National Urban Search and Rescue Response Cooperative Agreement \$1,998,400 USAID/OFDA International Search and Rescue Cooperative Agreement \$11,836,890	
7. Signature:	
	

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