

BALTIMORE SUN

Port gets 'near perfect' marks in security review
Report is part of assessment on state's emergency preparedness
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The port of Baltimore, which a year ago was criticized by the Coast Guard for shortcomings in security, has been given "near perfect" marks in its most recent review, according to the federal agency.

Capt. Brian Kelley, the chief Coast Guard officer at the port, said the Maryland Port Administration has made significant strides in correcting the security flaws found in a 2007 inspection.

Kelley did not quantify the two reports on any scale but said the more recent exam had yielded a "much shorter list" of security defects and that most of them had been "corrected right on the spot."

The Coast Guard comments came at a news conference today at the South Locust Point Marine Terminal, during which Gov. Martin O'Malley released the state's new assessment of Maryland's emergency preparedness efforts and outlined measures officials will take to respond to the findings.

The report, prepared for the state by the consulting firm run by former Federal Emergency Management Agency director James Lee Witt, identified numerous potential vulnerabilities in Maryland's plans for dealing with man-made and natural disasters.

Witt, who won accolades for his performance when he ran FEMA during the Clinton administration, said O'Malley has acted on many of the recommendations. The governor called the report "a tough, extensive assessment of both our strengths and our weaknesses."

Responding to one of the recommendations, O'Malley said he would ask the General Assembly to pass a bill to ensure that the director of the Maryland Emergency Management Agency reports directly to the governor as a way to end confusion about which agency would take the lead role in a disaster.

Among the improvements O'Malley said his administration has implemented are measures to upgrade security at the port, where The Baltimore Sun identified numerous lapses after an investigation in 2005. O'Malley characterized the state of security at the port before his tenure as a "Mickey Mouse operation with sleeping guards and wooden decoy cameras."

Administration officials said today that most of the problems identified in The Sun's investigation - including fences in poor repair, fake security cameras, poor lighting and broken security systems - have been addressed.

"Marylanders can be confident in the security of their port and their waters," the Coast Guard's Kelley said.

BALTIMORE EXAMINER

O'Malley outlines state progress on emergency preparedness

By Andrew Cannarsa

Examiner Staff Writer 1/16/09

As Baltimore officials work with the Secret Service and the Department of Homeland Security to secure the city for President-elect Barack Obama's visit Saturday, Gov. Martin O'Malley and safety officials are working to secure Maryland for the long term.

O'Malley and leaders from the Maryland Emergency Management Agency (MEMA) and other state and federal emergency management officials braved the cold on Thursday at the Port of Baltimore's Cruise Terminal to outline the state's progress on emergency preparedness.

Port receives 'near-perfect' score from Coast Guard

The Port of Baltimore, which a year ago received low marks on a security review by the U.S. Coast Guard, received a 'near-perfect' score during a recent security compliance exam from the Coast Guard, Gov. Martin O'Malley said Thursday. O'Malley, calling previous security at the port "a Mickey Mouse operation with sleeping guards and wooden decoy cameras," outlined the following security improvements:

>> Becoming first major U.S. port to require federally mandated worker identification cards

>> Beginning project that will implement real-time video surveillance of public terminals

>> Using real-time video and security checks to verify a visiting truckers' ID and purpose of visit

>> Strengthening perimeter fencing surrounding port's public terminals

In January 2008, the state commissioned James Lee Witt Associates, a Washington-based crisis management consulting firm, to review Maryland's level of preparedness and offer safety improvement recommendations. The state released the findings on Thursday.

"The report ... is a tough, extensive assessment of both our strengths and weaknesses -- many of which we've already taken steps to correct," O'Malley said. "The need is urgent, and with the forward momentum we've started, we will make progress toward our goal of a safer state for families."

Recommendations for improvement included the state's emergency management authority structure, communications with local jurisdictions, and the state's ability to operate during an emergency if the main Emergency Operations Center becomes unavailable or nonfunctional.

In response to a recommendation from the report, O'Malley said he would introduce legislation that calls for the director of MEMA to report directly to the governor. The change would eliminate any confusion regarding chain of command during an emergency.

Future plans call for a fully interoperable communications system for all local and state public safety and emergency response agencies throughout Maryland. Such a system could take five to seven years to install, O'Malley said.

James Lee Witt, who served as director from the Federal Emergency Management Agency under the Clinton Administration from 1993 to 2001, commended O'Malley for commissioning the safety review.

"These recommendations will not only make Maryland more prepared," Witt said, "but a leader in emergency preparedness in the United States."

WASHINGTON POST

State Is Addressing Problems, O'Malley Says

By Henri E. Cauvin
Washington Post Staff Writer
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A newly released study of Maryland's emergency preparedness faults the state for a range of organizational and management shortcomings that Gov. Martin O'Malley said his administration has begun to address.

Appearing at the Port of Baltimore, O'Malley (D) said the 116-page report by a former director of the Federal Emergency Management Agency is a "tough, extensive assessment of both our strengths and our weaknesses."

Among the findings is that clear lines of authority and responsibility have not been established among three key components of the state government: the Office of Homeland Security, the Maryland Emergency Management Agency and the National Guard.

In addition, the study concluded that MEMA, as the emergency management agency is known, lacks an alternative site from which to operate if its headquarters in Baltimore County were unavailable.

It also found that the state's emergency management efforts lack a strategic planning process and a dedicated source of funding, leading to a focus on short-term strategies and a reliance on federal grants. And it concluded that the state does not work closely enough with local governments in planning for emergencies.

O'Malley said his administration has begun responding to the concerns raised by the study.

"Given the urgency of these issues, we did not want to wait until the report was completed and released," he said. "As issues were identified, we immediately started addressing those issues."

In May, O'Malley appointed Richard G. Muth, who had been the director of homeland security and emergency management for Baltimore County, as the director of MEMA. The administration has also designated two alternative sites for MEMA's operations and has been preparing legislation that would make the agency's director a member of the governor's Cabinet.

The study was conducted by the consulting firm operated by James Lee Witt, a former director of the Federal Emergency Management Agency. The cost of the contract was \$225,000, O'Malley spokesman Shaun Adamec said.

In releasing the report, O'Malley talked about the state's security priorities. At the top of the list, he said, is a communications system that would link police, fire and other first responders from across the state. Some jurisdictions and agencies are already linked, but a statewide network is imperative, he said.

At the news conference, the head of the Maryland State Police, Col Terrence B. Sheridan, said a contract should be signed in coming months and that setting up the system is expected to take five to seven years.

