

Today's FEMA is a lot different from the organization that flubbed the Katrina response. There have been a number of positive changes, mostly during the past four years.

First, as the [Washington Post](#) explains, FEMA's authority has expanded:

*Congress has broadened FEMA's authority so that the agency can respond in advance of major storms, instead of waiting for governors to request federal aid after a disaster strikes. The measures earned plaudits from then-Gov. Haley Barbour (R) of Mississippi and Gov. Bobby Jindal (R) of Louisiana — usually tough Obama critics — and professional emergency managers who had sought the changes for years.*

Second, unlike the hapless "Brownie" who headed FEMA during Katrina, the current director is an experienced professional. W. Craig Fugate was the head of the highly regarded Florida emergency response agency under Governor Jeb Bush. Fugate began his career as a firefighter, then became head of emergency management in Gainesville, Florida, before going to work for Bush. He knows what he's doing.

Third, FEMA has [new management procedures](#). Using a new system called FEMASat, the agency is monitoring outcomes and tying them to program activities, providing important feedback for planning. The agency has also centralized procurement and has done intensive reviews of specific programs, determining that some aren't cost-effective and others need more support. In short, the management process is a lot more professionalized.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, FEMA has the full, direct backing of the White House. FEMA's primary role is to coordinate responses from diverse federal agencies, from the Pentagon to the Commerce Department. They all have bureaucracies and priorities of their own. But they'll respond a lot more quickly and effectively if they know that White House is focused on the issue and will back up FEMA.

None of this guarantees a smooth response to the unprecedented scope of Hurricane Sandy. But the chances of a quick, effective federal response are much higher than they would have been four or five years ago, let alone in 2005.