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The work of the 9/11 Commission, appointed after the September 11th attacks, was a landmark in America's response. Now, members of the commission have issued a progress report on how things are going ten years later.

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9/11 Commission: U.S. Still Unprepared

BRIAN WILLIAMS (anchor)

In less than two weeks, America and the world will mark ten years since the 9/11 attacks. It was shortly after those attacks, and largely at the insistence of the victim’s families that a commission recommended ways to make the nation safer. But tonight, members of that commission say a lot of things still are not right. We get a report tonight from our justice correspondent Pete Williams.

PETE WILLIAMS (reporting)

Members of the original 9/11 Commission say the U.S. is still unprepared for a major catastrophe, with no common system for emergency communications and no consistent rules for who should be in command.

LEE HAMILTON (Former 9/11 Commission Committee Co-Chair): We are not yet in the place in this country where the first responders can talk with one another. Ten years after 9/11, we are not yet in the place were we know who’s in charge at the site of a disaster.

P. WILLIAMS: Their report card out today says that was clear after the chaos after Hurricane Katrina. It says the response to last week’s massive oil spill in the Gulf was better, but local efforts were at odds with the overall clean up. Among other shortcomings, it cites, a lack of national I.D. standards, a deficiency exploited by 18 of the 19 hijackers who got state issued I.D. cards to board planes.

THOMAS KEAN (Former 9/11 Commission Co-Chair): If you can forge identification, then a terrorist, let’s say, who wants to do harm to the United States can get in and out of the country, can get in and out of buildings, in and out of airports, in and out of planes without being detected.

P. WILLIAMS: And it says while the U.S. now tracks arrivals from overseas, there’s no way to tell who overstays their visas, remaining here illegally. But Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano says the response to Hurricane Irene shows the government is now much better prepared for disasters, working more closely with the states, routinely putting supplies in place well before a disaster hits, and setting a
clear chain of command.

JANET NAPOLITANO: We have used the Department of Homeland Security as the overall incident coordinator.

P.WILLIAMS: And the 9/11 Commissioners do site progress. They say better intelligence, more information, and improved watch lists have made the nation safer. Pete Williams, NBC News, Washington.