

Satellite Conference:
Staffing for Emergency Response and Recovery
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Discussion Points

Pre-Event - Preparation

- a. Include emergency preparedness in job descriptions statewide, stating that disaster preparedness and response is required. It helps to go over this in interviews so that employees know what is expected up front.
- b. Emergency preparedness should be included in new employee orientations; such as a video on emergency preparedness explaining the department's role and employees' responsibilities.
- c. All existing employees should be advised about the organization's emergency preparedness policy and be aware that they are subject to call-out during an emergency.
- d. Medical teams should be pre-scheduled, trained and ready to go on a moment's notice. These teams should also be drilled on shelter operations
- e. A department-wide recall system should be in place and well rehearsed.
- f. Provide Medical Needs Shelter (MNS) training statewide for all staff who might be involved, either deployed or back-up at home.
- g. Offer pediatric and adult health assessment refresher courses for nurses to feel more up-to-date and comfortable with skills needed in shelters.
- h. Recommend entry level training in disaster response and Incident Command System (ICS) for all employees to increase comfort level with this process.
- i. Dedicate sufficient time to listen to staff needs and talk through issues and concerns.
- j. Identify sites for MNS and conduct a walk through of response:
 - Pre-place supplies at closest county health departments.
 - Develop kits for use by staff if deployed - this makes staff feel much more prepared and familiar.
 - Provide lists for staff to know what to take with them, things to take care of at home before leaving, etc.
 - Do all of this reinforced with training.
- k. Conduct exercises and drills - not just table top!
- l. When a potential disaster is anticipated, communication is paramount. Provide staff with regular updates (I.e. status of hurricane, etc.) and keep them informed when the situation changes.
- m. Begin now to address potential issues in paying staff overtime or granting compensatory time.

During the Event

- a. Be prepared for not only the thousands or millions of residents who will be evacuating, but also for many employees who may need to evacuate.
- b. Early activation of special needs shelters is important.
- c. Expect the unexpected. Be prepared to revise your plan if the existing plan is overwhelmed. Examples from Katrina/Rita:
 - When the levees broke flooding 80% of the city of New Orleans along with catastrophic flooding in St. Bernard, Plaquemines, Jefferson and St. Tammany parishes, many staff were needed for the huge search and rescue operation.
 - Tens of thousands of sick and injured people were being evacuated from the disaster areas after the storm and the Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals (DHH) needed to call out large numbers of additional staff (both medical and non-medical) that were not pre-assigned to teams.
 - DHH opened the largest field hospital in U. S. history on the LSU campus.
 - Administrative employees were assigned medical support duties that they never dreamed they would be performing (feeding/bathing/toileting patients, etc.)
 - Eventually, volunteers arrived from all over the country; DHH needed to quickly develop a plan for dealing with this number of volunteers.
 - DHH had over 3,000 employees displaced by Katrina and communications were difficult, if not impossible.
 - Just when Louisiana caught its breath after Katrina, Hurricane Rita devastated Southwest Louisiana (flooding large areas of New Orleans again in the process) and greatly exacerbated the situation. There were even Louisiana residents who had evacuated to Texas due to Katrina coming back to the special needs shelters in Louisiana because they were evacuated from Texas due to Rita's predicted path.
- d. Consider how you will continue normal services while responding to a disaster. After Katrina/Rita, DHH was under pressure to continue normal operations during the emergency, which resulted in tremendous staff burnout as people tried to work in shelters AND keep things going in the office.
- e. Have a clearly outlined staging center. Staff should know where to meet, where to leave cars, pick up prearranged van and supplies, kits, have maps and know where to go, what to bring, how long to stay, how to be relieved, etc.
- f. Communicate frequently: check on people, give status briefings, let folks know when possible of unexpected changes.
- g. Be sure that employees know how ICS functions. They should report to a supervisor at the site and not to call home to check on what to do. Use ICS to get resources that you need.

- h. Always have a place or person to call 24/7 with immediate response to staff with concerns and problems. Rotate staff as needed according to a schedule arranged ahead of time - adjust if the situation dictates.

Post Event - Recovery

- a. In Louisiana, the switch from “emergency” mode to “recovery” mode was delayed partly due to the magnitude of Hurricane Katrina’s destruction and partly from the fact that Hurricane Rita struck only 3 weeks later.
- b. The huge population shift within Louisiana has made recovery difficult. Large numbers of evacuees ended up in communities that do not have the infrastructure to serve their needs and this has been an on-going staffing problem for the state
- c. After Katrina/Rita, housing for employees has been a huge problem and DHH has worked very hard to get FEMA trailers placed on state land for their employees so they can continue their employment.
- d. It is important to keep in mind that true recovery will take many years and most people will feel that things will never be “the same” again
- e. Planning for the future will be an important priority and you will be faced with the balancing act of planning while still in recovery mode.
- f. Be prepared to deal with employees’ emotional and psychological states. During Katrina/Rita some employees feared for their lives while performing their jobs, impact of this fear is not easily overcome.
- g. Debrief is critical - after you catch your breath, but before you get caught up in getting back to normal, gather everyone and hear their issues, and be sure you leave enough time for all to be heard. This is the best time to get solutions for what could go better - after action reports are essential.
- h. Follow-up with Thank You's, both public and private. Recognize contributions at all levels - do it often and use humor.