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## LESSON LEARNED

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### **Emergency Communications: Establishing Radio Frequencies for Air Medical Responses During Disasters**

#### **SUMMARY**

States should consider establishing air medical disaster response radio frequencies and requiring that all air medical providers maintain the established disaster response frequencies. Disaster response plans should be aligned by incorporating the disaster response radio frequencies.

#### **DESCRIPTION**

On June 28, 2010, the Tampa Metropolitan Medical Response System and the Florida AeroMedical Association co-sponsored the Air Medical Disaster Response Tabletop Exercise (TTX). The purpose of the TTX was to evaluate response concepts, plans, and capabilities associated with an air medical response to a Category 5 hurricane making landfall in the Tampa, Florida, region. The TTX scenario projected that the hurricane caused more than 2,000 fatalities and left more than 10,000 injured. In addition, more than 1 million people were left without electricity, and thousands had to be rescued by air or boat. TTX objectives focused on air medical command and control, communications, crew resource management, and air asset technology, among others. Forty-six participants from 31 state, regional, local, and private sector organizations participated in the TTX.

During the TTX, participants observed that the state lacks an established, reliable, interoperable communications plan for air medical response to disasters. Participants noted that they would communicate with other aircraft via pre-established procedures on an air-to-air frequency. However, they commented that they did not know what frequencies would be needed to communicate with pre-hospital providers or hospitals for patient transport when they were operating outside their own region or response area.

TTX participants noted that current radio systems require pre-programming via computer. Personnel must program radio frequencies prior to responding in a disaster response situation or have the appropriate equipment to program radios with frequencies requested by incident command. Further, many counties in Florida use different 800 megahertz radio systems, but not all air medical providers have the ability to communicate with them. Participants were unaware of any pre-established frequencies that are dedicated and/or required for disaster response communications.

The TTX after-action report (AAR) recommends that the state establish air medical disaster response radio frequencies and require all air medical providers to maintain the established disaster response frequencies. The AAR also recommends that disaster response plans be aligned by incorporating the disaster response radio frequencies. This can help ensure that all responding groups are aware of communication capabilities. The TTX AAR also

recommends that all regional frequencies to be utilized by air medical units during responses be communicated to the units so they can pre-program the frequencies.

States should consider establishing air medical disaster response radio frequencies and requiring that all air medical providers maintain the established disaster response frequencies. Disaster response plans should be aligned by incorporating the disaster response radio frequencies.

#### **CITATION**

Tampa Metropolitan Medical Response System and Florida AeroMedical Association. *Tampa MMRS/FAMA Air Medical Disaster Response Tabletop Exercise After Action Report and Improvement Plan*. 25 Aug 2010.

<https://www.llis.dhs.gov/docdetails/details.do?contentID=45985>

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