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**LESSON LEARNED**

## **Volunteer Management: Pre-Screening Volunteers for Physical and Financial Limitations**

**SUMMARY**

Emergency managers should screen individuals who volunteer for a disaster relief mission prior to deployment. The screening process should ensure that volunteers are physically and financially capable of supporting a long-term deployment.

**DESCRIPTION**

In September 2004, three devastating hurricanes hit the southeastern United States, destroying thousands of structures and killing more than 100 people. On September 16, 2004, personnel from the Florida Department of Health contacted representatives from the Oklahoma State Department of Health (OSDH) to request volunteers for relief and recovery operations. In response, OSDH assembled two strike teams of 16 volunteers each and deployed them to Florida from September 22 to September 30. On site, volunteers assisted with distributing water and food to victims, performing immunizations, filing paperwork, answering telephone calls, and completing other duties as needed.

Despite receiving a rough estimate of their terms of deployment, many volunteers were unable to complete their periods of service. For some, the long hours and physical demands of the field were too taxing. Others were incapable of supporting themselves financially during a long-term, out-of-state deployment. Others were unable to devote the necessary time to the deployment due to personal or professional obligations. A number of these volunteers were therefore forced to leave the response team prematurely.

Volunteers willing to assist authorities in a disaster relief mission may be unable to provide the necessary time and labor. Emergency managers should screen individuals who volunteer for a disaster relief mission prior to deployment. According to the Oklahoma State Department of Health's after-action report on the mission, the screening should ensure that volunteers are physically and financially capable of supporting the mission by evaluating the following criteria: minimum physical standards; sufficient finances to support a long-term deployment; and flexibility of personal and professional schedules.

**CITATION**

Oklahoma State Department of Health. [\*Oklahoma State Department of Health Deployment: Operation Florida Recovery\*](#). September 16, 2004. ([LLIS.gov ID# 12311](#))

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