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LESSON LEARNED

Emergency Response Operations: Collaborating with School Systems to Feed Personnel during Incidents

SUMMARY

Emergency planners should consider collaborating with local school systems to pre-identify buildings with kitchen facilities that can prepare food for responders and other staff members during response operations.

DESCRIPTION

Hurricane Ike originated from a tropical wave that formed off the west coast of Africa in late August 2008. It made landfall as a Category 2 storm near Galveston Island, Texas, at 2:10 a.m. on September 13, 2008. The storm produced rainfall of over 3 inches across much of southeastern Texas and caused as much as 18 inches of flooding just north of Houston. The Texas coast experienced maximum storm surges over 10 feet, while the coasts of Alabama, Louisiana, and Mississippi had maximum storm surges ranging from 3 to 6 feet. As it traveled through Harris County, Texas, Hurricane Ike had sustained winds of over 110 miles per hour and brought excessive rainfall totaling 6 to 8 inches. The hurricane caused 11 deaths in Harris County, flooded over 3,700 homes, and inflicted \$103 million in damages to the county's infrastructure.

Harris County, Texas, has 3,984,349 residents. The county is approximately 1,728 square miles, and the metropolitan areas include Houston, Sugar Land, and Baytown.

Hurricane Ike caused 20 deaths and \$19.3 billion in damages, making it the third most expensive hurricane in US history.

The Harris County emergency operations center (EOC) has limited space and facilities for personnel during normal operations. The building lacks accommodations such as sleeping quarters, a food preparation area, and showers. When the Harris County Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Management (HCOHSEM) activates the EOC, emergency management personnel work in an extremely limited space without adequate resources for a long-term emergency response effort. The lack of facilities can impede HCOHSEM's critical response and recovery activities. In response to Hurricane Ike, HCOHSEM activated its EOC

During the Hurricane Ike incident, over 500 personnel operated from the Harris County EOC. These personnel encountered problems accommodating their daily needs despite their best efforts to overcome the limitations of the building. EOC staff members had difficulty providing food to personnel working in the EOC. The after-action report recommends that emergency planners research food distribution sites within area school systems to utilize buildings and kitchen facilities that can feed EOC staff members and responders. This will provide food to EOC personnel and will help maintain continuous operations throughout the response and recovery periods.

Emergency planners should consider collaborating with local school systems to pre-identify buildings with kitchen facilities that can prepare food for responders and other staff members during response operations.

CITATIONS

Berg, Robbie. *Tropical Cyclone Report: Hurricane Ike*. National Hurricane Center. 18 Mar 2009.

<https://www.llis.dhs.gov/docdetails/details.do?contentID=37367>

Harris County Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Management. *Harris County Hurricane Ike After Action Report and Improvement Plan*. 01 Mar 2009.

<https://www.llis.dhs.gov/docdetails/details.do?contentID=37139>

US Census Bureau, State and County Quick Facts: Harris County, Texas

<http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/48/48201.html>

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