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LESSON LEARNED

Mass Evacuation Planning: Clearing Evacuation Routes

SUMMARY

State departments of transportation (DOT) should consider conducting periodic reviews of infrastructure improvements to assess their impact on evacuation routes. State DOT personnel should coordinate with emergency operations centers (EOC) to confirm that all construction disrupting these routes has been halted and that all barriers are promptly removed during an emergency.

DESCRIPTION

On August 16, 2007, Tropical Storm Dean became a hurricane as it moved through the Caribbean Ocean. National Hurricane Center forecasts indicated that Hurricane Dean could make landfall along the southern Gulf coast of Texas. President George W. Bush issued an emergency declaration for 32 Texas counties to provide federal assistance to state and local preparations for Hurricane Dean. This constituted the greatest mobilization of emergency resources in the history of the state of Texas. The direct threat to Texas lessened as Hurricane Dean approached land, although rains and storm surge had the potential to cause coastal flooding. Hurricane Dean made landfall in Mexico on August 21 as a Category 5 hurricane and dissipated several days later without impacting Texas.

As Hurricane Dean approached landfall, the DOT assured the Rio Grande Valley District Disaster Center that all construction on evacuation routes in the region would be removed. However, the DOT did not sufficiently clear the routes. Coordination between the Texas DOT and Alamo area emergency managers proved more successful. DOT efforts to track ongoing and future construction contributed to preventing a similar problem in the Alamo area. Periodic reviews of construction projects enabled the DOT to identify possible route disruptions in advance and to address the potential impact construction would have on these routes.

The Rio Grande Valley after-action report (AAR) concluded that the DOT should halt and clear all construction at least 72 hours prior to a storm. This will facilitate a swift evacuation and will ensure that residents are able to access the appropriate evacuation routes. The Alamo area AAR identified the continued need for the Texas DOT to review ongoing infrastructure improvements. This will ensure the DOT's ability to clear construction quickly in the event of a disaster declaration.

State DOTs should consider conducting periodic reviews of infrastructure improvements to assess their impact on evacuation routes. State DOT personnel should coordinate with EOCs to confirm that all construction disrupting these routes has been halted and that all barriers are promptly removed during an emergency.

CITATION

State of Texas Emergency Management, Governor's Division of Emergency Management.
2007 Hurricane Dean After-Action Report. 26 Nov 2007.
<https://www.llis.dhs.gov/docdetails/details.do?contentID=32494>

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