

NOTES FROM THE FIELD

Hurricane Sandy: Deployment Procedures

In December 2012, the LLIS.gov team conducted data collection and analysis related to Hurricane Sandy response and recovery operations in New York and New Jersey. The team observed several strengths and challenges related to response and recovery activities. This document describes one of those activities.

DESCRIPTION

Hurricane Sandy

On Monday, October 29, 2012, Sandy made landfall near Atlantic City, New Jersey, pushing a massive storm surge to shore and generating winds of up to 75 miles per hour. Sandy caused record storm surges, significant flooding, and extensive wind damage. Millions of people were left without power and tens of thousands were displaced along the East Coast from North Carolina to Maine (see Figure 1).

In response, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) deployed significant numbers of personnel both before and after Sandy made landfall to support first responders and citizens. Over 1,000 FEMA personnel were deployed within the first four days of response. At the peak of response and initial recovery efforts, more than 17,000 Federal personnel—including more than 7,500 FEMA staff—were deployed (see Figure 2). In addition, states deployed over 11,000 National Guard personnel in the impacted areas. Hurricane Sandy was one of the Agency's largest personnel deployments in its history.

Deployment Strengths

Interviews with state and local officials from New York and New Jersey identified several deployment-related strengths. Many interviewees highlighted the early deployment



Figure 1: Sandy's impacts were felt across 24 states.

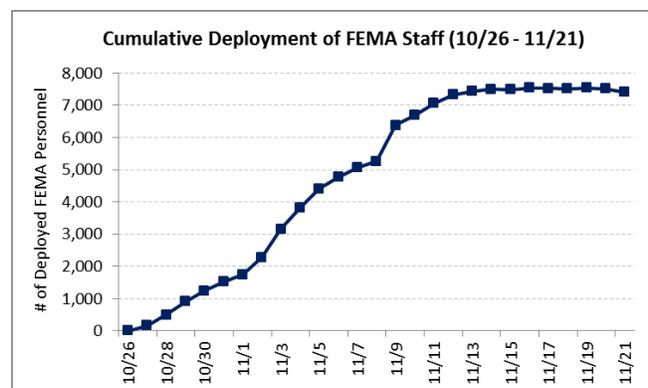


Figure 2: FEMA rapidly deployed a large number of staff to support Sandy response and recovery efforts.

Source: FEMA

of specific individual positions, such as Division Supervisors, as a crucial best practice that gives FEMA greater visibility into state and local response efforts while keeping the Agency abreast of specific resource needs. In addition, officials commended FEMA's Urban Search and Rescue assets. Within two days of the storm's landfall, nine federal Urban Search and Rescue (US&R) teams and two support teams deployed to New York and New Jersey. US&R teams searched over 47,000 structures, assisted over 1,200 survivors, performed over 1,400 health and wellness checks, investigated hazardous materials incidents, and rescued 38 survivors.

Deployment Challenges

Interviewees, including FEMA headquarters officials, field and regional personnel, representatives of other Federal departments and agencies, and state and local officials from New York and New Jersey, raised numerous challenges related to field deployment that FEMA must overcome in advance of future disasters:

- **Lack of Adequate Training.** Some deployed personnel did not receive the appropriate amount of training required to prepare them for their assignments in affected areas. This was an acute problem with Community Relations staff, many of whom did not have the relevant experience working in disaster areas. This negatively impacted the knowledge officials required to quickly assess and report victims' needs.
- **Lack of Appropriate Equipment.** FEMA sent some personnel to the field without the equipment necessary for them to do their jobs effectively. This was a common complaint with respect to information technology equipment, specifically laptops/tablet computers and wireless network access. This at times prevented staff from accessing FEMA systems that tracked resource and response needs, hindered effective communication, and posed challenges when trying to meet reporting requirements.
- **Deployment Guidance and Coordination Procedures.** The manner in which personnel were selected to fill certain positions appeared uncoordinated. Although the FEMA Joint Field Offices sought to institute a command structure to manage the rate and scale of deployment, the lack of clarity led to *ad hoc* selections that were not based on skills or needs of affected areas. For example, communications between deployed staff and coordination offices, such as the Regional Response Coordination Center, did not often synchronize priorities with regional needs or capabilities, leading to insufficient (or inadequately trained) staff deployments. In some cases, individuals received deployment notifications from FEMA Headquarters without the knowledge of Regional officials or alignment to Regional operation procedures.

Outcomes

FEMA's *Hurricane Sandy After-Action Report* includes recommendations to review and update policies to ensure that the Agency's disaster response workforce is properly equipped and supported during deployments. Further, FEMA will work to refine its system to clarify the lines of authority and position expectations for pre-established disaster roles to ensure personnel are prepared to fill them with little notice.

RESOURCES

Fugate, Craig. *Written testimony of Federal Emergency Management Agency Administrator Craig Fugate for a Senate Committee on Appropriations, Subcommittee on Homeland Security hearing titled "Hurricane Sandy: Response and Recovery."* 5 Dec 2012. <http://www.dhs.gov/news/2012/12/05/written-testimony-fema-administrator-senate-appropriations-subcommittee-homeland>

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