

Report from Mayor Mary Hawkins-Butler, Madison, Mississippi

I greatly appreciate the opportunity to share with the members present the City of Madison's experience associated with our City hosting evacuees during Hurricane Katrina as well as some of our local response guidelines and initiatives.

PREPAREDNESS

I believe first and foremost one of the most critical issues is the level of preparedness of a city to deal with a disaster. The city must be able to quickly put its house in order to serve its indigenous population before it can effectively support evacuees. This would include not only initial actions to address the disaster but a depth of sustainability of these services throughout the disaster. While the focus of this hearing centers on mass evacuations relative to a hurricane, quality preparedness is an all hazard exercise.

Some areas of general preparedness that the City of Madison undertakes are:

- Providing small portable generator for all essential traffic lights in order to maintain traffic flow as well as significantly reduce police overtime normally required to manually move traffic.

- Reserve fuel for vehicles and generators.

- Compilation of emergency declarations and ordinances in order to facilitate rapid implementation.

- The forming, training, and equipping of CERT teams to supplement local resources in numerous support roles.

- Maintain and continuous update disaster plans including Hurricane Preparedness Plan (copy included)

Some areas of Katrina specific preparedness that the City of Madison undertook were:

- Early opening (48 hours prior to landfall) of our City EOC with twice daily meetings of all principal parties.

- Preparation of information services for both local and evacuee populations. This included the movement of a mobile command post to serve as an information center at our local interstate exit. This information center was staffed by CERT team members. Signage was used to direct evacuees to this center located close to the exit to reduce traffic "wandering" around the City. Information was provided concerning; shelters both local and further along the evacuation route, food, medical facilities, veterinary needs for both equine and small pets, banks, fuel, current storm/weather forecasts, travel trailer park availability and the like.

- City wide safety briefing for all employees paying special attention to hurricane specific safety issues (downed power lines, flying debris, etc.)

SHELTERS

The City of Madison has three locations designated as approved shelters with a total capacity of approximately 350 persons. All shelters are faith based organizations and basic needs such as food and sleeping are met by those organizations.

The city provided constant fire and police presence in all shelters while evacuees are present. Special needs evacuees were identified and appropriate measures were taken to address these needs. Some special needs identified were very young infants, accessibility issues, hearing and or sight impaired issues, as well as language barriers.

The city provided support to the shelter in the form of transportation to and from medical clinics, food supplies between shelters and or from distribution points to shelters, kennel facilities, etc.

Information services were provided to keep evacuees apprized of weather forecasts, damage estimates, shelter information further inland, traffic issues, fuel availability, location and availability of special needs resources, as well as repopulation issues such as when return was permitted, what to expect upon return, etc.

Communication capabilities (usually cell phones) were provided to allow evacuees to notify relatives and friends of their situation. A secure roster of evacuees was maintained to assist in persons attempting to locate family members.

DIFFICULTIES DURING KATRINA

Fuel

This limited supply of fuel resulted in:

Evacuees staying in Madison when they actually had point destinations with support (family and friends) further inland. Consequently these persons were ill equipped to stay in a shelter.

Difficulty in moving critical employees to and from work, including shelter workers, medical staff, etc.

Difficulty in rapid movement of rescue teams into the disaster area. Many out of state responders lacked built in fuel reserves to allow for round trip movement without support during transit.

Long lines at gas stations that did have fuel resulting in localized traffic congestion that necessitated strong police presence for traffic and crowd control.

Shelters

The extended operation of shelters during Katrina created problems with staffing and logistics. The faith base shelters were challenged to meet the staffing needs for a continuous operation that lasted more than a week. The Madison shelters met this challenge; however discussion has been ongoing concerning a future event of this duration. The logistics problems were quickly overcome with local donations and support from non-shelter faith based groups.

There was some disconnect in the opening of shelters on a “tiered” basis as well as wide area (statewide) communication concerning available shelter locations, etc.

No clearly communicated plan was in place to relocate, consolidate, and ultimately close shelters. Plans to accommodate persons who became “permanent” evacuees were very minimal and to a large degree non-existent as were plans to provide services to these persons.

These long term evacuee needs were things such as schools, medical needs, restoration of mail service, restoration or social services, etc.

Donations Management

Donations management at every level was not managed. Donations were accepted by numerous faith based and service based organizations prior to any needs assessments or tracking methodology being initiated. Once the initial

stages of the disaster were over, these donation center looked to the cities to assist in distribution of and disposal of donated items. Great quantities of clothes were collected and subsequently abandoned due to lack of management.
(picture attached)

SUCSESSES DURING KATRINA

The acquiring of a closed gas station early in the event and the procurement of a supply of gasoline greatly enhanced the Cities ability to maintain services throughout the event. This gas station was operated by volunteer firefighters around the clock and any government agency vehicle could receive fuel. Through an inter-local agreement, contract crews hired by local utilities could fuel which resulted in rapid restoration of electrical service.

The information services function proved to be a major positive move during the entire event. Daily Frequently Asked Question (FAQ's) documents was prepared and distributed to every phone answering point in the City (sample attached). This resulted in accurate information being provided to all citizens and evacuees. The list was updated daily and previously unasked questions were addressed.

Daily countywide meetings between all local governments, service agencies, and utility providers were held. These meetings allowed for a better allocation of all resources to both citizens and evacuees. Items such as ice and water distribution locations could be moved as needs changed, shelter consolidation and closing could be coordinated, and information for the FAQ's document needed from agencies such as electrical utilities, DOT, etc could be obtained.

Early implementation of a curfew created a sense of stability within the community. It reduced needless fuel consumption as well as reduced manpower requirements on local police for traffic control. Agreements were reached with gas stations and fuel deliveries were scheduled during the curfew to prevent "mass" gatherings around fuel transport trucks.

The use of the Incident Command System's Unified Command concept during this event was without question a cornerstone of Madison's ability to address the needs of both its citizens as well as the evacuees. Regular training as well as mock drills have been and will continue to be used to keep all employees familiar with this concept.

ITEMS TO CONSIDER

Listed here are some items to consider that would assist with local governments being able to better deal with a disaster. These items may have already been discussed at the policy level, but I feel they are worth mentioning.

Provide solar power for all traffic lights in any hazard area (winter storm, high wind, etc). If traffic lights were solar powered they would remain operational during many power outage emergencies and if stand alone solar powered would eliminate a monthly utility bill which would result in long term saving after solar power installation cost was recovered. (This may be a DOT issue) Traffic issues in smaller communities rapidly tax local police resources.

Voluntary imbedding electronic medical data in drivers licenses and juvenile ID cards to provide easy transportability of this information.

Designating logistical support locations (primarily fuel) to assist with long distance movement of rescue resources, primarily state to state movement. (This may be a FEMA issue.)

Continued use and addition of message boards in and around evacuation routes.