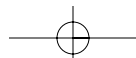


States Helping States When Disaster Strikes

By Beverly Bell

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hile controversy about the hurricane's aftermath continues, one fact that shouldn't get lost in the debate is that the response to the disaster has been unprecedented. Thousands of personnel and millions of dollars in equipment and other resources from across the country have been sent to the affected states.





Coordinating and deploying much of this help is the Emergency Management Assistance Compact (EMAC), a state-to-state mutual aid agreement that allows support across state lines when a disaster occurs. With a comprehensive operations system that can bend and flex to the demand, EMAC is managing the flow of people and goods to help Louisiana and Mississippi, the only two affected states that asked for the compact's assistance, in their recovery.

Bill Clark is with the New York State Emergency Management Office and is also a member of EMAC's National Coordinating Team (NCT), which serves as the liaison to the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the National Guard. He worked on the response to the World Trade Center attacks, and compares that to the Hurricane Katrina efforts. "In many ways, this is a bigger, larger activation," he says. "The area affected by the disaster is larger and the number of resources is much more significant."

The numbers associated with EMAC's response prove its scale: 49 states, plus the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico, are providing aid; all states are offering assistance; more than 50,000 people have been deployed to the affected areas; and

thousands of pieces of equipment, from medevac helicopters to diapers, from boats to body bags, from water purification systems to decontamination showers, have been sent to the Gulf Coast.

Deploying Record Number of National Guard Troops

Hurricane Katrina has resulted in many firsts for EMAC: the first time so many states have worked through the compact to offer assistance; the first time tens of thousands—not hundreds—of state, local and county personnel have joined in the response effort; and perhaps most importantly, the first time EMAC has deployed so many National Guard troops. An exact count is not yet known, but it's estimated that at least 30,000 of the 50,000 people assisting in this disaster are with the National Guard.

Typically, these forces are activated and controlled by their governors, making them a perfect match for EMAC. The National Guard are traditionally thought of as "peace-keepers," and while they've been used in that capacity during this catastrophic event, they've also been instrumental in search and rescue, ministry services, supplying generators, cleanup, construction and more.

Clark says that the EMAC National Coordinating Team's work with the National Guard is essential. "We sort out a lot of issues related to whatever resources are needed by the states to handle the response. Without us being here ... there might be some crossed paths or signals."

Help in Every Possible Form

EMAC's coordination doesn't stop with the National Guard. As it has with previous disasters, the compact is managing a wide range of medical personnel and equipment to help the victims of Hurricane Katrina.

Because of the enormity of the devastation, the federal government decided to federalize the medical resource deployment, thereby lifting some of the response burden from the states. However, EMAC continues to assist by currently deploying more than a thousand doctors, nurses, emergency medical technicians, ambulances and medevac helicopters.

In addition to medical assistance, teams of people have been sent to work on rebuilding transportation and communications infrastructure. Public and individual assistance program staff members have been called up to help victims with paperwork. Construction crews, building inspectors and engineers are just a few of the teams EMAC has help bring to the disaster area.

But then, Katrina's path changed, taking a more westerly route. In a matter of hours, Florida shifted from a state requesting assistance to a state giving it. Florida has used EMAC resources many times, most recently in 2004 when four major hurricanes hit in a six-week period. This familiarity with asking for help put the state in perfect stead for understanding what a region would need after a hurricane. "From our experience of receiving assistance, we knew many of the issues," says Craig Fugate, director of the Florida Division of Emergency Management.

Working through EMAC, Florida quickly moved all its supplies and resources into Mississippi, focusing particularly on the six southern counties of the state. With integrated logistical teams, Florida started with the basics: clearing the roads and setting up communications in order to bring much needed supplies and equipment into the area. The mission quickly expanded to helping citizens with food, water, ice and shelter, and providing law enforcement as well as search and rescue capabilities.

Florida's response is typical of the EMAC mentality. "The spirit of the compact is neighbor helping neighbor," says Jeff Phillips, chair of EMAC and the Emergency Operations Bureau Chief with the New Mexico Department of Public Safety. Regardless of the need, Phillips says, "The member states are more than willing to make it happen. I think that's what we're most proud of."

States Answer the Call

On the evening of Thursday, August 25, Hurricane Katrina came ashore along the Miami-Dade and Broward County lines, north of Miami, as a Category 1 storm. While the response in this area was handled with in-state resources, EMAC was already on standby, ready to be deployed to the Panhandle where the hurricane was expected to hit again. An EMAC A-Team, the lead group assigned to a disaster event, was sent to Tallahassee and emergency management operation centers in Mississippi and Louisiana prior to Katrina making landfall.

What EMAC Is—and Isn't

EMAC is neither a federal agency nor part of the federal government. Administered by the National Emergency Management Association, a CSG affiliate, EMAC is an agreement among 49 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands, to provide assistance across state lines when a disaster occurs.

The numbers associated with EMAC's response prove its scale: 49 states, plus the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico, are providing aid; all states are offering assistance; more than 50,000 people have been deployed to the affected areas; and thousands of pieces of equipment, from medevac helicopters to diapers, from boats to body bags, from water purification systems to decontamination showers, have been sent to the Gulf Coast.



The governor of the affected area must first declare a state of emergency, often doing so before the actual event. This allows EMAC to pre-stage resources and be in position when the state asks for the help it needs. It is this request that triggers response from other EMAC-member states and sets the EMAC operations system of coordination and deployment in motion. The compact uses established protocols that allow reimbursement from the requesting state to all assisting states. EMAC also has procedures in place to resolve workers' compensation and liability issues.

Prior to Hurricane Katrina, EMAC's largest utilization of state-to-state mutual aid in the nation's history was during the 2004 hurricane season. More than 800 emergency management personnel from 38 EMAC-member states and California were deployed for 99 consecutive days to Florida, Alabama and West Virginia in support of hurricane operations.

The Growing Value of EMAC

EMAC took its experiences in the 2004 hurricane season and learned from them. With surveys, interviews and other research, it conducted an extensive critique of its procedures. It commissioned an after-action report which outlined areas of improvement from both the requesting and assisting states' perspectives. It clarified its operations and consolidated the training curriculum.

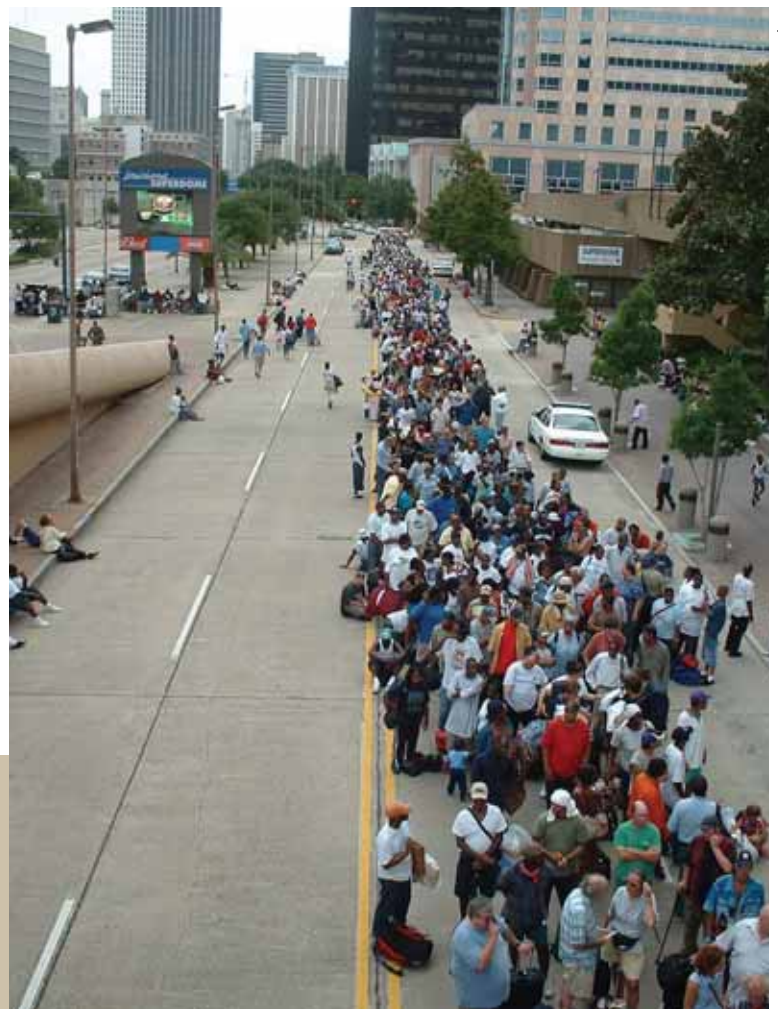
For Phillips, the self-assessment was critical. "The most important point is we were reactive to the lessons learned from last year and it's just put us in a better place to be able to meet the needs this year."

And as difficult as managing the response to Hurricane Katrina is, it will better position EMAC the next time a disaster hits. "Most people have not considered the true power of EMAC," says Fugate of Florida Emergency Management. "EMAC is typically seen as a good way to backstop." Now, he says, "EMAC can be seen as a first-response tool, stabilizing those counties that need it the most. We proved it, in a very chaotic and disastrous situation."

At this point, it's impossible to determine the total amount of assistance provided by other states or how long that assistance will be required in Louisiana and Mississippi. Phillips expects that it will last longer than his yearlong tenure as EMAC chair, a position he took over on August 29—ironically, the day Katrina hit the Gulf Coast.

Whatever the time required, Phillips is confident that EMAC will manage the response effort effectively. "We thought we had broken new ground last year, and we did. We made adjustments and we'll be able to sustain it. That's really what would be expected of the EMAC member states—to live it rather than talk about it."

—Beverly Bell is a policy analyst with the National Emergency Management Association.



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How EMAC Was Born

Though officially ratified by Congress in 1996 as law, EMAC traces its beginnings to several years earlier when another Hurricane—Andrew—hit Florida in 1992. Considered one of the most destructive hurricanes in U.S. history, Andrew caused 26 direct deaths and more than \$25 billion in damages.

As the state struggled to rebuild, former Florida Gov. Lawton Chiles suggested that the 19 members of the Southern Governors Association establish some type of formal mechanism for states to provide help to one another in times of disasters. Originally known as the Southern Regional Emergency Management Assistance Compact, the agreement grew and evolved into EMAC, which is now administered by the National Emergency Management Association, a CSG affiliate.

Today, 49 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands are members. EMAC requires each member to acquire state legislative approval to become part of the compact. California is the latest state to join EMAC, having passed legislation in mid-September. While previously not a member, it had assisted on other EMAC missions, including the 2004 hurricane season. Because of its location, Hawaii has not joined the compact, but membership discussions are currently underway in the state.

How EMAC Works

- Two things have to happen before EMAC can provide assistance:
 - The governor of the affected state must declare a state of emergency; and
 - The affected state must ask for help.
- Once the declaration is official, EMAC is notified.
- An EMAC leadership team works with the affected state in determining its needs.
- Other EMAC member states are contacted with these requests.
- The EMAC team helps the affected state determine the availability of requested resources and the costs.
- The affected state completes requisition orders and finalizes cost negotiation.
- Resources are sent to the requesting state.
- Fulfilled requests are communicated to all member states as they are met.
- The assisting state asks for and receives reimbursement.
- Throughout the process, various EMAC leadership teams interface and coordinate with state, regional, federal and government entities.

Examples of Requested Assistance

- Firefighters
- Law enforcement
- Health and medical resources
- Hazmat teams
- Mobile communication systems, including satellite and cell phones
- Coroners
- Wildlife officers
- Air transportation personnel
- Engineering support
- Horse patrols
- Portable showers
- Sandbags
- Construction crews
- Hand-washing stations
- Generators
- Water search and rescue
- Veterinarians

