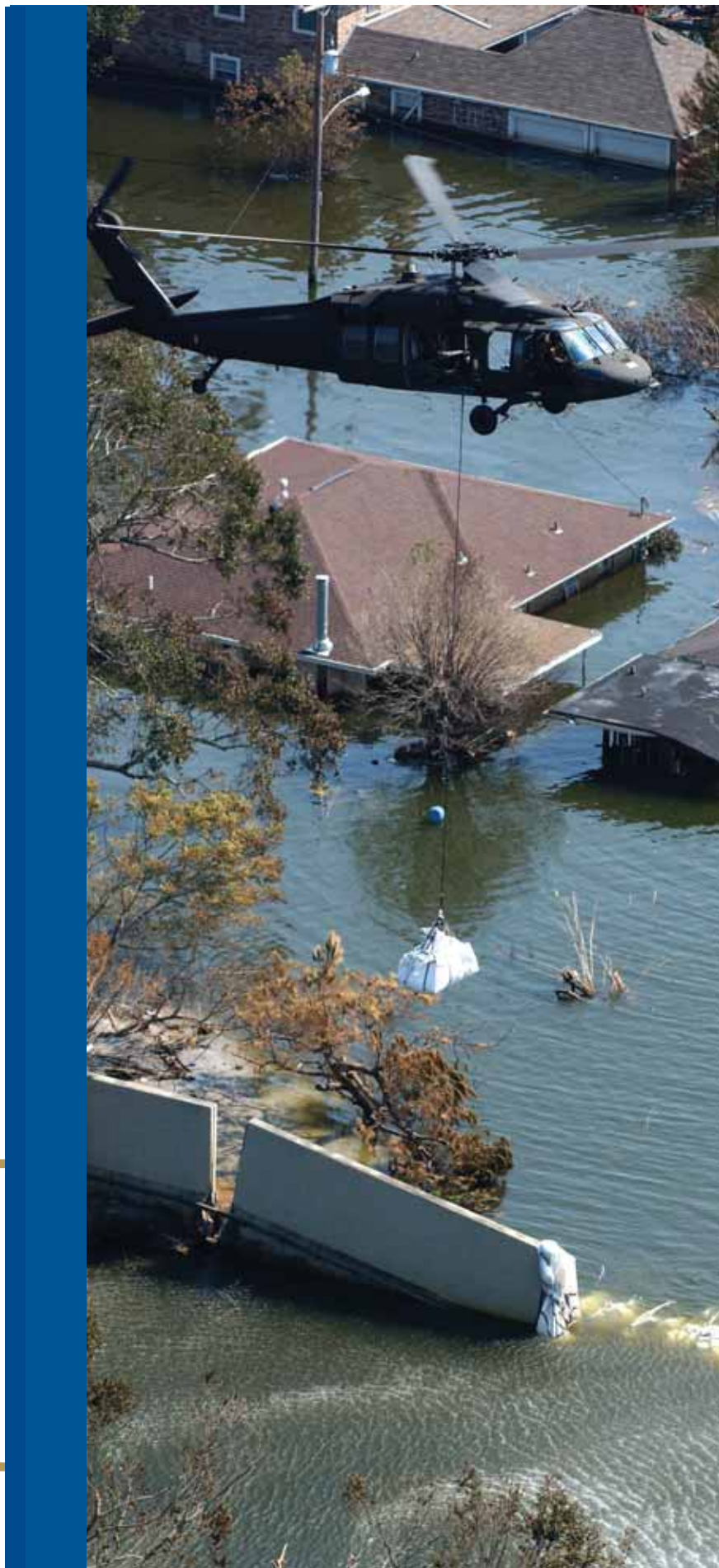


EMAC Responds While Demands Grow

The Emergency
Management Assistance
Compact met greater
demands in 2005
while improving
response levels

By Beverly Bell

In early January 2005, Arizona was hit by a brutal winter storm that dumped record-breaking amounts of precipitation on communities across the state's northern and central regions. The city of Flagstaff alone received 35 inches of snow over three days. Homes were without power, water mains broke, creeks flooded and several people lost their lives.



This storm combined with the assistance Arizona requested from other states, was the first event of 2005 for the Emergency Management Assistance Compact. Through EMAC, the state-to-state mutual aid agreement that allows support across state lines when a disaster occurs, National Guard troops were deployed to Arizona and assisted in the response effort.

While serious in its own right, the Arizona storm in no way foretold what devastation lay ahead for the country and what challenges EMAC would face in 2005. By the end of the year, the compact would coordinate its largest response ever, assisting in one of the most destructive natural disasters in U.S. history, Hurricane Katrina.

2005 Plan of Work

2005 tells a tale of two EMACs; the reliable, tested system it is in January, and the bigger, better and more responsive compact it becomes with fortunate planning, careful execution and the ability to adapt to an ever-changing and more demanding environment.

EMAC had already shown in 2004 how well it could perform. Four hurricanes—Frances, Ivan, Jeanne and Charley—hit the U.S. in a six-week period. EMAC deployed a record-breaking 800 emergency management personnel from 38 EMAC-member states and California for 99 consecutive days in support of hurricane operations.

The EMAC leadership sees this demonstration of mutual aid utilization in 2004 as an opportunity. In what will be one of the most propitious and strategic decisions in the compact's history, it's determined at the beginning of 2005 to ramp EMAC up to the next generation of response. The year will be spent overhauling the operational system; automating information fields for more accurate data and creating a comprehensive tracking component. Virtually every element will be evaluated and, if necessary, improved.

The vast changes to the system on all levels will prove to be critical in the unprecedented response to Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

January–May 2005 Improvement from the Ground Up

The EMAC Operations Manual explains each aspect of the compact and how it works. It outlines all procedures and protocols for states requesting help and states providing it. The man-

ual describes the EMAC organizational structure and delineates the chain of command for any type of event, regardless of its severity. It provides checklists and flowcharts, requisition forms and schedules. Simply put, it's the final word when it comes to EMAC.

In the early part of 2005, this manual is painstakingly reviewed, line by line. The end goal is to make the book more user-friendly and operationally oriented during a disaster. The team of people working on the manual includes those who have been with EMAC since its inception and understand the intricacies of the system. Other members are those intimately familiar with disaster response and the type of questions that come up during an event.

During the same time period, the EMAC Web site is redesigned. The event broadcast infrastructure is revamped. Notification/tracking components are expanded. Navigation is made easier and more understandable.

In addition, some of the basic EMAC operations are restructured. Many recommendations from the 2004 Hurricane Season After-Action Report—which is still in draft form at this point—are incorporated. Detailed tracking for individual disciplines, such as firefighting and law enforcement, is added. One of the most important changes is introducing overlapping A-Teams for continuity of operations during a disaster response.



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June 2005— Setting EMAC's Long-Term Strategy

The hurricane season officially begins June 1. A few days later, the EMAC Executive Task Force meets. These 18 people provide leadership, administration and management of the compact. During the first half day of the session, members focus on training and resource typing issues, review the nearly completed Operations Manual, and participate in a demonstration of the new Web site. They received a status report of the 2004 Hurricane Season After-Action Report and the findings to date.

The remaining day-and-a-half is spent discussing, debating and making extensive revisions to the compact's five-year strategic plan. Everyone agrees that EMAC reached a significant milestone in 2004 with its hurricane response. But they also realize that this very response demands even more from the compact. Next time, they reason, the expectations will be even higher and EMAC has to be ready.

The task force commits itself to four main goals: provide leadership on mutual aid issues; strengthen mutual aid through stronger relationships; align EMAC with national preparedness priorities and greatly enhance the system's capability.

The meeting concludes on June 8. The first storm of the season, Tropical Storm Arlene, makes landfall on the Florida Panhandle three days later.

July 2005—First U.S. Hurricane of the Year

After months of work, EMAC introduces its totally revamped Web site on July 1. EMAC key contacts from each state familiarize themselves with the event broadcast system and its new features. In addition, the newly published EMAC Operations Manual is released.

Hurricane Dennis, a Category 3 storm, hits Florida on the afternoon of July 10. Two days prior, EMAC has teams in place to help coordinate response efforts. This includes its National Coordinating Group, which provides oversight and governance of the compact, and three A-Teams, the lead group assigned to work with the impacted state EOC during a disaster event, in Florida, Alabama and Mississippi. Fortunately, Dennis' impact is far less serious than anticipated. The affected states handle most of the demands on their own, requiring little state-to-state mutual aid.

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August 2005— Disaster Strikes

Anticipating its annual rotation of EMAC National Coordinating Group members, EMAC leadership holds a transition exercise Aug. 9–10. This represents the final step in preparing the new team for the responsibilities it will assume at the end of the month. The two-day program entails a senior officials and operational briefing, as well a simulated disaster exercise that includes an earthquake in New York and wildfires in Washington state. The mock disasters and response are followed by a hot-wash, in which actions during the exercises are critiqued.

Next on the agenda is the National Emergency Management Association Annual Conference, Aug 28–31. Administered by NEMA through its Response and Recovery Committee, EMAC provides an annual report at the conference. This year, the meeting is held in Alaska, the home state of the NEMA 2005 president, Dave Liebersbach. The completed 2004 Hurricane Season

After-Action Report is presented as well as a status report on Hurricane Katrina.

At each of NEMA's two annual conferences, EMAC has a meeting room on standby in case a disaster occurs, and the compact must establish a temporary command center to deploy resources. As Hurricane Katrina builds in the Atlantic Ocean and a U.S. landfall becomes imminent, EMAC administration opens this office at the Anchorage hotel the day before the conference begins, constantly monitoring the hurricane's path.

Katrina continues to strengthen, reaching Category 5. A-Teams arrive on Aug. 27 in Florida and Mississippi, with another in Louisiana on Aug. 28. The EMAC National Coordinating Team (NCT), which serves as the liaison to the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the National Guard, sets up on the same day at the FEMA National Response Coordination Center in Washington, D.C.

The hurricane weakens slightly to a Category 4 and on Aug. 29, hits New Orleans. It decimates southern Louisiana and the Mississippi Gulf Coast, and also damages parts of Alabama. Despite the severity, it's first believed that New Orleans, which is below sea level, has dodged a bullet because the destruction isn't worse. Then, the levees, which protect the city on a daily basis from Lake Pontchartrain to the north, are breached. Eighty

percent of New Orleans is flooded, killing more than a thousand people, destroying thousands of homes and leaving tens of thousands stranded.

The new EMAC leadership takes over, ironically, the same day that Katrina makes landfall along Louisiana and Mississippi.

September 2005

Even before the full magnitude of the disaster becomes evident to the world, EMAC is getting help to the affected states. Every kind of imaginable resource and expertise is needed: hazmat responders, swift water rescue, helicopters, medical personnel, livestock inspectors, law enforcement, sandbags—and thousands and thousands of National Guard troops.

EMAC has deployed the National Guard during other events, but not to this degree. By the end of September, it's estimated that EMAC has coordinated 12,843 troops and more than 8,900 civilians. Personnel and equipment come into the devastated area from all over the country, as well as Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

On Sept. 24, as the Gulf Coast is still reeling from Katrina, Hurricane Rita strikes southeastern Texas and southwestern Louisiana. The Category 3 storm causes extensive power outages while the storm surge re-floods some areas in New Orleans. EMAC member states provide another 4,400 people and approximately \$55 million in total aid.

October–November 2005 The Onslaught Continues

These two months are spent keeping people and resources flowing to the affected states. A total of 64,207 personnel are deployed through EMAC for the response to Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. This represents more than \$819.3 million in total costs. All of the compact's previous records are shattered and the system meets a level of demand never before required.

EMAC develops a post-deployment survey on its Web site for all those who traveled to the ravaged areas and provided assistance. The feedback will be included in the 2005 Hurricane Season After-Action Report, and later, to make further changes to the compact.

Congress holds various committee and sub-committee hearings during October and November, investigating the Hurricane Katrina response. As part of the research, EMAC provides numerous reports to these committees and their staffs.

In the middle of October, EMAC lends additional help to New Hampshire when the state experiences serious flooding. A week later, Hurricane Wilma hits southern Florida. An EMAC National Coordinating Group is established in Washington, D.C. along with a Regional Coordinating Team in Atlanta. Fifty-two personnel will be deployed and a total of \$6.4 million in resources will be dedicated as a result of this latest hurricane.

December 2005

Mississippi transitions its response to in-state EMAC A-Team members while Louisiana is expected to have assisting state A-Teams through March 2006. The response totals include more than 2,188 missions comprising 65,720 personnel (19,355 civilians and 46,365 National Guard).

2005 ends with wildfires in Texas and Oklahoma, flooding in California, and December's Hurricane Epsilon, a record-breaking 14th storm of the season. EMAC continues to consolidate results from its deployment survey, update statistics, prepare for several post-event critiques and develop an online training management system. This is part of an educational campaign that will reach down to the local level of disaster response.

The strides made during early 2005 are instrumental in EMAC's successful response to the year's natural disasters. While Hurricane Katrina reveals other areas within EMAC that need further review, the compact plans to use the ensuing reports, feedback and self-evaluation as a foundation to create a better system, one that's even more prepared for the next major disaster.

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