



Report Praises

EMAC Response

Compact Lauded for Accomplishments During Hurricane Season

The Hurricane Season Response After-Action Report evaluated how the Emergency Management Assistance Compact stood up to the challenges of the 2005 hurricane season. The report cited both the compact's accomplishments and areas for improvement, but called its overall response-delivery outcomes successful.

By Beverly Bell

A final report on the performance of EMAC during the 2005 hurricane season praises the compact's ability to facilitate the delivery of people and equipment during the catastrophic natural disasters of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

The 2005 Hurricane Season Response After-Action Report (AAR) outlines the compact's substantial improvements since the 2004 hurricane season, which made the response to the overwhelming destruction in 2005 such a success story.

The report cited the following accomplishments:

- The delivery of "valuable resources quickly and in unprecedented quantities to Member States engulfed in a disaster of catastrophic proportions."
- Good communication between EMAC leadership, member states and the threatened Gulf Coast states well before the hurricane made landfall. This enabled early recruitment of personnel for EMAC A-Teams, the lead groups assigned directly to a disaster event and the affected state.
- EMAC staff and leadership who were "flexible, responsive and fully committed to supporting the A-Teams." The report specifically refers to enhancements made to the broadcast and resource tracking systems in real time as requested by A-Team members in the field, which greatly helped them in executing their responsibilities.

The report also lists areas for improvement:

- Securing adequate funding for EMAC—the compact "is a proven and valuable component of the Nation's response and recovery capabilities"... there should be "a base funding level to enable multi-year EMAC forward planning."
- "A major educational and public awareness campaign is needed to ensure all relevant parties are fully cognizant of EMAC's purpose, restrictions and operational parameters."



How the EMAC After-Action Report was Developed

- 742 Completed Post-Deployment Surveys
- Two-day, facilitated focus-group discussions with 60 people from EMAC Advance Teams (A-Teams), and members of EMAC's top leadership deployed to Washington, D.C. and the affected regions
- Two-day, facilitated focus group discussions with 150 individuals who were deployed to the devastated areas and who represented different disciplines; individuals came from all 48 assisting states
- Thousands of EMAC documents, including daily situation reports, Request-for-Assistance (Req-A) forms and other information from the EMAC database

- Several administrative and operational issues should be addressed, including 1) an electronic version of the Request for Assistance (Req-A) form, which is used by member states to formally request, offer and accept assistance; 2) greater accountability of deployed personnel, and 3) a new level of EMAC operations and larger A-Teams for catastrophic events.

The basis of the report, which took nearly a year to complete, is a post-deployment survey conducted two months after Katrina struck. More than 700 participants provided feedback on various operational elements, including what worked well and what procedures needed to be modified. This was followed up with facilitated focus groups and interviews with stakeholders and emergency responders who were deployed during the hurricanes Katrina and Rita responses.

The AAR focuses on hurricanes Katrina and Rita, which accounted for 97.3 percent of the 2005 missions and 99.6 percent of the personnel deployed during 2005. However, EMAC was activated 10 times that year; responding to one wildfire, one flood, one tropical storm, two winter storms and five hurricanes. These events generated 2,241 mission requests, resulting in the deployment of 66,207 personnel and countless pieces of equipment.

An Unprecedented Response

In its 11-year history, EMAC had never handled disasters the size of hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Prior to 2005, the largest utilization of state-to-state mutual aid in the nation's history took place the previous year. In 2004, four hurricanes—Frances, Ivan, Jeanne and Charley—hit the U.S. in a six-week period. 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.

In contrast, the 2005 civilian EMAC response was 23 times larger than that of 2004, totaling nearly 20,000 personnel. In addition, 46,500 National Guard personnel were deployed. EMAC had deployed the National Guard during other events, but not to this level.

“The EMAC system was tested during the worst natural disaster in our nation's history,” says Robert Latham Jr., retired executive director of the Mississippi Emergency Management Agency. And though the system was stretched to its limits, it never failed to deliver. “Virtually every asset shortfall was met by EMAC,” says Latham.

Some of those deployed in 2005 under EMAC:

- More than 1,300 search and rescue personnel from 16 states searched more than 22,300 structures and rescued 6,582 people.
- More than 2,000 health care professionals from 28 states treated more than 160,000 patients in the days and weeks after the storms, under the most primitive of conditions.
- Nearly 3,000 Fire/Hazmat personnel from 28 states
- 200 engineers from nine states
- More than 6,880 sheriff's deputies and police officers from 35 states and countless local jurisdictions deployed across Louisiana and Mississippi—a total of 35 percent of all of the resources deployed.
- 112 animal rescue personnel from four states; one team alone sheltered approximately 1,500 animals.

The magnitude of the response revealed EMAC's strengths and weaknesses. As a result, the 154-page AAR describes operational and administrative issues while providing nu-

“...EMAC is at a point where it needs a small full-time core support staff to carry on between emergencies and to serve as the foundation for sustained future operations... It is time to make an investment in a proven successful venture...”

*A recommendation for improvement in the EMAC
2005 Hurricane Season Response After-Action Report*

merous recommendations to improve the compact. Most of the suggestions fall into three main areas: 1) education and training, 2) Web site and database, and 3) adequate funding for EMAC.

The Need for Education and Technology Upgrades

Education emerged early as a key concern in the AAR process. Surveys and interviews revealed representatives from various disciplines weren't familiar with EMAC before Hurricane Katrina. This lack of knowledge resulted in problems with the mobilization and deployment processes for local first responders, which hampered some states' response efforts.

EMAC leadership decided to act upon this before the AAR was published. An EMAC Advisory Group was established in June 2006. It's comprised of individuals from national associations representing state and local emergency management, law enforcement, fire, public health, public works, EMS, the National Guard and elected officials. In addition, the National Guard Bureau, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security have been invited to name liaisons. The group serves as a vetting body for EMAC processes and procedures, assists with EMAC education and training for their respective disciplines and supports EMAC during major activations.

In addition, EMAC has increased its number of trained state personnel who can instruct other state staff in EMAC procedures. Since August 2005, 85 individuals have taken the "Train-the-Trainer" course for instructors, and 295 have completed the EMAC Field Course, a two-day class that explains all elements of the compact.

The EMAC Web site and database are also discussed prominently in the report. Considerable work has already been done on a recommended electronic version of the Request for Assistance or the Req-A form, which drives the entire EMAC process. This document is the legal agreement between a requesting and assisting state, but before the revised form is deemed acceptable, numerous hurdles must be overcome, including the legality of electronic signatures. Online training and exercises are also being developed to test the new Req-A process.

Rebuilt System Results in 2005 Response

Just three years ago, a small fee paid by each state sustained EMAC. This allowed for one part-time staffer. There was a Web site, but it offered only basic information and very limited functionality.

Had that type of backing persisted, it's debatable what kind of coordination and facilitation the compact could have provided after the 2005 disasters. "We definitely would have seen a less robust response," said Jeff Phillips, former chair of EMAC and the Emergency Operations Bureau Chief with the New Mexico Department of Public Safety.

The funding mechanism, however, changed in 2004 when the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) gave a three-year grant to EMAC to support enhancements and to help promote both interstate and intrastate mutual aid around the country. This allowed for the drastic overhaul EMAC conducted in 2005.

The entire EMAC system was revamped. The Web site was redesigned and the event broadcast infrastructure was significantly augmented. This included adding automated information fields for more accurate data and creating a comprehensive tracking component. Finally, the EMAC Operations Manual, which outlines all procedures and protocols, was thoroughly reviewed. Everything was finalized before hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

"The additional dollars enabled improvements on all levels," says Phillips. "Member states' understanding of the compact and their ability to implement EMAC were directly impacted by increased funding."

Recognizing the benefits of a successful national mutual aid system that is built on EMAC, Congress authorized \$4 million annually in the DHS budget to support the compact's activities. While the funding was authorized, it was not appropriated in the FY 2007 DHS budget. Regardless, this show of support by Congress is a testament to EMAC's successful response to the devastating events of 2005.

EMAC Belongs to the States

As the leading state-to-state mutual aid compact, EMAC belongs to the states. It is a vehicle for them to get help across state lines when a disaster is larger than one state can handle.

"Having been one of only a few states that has been the recipient of EMAC support for a catastrophic event, I can honestly say without hesitation that this asset, which supported our local governments and state for almost a year, resulted in reduced loss of life and expedited the recovery process," said Latham.

The belief is that EMAC must remain as strong as possible because there is always the possibility that a catastrophe the size and scope of hurricanes Katrina and Rita could strike anywhere and at any time in the country.

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