

THE LESSONS OF HURRICANE HUGO**Law Enforcement Responds**

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A number of buildings in the Charleston area collapsed, unable to withstand the storm's fury.

On the evening of September 21, 1989, Hurricane Hugo raged across the South Carolina coast. This storm, which had already devastated Martinique and Puerto Rico, passed directly over the city of Charleston, spreading hurricane-force destruction on a 200-mile front. It would later be judged one of the largest and most destructive storms to hit the U.S. mainland in the 20th century.

In recent years, Charleston has often been the possible point of landfall for tropical storms and, in each case, some preparation has been made. Fortunately, those threats came and went, leaving little in their wake but heavy rain and minor wind damage. Nevertheless, each new storm must be treated as a potential disaster.

On Monday, September 18, 1989, the Charleston County Emergency Services Division notified the police department that a hurricane watch had been declared. From that point on, all departmental planning and activities were based on the assumption that the storm would hit the city of Charleston with its most powerful front. Worst-case scenario planning was

left to chance, since there would be no opportunity during the crisis to correct mistakes or rectify omissions.

Staff and Personnel Briefings

Once a significant threat is evident, the agency must take steps to brief both command staff and individual employees, including:

- Scheduled staff meetings where problems are presented, duties assigned and follow-up on accomplishment levels done. These meetings must be kept short and to the point if they are to avoid defeating their own purpose. Assignments such as supply requisition, vehicle checks, etc., should be assigned to personnel with expertise in those areas.

- Situation briefs, conducted by appointed briefing officers, to keep the staff updated on the storm or disaster situation.

- Informative meetings to let employees know the particulars of the situation they are facing, what is being done by others, what they are expected to do and what steps they need to take to safeguard their own families and property since

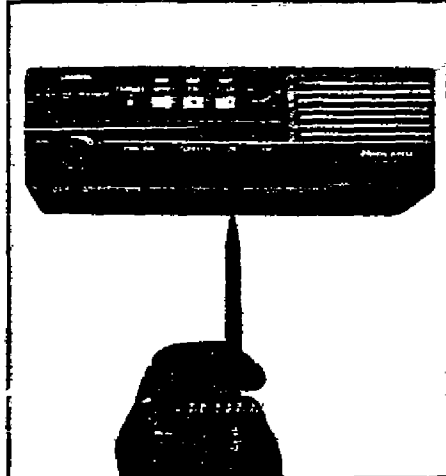
incident. During Hugo, we emphasized the fact that no officer would be allowed to leave during the storm unless there was a case of documented injury to a family member, and strongly encouraged evacuation of family members. We were gratified with the high level of compliance.

Personnel Recall

The implementation of recall may be staged with essential personnel—generally including members of the command staff, as well as communications and emergency-preparedness personnel—both placed on notice and brought in earlier. Other personnel should be advised that, once they report for duty at a predetermined time, they should expect to remain for the duration of the incident; thus, they should bring sufficient gear for two to three days and should make appropriate provisions in advance for their families.

In general terms, a major disaster would dictate a total recall for sworn personnel, while civilian personnel would be

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Charleston police stood vigil at danger areas, both to prevent injuries to those attempting to return and to deter potential looters.

essential employees should be excluded from recall since their presence, without gainful employment, will hinder rather than enhance the operational environment. These persons should be advised to contact the agency immediately after the event to determine when they are expected to return to work.

When recall is implemented, all normal days off and vacations are cancelled. It should also be a standard policy, included in the department's operational procedures, that, in the event of a pending or actual disaster, all personnel must check in with the agency for further instructions, regardless of where they may be located. Deferment from recall should be on a case-by-case basis only, as determined by the chief of police.

Interagency Planning

A law enforcement agency never operates in a vacuum—particularly not during a disaster, when it must work closely with a number of other law enforcement agencies, emergency services and social agencies tasked with "picking up the pieces." This is especially true where a multitude of jurisdictions interlap geographically and each must coordinate evacuation routes, mutual aid and shelter/relief management.

On September 19, as soon as the threat of Hugo became evident, the Charleston Police Department set up a meeting with the other law enforcement agencies in the area to discuss such matters as evacuation scheduling and route management. The advantages and disadvantages of each of the planned routes were discussed, as well as the policy each agency would follow should a mandatory evacuation be ordered.

All agencies agreed that no route would be closed without prior coordination, that mutual aid would be the order of the day and that mutual aid commu-

nications would be in plain language to avoid confusion among responding personnel. Among the concerns discussed were policies and procedures for towing stalled vehicles, answering alarms and investigating traffic accidents.

To avoid conflict between the law enforcement management of the crisis and the general Emergency Operations Center (EOC) policy response, only law enforcement-related issues were discussed at this meeting.

Evacuation Planning

Under South Carolina law, only the governor can order a mandatory evacuation. Other officials act under his order to direct the mandatory evacuation of their jurisdictions. In all other cases, evacuation is strictly voluntary. The governor's order is generally predicated on a request from the local governing agencies or emergency preparedness division.

In the case of Hugo, a voluntary evacuation had been recommended as early as the afternoon of September 20, and shelters began accepting evacuees by noon. A mandatory evacuation of low-lying and coastal areas, as well as the barrier islands, was ordered by the governor shortly before noon and a massive influx of traffic took to the evacuation routes. Due to the fact that an early evacuation had been ordered for the barrier islands, however, traffic moved freely from those points and the later evacuation of other areas was not hampered by this additional traffic.

Careful advance planning resolved several issues before they became problems. Among these were:

- Removal of stalled vehicles. The few vehicles that stalled were towed off the roadway by contract towing vehicles to a point where they no longer impeded traffic. No effort was made to tow them

to specific locations due to time constraints and the need to have the wreckers available. Those in the stalled vehicles were transferred to other vehicles or transported to safe locations.

- **Accident investigations.** Under a greatly simplified and streamlined procedure, drivers were issued white forms and allowed to go on their way where possible; if necessary, the vehicle was towed off the road and passengers assisted to safety.

- **Traffic flow.** Cars were prohibited from returning to areas that were the subject of mandated evacuation except in an emergency, such as the need to pick up persons needing transportation out.

The evacuation process was made much smoother as a result of the extraordinary cooperation we received. For example, the Howard Johnson's hotel located on I-26 used its large, lighted message sign (positioned on the rooftop facing traffic coming into Charleston) to display the message: "If you can read this, you are going the wrong way." Evacuation information was also broadcast over all local radio and TV stations, along with a strong warning to heed the evacuation order. Media cooperation was excellent.

By and large, the public cooperated with the evacuation order. It had previously been decided, however, that no one would be physically removed from his home if he insisted on staying, unless he was felt to be incompetent to make the decision.

Evacuation to shelters moved smoothly and, by mid-afternoon, the primary shelters were filled and alternate shelters opened.

All in all, it is estimated that more than 60,000 individuals had evacuated their homes and relocated either to shelters or to some other location by mid-afternoon. Local hotels on the interstate and cities up towards Columbia were full, as were most hotels in the city of Columbia. The University of South Carolina in Columbia, as well as the city of Columbia itself, opened shelters to accommodate the overflow.

Although evacuees were originally told to go at least as far as Orangeburg, the advisory was later amended to recommend going as far as North Carolina, if possible, due to the size and track of the storm. Hugo did, in fact, severely affect Columbia, as well as other portions of the state.

Several of the shelters experienced physical failures, such as portions of the roof collapsing, or flooding during the storm surge. Fortunately, most building failures occurred in nonoccupied portions of the shelters, thus avoiding serious injuries or fatalities.

Hugo taught us that

- evacuation should be ordered as early as possible (while a false start may be an inconvenience, waiting too long

may be fatal as roads become blocked and those who decide to leave cannot), and that

- shelters should be evaluated for fitness on a periodic basis, with emphasis on their physical ability to withstand damage. Alternate shelters (shopping centers, churches, etc.) might be designated by contract or other arrangements.

Nursing homes, hospitals and others were evacuated by the fire department, police personnel and South Carolina Electric and Gas (SCE&G) buses, which stayed on the road until wind conditions forced them to house their equipment for the safety of the drivers. They worked with the EOC in establishing pick-up points, late in the day, for groups of people who made a last-minute request for help in leaving. During the 35-minute period when the eye of the storm was centered over the city, fire and police personnel went out to try to assist in the evacuation of those who had called in during the first part of the storm and claimed they were suffering structural failure. This was necessarily a limited effort due to the short "life" of the eye.

Media Relations

Before Hugo hit, the broadcast media were of significant assistance in spreading the word about the need for evacuation, as well as evacuation routes, the status of the storm and shelter locations. Once the stations were back on the air after Hugo, they provided valuable assistance in updating the public on the status of the community, availability of assistance and curfew restrictions. Round-the-clock coverage of Hugo was standard in the week after the storm; once normal broadcasting schedules were restored, special bulletins were used to inform the public of any new developments.

The print media also assisted significantly by publishing up-to-date information sections telling the public where to find assistance, what areas had safe water, where to take relief supplies, etc.

With the arrival of the national media the day after the storm, some problem areas arose. Traditionally, the disaster story that sells air time is the one with the most tears and destruction. As a result, some areas of the country who were constantly shown pictures of outlying areas that had suffered almost total destruction believed they were seeing metropolitan Charleston. Phone inquiries from other parts of the country confirmed this as people tried to inquire about relatives and friends in the area. It took a considerable amount of work to tone down the outside media, but local media cooperation was a significant help.

Pre-Storm Supply Planning

In terms of supply planning, the de-

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partment was concerned not only with ordering and stocking but with protecting existing assets, as well.

The following items were among those obtained for use by our officers: chain saws, hip boots, flares, extra caution signs/barricades and crowd control equipment. Department-wide, provisions were made to obtain extra gasoline supplies and resupply, trucks, food for both employees and prisoners, water cans and other miscellaneous items.

Additionally, special provisions were made to protect the department's assets:

- Horses were moved from their barn inland to a safe location.
- Boats were relocated out of the water and secured indoors.
- Provisions were made to have aircraft available for an overflight of the area immediately after the storm.
- The emergency generator was tested and sandbagged.
- Vehicles that were not immediately needed were evacuated to higher ground to protect them.

Since we did not foresee a long-term disruption in water supply, we did not plan on the need for additional sanitary facilities. However, it might not be a bad idea to rent a few Port-o-Lets, secure them in a safe area and break them out later if needed.

Communications

In law enforcement generally, and particularly during any disaster, reliable communications are vital. Designated as one of the three legs of the C3 system (Command/Control/Communications), effective communications are the key to the coordination of departmental efforts. If the communications system fails, even the best-prepared organization will not achieve its goals.

Using a worst-case scenario planning model, one must assume the loss of the primary communications center and have an alternate communications command post in place, properly equipped and ready to take control.

All personnel must be briefed on both normal communications and procedures and special procedures that may come into play once mutual aid frequencies are activated. Circuit discipline is a must, with transmissions kept brief and limited to those that are absolutely necessary. Plain-language communications, especially when multiple agencies are involved, should be utilized.

If outside agencies are involved and are not in a mutual aid mode, provisions must be made to ensure that everyone's equipment can be utilized on the same frequency. (This may necessitate the loaning of equipment between agencies.)

Land-line communications are also vital. With minor exceptions, the Charleston area maintained the integrity of its telephone system during Hugo, thus

Personnel must be staged during the storm at predetermined and safe locations to allow their rapid entry into the community as soon as the period of maximum danger has passed. This is not only to seal off areas and prevent the predictable violations of the law that will accompany the storm, but to provide a positive psychological benefit for the community.

expediting communications from the department to other area command posts, the EOC and the public. Since we could not rely on this, however, arrangements had been made to obtain cellular telephones for key personnel.

These had both advantages and disadvantages. If used in automobiles, directly off the battery, they operated fine. They also worked well if they were allowed to charge off a single outlet. However, there were problems with dead zones that prohibited transmissions from certain areas and, at the EOC—where batteries were being charged off single outlets along with other equipment—their performance was marginal at best.

Early on, we established a bank of telephones manned by sworn personnel to field all inquiries from the public, other agencies requesting information regarding relief supplies and personnel needs, departmental personnel, businesspeople and anyone else inquiring about the storm and/or recovery. This technique allowed all calls of this nature to be routed to a central location rather than being dispersed throughout the department. Operators were provided information updates from both the command staff and the EOC so they would have the most accurate and up-to-date information. They were also responsible for making referrals to other agencies when the inquiry did not fall under the jurisdiction of our agency.

Arrangements must also be made for emergency repair, replacement and maintenance of communications equipment. Personnel from the city electrical department must be on hand at the police department to change portable radio batteries, do minor repair and assist in elec-

trical matters. This may require the relocation of equipment and personnel prior to the storm to ensure that they are in-house during the entire incident.

Departmental Command Post Operations

During both the storm and the recovery phase, the departmental command post was the nerve center of the department. In selecting an appropriate site, several factors must be taken into consideration, including:

- Size. While the room used must be large enough to accommodate three or four people comfortably, it should be small enough to discourage loitering by unnecessary personnel.
- Communications capability. There must be an adequate number of phones in the room to allow effective land-line communications both within the department and outside. There must also be room to hook up a portable radio unit with its support equipment and, if available, the 800 trunking system.

- Wall space. There must be room to display situation maps and bulletins.

The importance of keeping unnecessary personnel out of the command center cannot be overemphasized. Strict access control is a must or the center's functioning will be hampered. Also, bits and pieces of overheard information may become the source of rumors that can affect the morale of operational personnel.

Proper staffing of the command center is vital. Only those personnel who are fully knowledgeable of departmental response capabilities and can see the "big picture" should be utilized. The command duty officer (CDO) must be an individual of sufficient rank who has been granted the authority by the chief of police to make decisions, even those with financial or personnel implications. In the absence of the chief, the CDO will be acting for him, with all his authority and responsibility, and must, therefore, be a person in whom the chief has a high level of confidence.

Personnel Allocation and Deployment

Personnel must be staged during the storm at predetermined and safe locations to allow their rapid entry into the community as soon as the period of maximum danger has passed. This is not only to seal off areas and prevent the predictable violations of the law that will accompany the storm, but to provide a positive psychological benefit for the community.

Pre-positioned sites are necessary because you may either lose your primary staging area or be unable to enter or

leave it due to flooding or blocked streets. Such sites must be accessible to and from the area of the community they are intended to cover, and provide safety for the personnel housed as a response team.

The Charleston Police Department used its four team headquarters as staging areas, a strategy that allowed manpower to be physically present in each site during the storm, including those teams that might find themselves cut off due to possible damage to existing bridge or road access. Another response team was located at the main police building. Each of these facilities had been previously surveyed for its ability to survive the storm, so as not to place personnel in unacceptable danger. Additional sites, such as major hotels or shopping centers, may be designated for individual officers. During Hugo, officers were stationed in our two enclosed shopping malls to assist resident security personnel.

Another consideration must be the stationing of personnel in shelters. This will normally be required as soon as the shelter is opened, which is typically several hours prior to the storm's arrival.

Those agencies that do not have substations where personnel can be staged should begin reviewing public and private buildings, shopping centers, churches, etc., that might be usable for this purpose. Early identification of these sites is necessary so that legal requirements can be met and certainty of access guaranteed.

As soon as the storm has passed, personnel should be deployed from these staging areas to predetermined locations so that areas subject to damage and/or looting can be secured and areas with severe damage sealed for public safety considerations.

During the storm and the brief period of relief granted by the eye of the storm, personnel can be utilized for rapid response to protect equipment, make emergency repairs or respond to calls needing immediate action, such as trapped persons or looting. If the decision is made to send officers out during the eye of the storm, it is essential to have accurate information regarding the length of the eye; remember, too, to allow a buffer time zone to permit a safe withdrawal. Once the relatively calm eye passes, the full fury of the storm will resume as the second half passes over you. There is no gradual buildup the second time around.

During Hugo, we did send officers out during the eye of the storm to attempt the rescue of trapped persons and quell reported looting in the business district. All personnel were successfully withdrawn to safe areas before the eye passed. Information regarding the length and position of the eye was transmitted from the EOC to all agencies and shelters, with the caveats that only necessary personnel

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should leave shelters and that those who did should be advised that the storm was not over. History shows that people have often been caught unaware by the second half of the storm.

A specific individual with sufficient rank and authority should be designated to supervise and determine personnel deployment questions. This officer will be responsible for coordinating the usage of the department's personnel, as well as members of such varied groups as the National Guard and law enforcement agencies from outside the area.

During Hugo, a number of agencies from outside South Carolina sent personnel to augment our officers. Each of these officers had to be assigned with our own personnel in a manner that best utilized his talents. It was also necessary to assign experienced officers with National Guard units to help them find their way around unfamiliar territory and retain the essence of civilian law enforcement control.

Determinations regarding the location and shifting of assets must be reviewed daily, taking into consideration the changing circumstances. In our case, there was a total disruption of electrical service throughout the Charleston area, meaning not only that lights were out, but that there were no functioning alarm systems in the business district. Additionally, some areas of the downtown were so damaged that portions of buildings were in danger of collapse and, therefore, people had to be kept out of these areas. Assets other than departmental personnel were used both to augment and provide rest periods for our personnel. A major commitment of manpower was needed each day during the first two weeks. This was especially true with regard to maintaining the curfew, which was considered vital for the protection of both lives and property.

Each day's shifting requirements meant that the officer in charge of personnel allocations needed up-to-date and accurate reporting from operational units to determine when and where personnel were needed and to communicate that information to Guard officials to ensure the smooth operation of the recovery effort. This is an exhausting and time-consuming job, requiring the delegation of decision-making authority as well as responsibility. If manpower is not properly and gainfully utilized, augmentation personnel will question their presence there, which may lead to both morale problems and premature withdrawal of assets.

Requests for Emergency Assistance

Normally it will not be possible to estimate with any degree of accuracy how much outside assistance will be required until a preliminary post-storm damage assessment can be made. In many in-

While we had planned for recovery from a major storm, no one expected the level of devastation that Hugo brought. The extended response to the storm posed a whole new set of problems: massive and extended power failures, management of incoming aid and coordination of the National Guard's efforts.

stances the governor, anticipating the need for National Guard or State Guard assistance, may have begun a recall and staging effort prior to the storm. After the storm, determinations must be made as to where and when to deploy these resources or, if they are not needed, to implement either a full or staged deactivation.

Generally, the decision to request National Guard or federal assistance will be made by the political leadership after consultation with law enforcement and other emergency services personnel. In almost all instances, such a request is necessary prior to commitment of personnel. Once the governor receives a request for state troops, he will approve or deny it as he feels appropriate. The same will hold true with regard to requests for federal assistance. Due to provisions of the Posse Comitatus Act, federal troops can normally be used only after the governor has requested their deployment. Only emergency assistance of a nonlaw enforcement nature or actions to preserve federal property can be taken without such prior approval.

Once state or federal military assistance is obtained, two important requirements must be met:

- The jurisdiction must appoint a liaison to ensure that the resources are properly utilized and that any problems that arise can be expeditiously handled.

- An appropriate staging area must be established and identified for these personnel.

Staging areas for the Guard or military personnel may vary from actual military reservations in the area to National Guard armories to school complexes or other areas conducive to their operations. Emergency assistance requests may range from a simple request for specific equipment (such as for water purification

or road clearing) to actual commitment of personnel in a law enforcement environment. The level of commitment requested should be determined by necessity; only the lowest appropriate level should be requested.

Extended Response

The extended response to the storm posed a whole new set of problems. While we had planned for recovery from a major storm, no one expected such tremendous devastation. Some of the areas in which our planning fell short follow:

- Coordination of the National Guard. We did not expect a disaster of such magnitude that it could not be controlled by local resources. When it was necessary to call in the Guard, special arrangements had to be made to coordinate their activities, provide equipment and assign personnel to assist them.

- Massive and extended power failures. Not only did the storm destroy two vital steam-generating plants that provided the primary source of electrical power to the area, but main transmission lines from other areas of the state were down. Towers were blown over, thousands of electrical poles were damaged and hundreds of miles of lines were down. While power outages had been expected, the pre-storm estimate of a few days of inconvenience turned into a month or more for some areas. This totally changed the complexion of the response, since we had to anticipate the human dynamics of combining the necessary curfew with darkened, unheated homes housing potentially disoriented people. Fortunately, the potential for "cabin fever" erupting into violence was never realized. Another power-related problem was that vital businesses (food stores, service stations, doctor's offices, etc.)—even those that were not storm damaged—were not able to function adequately without the provision of generator power.

- Management of incoming aid. Literally hundreds of volunteers, including law enforcement officers, flocked to the Charleston area to assist. Again, the influx of manpower and materiel was not anticipated. Personnel had to be assigned to meaningful duties, incoming supplies inventoried and distributed and accommodations found to house the personnel. While all assistance was needed and appreciated, it did present a whole new set of logistical problems.

Interagency coordination, however, never presented a major problem as all worked hand-in-glove. Since the disaster affected 24 counties, problems were mutual and were treated as such.

Constant coordination with the EOC continued throughout the recovery phase. Damage assessment was also ongoing and continues today. Officers

we e advised to continually survey areas for possible threats to public safety and ensure that such threats were immediately reported to proper authorities. Signs had to be placed at major intersections and some controlled by officers during high-traffic periods due to the complete initial failure of the traffic control lights. Since only a limited number of people were on the streets initially, this problem was minimized and most traffic control signals were operational by the time schools reopened and businesses resumed normal hours.

Internal relief operations were established to help those officers and other departmental employees who suffered significant or total destruction of their property. Reuniting families was also a priority. As with all portions of the population, many officers' families refused to evacuate what appeared to be relatively safe areas. Not surprisingly, their welfare was on the minds of officers, as was the condition of their property. Arrangements were made to place officers on 12-hour shifts to allow them some free time by the evening of the 22nd.

FEMA Response

Once a presidential declaration establishes an area as a federal disaster area, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) will set up full-scale relief operations. Immediately after a major disaster, a FEMA team will arrive on site to begin an evaluation of the situation, forwarding its recommendations to the president to supplement those received from the governor of the affected state(s).

FEMA not only provides relief to private individuals and businesses, but will also pick up most of the expenses incurred by local and state governments for disaster-related efforts. This is usually figured on a formula of 75 percent/13 percent/12 percent, paid by the federal, state and local governments, respectively. FEMA reimbursement does, however, hinge on detailed and complete record keeping. Record-keeping requirements should be an integral part of any agency's overall disaster preparedness plan, and the implementation of that record keeping should be contemporaneous with the beginning of the disaster response.

It was apparent both during and after the storm that, though errors had been made, our plans were viable. It was also apparent that adjustments had to be made in many cases. Though damage is estimated to be in excess of \$6 billion, loss of life was minimal and we are fortunate in that regard.

As an editorial in the *Charleston News and Courier* commented, "The community has survived the hurricane's blast. In the aftermath, it faces other threats, some of which are yet undefined. It is important to have survived the blast. It is even more important to survive the aftermath." ★



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