

Transportation Department Outlines Hurricane Preparedness Efforts

AUSTIN—Hurricane season has arrived along with a flurry of activity around the state-government agencies, volunteer groups and private sector partners, all getting ready for the next big storm.

The Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) plays a critical role in storm education, evacuation and recovery. So each year, along with its hundreds of partners around the state, the department begins, months ahead of time, preparing for the possibility of seasonal storms.

"Preparations for the hurricane season begin at the end of the previous year while experiences and lessons learned are still fresh on the mind," explained Amadeo Saenz, TxDOT executive director.

"TxDOT divisions and districts meet early to talk about what worked and what didn't," Saenz noted. "With each event, we learn more about the procedures we can put in place to bring the citizens of Texas to safety."

As the hurricane season draws near, TxDOT starts an intensive review and training preparedness program to make sure emergency personnel and systems are in place to handle potential situations.

An important part of the preparedness program is reviewing the TxDOT Emergency Management Plan as early as possible. Video teleconferences with division and district emergency personnel across the state begin early in the year with an extensive review of the components of the plan before a hurricane hits the Texas coast.

Responders are prepped on logistical support teams, evacuation, reentry plans and other

emergency policies and procedures including reviewing and updating phone lists and Web sites.

Seasonal training begins early to prepare personnel on emergency traffic control measures, debris removal and other recovery procedures that are put in place immediately following the storm. Employees are also trained to serve on Courtesy Patrols during evacuations.

After each storm or event, employees share experiences including situations with wildlife (snakes, alligators and wild hogs), downed electrical wires, and living and working for several weeks in a primitive and sometimes dangerous environment.

All this shared information is rolled into a number of fairly intensive and well-structured training programs throughout the year.

TxDOT also participates in regional and statewide emergency drills involving other agencies and local jurisdictions throughout the year.

Equally important on the preparedness list are actions to identify and prepare facilities and equipment for quick mobilization and making sure contraflow routes are open and available (no lane closures).

TxDOT personnel also identify—well in advance of a storm—locations of comfort stations along designated evacuation routes.

Division traffic operations personnel review evacuation plans to be prepared to open—if necessary—evacuation lanes or to implement contraflow measures.

Dynamic Message Signs (DMS) are tested and made ready to communicate emergency messages to travelers across the

state, including frequent warnings to citizens in other parts of the state to not travel to the affected areas.

Each year, personnel evaluate the agency's external and internal communications efforts designed to keep employees and the public informed.

A comprehensive hurricane preparedness section on the agency's Web site includes information on road conditions and evacuation procedures, in addition to links to other agencies with information on local conditions including the www.texasonline.com, a state Web site.

Regional maps online show evacuation routes, all accessible on the Web at TxDOT's site, www.txdot.gov.

What's New

From last year to this year, even more procedural improvements equate to a more efficient hurricane response and recovery system for TxDOT. Here's what's new for the 2009 storm season.

1. Recently, the agency added several new social media sites including Twitter (www.twitter.com/txdot), Facebook (www.txdot.gov/facebook) and YouTube (www.youtube.com/txdotpio)

2. The agency developed a new Emergency Response Reentry Plan to better anticipate resources needed during and after the emergency.

The plan specifies the types of crews and equipment needed including the person responsible for mobilizing crews from designated staging districts. TxDOT employees across the state have been briefed on mobilization procedures.

3. Debris management contracts were reworked to provide better service. Ike taught us a lot about debris—boats, houses and huge barges deposited in the middle of the road with four to five feet of marsh grass.

And, what wasn't deposited by the storm was added later by citizens trying to clean up their property. TxDOT is still cleaning up from last year's storm. This

year's debris management contracts now include provisions to assure quicker response.

There is also a contract monitoring provision to make sure debris removal contractors are meeting all federal requirements.

4. TxDOT is doing a better job preparing its own first-time responders. To help new responders get a better idea of the magnitude of a disaster, TxDOT's audio visual team visited six districts and conducted interviews with disaster veterans.

The result is a 15-minute video that highlights the destruction—and the heartbreak—from previous storms to give first-time responders an idea of what they might be facing.

5. No electricity, no food or showers. In past disaster situations, TxDOT emergency responders had difficulty finding relief from the long hours of working in a hot, sticky and sometimes dangerous environment. TxDOT found a way to provide food and facilities for emergency personnel.

As one veteran noted, "It gets real old eating MRE's (Meals Ready to Eat) after you've put in a 12-hour shift or more." The contract will provide some comfort—including a hot shower—for the men and women working around the clock to restore normalcy after the storm.

6. TxDOT is working to develop a program to better determine when evacuees should be opened or contraflow implemented. TxDOT and local officials need good data to help them make educated decisions on when to open evacuation routes.

The agency is working on a research project with the Uni-

versity of Houston and the Texas Transportation Institute (TTI) to develop a tool that will fine-tune

the process and make it easier to implement each evacuation system at just the right time.

WHAT ARE PLAQUE AND CALCULUS?

Plaque is a soft, sticky substance that forms on teeth which is composed of bacteria and bacterial by-products, regardless of what foods are eaten.

Calculus, also known as tartar, is a hard, mineralized deposit, somewhat like cement, that is formed from the plaque in the mouth and the minerals in saliva.

While most people brush their teeth and take care of their mouths, sometimes their efforts may not be effective. Brushing quickly, using a worn brush, using a too-stiff brush, or inappropriate technique might be to blame. Some medical conditions or medicines may also cause more plaque and calculus to develop. As part of your care, your dentist or hygienist will show you how to brush effectively, as well as use floss and other tools. This will help prevent dense plaque and calculus from developing.

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SAWS Files \$ 1.23 Billion Lawsuit Against LCRA

On August 24, LCRA learned that it is being sued for \$1.23 billion by the San Antonio Water System because studies for a joint water-sharing project showed that the project would fail to meet legislative standards and could not be implemented.

"LCRA is disappointed that SAWS, rather than face facts, is spending ratepayer money on a meritless lawsuit," said Tom Mason, LCRA General Manager.

"LCRA will vigorously defend itself against the attempt to extract more than \$1.2 billion from the people of the Colorado River basin.

"LCRA has worked with SAWS in good faith with a genuine commitment to solutions that could be beneficial to both regions. "At the same time, LCRA maintains an unwavering commitment to uphold its responsibilities to protect and benefit the interests of the lower Colorado River basin - consistent with its mission since 1934.

"At a time when Colorado River water users like those in Austin are taking unprecedented steps to cut back their use in response to extreme drought, it is perplexing that San Antonio officials are claiming that they are entitled to water from the Colorado River," Mason said.

"The study results show there isn't enough water to meet requirements for both regions."

In 2001, the Texas Legislature took the rare step of passing a special law to authorize a transfer of water from the Colorado River to San Antonio contingent on whether a list of requirements could be met.

The requirements set by the Legislature include:

- Protect and benefit Colorado basin interests.
- Be consistent with state water planning processes.
- Ensure health of Matagorda Bay.
- Maintain necessary Colorado River flow protections.
- Require stringent water conservation by SAWS.
- Provide broad review process of studies.
- Raise average levels of lakes Travis and Buchanan.

LCRA and SAWS signed an agreement in 2002 that is consistent with the legislative requirements.

In the agreement, LCRA promised to conduct in-depth, scientific feasibility studies.

LCRA has done so, seeking to use the best science and engineering available. LCRA never promised that the studies would show a specific amount of water could be provided to San Antonio.

Both parties had high hopes for a win-win solution that could benefit each region.

Earlier this year, preliminary study findings indicated that the LCRA-SAWS Water Project would not meet all of the legislative requirements, meaning no water would be available for San Antonio.

These are the facts based on scientific studies, including an updated projection of how much water will be needed by the Colorado River basin.

"SAWS claims that the proposed project would mean 10 or 20 extra feet of water for Lake Travis and Lake Buchanan during this drought.

Lake-area residents need to know that feasibility studies show this claim is patently false," Mason said.

"The project simply does not meet this legislative standard."

The need for more water to meet growing demands in the Colorado basin, environmental needs for the Colorado River and Matagorda Bay, and lake level requirements were the primary factors leading to the study results.

Under its responsibility to protect the interests of the lower Colorado River basin, LCRA, at its Board's direction, included updated projections for water needs in the basin in the feasibility studies.

The updated projections showed that more water than was previously estimated would be needed for cities and industries in the Colorado basin.

"SAWS also claims that the LCRA Board of Directors has no right under the LCRA-SAWS agreement to ensure that this project would leave enough water in the Colorado River basin for the people who live here and the businesses that employ them.

"That is simply contrary to the agreement and Texas statutes," Mason said.

LCRA has worked closely with SAWS as these studies proceeded.

Since first learning of the preliminary study results, LCRA has urged joint consideration of options that could adequately protect and benefit the lower Colorado River basin and provide water to San Antonio.

LCRA worked diligently to explore potential solutions and, during a recent mediation session, even offered to do additional work at its own expense.

LCRA regrets that SAWS officials have flatly refused even to consider options for a project that might meet standards set by state law.

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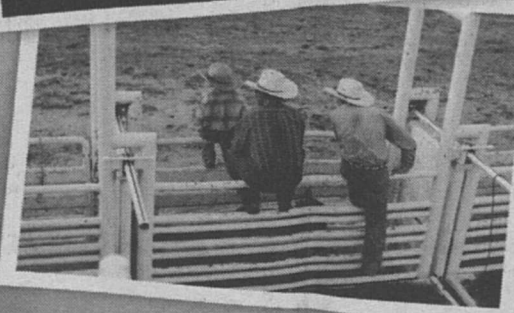
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