

SARASOTA COUNTY GOVERNMENT

Emergency Services

TO: Sarasota County Commission
THROUGH: Jonathan R. Lewis, County Administrator
FROM: Richard A. Collins, Director, Emergency Services
DATE: February 28, 2018
SUBJECT: **Update on Hurricane Irma Response and Recovery**

BACKGROUND:

On September 10, 2017, Hurricane Irma made landfall on the Southwest Florida coast as a major hurricane and subsequently moved north up the Florida peninsula, impacting over 50 counties. Sarasota County sustained impacts consistent with a strong tropical storm to minimal Category 1 hurricane, including loss of electrical utilities to almost 220,000 customers, as well as impacts to various critical facilities, residential structures, traffic signals, and vegetative debris.

The County planning effort for Hurricane Irma began as early as Monday, September 4, 2017, as the hurricane formed in the Atlantic Ocean. Throughout the week, up to landfall, the track and intensity remained fluid, resulting in a potential track and impact to Sarasota County as a Category 4 major hurricane.

Sarasota County Government implemented its Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan (CEMP) and initiated protective actions to prepare the community for a major hurricane. This included regular communication with all municipal partners, constitutional partners, and community stakeholders. A Declaration of a State of Emergency was initiated, along with sheltering over 20,000 residents in both general population shelters and special needs shelters.

Evacuation orders were coordinated with municipal partners to ensure all barrier islands, homes in low-lying areas, and manufactured homes evacuations were completed prior to hurricane landfall. Strong and consistent communication between county and municipal teams, along with consistent public messaging, provided relevant and important information to citizens throughout the storm.

Following landfall and impact to Sarasota County, response actions began by approximately 1:30 a.m. on Monday, September 11, 2017. Tactical First-In Teams completed initial opening of primary roadways by later that morning. Concurrently, emergency response partners answered all 911 calls waiting in queue by 3 a.m. Crews from the county and municipalities quickly began assessing damage to critical facilities, as well as neighborhoods and homes. All barrier islands were cleared and opened to returning residents by the afternoon of September 11.

As response operations subsided, recovery operations, including debris collection, began in the days immediately following impact. FPL completed power restoration to 220,000 customers within 10 days. Initial estimates from the Sarasota County recovery team identified approximately 250,000 cubic yards of vegetative debris in the unincorporated county, and a total of 1,000,000 cubic yards of debris including the cities.

The County initiated debris contracting services prior to storm landfall; however, the extensive nature of the impact across the peninsula, as well as the extended operations in Houston Texas, created widespread issues for the contractors in obtaining and supplying equipment for debris collection. The recovery team implemented multiple plans and initiated reviews through the Florida Attorney General's Office to increase debris collection efforts. The efforts increased debris collection to over 30,000 cubic yards per week by mid-October. Through these efforts, completion of first-pass debris collection occurred within 70 days post storm, with final collection of second pass and tree stumps by January 15. A total of 300,000 cubic yards of debris was collected in unincorporated county areas.

Although not the potential Category 4 hurricane expected to impact Sarasota County, Hurricane Irma created the need to implement protective actions consistent with a major hurricane. Given the extensive effort taken to prepare the community for this hurricane, it is important to capture best practices, lessons learned and opportunities for improvement from across the organization.

In November, Emergency Services began collaborating with all county departments and community partners to ensure a thorough review of all processes. The Gulf Coast Community Foundation and the Barancik Foundation partnered with the County to complete an in-depth After Action Review. Peer reviewers including Craig Fugate, former FEMA Director; Jonathan Lord, Florida Division of Emergency Management; Alan Harris, Emergency Management Director for Seminole County; and Manny Soto, Emergency Management Director for the City of Orlando, assisted in reviewing the actions to Hurricane Irma. Additionally, Emergency Response Educators and Consultants (EREC) were brought in through State grant funding to facilitate meetings and produce the After Action Report.

Since November 2017, and in the months following, the County has held over 23 meetings with more than 350 stakeholders, including elected officials, local municipalities, Sarasota County Schools, area hospitals, nonprofits and the business community, to gather their input. Currently, EREC is preparing the final After Action Report, which will be delivered to the Board of County Commissioners by Craig Fugate on March 14, 2018. The report will include recommendations to enhance the County's emergency plans for future disasters.

Many of recommendations, in draft form, were shared with County elected officials at the February 9, 2018 joint meeting. Although these recommendations are currently being drafted into a final After Action document, County staff has been actively engaged in all stakeholder meetings, and is already initiating actions to prepare for the next hurricane season. Staff is focusing on five major areas to enhance operational plans, including:

- Hurricane Evacuation Center Planning
- Public Education Programs
- Employee Planning and Preparation
- EOC Processes & Information Sharing
- Emergency Contracts

Each of these areas includes multiple components to ensure preparedness. For example, Hurricane Evacuation Center Planning includes all facets of general population sheltering, medically dependent sheltering, identification of additional "safe" sheltering locations in the Venice area for this coming season, transportation planning, employee sheltering, etc. On February 13, 2018, a multi-agency planning session was held at the County EOC to develop the plan, deliverables, and components to a multifaceted Hurricane Evacuation Center plan.

Planning milestones include:

- **February/March:** Update/develop plans for hurricane evacuation centers.
- **April:** Prepare training for staff and implement public messaging.
- **May:** Implement staff training.
- **June:** Functional exercise for all shelter teams.

The team is also actively looking for potential sites to shelter residents in unincorporated areas of mid-to South County and the Venice area. The Venice Fire Department Emergency Management Chief is working with the planning team, and we will work to find a wind and surge “safe” Hurricane Evacuation Center in that area.

Following the March 14, 2018, After Action Report delivery to the Board of County Commissioners, staff will continue to provide regular reports to the Board and partners on status of plans and implementation of recommendations. The team will also be preparing an elected officials training for disaster activations. This course is a federally developed program delivered through the State and Federal Emergency Management Institute that will provide elected officials with a certification of completion. Additionally, the Emergency Management Office will hold meetings with County and City administrative leadership team at the beginning of hurricane season, and as soon as practical with an approaching storm during hurricane season, to ensure close collaboration and planning.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. PowerPoint Presentation