



College of Medicine

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Florida Emergency Mortuary Operations Response System

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Friday, October 15, 2004

TO: Robert A. Smith, Ph.D.
Director Emergency Operations
Florida Department of Health

FROM: Larry R. Bedore
FEMORS Commander

SUBJECT: After Action Report – Hurricane Charley, August 13-18, 2004, Mission #1112

Executive Summary

This was the first activation of FEMORS since its inception in June 2002. FEMORS was able to determine its response capability within a few hours, respond to the scene in a timely manner, assess the magnitude of the situation, satisfy the needs of the medical examiner, and demobilize operations rapidly as search and rescue teams ruled out rumors of massive fatalities.

- FEMORS was placed on alert at 1:55 pm Friday, August 13, 2004. Landfall occurred approximately 3:45 pm that afternoon.
- FEMORS was activated to respond at 12:40 am Saturday, August 14, 2004 based upon initial reports of 20 confirmed dead. Command staff arrived at the Charlotte County EOC by 6:00 am with the remaining 35 team members due to arrive at noon. Another 39 members were available and placed on stand-by if needed.
- Great difficulties were encountered attempting to locate medical examiner staff due to downed phone systems. Contact was established at 11:30 am with Chief Investigator Richard Kaufman. FEMORS set up temporary storage operations to manage recovered remains at two refrigerated trucks staged in the parking lot of a Best Western Motel. Phone contact was made with the Associate Medical Examiner Dr. James Weiner at 3:45 pm (Chief Medical Examiner Riazul Imami was out of the country at the time.) Dr. Weiner set a meeting for 9:00 am Sunday.
- By late Saturday afternoon, earlier rumors of great numbers of deaths began to evaporate as only four storm-related fatalities had been logged into the temporary morgue. (A small number of non storm-related natural death remains were also stored for medical examiner and funeral home assistance.) Investigator Kaufman and Commander Bedore agreed to stand down all but 8 team members who would assist Dr. Weiner to autopsy the four storm-related fatalities the following morning at the intact but powerless medical examiner facility.
- The four storm-related cases were processed Sunday and 7 more team members were deactivated leaving one to continue oversight of the remote temporary storage site until power could be restored to the medical examiner facility to reactivate the refrigeration unit.
- On Tuesday, September 17th, the refrigerated trailer was relocated to the medical examiner facility in the evening. The last FEMORS member was deactivated as custody of the remains was transferred back to medical examiner staff.
- Approximately 600 labor hours were expended in this activation.

Lessons Learned

- Notification of alert status for hurricanes from ESF8 (SEOC) to FEMORS should be made not less than 24 hours before anticipated landfall.
- In the absence of a request for assistance issued by the medical examiner, and upon activation SEOC should provide FEMORS with local EOC contact information including the name of a contact person. Normally, it should be the medical examiner that initiates a request for mortuary assistance.
- Once activated by SEOC, FEMORS should attempt to establish direct contact with the Chief Medical Examiner or Investigator on call for that district to coordinate response needs and staging areas. Because phone systems were compromised early on in the storm, phone contact was not established at the primary phone number for the district and alternate phone numbers were not then known.
- Pre storm communications between the medical examiner and local Emergency Operations Center is essential. The absence of advance notice to the EOC by medical examiner staff resulted in confusion within the EOC and for FEMORS Command whose first responsibility is to establish contact with the medical examiner to assess needs. (For subsequent Hurricanes Frances, Ivan, and Jeanne, FEMORS initiated pre-storm contact with medical examiner offices in the path of the storms to provide guidance on methods of requesting assistance and to establish pre-storm contact information. Additionally, Charlotte County medical examiner staff initiated pre-storm contact with the local EOC to provide appropriate contact information.)
- Initial reports of massive deaths must be treated as valid until proven otherwise. However, initial response of FEMORS should be limited to the original Go Team concept where 10-12 early responders arrive to assess the situation, set up operational areas, and determine levels of additional resources to bring forward, as deemed necessary by the medical examiner. FEMORS' initial response with 37 members proved to be inefficient as most team members were not essential to establishing command and control until the true nature of the situation could be determined. Once the true situation became apparent, however, FEMORS was able to rapidly demobilize non-essential staff.
- Communications links among medical examiner staff, EOC, and FEMORS are essential, especially in storm situations where cell phone towers are compromised. The equipment cache for FEMORS should contain a base station and eight radios for communications within a few mile radius of the base of operations.
- Establishment of a medical examiner representative at the local EOC would have aided in managing rumor control. For offices with limited or compromised staff, a FEMORS member (with medical examiner operations experience) could serve in such a liaison position.
- Medical Examiner staff should obtain at least one radio from the local EOC so that reports of fatality locations can be readily transmitted between the EOC and the medical examiner's office for the purpose of dispatching transport teams to retrieve the remains as quickly as possible.
- If local law enforcement resources permit, at least one officer with marked vehicle should be assigned to the medical examiner's office for the purpose of escorting the medical examiner or principle designee to locations where fatalities have been recovered for proper initial investigation. Escort through often-congested traffic, and during curfew hours, would expedite the retrieval of the remains and minimize both public distress and media over-reaction.
- Had the number of fatalities approached the rumored levels, a surge of families (typically estimated at 5-8 times the number of fatalities) would have made contact, either in person or by telephone, to report missing persons. Establishment of a Family Assistance Center to manage the grieving families

and to obtain information vital to identification of the victims would have been essential, and at a location remote from the actual morgue.

- The early deployment of refrigerated trucks was valuable as a means of preserving recovered remains from the effects of Summer heat. However, placement of the refrigerated trucks in a central, main thoroughfare parking lot with no provision for shielding from public view was not the optimal solution. Placement of such storage units should be made as close as possible to the medical examiner's facility.
- Backup generator power for the medical examiner facility is essential both to maintain temperatures below 40 degrees Fahrenheit in the cooler section for remains preservation and to provide general office power necessary to process remains in a timely manner. Additionally, this may become the only operative location with cooler capacity to hold non storm-related remains for funeral homes without power.
- Because the medical examiner facility remained undamaged by the storm, and because the number of fatalities was not more than the local resources could manage, no need arose to establish a separate temporary morgue for processing remains. However, if either situation had changed a portable morgue would have been required. At present, FEMORS does not possess equipment sufficient to set up such a morgue. Four options (all time consuming) to address the need for an immediate portable morgue operation exist:
 1. Request assistance of the Federal DMORT portable morgue team with an estimated activation interval of between 24-48 hours,
 2. Contract with the Kenyon International portable morgue team with an estimated activation interval of between 24-48 hours,
 3. Initiate field purchasing of hundreds of equipment items necessary to create a temporary morgue taxing ESF desks with rush order requirements and bringing into question the ability to affect deliveries in a timely manner, or
 4. Secure funding for the basic load equipment list during non-hurricane season months so that it will be ready for the ensuing season.
- Identifying insignia, even temporary ID cards and lanyards, are needed to allow members access when curfews have been established and working hours extend beyond or before non-curfew times. Identifying vehicle insignia or window signs are also needed for negotiating traffic checkpoints.
- All cotton, navy blue uniform shirts proved to be too hot for members assigned to work out in the sunny areas while temperatures were 90 degrees or above. Canvas cotton pants, likewise, proved to be uncomfortable and prevented adequate cooling. Lighter weight and lighter colored summer uniform shirts should be considered for future deployments.

Event Time Line

August 13, 2004, Friday

- 1:55 pm Arlene Crow and Gretchen Iskander of Department of Health contacted FEMORS Commander Larry Bedore to put teams on alert for Hurricane Charley.
- 2:20 pm FEMORS Go Team was alerted by e-mail.
- 3:00 pm All FEMORS members were alerted and requested to reply if able to respond.
- 3:45 pm Jim Luten with Medical Examiners Commission contacted Commander Bedore to review the reporting procedures for disaster fatalities by the medical examiner affected should FEMORS need to respond.
- 3:45 pm Weather reports plotted Hurricane Charley on a direct path to Tampa Bay but it turned east early striking Port Charlotte and Punta Gorda in Charlotte County.
- 6:30 pm 37 members had reported by e-mail as ready to respond.

August 14, 2004, Saturday

- 12:20 am Ken Sturrock, DOH, contacted Commander Bedore with a heads up that he was responding to Charlotte County. He had received reports of many dead on trailer park streets and heard of one 5-story condo collapsed with those trapped inside calling out to rescuers by cell phones. He also received reports of bodies hanging out of windows at the condo.
- 12:38 am Mike Jacobs, ESF-8 Desk at State Emergency Operations Center (SEOC), contacted Commander Bedore to activate the team with Mission #1112 advising that there were 20 confirmed fatalities and more likely. He was advised that we had 37 members ready to respond and the staging area was to be the Charlotte County EOC with assembly time at 12:00 noon. Mike asked if refrigerated trailers were needed. Commander Bedore requested that two trailers be provided.
- 12:48 am FEMORS Program Director Dr. Bruce Goldberger was notified.
- 12:52 am FEMORS Administrative Chief Kelly House was notified, voice mail messages left.
- 1:05 am Commander Bedore e-mailed Go Team with notice of activation and began making phone calls to activate members Deputy Commander Paul Taylor, Family Assistance Center Team Leader Gary Daugherty, Forensic Pathologist Hunt Scheuerman, and Forensic Odontologists Barry Lipton, Ken Cohn, and Michael Bell. Maps with meeting instructions were e-mailed to those notified. At Commander Bedore's request Daugherty activated IR Specialist Jonathan Scott, Deputy Commander Taylor activated Mortuary Officer Thomas Ralph, and Dr. Lipton activated Forensic Odontologist Dr. Nancy Havens.
- 2:04 am Activation list was e-mailed to Administrative Chief House to continue with call out sequence.
- 2:28 am Commander Bedore e-mailed Go Team with update from ESF8 that reefers were enroute.
- 2:46 am Commander Bedore asked Administrative Chief House to bring in administrative help to make phone notifications as she was ill and would remain in Gainesville.
- 4:00 am Commander Bedore departed for Punta Gorda.
- 4:25 am Ken Sturrock, DOH, contacted Commander Bedore and advised that EOC contact would be Ed McCrane or Mr. Frost.
- 4:30 am Commander Bedore contacted Deputy Commander Taylor, he would depart soon to meet at the Charlotte EOC.
- 5:45 am Traffic was blocked on I-75 at North Port for 15 minutes due to a traffic accident.
- 6:00 am Commander Bedore checked into EOC at Punta Gorda. Contacted Ed McCrane who put him in touch with Linda, his supervisor with DEM. Commander Bedore explained need to contact Medical Examiner to assess situation and develop a plan. No one had received contact from the medical examiners office. Medical examiner office phone was out of service. Cell phone service was still

operative and e-mails were being received via Blackberry. Barry Kellor staffed the ESF8 Desk as NDMS, MST representative.

6:47 am List of initial responders was e-mailed from Administrative Chief to Commander Bedore:

Bedore	Larry	FCMD	Merves	Michele	FORS
Goldberger	Bruce	RGTL	Needell-Preslier	Barbara	ODNF
Austin	Tony	MRTO	Quilter	Patty	FACS
Bell	William	ODNF	Ralph	Thomas	RGTL
Bradley	Robert	MRTO	Recca	Lori	RGTL
Brewer	Pat	RGTL	Reed	Paula	IRCS
Chasteen	Caryn	MRTO	Rhodes	Jay	MRTO
Cohn	Ken	ODNF	Rowell	Peggy	DENA
D'Andria	David	FPTS	Scheuerman	Hunt	PATF
Daugherty	Gary	FACL	Scott	Jonathan	IRCS
Dickinson	Gregory	ODNF	Smith	Janet	FORS
Grosskopf	Tammy	FORS	Sullivan	Linda	FORS
Guelich	Margaret	MRTO	Taylor	Paul	RGTL
Guerra	Rafael	FORS	Westberry	Jan	ODNF
Havens	Nancy	ODNF	White	Rosemary	MEDI
Hewlett	Missa	ADSP	Wilkes	Cedric	MRTO
Laska	Paul	FPTS	Williams	John	ODNF
Lipton	Barry	ODNF	Wilson	Walter	MRTO

7:00 am EOC briefing. All 31 trailer parks were to be searched by 31 SERT teams at first light; all 3 hospitals were closed due to damage.

8:15 am Commander Bedore departed to medical examiner facility with Deputy Commander Paul Taylor for inspection. Cell phone service ceased working.

9:00 am Medical examiner's facility was found to be intact but without power. No one was present. A note was left on the front door requesting contact through EOC.

9:30 am Commander Bedore reported back to EOC on the condition of the medical examiner office as operable except for power; still no word received from medical examiner staff.

10:00 – 12:00 noon Coordinated staging of arriving members near EOC.

10:44 am Received e-mail that Pat Brewer was available with his motor home as command post. Reply e-mail did not get out until 11:52 am due to limited phone service.

11:15 am Coordinated with Law enforcement desk to have someone drive to Dr. Imami's home to see if he was injured or present.

11:30 am Medical Examiner Investigator Dick Kaufman arrived at EOC to request generator power for medical examiner facility. He advised that Dr. Imami was out of the country and that Associate Medical Examiner James Weiner was on duty and currently at the medical examiner facility doing one pre-storm autopsy. Investigator Kaufman also obtained a radio from EOC to maintain contact regarding found remains.

12:00 noon FEMORS responders were split into 2 teams. Deputy Commander Taylor took one team to the two refrigerated trailers at the Best Western parking lot to manage remains receipt. Commander Bedore took the balance to the medical examiners facility to meet with Dr. Weiner.

12:15 pm Commander Bedore arrived at medical examiner facility to find that Dr. Weiner had departed for Bradenton following the morning autopsy. Medical Examiner Investigator Les Husbands was present. Office and cell phone service was out.

- 12:30 pm Dr. Scheuerman and part of the team departed from medical examiner facility to the temporary storage site for the purpose of assisting Deputy Commander Taylor by taking cleaned up photographs of any remains as received for later potential identification.
- 1:00 pm Dr. Weiner's wife stopped by the office only to find that he had gone to Bradenton as their home was badly damaged. She has been unable to reach him on his cell phone. Commander Bedore provided her with a business card to have Dr. Weiner make contact as soon as possible. She provided a phone number where he might be heading at his sister's. (Throughout the afternoon, numerous attempts were made to reach Dr. Weiner. Contact was made with his brother-in-law and messages were left.)
- 3:30 pm Mortuary Officer Pat Brewer arrived and set up his mobile home as command post at the temporary storage site.
- 3:40 pm By driving 10 miles north of Port Charlotte, Commander Bedore established phone contact and was able to retrieve voice mail messages (19) and return calls.
- Dr. Goldberger advised that both District 20 Medical Examiner Marta Coburn and District 12 Medical Examiner Russell Vega had reported that their facilities were fully functional and available should a need arise to transfer fatalities out of Charlotte County for processing.
 - Odontologists Lipton and Cohn discussed with Dr. Vega options available for using dental x-ray equipment as District 22 had no dental x-ray unit but relied on a body x-ray machine.
 - Commander Bedore discussed options with Dr. Vega in the event that a portable morgue would have to be set up in a parking lot area adjacent to one of the District 12 offices due to the potential numbers of fatalities. At that point in time, District 12 had only 1 storm-related fatality in Desoto County.
- 3:45 pm Commander Bedore received a return phone call from Dr. Weiner. He stated his plan to use the existing facility to manage all cases without needing to move any to other districts. He placed Investigator Kaufman in charge of making all arrangements and planned on meeting with FEMORS at 9:00 am Sunday morning at the medical examiner's office to begin processing remains.
- 4:00 pm Commander Bedore returned to temporary storage site to brief members of status. Groups of members were rotated to the EOC for food service.
- 5:30 pm Commander Bedore returned to the EOC to make contact with SEOC to arrange accommodations for responders.
- ESF-8 desk Gretchen Iskander would make arrangements.
 - Attempts to determine if additional fatalities had been discovered proved confusing but fruitless. Member Recca spoke with one knowledgeable search and recovery leader who reported that he had heard "that they stopped counting when it reached triple digits". Recontact with the law enforcement desk in the EOC indicated that no additional remains had been reported in from the field after the 31 trailer parks had been searched a second time.
- 7:00 pm Ms. Iskander advised that 9 rooms had been secured at the Hilton on Longboat Key in Sarasota for the week. At that time 38 responders were present as Dr. Goldberger arrived.
- 7:30 pm Commander Bedore met with Dick Kaufman and command staff to discuss situation.
- Earlier Mr. Kaufman had made renewed contact at EOC to obtain generator power and a fire department tanker truck to provide water to the medical examiner's facility. The generator request was forwarded to SEOC.
 - To that point in time, 4 storm victims had been received. A few other natural death cases were also being held in the refrigerated trailers as the only option for the community.
 - Mr. Kaufman was in radio contact with the EOC so that should any fatalities be discovered Mr. Kaufman would be advised to respond to investigate and arrange for transportation of the remains to the temporary holding site.

- Mr. Kaufman would request both diesel fuel top off for the trailers and assistance to move them to the medical examiner's facility via EOC contacts.
 - The 4 cases would be autopsied on Sunday beginning at 9:00 am and only a handful of staff would be needed to assist the medical examiner.
 - All other responders could be released with the knowledge that many would be available to return on 2-hour notice if needed.
- 8:15 pm Commander Bedore met with FEMORS team to advise them of the situation and stand-down status of all but:
- Dr. Goldberger
 - Commander Bedore
 - Deputy Commander Taylor
 - Forensic Pathologist Scheuerman
 - Evidence Specialist Paul Laska
 - Autopsy Assistant Hewlett
 - Administrative Assistant Grosskopf
 - Mortuary Officer Brewer (to staff the temporary storage site nightly)
 - Odontologist Williams (to return home the following morning)
- 8:30 pm Mr. Brewer secured the trailers with padlocks and continued security operations. The balance of the team departed for Longboat Key.
- 9:12 pm Commander Bedore updated Mr. Sturrock of current status and plans.
- 10:15 pm Team arrived at Hilton, Longboat key.
- 10:48 pm Commander Bedore updated SEOC ESF-8 desk of status and plans.

Sunday, August 15, 2004

- 6:00 am Commander Bedore returned phone messages to SEOC, ESF-8 desk Mike Jacobs.
- He inquired about a new request for a third refrigerated trailer and 100 body bags for Highlands County. Commander Bedore advised that he was unaware of any need for such, that he had not requested those items, and did not believe Mr. Kaufman had either. The request must have come from another source.
 - Mr. Jacobs also advised that the generator for the medical examiner office could not be purchased as it would have been a permanent addition.
 - Trailers have been "purchased" and might be kept at the DMAT Orlando warehouse when demobilized.
 - Commander Bedore advised him of the team downsizing and expected completion by the end of the afternoon.
- 6:30 am Team departed for medical examiner office.
- 8:15 am Team arrived at medical examiner office to find that it was still without power and no water supply.
- Mr. Kaufman had been trying to renew his request through the EOC and to request a water truck for rinsing during autopsy.
 - Deputy Commander Taylor returned to the temporary storage site to assist Mr. Brewer.
- 9:00 am Commander Bedore and Administrative Assistant Grosskopf visited with Fire Station #2, spoke with Lt. Coblenz to request a small portable generator to power autopsy tools and a water source. He was unable to obtain immediate clearance due to limited communications and gave directions to a sub command post at Kings Point to contact Charlotte EOC. Once there, Commander Bedore contacted Charlotte EOC to request the generator and water supply once again.
- 9:15 am Mr. Kaufman arranged for transport of 2 remains from temporary storage site to medical examiner office to begin processing.

- Later, they were returned and the remaining 2 brought to medical examiner office for processing.
- 10:00 am Dr. Weiner used his personal portable generator to power autopsy tools so he and Dr. Scheurman could complete the autopsies.
- 12:15 pm Dr. Goldberger advised that Orlando had requested one of the two trailers because they were without power. Cell service was still down. Commander Bedore conferred with Mr. Kaufman who agreed that only one was needed for Charlotte County. Commander Bedore sent an e-mail to Sheri Blanton advising of agreement to release one with copy to Jim Luten at the Medical Examiner Commission. Due to poor phone service, e-mail did not get sent out until 12:31 pm. Mr. Luten relayed the information to Ms. Blanton as their power was out and computers were inoperative.
- 3:30 pm Operations at the medical examiner office were completed.
- Last 2 remains were returned to temporary storage site.
 - Members were released to return home.
 - Commander Bedore met with DOH David Crowe at temporary storage site to advise of stand-down with the exception of Mr. Brewer who would remain until the trailer was moved to the medical examiner office.
- 5:00 pm Commander Bedore departed.

Monday, August 16, 2004

- 7:50 am Mr. Brewer contacted Commander Bedore with an update.
- Trailer had not been moved yet.
 - Medical examiner office was still without power.
- 11:00 am Mr. Kaufman contacted Commander Bedore with an update.
- Still working on getting trailer moved to medical examiner facility.
 - No success yet with obtaining a generator.
- 4:00 pm Mr. Brewer contacted Commander Bedore with an update.
- Trailer not moved yet. Mr. Kaufman still pursuing.
 - Eleven remains total had been received, mostly holding natural deaths for local funeral homes.
 - Medical examiner office still without power.
- 7:15 pm Mr. Kaufman contacted Commander Bedore with an update.
- Still working on getting trailer moved to medical examiner facility.
 - Army Corp of Engineers inspected the building for generator. They would be installing one Tuesday morning.
 - For that reason, there might be no need to move the trailer if power is restored soon and cooler temperatures can be chilled.
- 9:00 pm Laura, ESF-8 Desk SEOC, called Commander Bedore asking about release of the trailers. She was advised that until power was restored to the medical examiner's office, refrigerated storage of remains would need to continue. Further, Mr. Kaufman was trying to arrange movement of one trailer to the medical examiner office and had authorized release of the second to Orlando if needed.
- She advised the owner had orders to remove them to the jail for another assignment. She was advised that Mr. Kaufman was the decision maker on use of the trailers and when they could be released.
 - Commander Bedore informed Laura of past conversations concerning purchase of the trailers. She advised she would look into it.
- 10:00 pm Ronnie Fetsco, DOH, called to advise that DOH had intended to purchase the trailers not rent them.

10:15 pm Mike Jacobs, ESF-8 called Commander Bedore inquiring about a new request for a third refrigerated trailer. Commander Bedore advised that he was unaware of any need for such, that he had not requested those items and did not believe Mr. Kaufman had either.

Tuesday, August 17, 2004

3:45 pm Mr. Brewer contacted Commander Bedore with an update.

- Trailer had not been moved yet. Mr. Kaufman was still pursuing.
- Medical examiner office was still without power.

4:00 pm Mr. Kaufman contacted Commander Bedore with an update.

- Still working on getting trailer moved to medical examiner facility.
- Medical examiner office was still without power.

5:50 pm Mr. Kaufman contacted Commander Bedore with an update.

- SEOC ESF-8 has arranged for movement of trailer.
- Second unit may be freed up.
- Medical examiner office was still without power.

6:10 pm Commander Bedore contacted ESF-8 regarding movement of second trailer to Orlando if needed. She would check on status of Orlando request.

6:30 pm John Erwin, ESF-8 contacted Commander Bedore to advise that the unused trailer will be returned to the owner. When the used one is no longer needed it will be demobilized and incinerated. Commander Bedore requested that it be saved following decontamination and cleaning once no longer needed by the medical examiner. He entered a note to that effect.

Wednesday, August 18, 2004

8:20 am Mr. Brewer contacted Commander Bedore with an update.

- Trailer was moved at 7:00 pm last evening.
- Paula Alexander, Medical Examiner Administrator, and the driver were present.
- All storage, transfer paperwork, and keys were turned over to Ms. Alexander. (She would have to retrieve lock from unused trailer before release.)
- Medical examiner office was still without power. Forest Service generator (11KW) was too small, Army Corp still working on a solution.
- Mr. Brewer was deactivated and returning home.

9:00 am Commander Bedore left a message for Ms. Alexander regarding trailer lock.

10:30 am Commander Bedore contacted Becky at ESF-8 to advise of last member demobilized.

- Trailer has been moved to medical examiner office.
- Decon and cleaning will take place once finished.
- Ms. Alexander's contact information was provided as she was taking over for Mr. Kaufman who was enroute to another state.
- Ms. Alexander would advise when trailer has been cleaned and ready for transport.

11:05 am Ms. Alexander contacted Commander Bedore with an update

- Lock would be retrieved.
- Still no power, portable generator still being used to power phone system.
- She has the ESF-8 phone number to contact after trailer has been cleaned and is no longer needed (probably the following week).

(Florida Power and Light restored power to the facility late Wednesday.)