Texas Severe Storms TX-4332-DR

Media Analysis Report

September 10, 2017

Hot Issues –

- *Survivors Struggling to Rebuild* – Whether it be the lack of flood insurance, limited finances or the simple inability to rebuild, media states rebuilding in the aftermath of the storm is becoming a greater, more challenging task than some residents realized.

- *Flood-related Toxins* – Survivors are growing progressively more frustrated with their exposure to the toxins that may have been floating in floodwaters. As recovery continues, both print and broadcast media emphasize the importance of "limited exposure to the unknown" and signs of illness. In addition to general conversations about the toxins there have also been some heated discussions about how some of the exposure could have been avoided – *See the article below for an example of residents, who are concerned about the impact of contaminated water and the actions of various officials.*

Houston residents confront officials over decision to flood neighborhoods
By Emily Flitter –Reuters –September 9, 2017
HOUSTON (Reuters) - Angry Houston residents shouted at city officials on Saturday over decisions to intentionally flood certain neighborhoods during Hurricane Harvey, as they returned to homes that may have been contaminated by overflowing sewers. A town hall grew heated after City Council member Greg Travis, who represents parts of western Houston, told about 250 people that an Army Corps of Engineers official told him that certain gauges measuring water levels at the Buffalo Bayou - the city's main waterway - failed due to a decision to release water from two municipal reservoirs to avoid an overflow….

Noteworthy issues:

FEMA: Agency provides aid, but can't cover all costs
By Marissa Barnett, Daily News – Galveston News – September 8, 2017
…Hurricane Harvey victims this week were beginning to receive determination letters and even claims back from the Federal Emergency Management Agency while others register or await news. Because many flooded residents didn't have insurance, the claims were particularly important for learning how homeowners might be able to get their properties back to normal, residents said….

Lack of Infrastructure, Regulation Made Houston Vulnerable
By By Phil Bedient and Andrew Juan – Houston Chronicle –September 9, 2017

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Harvey starkly exposed the inadequacy of the city and county's flood management strategy, both in terms of flood control infrastructure and flood prevention policies. Early estimates are that the storm dropped about a trillion gallons of water on Harris County and inundated 10 percent of all structures in the Harris County Appraisal District….

Houston's Unauthorized Immigrants Struggle In Shadows To Rebuild After Harvey
By Naomi Martin, Reporter – Dallas Morning News –September 9, 2017
HOUSTON — The Tamayo family stacked their mattresses on top of chairs, and propped the fridge on bricks. But in the end, Harvey's floodwaters still damaged their floors, walls and furniture. Now, as the family, which includes some unauthorized immigrants, starts to rebuild and apply for disaster assistance, they face an additional fear. The same federal government that they're asking for help — and supplying with personal information — could also deport them…

Media Monitoring Trends –

Print/Online –

- While today's print media reports seem to be covering a gambit of disaster-related topics, the most noticeable is the topic of flood insurance. Whether survivors are talking about the lack of insurance, the cost of coverage or a simple misunderstanding with how everything works, it's become a sore subject that is quickly adding to the strain of the recovery process.
- Echoing broadcast media, print media continues to highlight the concerns surfacing among survivors. While finances and displacement have stirred emotions, one of the greatest fears is the lingering effects of toxic floodwaters that were likely filled with traces of pollution and contaminated sediment.
- Various print media outlets have made reference to the emotional and physical toll first responders are facing as they deal with multiple catastrophic hurricanes. Above all else it's media's perception that each new disaster will continue to deplete resources, making it even more challenging to assist survivors.

Radio/Television –

- While Hurricane Irma currently dominates the headlines, broadcast media continues to draw the occasional comparison to Harvey, and the significance of two devastating weather events occurring in such a short amount of time. Not only is it "making the recovery process more difficult," it's also generating deeper conversations about the benefits of flood insurance and the various reasons to utilize disaster preparedness tips.
- Aside from being hyper-focused on the events surrounding Hurricane Irma, broadcast media remains deeply engaged in highlighting the struggles associated with Hurricane Harvey recovery efforts. This is not to say that all the stories are negative, but rather fixated on viewers better understanding the gravity of the situation.
- In addition to the above mentioned stories, media has also devoted a large portion of the disaster-related coverage to volunteerism and the numerous ways the generosity of strangers is helping Harvey impacted families recover from the devastation.

Social Media –

- The volume of Harvey discussions continue to decline slowly with recovery efforts due to the noise from Irma.
- With regard to disaster specific trends, conversations continue on animal shelter efforts and people looking for ways to help with debris clean up.
- In addition to the above mentioned topics, there has also been an increase in frustration of being denied FEMA assistance.

- To learn more about additional social media trends, please access the Social Listening Report at the end of this document.

Table of Contents –

Nottingham residents get first look at Harvey flooding 5
These FEMA Centers Offer Disaster Recovery Assistance To Houston Area 6
Lack Of Infrastructure, Regulation Made Houston Vulnerable 7
Tank failures in Houston reveal vulnerabilities after Hurricane Harvey 8
Trying To Return To Normal 10
Residents Slowly Returning To Normal 11
Elliott: Don't Get Back To Normal 12
Houston's Unauthorized Immigrants Struggle In Shadows To Rebuild After Harvey 13
Residents Washed Away By Harvey Wait for Answers about Waste Pit Pollution 15
EPA says no volatile chemicals found in water near Arkema plant in Texas 18
Texas Bays Struggle To Adjust In Harvey's Aftermath 19
Aerial Spraying To Try To Control Mosquitoes After Harvey 21
FEMA To Deploy Military Planes To Spray Houston Mosquitoes 22
Mosquitoes, Medicine and Mold: Texas Battles Post-Harvey Health Issues 22
Tank Failures In Harvey Reveal Vulnerabilities In Storm 24
FEMA: Agency provides aid, but can't cover all costs 26
Hurricane Harvey Seems Certain To Delay Flood Relief for Some West Ashley Homeowners 28
Harvey's lesson: We must make government work better 28
Watertown Daily Times | What A 500-year Deluge Could Look Like In Five Cities 31
A Storm of Misinformation on HB 1774 32
GUEST VIEW: A Storm Of Misinformation 33
Trump Chides FEMA for Denying Disaster Relief to Churches 35
Trump Tweets Support for Giving Texas Churches Disaster Aid 36
Trump Tweets Support For Texas Churches Seeking FEMA Money after Harvey; Lawsuits Already Filed 36
Bill Maher: 'Unfair' for states like Texas to request federal aid after Harvey 38
Houston residents confront officials over decision to flood neighborhoods 39
Houston perseveres after Harvey 40
Over 100 Volunteers Leave LAX for Houston to Aid with Harvey Response 42
'This is human kindness': Hurricane Katrina survivors help Houston after Harvey 42
Beyoncé Teams Up With Houston Pastor to Help Harvey Survivors 44
Kimora Lee Simmons bringing aid to Houston Harvey victims 47

Relief Effort Needs Better Planning 47
5 ways to avoid charity scams exploiting Hurricane Harvey 48
From nurses to animal rescuers: Coloradans make way to Houston to aid the drowned city 50
J.J. Watt Taking the Field in Houston for First Time Since Hurricane Harvey Will Give You Chills 51
Houston football wearing 'Texas Strong' helmets to show support after Hurricane Harvey 52
Houston couple takes shelter in Omaha following Hurricane Harvey 52
Fight Flooding Now 53
First Harvey and Now Irma; Relentless Storms Strain Rescue Workers: NPR 57
Harvey's aftermath might have killed thousands of Texas cattle 58
Editorial: Price-gougers, Scammers Take Advantage Of Storm Victims, Our Desire To Help 59
Body of Houston hotel worker trapped in flooded elevator during Harvey discovered after weeks long search 60
Hurricane Harvey – Social Listening Report 61

What Others Are Saying –

Devastated but determined to rebuild, the people who have been affected most by Harvey's wrath are showing a fighting spirit that has caught the attention of people all across the country….

"I never doubted for a moment what was going to happen when this storm hit, and immediately after it hit," said David Brady, CEO of the American Red Cross' Texas Gulf Coast Region. "I know my fellow Texans too well. We are going to step up, we are going to rally around each other and we're going to support each other across all differences, whether it's socioeconomic, whether it's race, whether it's religion, Texans don't care about that.

"Texans — we may annoy a lot of people — but we are Texans first in a lot of ways. We're going to step up and help our fellow Texans in a time of need."

Brady has been leading the recovery efforts at the George R. Brown Convention Center in Houston, where more than 11,000 people were housed during the height of the flooding in the city….

"It was demonstrated every single minute of every day during this storm, and after the storm," Brady said of the spirit of togetherness he witnessed over the last couple of weeks. "My neighbor took his fishing boat and went and found a neighborhood that needed help. He spent four days out there rescuing people that he didn't know. That's one story, but there are thousands of stories like that. That's what people did."

Times-Review, September 10, 2017

Video/Audio –

Nottingham residents get first look at Harvey flooding
By Matt Dougherty, KHOU – KHOU – September 10, 2017

Many Nottingham Forest residents were finally able to access their homes Saturday for the first time since the Hurricane Harvey flooding. Entire subdivisions were blocked and barricaded with checkpoints manned by both neighbors and state troopers. Only residents and approved work crews were allowed entry….

Props to Texas - Spectrum News Austin
http://mms.tveyes.com/PlaybackPortal.aspx?SavedEditID=8491dcb7-1758-41b0-8fcc-16266e6f9ba0
9/10/2017 12:06:29 PM
FEMA Administrator Brock Long is giving props to Texas….

Kimora Lee Simmons bringing aid to Houston Harvey victims
ABC13 – September 9, 2017
HOUSTON (KTRK) -- Fashion designer and entrepreneur Kimora Lee Simmons is in town to help Harvey victims in Houston get back on their feet. Simmons will visit the Aldine Family Hope Center today to hand out relief supplies….

Texas A&M wants fans to help out in a show of support Saturday
TexasA&M
September 9, 2017
As shown in the video … you can see that Aggies fans are being asked to wear "Beat the Hell out of Harvey" T-shirts during Texas A&M's game against Nicholls State on Saturday at Kyle Field. The shirts are an effort to show support after Hurricane Harvey caused huge damage in Houston and other areas of southeastern Texas recently….

Full Stories –

RECOVERY

Nottingham residents get first look at Harvey flooding

By Matt Dougherty, KHOU
KHOU
September 10, 2017

Many Nottingham Forest residents were finally able to access their homes Saturday for the first time since the Hurricane Harvey flooding.

Entire subdivisions were blocked and barricaded with checkpoints manned by both neighbors and state troopers. Only residents and approved work crews were allowed entry.

Scattered debris from the homes' interiors along with antiques were stacked in piles atop what were once manicured lawns.

Neighbors make a clear distinction, saying they were not victims of the flood waters that came from Hurricane Harvey, but that they were the victims of the water released from the dams.

Worst of all, they say it happened without warning.

"We got no notification," said Nottingham Forest resident Sally Smith.

They say the water rushed into their homes like a surge in the middle of the night; allowing them no time to plan; no time to evacuate before the water reached their doorsteps; no time to protect even their smallest, sentimental items from their homes.

“I understand it completely, they kind of had to sacrifice us to save the dam or they were worried about the dam breaking, so they had to release to our homes,” Smith said. “But they should’ve told — we would’ve bought flood insurance had we been in the flood plain.”

The body of a man was finally recovered by members of the HPD dive team on Friday from a home two miles from Nottingham Forest.

Dive team members had attempted to reach the home for a recovery operation on two prior occasions but were never able to safely reach the residence.

These FEMA Centers Offer Disaster Recovery Assistance To Houston Area

Community Impact News (TX)
September 9, 2017

A disaster recovery center opened in Magnolia on Friday morning, supported by the state and Federal Emergency Management Agency. This marks the third DRC to open in the Greater Houston area as recovery from Hurricane Harvey continues.

According to FEMA, area locations include:

West Montgomery County Community Development Center
31355 Friendship Drive, Magnolia

George Brown Convention Center
1001 Avenida De las Americas, Houston

Sienna Annex
5855 Sienna Spring Highway, Missouri City

Additional sites can be located online.

Affected residents and businesses can visit any DRC for in-person support when seeking federal aid.The centers are open to anyone within the 39 counties included in the Texas federal disaster declaration. Harris, Montgomery and Fort Bend counties are apart of this declaration, and residents may be eligible to receive disaster recovery assistance.

According to a statement from FEMA, representatives with the Small Business Administration are also onsite to help businesses rebuild. Before visiting the center, residents and businesses should register with FEMA online, by phone (800-621-3362) or via the FEMA app.

Lack of Infrastructure, Regulation Made Houston Vulnerable

By Phil Bedient And Andrew Juan
Houston Chronicle
September 9, 2017

Harvey starkly exposed the inadequacy of the city and county's flood management strategy, both in terms of flood control infrastructure and flood prevention policies.

Early estimates are that the storm dropped about a trillion gallons of water on Harris County and inundated 10 percent of all structures in the Harris County Appraisal District. That means about 135,000 homes flooded-more than twice the number flooded by Tropical Storm Allison in 2001, the previous benchmark for the city's worst flooding.

In the face of so much rainfall – 30-40 inches in most parts of the county – could anything have prevented flooding? No. But the scale of the flooding did not have to be so catastrophic. To understand why, we need to examine how Houston got where it is today and where it should go in terms of flood prevention and control.

Houston is flood-prone for many reasons. Our topography is flat. We're subject to frequent, high-intensity rain events. Our soil tends to shed water rather than absorb it.

After a major thunderstorm in 1935 inundated Buffalo Bayou and killed several people, local leaders took action to try to prevent future floods. The Texas Legislature created the Harris County Flood Control District. The Army Corps of Engineers began building the Addicks and Barker reservoirs to prevent catastrophic flooding in Buffalo Bayou.

Unfortunately, most of this drainage infrastructure was overwhelmed by our rampant urban expansion that began in the 1960s and continues to this day. No other large reservoirs have been built. Brays, Buffalo and White Oak bayous were lined with concrete to improve water flow, but that wasn't enough to handle the increased runoff from the city's urban sprawl. By the 1990s, most of the bayous that drain Houston were unable to contain a 100-year flood, much less the 500-year or 1,000-year variety.

Brays Bayou, for example, can currently only handle a 10-year storm. A massive, federally-funded project to update the bayou, Project Brays, began construction in the early 2000s and was designed to handle anything up to a 100-year flood. The project included upstream detention basins, channel improvements and bridge modifications in the middle and downstream sections of the bayou. But even a project of this scale was insufficient to prevent flooding when the channel overtopped its banks in 2015's Memorial Day Flood, 2016's Tax Day Flood and now Harvey.

Preventing and controlling future floods will require new flood control infrastructure and new policies and regulation. We need to add more water storage capacity by building new reservoirs. Local, state and federal agencies must invest in properly maintaining and retrofitting existing channels, storage basins and storm sewer networks. A reasonable goal is to protect all parts of the county from a 100-year event.

But while Houston built its way into its current predicament, it cannot build its way out. The county and city must look beyond simply building more infrastructure, important as that is. To significantly reduce flooding, elected leaders must be willing to try politically challenging options such as property buyouts to replace flood-vulnerable homes with new or expanded detention basins.

For watersheds like Cypress Creek that are becoming increasingly urbanized but are not yet fully developed, measures must be enacted to preserve natural green spaces like native prairies and wetlands, which prevent floods by storing and holding runoff. These can be supplemented with engineered green spaces such as golf courses and parks.

Houston and Harris County's drainage regulations for property development should also be updated. For example, Fort Bend County's drainage standards require almost double the storage per acre of development as Harris County's. That's a major reason why Fort Bend County fared much better than we did during Harvey.

Finally, Houston's development and flood insurance practices have historically been governed by FEMA-created 100-year floodplain maps. The maps generate a false sense of security among property owners about flooding and are an unreliable guide to an area's true risk.

Look at the widespread flooding that occurred beyond the official floodplain in the Harvey, Tax Day and Memorial Day floods. Moreover, many floodplain maps are outdated and do not reflect existing land use or development conditions. Aside from updating these maps more frequently, FEMA should create new probabilistic floodplain maps for a more accurate representation of flood risks.

In Houston, 100-year floods are no longer the benchmark. Harvey is.

Bedient is the director of Rice University's Center for Severe Storm Prediction, Education and Evacuation from Disasters (SSPEED). Juan is a graduate student in Civil and Environmental Engineering at Rice.

Tank failures in Houston reveal vulnerabilities after Hurricane Harvey

By Matthew Brown and Larry Fenn
NWHerald
September 9, 2017

More than two dozen storage tanks holding crude oil, gasoline and other contaminants ruptured or otherwise failed when Harvey slammed into the Texas coast, spilling at least 145,000 gallons of fuel and spewing toxic pollutants into the air, according to an Associated Press analysis of pollution reports submitted to state and federal regulators.

The tank failures follow years of warnings that the Houston area's petrochemical industry was ill-prepared for a major storm, with about one-third of the 4,500 storage tanks along the Houston Ship Channel located in areas susceptible to flooding, researchers said.

More of the massive storage tanks could be put to the test in coming days as Hurricane Irma bears down on Florida. The tanks are prone to float and break during floods, and Harvey's unprecedented rainfalls revealed a new vulnerability when the roofs of some storage tanks sank under the weight of so much water. Federal and state rules require companies to be prepared for spills, but mandate no specific measures to secure storage tanks at refineries, chemical plants and oil production sites.

Although Florida has no oil refineries, it has more than 20 petroleum product storage terminals in coastal communities and about 30 chemical companies with a presence in the state, including a significant

number of facilities in the Tampa Bay area, according to the American Chemistry Council and U.S. Energy Information Administration.

“Tampa Bay is one of the most vulnerable cities in the country” to hurricanes, said John Pardue, a Louisiana State University professor who has researched problems with storage tanks during storms.

“But there’s no requirement that says when you’re in a hurricane zone you’ve got to do things differently,” Pardue added. “If we’re going to continue to put some of these facilities in harm’s way, it would be great to have some specific regulations” to safeguard storage tanks.

The storm surge from Harvey was small enough that the refineries in the Houston Ship Channel appear to have avoided the huge spills associated with past storms such as Hurricane Katrina, when ruptured storage tanks released several millions of gallons of oil including into residential areas, said Jamie Padgett, an associate professor at Rice University who has inventoried the Houston Ship Channel’s storage tanks.

One difference during Harvey was that before the storm, some refineries apparently were able to fill up their storage tanks to make them less buoyant and therefore less prone to floating and being damaged, said Kyle Isakower, vice president of regulatory policy at the American Petroleum Institute.

That wasn’t the case with about a dozen smaller storage tanks that experienced spills in Fayette County west of Houston, said Ron Whitmire with EnerVest, the Houston-based company that operated the tanks. The capacity of those tanks ranged from about 250 to 400 barrels, which he said was not large enough to resist the force of the floodwaters that swept them away.

“Do we plan for storms and hurricanes? Absolutely,” Whitmire said. “But nobody plans for 50-plus inches of rain.”

The record rainfall also exposed problems among almost 400 large storage tanks in the Houston area that have “floating roofs” that go up or down depending on how much fuel is inside the containers. The unprecedented rains that came with Harvey caused 14 of those roofs to sink, in some instances allowing the chemicals inside them to escape, according to company reports and Padgett of Rice.

There are no government rules dictating how tanks are designed. But the American Petroleum Institute has established industry standards for tank construction that call for tanks to be able to drain at a minimum 10 inches of rain over a 24-hour period. Rain was falling at more than twice that rate during Harvey, Padgett said.

At least two of the floating roof failures occurred in gasoline storage tanks at Shell Oil’s Deer Park refinery and another occurred at Exxon Mobil’s Baytown refinery.

Pollution reports submitted by the companies to Texas regulators blamed the roof problems on Harvey’s excess rainfall. The reports said air pollutants including benzene, toluene and xylene were released into the atmosphere. Long-term exposure to such pollutants can cause cancer, although Texas officials said they never reached concentrations high enough in the storm’s wake to cause health concerns.

A Shell representative said in a statement to the AP that the roof problems presented an “extremely rare” circumstance and that company workers had quickly responded by spraying the spilled fuel with foam to suppress any harmful vapors. All the gasoline that was released was contained on-site, Shell spokesman Ray Fisher said.

Exxon Mobil spokeswoman Charlotte Huffaker said safety was a priority for the company and it was able to lessen environmental damage from Harvey by shutting down equipment in advance. Huffaker said Exxon "reported and responded to the event as soon as it was identified."

As state and federal officials investigate the impacts from Harvey, it's uncertain how much spilled material flowed off-site from the storage yards, oil production areas and refineries.

It's expected to take about two weeks from the time of the spills for any contamination in the ship channel to reach Galveston Bay, according to Hanadi Rifai, director of the graduate program in environmental engineering at the University of Houston.

Texas has rules governing protections for underground storage tanks during floods, but not for above-ground tanks found at many refineries and chemical plants, according to Andrea Morrow, a spokeswoman for the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality.

Morrow declined to say if the agency planned to investigate the Harvey-related tank failures and whether tanks that failed had been properly secured before the storm.

"We have established a Unified Command with other state and federal partners, and are in the field conducting rapid needs assessment at this time," she said. "Due to the widespread impact from Harvey, the TCEQ anticipates conducting many storm-related investigations over the next several months."

Trying To Return To Normal

Wharton (TX) Journal-Spectator
September 8, 2017

Residents all over Wharton and Wharton County are working on getting their lives back together following Hurricane Harvey and the ensuing river flooding from the Colorado and San Bernard rivers.

The Wharton County Recovery Team will hold a county-wide meeting to address long-term recovery for the area at 7 p.m. Tuesday at the Wharton Civic Center.

"Issues that will be addressed at the meeting will mainly be surrounding un-met needs," said Recovery Team President Cathy Garcia.

The Wharton County Recovery Team was formed last year after Wharton was hit by two consecutive Colorado River floods, leaving more than 100 residents misplaced from their homes. The Recovery Team's goal is to get peoples' lives back to normal after the devastation of their homes.

This year's flood in Wharton affected a wider area than past floods. Officials said 60 percent of the city was flooded, including many areas on the north side that have never flooded before.

"The long-term recovery team is here to make sure that when FEMA and other federal agencies go home, we are here to provide residents with the needs they didn't receive from those agencies," said Garcia.

The Recovery Team has seven committees that were named last year and will need volunteers to staff each position.

The following positions that need to be filled are: Case Management, Financial Resources, Construction, Spiritual Emotional and Mental Health Counseling, Volunteer Management and Donated Goods Management.

Residents who signed up for those positions last year can resume their positions and start working toward a community goal, those that did not serve on the Recovery Team last year are welcome to join.

"We need as many people as possible," said Garcia. "We would like to be able to take care of residents and allow them to know that they're not in this alone."

One of the services that the Recovery Team offers is help with FEMA appeals and applications. "People who have applied for FEMA and been denied funding often don't know that they need to appeal that decision," said Garcia.

The Recovery Team will address in depth at the Tuesday meeting the impact of these floods on the community and how to help the 1,400 people affected by it in Wharton County.

"If you or someone you know is looking to help, I encourage you to come to the meeting," said Garcia. The meeting will be held Tuesday from 7:00 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. at the Wharton Civic Center.

Disaster relief and distribution centers have been set up all over Wharton to try to meet the needs of residents who lost everything.

Disaster centers set up by FEMA to help residents apply for funding can be found at the Wharton Civic Center from 8 a.m. to 7 p.m. daily and an auxiliary location at Caney Creek Church located at 118 W. Milam St. in Wharton.

Distribution centers for a variety of items can be found at First united Methodist Church, East Gate Plaza parking lot, New Hope Church, Holy Family Catholic Church, American Legion, and Abundant Life Christian Fellowship Church in Wharton.

The Small Business Administration (SBA) is also offering help for those who lost their businesses during the disaster. To reach an SBA representative, go online and apply for assistance at www.disasterloans.sba.gov or call 1-800-659-2955 you may also call the number to locate a disaster recovery center near you.

Residents Slowly Returning To Normal

The Brazosport (TX) Facts
September 10, 2017

The sun blazed in a clear blue sky Saturday, leaving little evidence of the floodwaters raging through Brazoria County until just days ago following Tropical Storm Harvey's second swipe at the coast. Plenty of debris piled up on roadsides to serve as reminders, however, as residents returned home to rip out damaged pieces of their homes and start piecing back together their lives.

"It looks like we have good weather in front of us for a while for citizens to deal with whatever aftermath Harvey left for them to deal with," Brazoria County Judge Matt Sebesta said. "Folks seem to be moving into recovery mode."

The Brazos River had fallen well below flood stage at the National Weather Service gauge near Rosharon, hovering at 23.54 feet as of 5 p.m. Saturday. The same river had dropped to 12 feet at the gauge near West Columbia.

The San Bernard River was almost a foot below flood stage to 15.1 feet at the National Weather Service gauge near Sweeny as of 5 p.m. Saturday. It had been at a record height less than a week ago.

Sweeny residents no longer have to conserve water, as officials lifted the request Saturday morning. Public works crews fixed sewer issues at two homes Friday in Brazoria, but those were the only problems Mayor BobbyJo Newell had heard of Saturday, she said.

"It was from a build-up of things that should not be flushed, is what I was told," Newell said.
West Columbia Mayor Laurie Kincannon hadn't heard of any sewer issues in her city either, she said. Residents have established recovery centers in West Columbia at the Lighthouse Church, 501 W. Brazos Ave., and First Baptist Church, 226 S. Broad St.

"We are looking at coordinating down to one next week," Kincannon said.

Things are starting to return to normal in West Columbia as well, a day after the city lifted its mandatory evacuation order for good, Kincannon said.

"People are one and working on damaged houses, she said. "There is lots of debris piling up."

The state highway department Saturday opened the last closed stretch of Highway 35, spanning roughly from West Columbia to Bar-X Ranch, Sebesta said. Drivers still should exercise caution, as water remained over parts of the road, according to the highway department.

Residents living along state and county roads in the county should call 979-900-9037 or email debrispickup@brazoria-county.com, and place their debris as close to the road as possible. There should be separate piles for vegetative debris (leaves and logs), construction and demolition debris, appliances and white goods, such as air conditioners and stoves, electronics and household/hazardous waste. Crews will make multiple passes through residential areas, according to the county's Facebook page.

Residents within city limits should consult with their local leaders about debris removal.

Federal Emergency Management Agency representatives will be on hand from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. today at the Liverpool Police Department, 8901 Calhoun St., to help flood survivors navigate the federal assistance program.

Residents who waded into floodwaters can stop by the Angleton Public Health Department, 434 E. Mulberry St., from 8 a.m. to 7 p.m. today for a free tetanus vaccine.

Erinn Callahan is a reporter for The Facts. Contact her at 979-237-0150.

Elliott: Don't Get Back To Normal

By Rebecca Elliott
Houston Chronicle

September 9, 2017

In the days after a disaster like Harvey, as residents return to their homes, or what's left of them, they will want to get back to "normal." They will clean what can be salvaged, clear out what can't, fight mold, hang drywall and replace insulation. This impulse is entirely understandable. A flooded home is a disrupted sanctuary, and making it habitable again goes a long way toward restoring the ordinary rhythm of life.

In the wake of Harvey, though, Houston shouldn't get back to normal. The storm was indeed a historic event, but poor planning and governance significantly exacerbated the catastrophe: inadequate building codes that don't require flood resilience, zoning that puts residents and chemical plants in vulnerable areas and the paving over of prairies and wetlands that provide natural protection from floods.

For individual homeowners, not getting back to normal means treating Harvey as an opportunity to rebuild differently. If you can afford it, consider elevating your home at least as high as it flooded during Harvey. Move heating and cooling systems to higher floors. If possible, relocate to safer ground.

That's a tough job for individuals to do on their own, which is why city, state and federal assistance is so badly needed. FEMA's Hazard Mitigation Grant Program, for instance, gives homeowners in flood-prone areas money to protect their houses, and should be expanded. The program already provides $30,000 grants to some National Flood Insurance Program policyholders to elevate their homes, but that's only about a third of the full cost.

More money also should go to helping communities pursue buyouts, a policy implemented in some Staten Island neighborhoods that flooded during Superstorm Sandy. Those residents received the pre-storm value of their homes, plus a 5 percent bonus for those who stayed on Staten Island to avoid eroding the tax base that funds schools and other services.

Not getting back to normal isn't just a matter of how much we spend, but how we spend it. According to the Natural Resources Defense Council, for every $100 the nation has spent to rebuild homes through the National Flood Insurance Program, only $1.72 has gone to helping people move out of harm's way. If we are going to continue to rebuild flooded homes with disaster relief, we should at least require tougher building standards as a condition of doing so.

Disaster relief gets flood victims back into their homes and back to normal. But a substantive disaster response-one that rejects "normal" in favor of better, smarter and safer-can prevent them from being flood victims again in the future. Disaster relief is an expression of our generosity to those who are suffering today. A disaster response signals a commitment to a more supportive society, in which we can all fare better as we face a future defined by climate change.

Elliott is a professor of sociology at the London School of Economics. Her book in progress, "Underwater," examines the politics and social effects of flood management.

Houston's Unauthorized Immigrants Struggle In Shadows To Rebuild After Harvey

By Naomi Martin, Reporter
Dallas Morning News
September 9, 2017

HOUSTON — The Tamayo family stacked their mattresses on top of chairs, and propped the fridge on bricks. But in the end, Harvey's floodwaters still damaged their floors, walls and furniture.

Now, as the family, which includes some unauthorized immigrants, starts to rebuild and apply for disaster assistance, they face an additional fear. The same federal government that they're asking for help — and supplying with personal information — could also deport them.

"It's painful to see, when you grow up in a country that expresses a lot of support for their people, that at the same time, it's only certain people," said Areli Tamayo, 23, whose parents brought her to the U.S. as a baby. Tamayo's parents are among Houston's nearly 600,0000 unauthorized immigrants — the third largest population of any U.S. city, after New York and Los Angeles, according to Pew Research Center. No one knows how many were affected by Harvey's devastation, but activists with the group United We Dream believe the number to be at least several thousand.

Houston's unauthorized community was already fearful amid immigration raids and crackdowns. A new Texas law, called SB4, which bans sanctuary cities and allows police to check anyone's immigration status, was to take effect Sept. 1, though a federal court temporarily blocked parts of it. And President Donald Trump's administration moved last week to end DACA, or Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, an Obama-era program that protected undocumented youths brought to the U.S.

"There is nothing compassionate about the failure to enforce immigration laws," U.S. Attorney General Jeff Sessions said in announcing the end of DACA. "The compassionate thing to do is end the lawlessness, [and] enforce our laws."

After Harvey, unauthorized immigrants face a particularly tough road ahead, as they navigate a lack of assistance and interactions with the government that they fear could separate them from their families.
A kitten and a rooster inspect piles of discarded items to be thrown out on the curb of the Romero residence on Bronson Street in South Houston. Residents continue to work to recover from the Hurricane Harvey in Houston, photographed on Sept. 8.

Discarded items to be thrown out sit on the curb of houses on Bronson Street in South Houston, as residents continue to work to recover from the Hurricane Harvey in Houston.

"The undocumented community's been affected even more so" by Harvey, said Laura Patricia Fernandez, an immigration attorney and board member of the Mexican American Bar Association of Houston.
In Houston, 1 in 10 people is an unauthorized immigrant. Those with children who are U.S. citizens are eligible for assistance through the Federal Emergency Management Agency. However, Fernandez said, seeking that help brings the risk that FEMA could share their information with immigration authorities.
In an email, a FEMA spokesperson said the agency would not "proactively" share people's information with immigration authorities, but may do so if the authorities claim a "significant law enforcement interest exists" such as a national security case.

Even if the immigrants can apply to FEMA for aid through their children, some don't have proof of leases, insurance coverage or their belongings because they often didn't know to keep documentation, Fernandez said. Some are facing eviction notices from landlords, she said, and because they always paid in cash and never had a written lease, they have no recourse. They're also not eligible for state disaster unemployment aid.

There is some help available. FEMA said anyone affected by presidentially declared disasters — "regardless of citizenship status" — is eligible for short-term relief such as shelter, food and water. They could also apply for legal services, case management and disaster food stamps.

ENVIRONMENT/HEALTH CONCERNS

Residents Washed Away By Harvey Wait for Answers about Waste Pit Pollution

By Lise Olsen
Houston Chronicle
September 9, 2017

Hundreds of families in riverfront neighborhoods east of Houston fear that massive flooding has poisoned their land and fouled their wells with sewage, industrial pollution and toxic sediment from the region's most notorious Superfund site – the San Jacinto Waste pits.

The San Jacinto River floods unleashed by the remnants of Hurricane Harvey created a wall of water that smashed into nearly dozens of homes in the Channelview riverfront neighborhood next to the pits and demolished two low-lying subdivisions in Highlands.

Some Channelview river bottom homes washed away entirely. Others lost their roofs and were pushed off foundations. A few ruins now teeter on the brink of sink holes that now pockmark the neighborhood, called San Jacinto River Estates, that's built around a county park and a private marina.

Linda Bonner, 71, shuffles in black tennis shoes through the silt to a jagged hole where her front porch, dining room and bedroom used to be. Bonner bought her place in 1978 – unaware of old paper mill dump sites on the riverbanks behind it – and raised seven children here. She rebuilt after the 1994 floods and again after Hurricane Ike, but says Harvey "was the worst."
Her home now slants, half in and half out of a sandy6-foot deep hole. It's stuck, which is much the same that Bonner has felt since 2008, when the federal government first declared the waste pits worthy of national Superfund status because of the cancer-causing dioxins and other poisons they contain.

"The Superfund site sits not a mile from here, but if you don't have anywhere to go what do you do? You live with it," she said. "But now I'm done. … And when I leave, I'm going to throw away these shoes too."
Bonner and others in Channelview, Baytown and Highlands neighborhoods along this industrial stretch of the river south of the Lake Houston dam worry about the toxicity of murky water, white dust and the foul-smelling sludge covering their properties.

The question for dozens of people, who a week after the storm still guard wrecked riverfront properties from marauders seeking scrap, is whether their neighborhoods are now too contaminated to recover – and whether it's safe to retrieve their remaining possessions. And no one seems to be giving them any answers.
The San Jacinto pits are among 13 of 60 state and federal Superfund sites in Texas that were flooded and potentially damaged in Hurricane Harvey. Of these sites, only two federal sites – San Jacinto and U.S. Oil Recovery – require additional assessment efforts, the EPA says.

Few sites are as vulnerable to the elements as the waste pits. For years, paper mill wastes containing cancer-causing dioxin were stored along the western river banks, which later became partially submerged as the river changed course.

They were capped back in 2011, pending an EPA review of a more expensive plan to remove the waste completely. Both the EPA and the companies responsible for the pits say the armored cap remains sound

after Harvey. Those inspections have been conducted by boat and by land. More extensive monitoring has been promised.

Tracking dioxin

Figuring out how much toxic waste Harvey redistributed in neighborhoods along the southernmost stretch of the heavily industrialized San Jacinto River could prove difficult.

Much of the industrial areas of Harris County already are contaminated – a certain amount of heavy metals and toxics comes with this territory.

But dioxins, like those stored in the paper mill pits, are "a family of compounds" with variations that create "something of a chemical signature," said Dr. Hanadi Rifai, professor of Civil and Environmental Engineering at the University of Houston.

For years, Rifai has lead research teams that tracked dioxin in water and sediment across the Houston metro area and beyond. "We have tracked the dioxin from the pits all the way down the channel and down the bay," she said.

The last sediment samples in the Houston area were taken in 2012, Rifai said. Her team hopes to redeploy soon to explore the damage caused by Harvey.

"It's our neighborhood. So we're looking at collecting samples ourselves. We definitely have an interest in tracking this more consistently over time," she said.

Surprisingly few government-funded studies have been conducted in nearby neighborhoods since the pits became a Superfund site. About 6,000 homes in that area depend on wells for water. About 150 wells have been tested by Harris County to see if the drinking water is safe.

James Corley, 52, used to worry about the well water in his Highlands Shores neighborhood.
Then on Aug. 27, floodwater rose nearly to the ceiling of his two-story house. He managed to push a borrowed canoe out the front door and paddle to safety.

When the access road reopened, Corley returned to find his neighborhood in ruins. His home has been pushed sideways off its pilings. His neighbor's house – with whom he shared a well – disappeared. Huge power lines and poles were knocked flat.

"I'm a river rat. I'm used to floods. But it's never been this bad," he said.
He returned only to retrieve his cat, Biddy Boo, and to extract a few more mud-covered keepsakes.
He stood barefoot in the mud Thursday, hammering, the same foul-smelling muck that now covers the subdivision splattered across his arms, tattooed chest and toes.

Corley said he fears toxic sludge as much as anyone else. But he's already got cancer. He was diagnosed the week before Harvey hit.

Health ruined

Six hundred families from the communities of Channelview, Highlands and Baytown are part of a pending civil lawsuit that claims their property and their health already has been ruined by exposure to toxics from the pits, which contain cancer-causing dioxins barged there from a paper mill throughout the 1960s and 1970s. Their case remains pending in Harris County courts.

Many individuals involved in the lawsuit suffer from cancer. Clusters of childhood cancers and birth defects identified in the area prompted a series of studies, though the research, coordinated by the State of Texas, has never pinpointed a specific cause.

Harris County officials sued the companies overseeing the pits six years ago, claiming that pollution from the partially submerged pits had endangered the environment and public health.

Two companies involved in the lawsuit did not admit responsibility. They deny any dioxins have escaped from the pits, but settled the case for $29 million. That money was split among the county, the state and the attorneys.

Harris County used some of its $10 million settlement to test 150 wells. At least seven of them flooded in Harvey and will require retesting, said Harris County pollution control director Bob Allen.

The first round of well tests completed in July 2016 initially found unacceptably high levels of dioxin in drinking water only in a few wells in Lynchburg – a community just across Interstate 10 from the pits. But soon the county reversed the findings, blaming the results on a lab error.

Diana Fitzgerald and her husband received a letter that told them to avoid drinking or cooking or bathing in their water. A month later, another letter arrived that said their water was fine.

They don't know what to believe. She and her husband are active members of a grassroots group called the Texas Health and Environment Alliance that is insisting on more testing.

"I don't drink the water. I don't use it to cook. I make my husband get bottled water. I don't even like taking baths and showers in it," Fitzgerald said.

The state of Texas also got a $10 million share of the waste pits settlement. It spent none of the money to test wells, sediment or fish in the lower San Jacinto River, where pregnant women and children are warned to avoid eating any seafood because of contamination.

Instead, the state used its money to improve parks along the San Jacinto River – including a park with a boat ramp right next to the waste pits.

Most of those parks flooded in Harvey.

Memories hard to leave

Becky Cooey moved to Channelview's San Jacinto River Estates only last year. She rented a house across from the county park with ponds lined by cypress trees that offered expansive views of the river. She knew nothing about flood risks or the waste pits sandwiched between the neighborhood and busy Interstate 10. When Hurricane Harvey approached, Cooey crammed a few clothes into a suitcase and left. By the time she returned, her tiny house had disappeared. Her white 1998 Chevy pick-up sits upended into a huge hole where the house used to be. A FEMA inspector took a quick look on Monday and declared her property a total loss.

She's afraid to retrieve scraps that remain. "I was told even if we could wash it, it might never be safe." Just down the street, Ana and Armando Cruz' house sits a bit higher and appears sound. But its interior is entirely carpeted with foul-smelling river muck. The couple bought here in 2000, attracted by the tranquility

of the river bottom. They've been frustrated that nearly all of the information delivered in mailings and meetings since the Superfund site was declared in 2008 has been in English.

Ana wants to leave. Armando would like to clean up and rebuild. But he hasn't seen FEMA yet and his insurance adjuster instructed him not to touch anything. They need information to decide.

Just around the corner, Bonner has been keeping vigil for a week outside her ruined house with her 10-year-old granddaughter, Gaige-Lyn. They're waiting for FEMA too.

Some memories are hard to leave behind.

Bonner stayed on at this house with her seven children even after her husband left her. She stayed on after record floods in 1994.

And she returned even after Hurricane Ike in 2008 brought so much high water that a local fireman came to fetch her in a boat. After Ike, she and her children and her grandchildren all donned gloves and boots to muck out the sludge from the house. None of them knew about potential dangers from the waste pits back then.

Gaige-Lyn hasn't wanted to leave her grandmother's side since Hurricane Harvey.

"I just feel like she gets lonely. And I don't like her being lonely," she said. So they pass their days together, talking, eating white bread and bacon sandwiches and watching out for thieves.

Bonner said she thinks some of lawsuit settlement money would have been better spent to help people who owned homes and land in vulnerable neighborhoods like hers.

Post Harvey, Harris County officials say that they may ask FEMA to provide money to buy out residents in hard-hit San Jacinto River communities. But no list has been released.

It's a little late for Bonner.

"I have no house left anymore," she said. "But we're going to be fine. We're resilient. We're Texans."

EPA says no volatile chemicals found in water near Arkema plant in Texas

Reuters
September 9, 2017

(Reuters) - Water samples collected after an Arkema chemical plant in Crosby, Texas caught fire following a power outage due to Tropical Storm Harvey contained no volatile chemicals, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency said Friday.

The Arkema plant experienced a series of fires as a result of sensitive organic chemicals that rose to dangerous temperatures after the facility lost power due to storm flooding.

People in a 1.5-mile radius around the plant, located about 20 miles (35 km) northwest of Houston, were evacuated after company officials said an explosion or large fire was likely because the organic peroxides used to make plastics and other products could not stay cool enough.

The EPA, in its statement, said that no "volatile organic chemicals or semi-volatile organic chemicals were detected in the surface water runoff samples," which were collected on September 1.

The investigation, which involves the U.S. Chemical Safety Board, the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, and other state, federal and local agencies, is ongoing.

The first explosion took place on Aug. 31, several days after Harvey hit. The storm dropped several feet of rain in the Houston area.

Texas Bays Struggle To Adjust In Harvey's Aftermath

By By Shannon Tompkins
Houston Chronicle
September 9, 2017

On a typical September day, the water lapping against Galveston Bay's western shoreline adjacent to the village of Bacliff is a slightly murky green, about the color of original Gatorade but without that sports drink's almost neon tint and considerably more salty.

Based on long-term sampling and monitoring of such things, the average salinity level of Galveston Bay water along the Bacliff shoreline in early September is 10.5 parts per thousand. That's salty but not especially so – about a third of the 35 ppt salinity level in the open Gulf of Mexico and half the average September salinity in lower reaches of the sprawling bay.

But that 10.5 ppt salinity level is just fine for speckled trout and redfish, black drum, bay anchovies and most of the rest of the assemblage of marine life that must have a saline environment to survive.

Last week, however, water in Galveston Bay off Bacliff registered a salinity level of 0.6 ppt. Some Texas rivers are saltier than that in late summer. Instead of Gatorade green, the Galveston Bay water had the color and nearly the syrupy consistency of cafe au lait.

Galveston Bay, like bay systems from Sabine Lake on the Texas/Louisiana border to Nueces Bay near Corpus Christi, was awash in silt-laden freshwater as the trillions of gallons of rain generated during Hurricane/Tropical Storm Harvey's prolonged, deadly, devastating, record-setting careen around Texas slowly drain.

That runoff, as well as the storm's other side effects, will have significant impacts on the coastal marine environment, the creatures that live there, the anglers who pursue the bay's sport fish and even the landscape along the coast.

Some of the effects will be short term. Others will last longer. And some are simply unknown.

"This is all new ground," Lance Robinson, deputy director of coastal fisheries for Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and a veteran marine scientist with decades of experience on Texas bays, said of gauging Harvey's effects on coastal ecosystems. "This is an unprecedented event.

"No one has ever seen something on this scale, so no one can say they know what all the impacts will be."

TPWD will be making a huge effort to learn as much as possible about the storm's effects, he said. But some short-term effects easily can be seen or guessed, and longer-term effects inferred based on past experiences.

Freshwater runoff

One of the most obvious is the overwhelming of bays with freshwater runoff that promises to swamp huge expanses of upper and mid-coast bays for weeks if not months.

This is highly unusual for a hurricane. Tropical cyclones typically increase salinity levels in bays, with their storm surges pushing massive slugs of high-salinity water from the Gulf into the bays and beyond.

Harvey did a bit of that along the mid-coast when it came ashore, devastating Rockport, Port Aransas and Aransas Pass as its storm surge shoved into and over Redfish, Aransas, Nueces and Corpus Christi bays and combined with the high winds to wreck the region.

That wind, storm surge and its powerful currents also changed the face of some of the coast. Most dramatically, it "blew open" Pass Cavallo near Port O'Connor.

Cavallo, one of the major, natural bay/Gulf exchanges on the Texas coast and a crucial avenue for marine life whose life cycles depend on access/egress to both Gulf and bays, had been slowly sanding shut – a result of man-made changes in coastal hydrology. The storm's powerful surge scoured Pass Cavallo's channel, widening and deepening it.

It also tore a new adjacent channel when it breached the tip of Matagorda Island, cutting through a spot called Sunday Beach and mating the new channel with Pass Cavallo.

In one of those inexplicable twists all too common with hurricanes, the storm did not do the expected and scour open Cedar Bayou/Vinson Slough just 20 miles or so down Matagorda Island from Pass Cavallo. That natural connection between the Gulf and Mesquite Bay, separating Matagorda Island and San Jose Island, had been reopened in 2014 after a multimillion-dollar public/private effort to restore the long-closed pass.

Cedar Bayou/Vinson Slough channel had again sanded closed earlier this summer.

Most assumed – or hoped – Harvey's powerful storm surge would reopen the pass. It did not.
But Harvey's rains, and not its storm surge or winds, are having the most profound and immediate impacts on coastal fisheries.

Search for saltier water

Short-term effects of the inundation of coastal bays with silty, muddy, freshwater runoff include forcing major movement of marine fish in affected systems. Fish and other marine life that can't survive long-term exposure to fresh water move away from the swamped portions of the bay, searching for saltier water.

This leaves huge swaths of bays most affected by Harvey's runoff – Sabine, Galveston and Matagorda – devoid of the fish coastal anglers most often target, especially speckled trout.

"They will move out of those areas and find areas where salinities are more suitable," Robinson said of marine fish hit by freshwater flooding.

In the Galveston Bay system, West Galveston Bay currently is holding the saltiest water. Late last week, salinity levels along the south shoreline of West Galveston Bay ranged from 8 ppt to as much as 15 ppt in some pockets. Typically in September, those areas hold salinities above 20 ppt.

Similar situations exist in the Matagorda Bay system, where some areas in both East and West Matagorda bays hold salinities below 1 ppt while others – portions of East Matagorda Bay and areas along the south shore of West Matagorda away from where the flooding Colorado River is pouring billions of gallons of freshwater into the bay and Gulf – are holding 10 ppt to 15 ppt salinities. Fish are concentrated in those saltier areas.

The farther down the coast you go, the less freshwater flooding is seen, and the bays and the fishing prospects are significantly better.

While fish can get out of the way of the freshwater inundation in Texas bays, oysters can't. And these marine mollusks, crucial pieces of the bays' ecosystem, stand to see the greatest short-term and perhaps long-term effect from the flooding.

Oysters can't survive much more than a few days in freshwater, and flooding for a week or two will result in almost complete die-offs of all oysters in affected areas. That almost certainly is going to occur in bays along the upper coast.

But the situation isn't necessarily grim for oysters, Robinson said.

"Oysters are extremely resilient animals," he said. They've been around for millennia and have faced every kind of environmental challenge. They have found ways to persist."

While reefs in areas that see weeks of freshwater swamping may die, their shells will remain, serving as habit for a plethora of marine life as well as providing the hard surface to which larval oysters attach when conditions moderate.

And the flooding-caused changes in salinity gradient in the bay can benefit oysters by opening up new areas to colonization. That is what happened in the wake of a somewhat similar flooding event in 1979 when Tropical Storm Claudette dumped biblical amounts of rain that sweetened high-salinity West Galveston Bay enough that oysters could thrive but their major parasites and predators – oyster drills and dermo, which require high-salinity levels to survive – could not.

All is not lost

The result was an explosion of oysters in West Galveston Bay in the wake of that epic flooding.

"Events like this have devastating and heartbreaking effects on us. This is an unimaginable tragedy on an unprecedented scale," Robinson said. "For the bays, there are positive and negative effects. It can be like a forest fire, destroying things but also pumping nutrients into the bays. Almost invariably, productivity goes up in the years after something like this."

That's at least something positive to hold onto.

Aerial Spraying To Try To Control Mosquitoes After Harvey

Associated Press
September 9, 2017

BEAUMONT, Texas (AP) — Texas health officials say the Federal Emergency Management Agency will use military planes to spray chemicals near Houston to help control disease-carrying mosquitoes following Hurricane Harvey.

Texas Health and Human Services spokesman Chris Van Deusen says spraying begins Saturday evening east of Houston, in Jefferson, Orange and Chambers counties.

Harvey's rains flooded the region. Standing water is a breeding ground for mosquitoes, including those that carry the West Nile and Zika viruses.

Van Deusen says there haven't been reports of the viruses in the region. He says health officials want to prevent any outbreak and control "nuisance" mosquitoes that could interfere with recovery efforts.
Van Deusen says FEMA is using modified Air Force C-130 aircraft to spray the chemicals, which he says don't pose health risks to humans or pets.

FEMA To Deploy Military Planes To Spray Houston Mosquitoes

Associated Press
September 9, 2017

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Mosquitoes, Medicine and Mold: Texas Battles Post-Harvey Health Issues

By Maggie Fox
NBCNews
September 9, 2017

Dr. Carrie de Moor has a nasty cough, and she's not sure if it's allergies or one of the common respiratory infections that have been spreading since Hurricane Harvey hit southeast Texas late last month.

She's been sleeping in a trailer adjacent to her free-standing emergency room and urgent care clinic in Rockport, Texas, which was devastated by Harvey's winds and flood waters. The clinic had only been open for two weeks when Harvey hit.

De Moor is home in Dallas now for a few days with her children but will soon head back to the clinic, which is overwhelmed by people crowding in for stitches, tetanus shots, ear infections and skin rashes.

"We were seeing numbers outpacing anything we were prepared to take care of," said de Moor, an ER physician who is CEO of Code 3 ER and Urgent Care.

Physician volunteers have been cramming into the trailer and sleeping on the clinic floors as they tend to as many as 90 patients a day.

Related: Doctor Wades to Get to Cancer Patient

Lara Hamilton describes a similar scene at Christ Clinic in Katy, west of Houston.

"We typically see about 200 patients a week. In the first week we saw triple that," said Hamilton, a registered nurse who is executive director for the clinic. Volunteer doctors from as far afield as Vermont, Minnesota and Oregon have brought cots and are camped out in the clinic and at other nearby facilities, offering their services as needed.

"They're showering at the YMCA," Hamilton said.

No one single entity has authority over health matters in Texas, which has a history of turning away federal funding and oversight and which has a limited Medicaid program. County health authorities like the one in Harris County take care of issues like mosquitoes, clean water, inspecting restaurants and some vaccinations, but free and charity clinics like Christ Clinic and for-profit operations like Code 3 struggle in the best of times to fill in the gaps.

Now, post-Harvey, they are overwhelmed.
Zika mosquito 'heaven'

So far, there's no big epidemic to cope with. The Harris County Health Department had to squelch rumors that plague was being spread by flood waters. Plague is carried by fleas, not in water.

But there are plenty of other messes left behind by Hurricane Harvey's floodwaters.

They include masses of mosquitoes, respiratory infections and a dramatic worsening of the day-to-day ills that people could cope with in normal times, but that get out of control in a crisis.

"We are seeing people who have just been eaten up by mosquito bites," Hamilton said. "Typically, people won't go to the doctor for mosquito bites." But the combination of standing water, a lack of electricity and the need to work outside means a lot of exposure.

"People are working outside all day long, cleaning up their homes," said Hamilton. "The doors are standing open because they are carrying debris in and out."

Aerial spraying for mosquitoes started this week, said Chris Van Deusen, spokesman for the Texas Department of State Health Services. They're bringing in heavy ordnance for the job, including an Air Force reserve wing from Youngstown, Ohio flying specially equipped C-130 aircraft.

Expected to get worse

"As the floodwaters recede, mosquito numbers are going to start going up," said Dr. Peter Hotez, dean for the National School of Tropical Medicine at Houston's Baylor College of Medicine.

"There's just debris everywhere. It's like Aedes aegypti heaven."

Aedes aegypti are the mosquitoes that carry viruses such as dengue and Zika virus. Stagnating water in ditches, bayous and flooded fields will breed other mosquitoes that spread West Nile virus.

No one's sure how much worse things will get, but Dr. Umair Shah, who heads the Harris County health department, is sure it will get bad.

He says teams are trying to replace mosquito traps pulled out hurriedly ahead of Harvey's floods. "It's good we removed them," he said. They would have been washed away, but now it will take time to get back up and running to monitor where disease-causing mosquitoes are breeding.
'True post-traumatic stress'

Patients are also beginning to come in with more urgent problems as they run out of insulin or blood pressure medications, said Jody Hopkins, CEO of the Texas Association of Charitable Clinics.

"For some of our clinics who supply insulin, a lot of them lost it because they lost refrigeration," Hopkins said.

And people are starting to show up with depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder.

"I think mental health is going to be huge," Hopkins said. "A patient came and said, 'I worked at Dollar General and the store is wiped out. I am out of a job.' That has a huge impact," she said.

Hamilton said Christ Clinic has already seen a big uptick in visits from people needing help from the licensed clinical social workers and psychologists helping out at the facility.

"Typically, a mental health provider will see eight to nine patients a day," she said. "We saw 32 mental health patients in one day this week."

Harris County's Shah said he was struck by the experience endured by an evacuee staying in a hotel. "Every time the air conditioning came on at the hotel, she heard the water dripping and she started having flashbacks to the rain and the rising water. That was true post-traumatic stress," Shah said.

Authorities are cutting through red tape as quickly as they can. The state medical board is expediting licenses for out-of-state doctors to practice and schools have loosened immunization requirements.

"Last night a waiver came through for mold remediators," said the health department's Van Deusen.

As long as they register with the state health department, mold contractors can work without a license for as long as the disaster declaration is in effect.

Tank Failures In Harvey Reveal Vulnerabilities In Storm

By Matthew Brown And Larry Fenn
Washington Post
September 9, 2017

More than two dozen storage tanks holding crude oil, gasoline and other contaminants ruptured or otherwise failed when Harvey slammed into the Texas coast, spilling at least 145,000 gallons (548,868 liters) of fuel and spewing toxic pollutants into the air, according to an Associated Press analysis of pollution reports submitted to state and federal regulators.

The tank failures follow years of warnings that the Houston area's petrochemical industry was ill-prepared for a major storm, with about one-third of the 4,500 storage tanks along the Houston Ship Channel located in areas susceptible to flooding, according to researchers.

More of the massive storage tanks could be put to the test in coming days as Hurricane Irma bears down on Florida. The tanks are prone to float and break during floods, and Harvey's unprecedented rainfalls revealed a new vulnerability when the roofs of some storage tanks sank under the weight of so much water.

Federal and state rules require companies to be prepared for spills, but mandate no specific measures to secure storage tanks at refineries, chemical plants and oil production sites.

Although Florida has no oil refineries, it has more than 20 petroleum product storage terminals in coastal communities and about 30 chemical companies with a presence in the state, including a significant number of facilities in the Tampa Bay area, according to the American Chemistry Council and U.S. Energy Information Administration.

"Tampa Bay is one of the most vulnerable cities in the country" to hurricanes, said John Pardue, a Louisiana State University professor who has researched problems with storage tanks during storms.

"But there's no requirement that says when you're in a hurricane zone you've got to do things differently," Pardue added. "If we're going to continue to put some of these facilities in harm's way, it would be great to have some specific regulations" to safeguard storage tanks.

The storm surge from Harvey was small enough that the refineries in the Houston Ship Channel appear to have avoided the huge spills associated with past storms such as Hurricane Katrina, when ruptured storage tanks released several millions of gallons of oil including into residential areas, according to Jamie Padgett, an associate professor at Rice University who has inventoried the Houston Ship Channel's storage tanks. One difference during Harvey was that prior to the storm, some refineries apparently were able to fill up their storage tanks to make them less buoyant and therefore less prone to floating and being damaged, said Kyle Isakower, vice president of regulatory policy at the American Petroleum Institute.

That wasn't the case with about a dozen smaller storage tanks that experienced spills in Fayette County west of Houston, said Ron Whitmire with EnerVest, the Houston-based company that operated the tanks. The capacity of those tanks ranged from about 250 to 400 barrels, which he said was not large enough to resist the force of the floodwaters that swept them away.

"Do we plan for storms and hurricanes? Absolutely," Whitmire said. "But nobody plans for 50-plus inches of rain."

The record rainfall also exposed problems among almost 400 large storage tanks in the Houston area that have "floating roofs" that go up or down depending on how much fuel is inside the containers. The

unprecedented rains that came with Harvey caused 14 of those roofs to sink, in some instances allowing the chemicals inside them to escape, according to company reports and Padgett of Rice.

There are no government rules dictating how tanks are designed. But the American Petroleum Institute has established industry standards for tank construction that call for tanks to be able to drain at a minimum 10 inches (25 centimeters) of rain over a 24-hour period. Rain was falling at more than twice that rate during Harvey, Padgett said.

At least two of the floating roof failures occurred in gasoline storage tanks at Shell Oil's Deer Park refinery and another occurred at Exxon Mobil's Baytown refinery.

Pollution reports submitted by the companies to Texas regulators blamed the roof problems on Harvey's excess rainfall. The reports said air pollutants including benzene, toluene and xylene were released into the atmosphere. Long-term exposure to such pollutants can cause cancer, although Texas officials said they never reached concentrations high enough in the storm's wake to cause health concerns.

A Shell representative said in a statement to the AP that the roof problems presented an "extremely rare" circumstance and that company workers had quickly responded by spraying the spilled fuel with foam to suppress any harmful vapors. All the gasoline that was released was contained on-site, Shell spokesman Ray Fisher said.

Exxon Mobil spokeswoman Charlotte Huffaker said safety was a priority for the company and it was able to lessen environmental damage from Harvey by shutting down equipment in advance. Huffaker did not directly respond to emailed questions about the sinking roof on the Baytown tank.

As state and federal officials investigate the impacts from Harvey, it's uncertain how much spilled material flowed off-site from the storage yards, oil production areas and refineries.

It's expected to take about two weeks from the time of the spills for any contamination in the ship channel to reach Galveston Bay, according to Hanadi Rifai, director of the graduate program in environmental engineering at the University of Houston.

Texas has rules governing protections for underground storage tanks during floods, but not for above-ground tanks found at many refineries and chemical plants, according to Andrea Morrow, a spokeswoman for the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality.

Morrow declined to say if the agency planned to investigate the Harvey-related tank failures and whether tanks that failed had been properly secured before the storm.

"We have established a Unified Command with other state and federal partners, and are in the field conducting rapid needs assessment at this time," she said. "Due to the widespread impact from Harvey, the TCEQ anticipates conducting many storm-related investigations over the next several months."

GOVERNMENT/ POLITICS/FLOOD INSURANCE

FEMA: Agency provides aid, but can't cover all costs

By Marissa Barnett, Daily News
Galveston News

September 8, 2017

GALVESTON

Hurricane Harvey victims this week were beginning to receive determination letters and even claims back from the Federal Emergency Management Agency while others register or await news.
Because many flooded residents didn't have insurance, the claims were particularly important for learning how homeowners might be able to get their properties back to normal, residents said.

But as some learned, the aid from FEMA is not intended to "make a person whole," as FEMA officials explain it.

"We help them get started, but the job of getting to normality is on the person and the community," said William Rukeyser, a media affairs specialist. "FEMA is not a substitute for insurance."

Residents should start the process by registering for FEMA aid. It takes seven to 10 days to hear from a FEMA agent, who then will send a contractor to inspect a home, Rukeyser said.

"FEMA doesn't know about you unless you contact FEMA directly," Rukeyser said.

"We always hear about people who gave their info to The Red Cross, a church group, the county, etc. And they assumed all the info on needs and damage was passed on to FEMA. It's not."
From there, FEMA sends a determination letter with the aid offered, which could be grants toward personal property, housing repairs or transitional housing, or some mixture, he said.

"Almost always people are upset," Rukeyser said. But they need to know "the determination letter is the start of the conversation, not the end."

Property owners can appeal the determination letter if they disagree with the findings, he said.
"Everything is appealable, but that doesn't mean each person will get what they want," Rukeyser said.

Residents expressed frustration this week over claims and the FEMA process, with some saying they had waited on hold for several hours attempting to talk to someone about the process.

Because there were so many people affected by Hurricane Harvey, the agency is experiencing a large number of requests, which slows down wait times, Rukeyser said. The calls are typically handled on a first-come, first-serve basis, he said.

Despite mixed-messaging in communities, FEMA does not require homeowners to keep debris from their house to determine damage, Rukeyser said.

"What we do ask is people document, document, document — where one picture of the couch is good, 20 pictures from different angles is better," he said.

As residents get back claims, FEMA officials were urging them to understand that the checks will likely not cover the entire damage. Because the agency is taxpayer-subsidized, the program is intended to help people get started but not cover all losses, which might be handled by insurance, Rukeyser said.

"There's no way a disaster will be painless, we try to minimize it to the extent we can," Rukeyser said.

Hurricane Harvey Seems Certain To Delay Flood Relief for Some West Ashley Homeowners

Charleston (SC) Post and Courier
September 9, 2017

Several dozen West Ashley property owners saw their homes flood badly in 2015 and last year. As Hurricane Irma approaches, relief might be further away.

The city of Charleston has applied to the Federal Emergency Management Agency for a grant to buy out the owners of 47 properties in its West Ashley Church Creek drainage area. Each property had a record of significant flood damage in recent years.

However, the agency's extensive response to Hurricane Harvey and flood-devastated Houston will delay a decision, said Charleston Public Services Director Laura Cabiness.

Cabiness said the city recently received a letter saying FEMA has evoked "immediate needs funding," which means it will focus its work on current emergencies.

"This doesn't help those (West Ashley) folks as we look down Hurricane Irma in the next few days," she said. "On the other hand, you look at what's happening in Houston and you understand."

She said the city had expected to get word on the grant this month — or at least by year's end. The timetable is now uncertain.

The agency's decision on the grant ultimately could hinge on Congress' decisions on an aid package for Harvey victims and an overall decision on federal spending levels as well as how much FEMA ends up spending on Hurricane Irma.

Meanwhile, FEMA is looking to buy out some Houston property owners whose homes have flooded repeatedly instead of giving them insurance proceeds to rebuild, according to The Houston Chronicle. The report quoted Roy Wright, the FEMA official who runs the National Flood Insurance Program.

"I've got to make sure I can make the program work," Wright said. "The point is, I'm not going to make someone redo their house, then re-buy it."

Harris County around Houston already has bought out more homeowners than any county in the nation, Wright said, adding that about $225 million was spent on such purchases in the last two decades.

The city of Charleston has not had a single such property bought out yet, but it has sought the grant before, without success. That was before Hurricane Matthew caused yet another bout of costly flooding last fall. Federal confidentiality rules prohibit the city from specifying which West Ashley properties are involved. Cabiness said the city will keep pursuing its grant request — largely because there's no known drainage fix to prevent these homes from flooding again — and it also seek similar grants for other properties, too.

"This isn't a one-shot thing," she said.

Harvey's lesson: We must make government work better

By Lisa Falkenberg |
Houston Chronicle
September 9, 2017

Yes, government matters.

Harvey's wrath, and Houston's response to it, taught us a lot about our neighbors, our faith communities, our leaders. But it also has taught us about the importance of institutions, regulations and the need for policies crafted with forethought and courage.

What our government should do, and how much, is a constant debate that often disintegrates into partisan talking points and ideology. A historic flood makes flesh of philosophy.

We may applaud the performance of government on some levels, including the heroic response of first responders and the tough, bipartisan calls of Harris County Judge Ed Emmett and Houston Mayor Sylvester Turner to hunker down.

But let's start asking some tough questions.

What more, for instance, could Houston Police Chief Art Acevedo and his officers have done to save people if his department weren't 2,000 officers short?

What could have been done to safeguard chemical plants and avoid potential disasters such as the explosions at the Arkema plant in Crosby, which has already drawn a lawsuit by first responders who say they were overcome by fumes?

As my Houston Chronicle colleagues have reported, such plants operate under loose federal and state regulation, and after a 2013 ruling by then-Attorney General Greg Abbott, Texans don't even have a right to know what dangerous chemicals are being stored in their neighborhoods.

The Chronicle's Mark Collette and Matt Dempsey have reported that the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration and the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality are all poorly equipped to inspect plants damaged during Harvey or to look for long-term problems because they are "understaffed, underfunded and don't account for scores of dangerous chemicals."

"Who is going to oversee any of this?" Jordan Barab, a former top OSHA official asked in a recent Chronicle story. "The answer is no one."

Consider this from that same report: President Donald Trump's budget cut OSHA enforcement spending - including inspections - but a House budget committee in July went even further, proposing cuts of $14.7 million, or more than 7 percent. The agency already was unable to inspect most facilities.

In Harris County, we should ask what more officials could have done to prevent flooding. More specifically, whether the devastating, sustained flooding we have seen in neighborhoods downstream from controlled reservoir releases could have been avoided. What if flood control officials had demanded protections, federal funding to pay for it, and tried to curb development in the area around Addicks and Barker?

'Chilling accuracy'

The answers seem clear after The Dallas Morning News last week cited a Harris County Flood Control District report from two decades ago, that predicted with "chilling accuracy" reality experienced by thousands of homeowners.

The report, which concluded the aging reservoir system was severely insufficient, proposed a $400 million fix that could have pushed water toward the Houston Ship Channel more quickly. It also suggested buying out properties at risk and regulating development in the area.

None of it happened. The report was mostly forgotten. Over time, land on the western fringes of the reservoirs filled with rows of brick homes.

Today, many sit mangled and destroyed - a preventable outcome that haunts Arthur Storey.

In a surprisingly candid interview with the Dallas paper, Storey, who was flood control director at the time of the 1996 report, said he regretted that he didn't do more to pressure officials to act, and that he was "not smart enough, bold enough to fight the system."

Storey didn't return my call on Friday, perhaps because he was busy tending to his home, which flooded as well. The longtime public servant, who retired from the county in 2015 at age 78, was clear in his assessment to the Dallas paper:

"This, what we have before us, is a massive engineering and governmental failure. I'm both angry about it and embarrassed about it."

Storey's honesty is commendable, and also heartbreaking.

But no one person is to blame for shortsighted policies. Forward-thinking, long-term investment requires buy-in from every level of government.

It also requires something else: Buy-in from you and me.

We, the people served, must acknowledge that, yes, government matters. Yes, there are some things government can solve or just make better.

Start at the polls

We can't keep electing people openly contemptuous of the government institution that signs their paycheck. Their obstruction is not helpful, or cost-effective. We can't keep demanding ever-lower taxes without regard to the cruel consequences.

As citizens, we have a duty to look beyond our own self-interests, to support investment that protects our neighbors, and to hold elected leaders accountable for doing what's right.

If you're looking for a place to start, here's one:

The U.S. House overwhelmingly approved on Friday $15 billion in aid for Harvey victims throughout southeast Texas. But four of our fellow Texans voted against it: U.S. Reps. Joe Barton of Ennis, Jeb Hensarling of Dallas, Sam Johnson of Richardson and Mac Thornberry of Clarendon.

They're all Republicans, but they have something else in common - none of them represent counties in the direct path of the storm.

Watertown Daily Times | What A 500-year Deluge Could Look Like In Five Cities

Washington Post
September 10, 2017

Hurricane Harvey pummeled the Houston area with an unprecedented four feet of rain, making it the most extreme rain event in U.S. history. Cars and houses are underwater, and thousands of people have needed or await rescue.

The event has been called a "500-year flood"- a flood event that has a one-in-500 chance of occurring in any given year in that location. Residents in 500-year flood zones aren't required to purchase flood insurance, even though there is more than a 5 percent chance, more than one in 20, of a 500-year flood over a 30-year mortgage.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) mandates that people living in the high-risk 100-year flood zone purchase flood insurance. While a 1 percent chance every year sounds unlikely, consider that it equates to roughly a 25 percent chance over a 30-year mortgage. A 500-year flood has roughly a 5 percent chance.

Hundreds of thousands of people live in flood-prone cities like Houston, Miami, New Orleans, Tampa Bay and New York.

In catastrophic flood events like the one in Houston, areas well beyond the 100-year flood line, or even the 500-year line, can end up under water. (Recent reports claim up to 30 percent of Houston may be flooded due to Harvey.) For those without federal flood insurance, there are few resources to help them rebuild after the floodwaters recede.

Here's what 500-year floods look like, or could look like, in other cities.
New York city

New York City sustained an estimated $4.8 billion in uninsured private losses as a result of Hurricane Sandy in 2012, which caused a storm surge that flooded the subway system and shut down the New York Stock Exchange. Only about 7 percent of the city's population lives in a flood area that is moderate- to high-risk. But because of New York's size, that amounts to more than 560,000 people — greater than the number of people living in flood zones in Tampa Bay. The places most vulnerable to flooding are along the city's waterfronts in all five boroughs.

Harris County, Texas (Houston)
Almost 13 percent of people live in a 100-year flood zone in Houston and Harris County, but as one of the nation's most populous counties, that's more than half a million people. Another half-million residents live in moderate risk areas, the 500-year flood zone, where the likelihood of flooding is between 1 and 0.2 percent each year.

This works out to over a million people in moderate-to-high flood-risk areas in Houston alone. Other cities that have recently weathered hits from hurricanes aren't much better off.

New Orleans, La.

With much of the city below sea level, New Orleans is particularly vulnerable to flooding. Hurricane Katrina devastated the city in 2005, and remains the most costly and one of the deadliest hurricanes to hit the United States. More than 10 years later, the city's population still hasn't recovered to pre-Katrina levels.

Nearly 95,000 people live in areas at a high risk of flooding, requiring flood insurance, while another 160,000 live in moderate-risk areas. The rest of New Orleans's population resides in areas protected from floods by levees, though in the event of a levee failure, as in Katrina, those areas would also become vulnerable.

Miami-Dade County, Fla. (Miami)

Nearly half of all people in Miami-Dade County live in a high-risk flood zone. While the last major hurricane to make landfall nearby was Hurricane Andrew in 1993, sea-level rise has contributed to higher king tides, or the highest tides, and more frequent coastal flooding.

Some areas of Miami-Dade, like the "Billion Dollar Sandbar" in Biscayne Bay, lie on reclaimed land only a few feet above sea level. A large chunk of the county's western side is uninhabited wetlands outside the county's development zone.

Hillsborough and Pinellas Counties, Fla. (Tampa Bay)

Analysts say the Tampa Bay area, which includes the cities of Tampa and St. Petersburg, is the most vulnerable in the United States to flooding and damage in the event of a major hurricane. A direct hit would likely surpass the cost of Hurricane Katrina, with one Boston firm that analyzes potential catastrophic damage estimating a cost of more than $175 billion to the region. More than 30 percent of residents live in a moderate to high risk flood zone.

Unlike the other areas included, the Tampa Bay region hasn't experienced a direct hit from a Category 3 or higher hurricane in nearly a century.

A Storm of Misinformation on HB 1774

San Antonio Express-News
September 10, 2017

Natural disasters like Hurricane Harvey can bring out the best in people, as we've seen in the past weeks across Houston and the Texas Gulf Coast with everyday Texans doing heroic things.

There's also an unfortunate increase in scams and misinformation that preys on Texans impacted by the storms.

And one such misinformation campaign took social media and traditional media by storm this past week, confusing and striking fear in homeowners over their insurance claims and coverage.

At issue is a new law that took effect Sept. 1 that's aimed at reducing lawsuit abuse around insurance claims. Some personal injury lawyers have gone from ambulance chasing to storm chasing, stirring panic and fear over House Bill 1774, suggesting the new law will greatly limit homeowners' rights to file legitimate suits against their insurers.

It's time to get the facts straight on the impact of the new law. HB 1774 is a common-sense reform that will limit lawsuit abuse by giving insurance companies 60 days to resolve a claim before being taken to court. It also preserves Texas homeowners' right to sue, while ensuring that natural disasters aren't used for financial gain driven by personal injury lawyers.

Texans should know their rights and remedies under Texas law as they work to recover from Harvey. Our state has some of the strongest consumer protections against insurers that unfairly deny or delay claims. That was the case before this new law, and it remains so after it took effect.

Homeowners should remain vigilant against this and other misinformation, and seek counsel from verifiable, credible sources. Don't just take our word for it.

The Texas Department of Insurance publicly reassured homeowners that they will maintain the same rights to an insurance claim now that the law has taken effect. Gov. Greg Abbott worked to assuage fears by reinforcing that homeowners did not need to rush to file a claim before Sept. 1, as have Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick, Attorney General Ken Paxton and many House members and senators.

But legitimate sources of information risk being drowned out by the deluge of misinformation from personal injury lawyers and their allies seeking to generate new cases and use our courts for greed, not justice.
And what does all this mean for survivors of Harvey, specifically?

Homeowners should know the new law likely will not apply to the majority of claims or lawsuits arising from Harvey because of the type of damage that occurred and the areas it occurred in.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has made clear that the new law does not apply to claims with the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP), because it is governed by federal law. This program is where most people get their flood insurance. Additionally, the new law does not apply to claims made through the Texas Windstorm Insurance Association (TWIA) — a major insurer on the Texas coast — because it is subject to a different law governing post-disaster lawsuits.

The primary purpose of HB 1774 is to require written notice of a dispute before a lawsuit is filed. It's really that simple, and it's being done to ensure an insurer is aware of a policyholder's complaint and has an opportunity to address the complaint before being sued.

HB 1774 is designed to discourage unscrupulous personal injury lawyers, adjusters and contractors from preying on Texans impacted by weather-related events.

The bottom line is the normal insurance claims process has not changed, and a homeowner's ability to file suit and receive full damages for unpaid claims does not change with this new law either.

Be wary of individuals claiming to help you get more from your insurance company if you allow them to file suit on your behalf. They may be motivated by greed more than by ensuring you and your family's property is repaired and made whole.

Jennifer Harris is executive director of Texans Against Lawsuit Abuse.

GUEST VIEW: A Storm Of Misinformation

Odessa (TX) American
September 10, 2017

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Trump Chides FEMA for Denying Disaster Relief to Churches

Townhall
September 9, 2017

The Federal Emergency Management Agency has been doing incredible work down in Texas and Florida these past few weeks as the states recover from Harvey and prepare for Irma. Under the purview of administrator Brock Long, the agency has been utilizing all resources to get victims the help they need. Yet, FEMA's decision to reject disaster relief funding to three churches in Texas seeking to rebuild their communities in the wake of Hurricane Harvey is causing leaders to shake their heads. All three have filed lawsuits against the agency.

One of the churches, the Hi-Way Tabernacle, sheltered 70 people and provided over 8,000 emergency meals.

President Trump said FEMA deserves those funds.

Sen. Ben Sasse (R-NE) noted his own frustration in a new statement.

"This policy discriminates against people of faith," he wrote. "It sends the message that communities of worship aren't welcome to participate fully in public life.... It reduces the facilities and volunteer time, talent, and effort available to support the broader community. And it is inconsistent with the Supreme Court's recent 7-2 ruling in Trinity Lutheran Church v. Comer.... In other words, it is unjust. It is unconstitutional. It is unreasonable. And it is impeding ongoing recovery efforts."

Sasse used a recent court ruling, Trinity Lutheran v. Comer, to bolster his argument. In that case, the judges ruled that excluding a religious organization from a public benefit for no other reason than its being a church, is "odious to our Constitution . . . and cannot stand."

"When facilities for stamp and coin collecting are eligible for aid, but houses of worship aren't, something has gone seriously wrong," Sasse added.

Don't be misled by this current disagreement. Trump does appear to have a good overall relationship with Long and FEMA. The two have complimented one another for their efforts in the past couple of weeks, with Long telling Fox News anchors how thankful he was that the president was so "engaged."

Trump Tweets Support for Giving Texas Churches Disaster Aid

By Miranda Green
CNN
September 9, 2017

Washington (CNN) President Donald Trump put himself into the middle of an ongoing lawsuit late Friday, tweeting support for giving federal aid to Texas churches dealing with the aftermath of Hurricane Harvey. Three Texas churches filed a lawsuit this week challenging a Federal Emergency Management Agency policy that excludes religious institutions from receiving disaster-relief grants.

"Churches in Texas should be entitled to reimbursement from FEMA Relief Funds for helping victims of Hurricane Harvey (just like others)," Trump tweeted Friday night.

The three churches, the Harvest Family Church, the Hi-Way Tabernacle and the Rockport First Assembly of God, "are not seeking special treatment; they are seeking a fair shake," the lawsuit reads. "And they need to know now whether they have any hope of counting on FEMA or whether they will continue to be excluded entirely from these FEMA programs."

All three churches were damaged during Hurricane Harvey, according to the lawsuit, which was filed Monday in the US District Court for the Southern District of Texas.
Trump's support for providing Texas churches with federal money is notable given that the lawsuit was filed against his own administration. It is unclear whether the President meant the tweet as a broader call for FEMA to treat secular nonprofits and religious-based groups equally in the disbursement of disaster-relief funds.

The lawsuit comes after the Supreme Court handed down a major religious liberty decision in late-June, ruling that a Missouri policy that excluded a church-run preschool from a grant program was unconstitutional, potentially opening the door for similar cases.

The White House and FEMA did not immediately return requests for comment Saturday.

Trump Tweets Support For Texas Churches Seeking FEMA Money after Harvey; Lawsuits Already Filed

By Justin Wm. Moyer
Chicago Tribune
September 9, 2017

President Donald Trump stepped into a hot church-state dispute Friday night, tweeting support for Texas churches that were damaged by Hurricane Harvey and now want assistance from the Federal Emergency Management Agency to rebuild.

Trump's tweet came after three Texas churches filed a lawsuit this week challenging a policy from FEMA that excludes houses of worship from disaster relief grants, and as Hurricane Irma barreled toward the southeastern United States.

The Harvest Family Church, the Hi-Way Tabernacle and the Rockport First Assembly of God were all damaged during Harvey, according to a lawsuit filed Monday in the U.S. District Court for Southern District of Texas. The First Assembly of God lost its steeple, roof and church van, while the other two churches were severely flooded. In addition, the Hi-Way Tabernacle serves as a FEMA staging center, sheltering up to 70 people and distributing more than 8,000 emergency meals.

Yet the churches will not be eligible for recovery money from FEMA, which "categorically excludes houses of worship from equal access to disaster relief grants because of their religious status," according to the lawsuit, which asks the court to declare FEMA's church exclusion policy unconstitutional and seeks an emergency injunction preventing its enforcement.

"The churches are not seeking special treatment; they are seeking a fair shake," the lawsuit reads. "And they need to know now whether they have any hope of counting on FEMA or whether they will continue to be excluded entirely from these FEMA programs."

FEMA excludes buildings that provide "critical service" or "essential government services" from repair if more than half their space is used for religious programming, the suit said. Museums and zoos are eligible for relief, but churches are not.

"If the Churches were to cease all religious activity in their houses of worship, those buildings would become assistance-eligible," the lawsuit read.

A FEMA spokesman declined to comment on pending litigation.

This issue is not new. In 2002, President George W. Bush made news when his administration approved a $550,000 grant to a Jewish school devastated by an earthquake. After Katrina in 2005, the Bush administration said that parochial schools, nursing homes and other faith-based institutions could get federal disaster aid but that the government would not pay to rebuild houses of worship.

This week's lawsuit comes three months after the Supreme Court decided that a church in Missouri could get government money to resurface its playground – a major religious-liberty decision that has set the stage for similar cases, some experts say.

"The consequence is, in all likelihood, a few extra scraped knees," Chief Justice John Roberts Jr. wrote in Trinity Lutheran v. Comer. "But the exclusion of Trinity Lutheran from a public benefit for which it is otherwise qualified, solely because it is a church, is odious to our Constitution all the same, and cannot stand."

Diana Verm of Becket, a nonprofit Washington law firm that seeks to defend religious liberty, said the churches sued FEMA partly because of the Trinity case.

"This is a time of crisis in Houston," she said. "Churches are some of the helpers, doing everything they can to get back on their feet. Yet they are denied the same relief other nonprofits are getting from FEMA."

When FEMA provides money to communities stricken by natural disaster, not everyone can get it. For example, community centers "operated by a religious institution that provides secular activities" are eligible, according to the agency's policy guide, but other religious institutions may not qualify.

Alex Luchenitser, the associate legal director for Americans United for Separation of Church and State, another D.C.-based nonprofit, said the Trinity decision was not applicable to the church litigation. That

decision allowed a church to get funding for a nonreligious function, he said; the Texas churches are seeking money for “core facility” repair.

“We know a lot of people in Texas are suffering, and we are sympathetic,” he said. “But the fact that something bad has happened does not justify a second wrong.” He added: “Taxpayers should not be forced to protect religious institutions that they don’t subscribe to.”

FEMA funds have been used to reimburse churches before. When money went to churches after Hurricane Katrina in 2005, officials said the decision was unprecedented, and some – including some of the faithful – wondered whether the funding was appropriate.

“The people have been so generous to give, that for us to ask for reimbursement would be like gouging for gas,” the Rev. Flip Benham, the director of the antiabortion group Operation Save America, said at the time. “That would be a crime against heaven.”

Founded more than 15 years ago, the 300-member Hi-Way Tabernacle in Cleveland worked with FEMA during Hurricanes Rita and Ike, the lawsuit said, and turned its gym into “a warehouse for the county” during Harvey. The church’s pastor said Hi-Way would do the work anyway but would like some help.

“The Tabernacle is here to help people,” Pastor Charles Stoker said in a statement. “If our own government can help us do that, that’d be great. And if not, we’re going to keep doing it. But I think that it’s wrong that our government treats us unfairly just because we’re Christians.”

Bill Maher: 'Unfair' for states like Texas to request federal aid after Harvey

By Max Greenwood
The Hill
September 9, 2017

HBO host Bill Maher complained that it "seems a little unfair" for residents of conservative states like Texas to rely on federal assistance in the wake of Hurricane Harvey.

"These places that got flooded, like Texas, okay, they have a low tax base," Maher said on his show "Real Time" on Friday. "So, the federal government bails them out. Their governors, their legislators they don’t believe in climate science."

"It seems like the responsible folks in this country, the people who pay a little more taxes and the people who believe in climate change are bailing out the people who hate government, except when they need government when they’re in trouble," he continued. "That seems a little unfair."

“Suddenly, socialism is not such a bad idea when you’re standing in toxic floodwater.”

Maher's comments came just two weeks after Hurricane Harvey made landfall in southeast Texas, bringing with it historic floodwaters that devastated the Gulf Coast.

Congress voted this week to approve a stopgap spending measure that, in addition to keeping the government running past September, included more than $15 billion for hurricane and emergency relief.

Some conservatives, like Sen. Ted Cruz (R-Texas), have faced criticism recently for pleading for federal assistance in the region, despite voting against a more than $50 billion relief package in 2012 for victims of Hurricane Sandy, which struck New York and New Jersey.

WORKSHOPS & MEETINGS

Houston residents confront officials over decision to flood neighborhoods

By Emily Flitter
Reuters
September 9, 2017

HOUSTON (Reuters) - Angry Houston residents shouted at city officials on Saturday over decisions to intentionally flood certain neighborhoods during Hurricane Harvey, as they returned to homes that may have been contaminated by overflowing sewers.

A town hall grew heated after City Council member Greg Travis, who represents parts of western Houston, told about 250 people that an Army Corps of Engineers official told him that certain gauges measuring water levels at the Buffalo Bayou - the city's main waterway - failed due to a decision to release water from two municipal reservoirs to avoid an overflow.

Travis' words inflamed tensions at the town hall, held at the Westin Houston hotel, as the region struggled to recover from Hurricane Harvey, which dropped as much as 50 inches (127 cm) of rain in some areas along Texas' Gulf Coast, triggering historic floods.

More than 450,000 people either still do not have safe drinking water or need to boil their water first.

On Aug. 28, the Army Corps and the Harris County Flood Control District opened the Addicks and Barker reservoirs in western Houston to keep them from overflowing. They warned it would flood neighborhoods, some of which remained closed off two weeks later.

Travis said the Army Corps official said they kept releasing water without knowing the extent of the flooding. "They didn't understand that the bathtub effect was occurring," he said.

Residents attempting to return to flooded homes may have to contend with contaminated water and air because the city's sewer systems overflowed during the floods. Fire chief Samuel Pena said people returning home should wear breathing masks and consider getting tetanus shots.

"We couldn't survive the Corps - why should we rebuild?" Debora Kumbalek, who lives in Travis' district in Houston, shouted during the town hall.

Scattered heaps of discarded appliances, wallboard and mattresses can be still seen throughout the city of 2.7 million people, the nation's fourth-largest.

There were no representatives from the Army Corps at the town hall. An official from the Army Corps could not immediately comment. An official from the Harris County Flood Control District did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

The Corps released water at an intended maximum rate of 13,000 cubic feet (370 cubic meters) per second to keep those reservoirs from overflowing. However, preliminary data from the U.S. Geological Survey suggests that on at least two days, the average release rate exceeded that 13,000 level.

Many residents face lengthy rebuilding processes, and the majority do not have flood insurance. The Federal Emergency Management Administration will contribute a maximum of $33,000 per home in assistance to cover damages, a FEMA official said at the town hall, though for heavily flooded homes, damages will likely exceed that amount.

Fire chief Pena said homes may also be occupied by alligators, rodents and snakes due to the floods. A total of 52 of the state's public drinking water systems were still damaged, inoperable or destroyed, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, leaving 70,000 people without water. Another 380,000 people need to boil their water.

HUMAN INTEREST & COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Houston perseveres after Harvey

By Tom Waddill
Times-Review
September 10, 2017

Devastated but determined to rebuild, the people who have been affected most by Harvey's wrath are showing a fighting spirit that has caught the attention of people all across the country.

Texans pulled together when times got the toughest during the storm, and they're doing it again a week later as they move into recovery mode.

"I never doubted for a moment what was going to happen when this storm hit, and immediately after it hit," said David Brady, CEO of the American Red Cross' Texas Gulf Coast Region. "I know my fellow Texans too well. We are going to step up, we are going to rally around each other and we're going to support each other across all differences, whether it's socioeconomic, whether it's race, whether it's religion, Texans don't care about that.

"Texans — we may annoy a lot of people — but we are Texans first in a lot of ways. We're going to step up and help our fellow Texans in a time of need."

Brady has been leading the recovery efforts at the George R. Brown Convention Center in Houston, where more than 11,000 people were housed during the height of the flooding in the city. He and thousands of Red Cross volunteers have comforted people who have lost loved ones, left their homes with floodwaters rising and lived to tell horrific tales of Hurricane Harvey and the 51 inches of rain that fell in the Houston area while the storm slowly made its way around the Lone Star state.

"It was demonstrated every single minute of every day during this storm, and after the storm," Brady said of the spirit of togetherness he witnessed over the last couple of weeks. "My neighbor took his fishing boat and went and found a neighborhood that needed help. He spent four days out there rescuing people that he didn't know. That's one story, but there are thousands of stories like that. That's what people did."

A Category 4 storm when it roared into Rockport on Aug. 25, Harvey's winds weakened some, but the tropical storm hung around for four days and dumped more than 40 inches of rain on Southeast Texas, causing catastrophic flooding and at least 70 deaths. More than 185,000 homes were damaged across Texas. Some were ravaged by high winds in small coastal communities; others in Houston were flooded with 6 feet of water or more.

People who were caught up in the storm will never forget what it was like.

"It was so stressful," Bay City school teacher Linda Smith said. "My house (in Sweeny) was surrounded by water. Water got in the garage, but thank God, it did not get in the house. We were very worried, but it was out of my control. I know what it's like to be flooded because I had gone through it before. We're doing good now, but watching television is stressful because there are so many individuals hurting."

Harvey made a lasting impact on a huge swath of South and Southeast Texas. After flooding Houston, the storm briefly retreated into the Gulf of Mexico, then returned to land near the Texas-Louisiana border. That's when people in Texas' Golden Triangle — an area that includes Beaumont, Port Arthur, Orange and other smaller communities — felt Harvey's fury.

"The most horrific part of the experience for me was (Aug. 29), getting the phone calls, emails and Facebook messages from people in Port Arthur desperately calling for water rescues," said Brandon Scott, a reporter with KFDM News in Beaumont. "We heard from the Jefferson County judge, sheriff and commissioner who represents that area. All of them frantically sought help for a city underwater."

Like it did in Houston days earlier, the rain kept falling and the water kept rising.

"County officials warned earlier in the day that it would be nearly impossible to navigate through the floodwaters after nightfall," Scott explained. "They shut down water-rescue operations and it seemed as though no one would be able to save these people. And the calls kept coming. The images people saw, either on social media or television, ended up being exactly what we were hearing about through phone calls.

"It was chilling."

Then, like Brady witnessed inside Houston's spacious downtown convention center, people in Bay City and Beaumont began rallying together.

"Those folks stranded in Port Arthur, many of them would've died without the volunteer rescue efforts of civilians with boats and the willingness to risk their own safety to save people," an energized Scott said. "We saw humanity in all of its glory."

Smith, who has been trying to help students at Bay City High School understand what happened over the past couple of weeks, said it's been uplifting to see everyone in her small community working together and helping one another.

"I love the Texas spirit," Smith said. "Recently, this country has been divided among races, but in the last couple of weeks, a storm has brought everyone back together. Even the news is not reporting on the division. God has a way of bringing us down together. I just hate that it had to be a storm that made us do this. We need to remember that God's greatest commandment is love and we all should love our neighbors."

Brady worked 20-hour days during the worst part of Harvey. He saw that same Texas grit in the big city. People in Houston refused to let Harvey get them or their neighbors down.

“There’s a reason we’re proud,” Brady said, “It’s not arrogance. We’re just proud to be from this state, proud to be part of a culture that is about caring for and helping people. That came shining through during and after this storm.

“What do I expect when this is over. I expect organizations, whether they be government, nonprofit or businesses, I expect everyone to keep working together as we always do, but even more collaboratively on elevating our communities, on elevating our state.

“We’re going to be stronger,” Brady stressed. “This storm is going to make us stronger.”

Over 100 Volunteers Leave LAX for Houston to Aid with Harvey Response

By Jessica Rice
NBC-LA
September 9, 2017

Some 135 people including military veterans and first responders left LAX for Houston Saturday morning, to aid with the disaster response to Hurricane Harvey.

The devastating storm killed more than 70 after landing on the Gulf Coast of Texas on Aug. 25 as a Category 4 hurricane, leaving hundreds of thousands of families with flood-damaged homes.

The volunteers headed to Texas with Team Rubicon, a Los Angeles-based nonprofit sending up to 2,000 volunteers to support "the Hurricane Harvey cleanup effort over the next six weeks," read a statement from the nonprofit.

There, volunteers will help families affected by the storm "get back into their homes as soon as possible," the statement read.

'This is human kindness': Hurricane Katrina survivors help Houston after Harvey

By Meghan Holohan
TheTodayShow
September 9, 2017

Soon after Hurricane Katrina, Connie Uddo was sitting with a friend in an iHop in Kingwood, Texas, where she was living after she was forced to evacuate New Orleans in 2005. She had just learned that she and her two children wouldn't be able to return to their home to salvage their belongings and start rebuilding their lives.

“My husband tells me,‘I don’t think I am going to be able to get us home. Keep the kids in school and find an apartment,’” she told TODAY. “I just lost it.”

As Uddo cried, two women came over and began comforting her.

“They literally sat at our table and just ministered to us and prayed with us and hugged us and comforted us,” she said.

When Uddo went to pay for her bill, she was overwhelmed with gratitude after learning another stranger had already covered it.

“That’s what Houston gave to me. They gave me strangers seeing me crying at the table who came up to me and loved on me,” she said. “This is human kindness.”

Uddo eventually returned to Louisiana and helped rebuild her neighborhood, Lakeview, which was one of the hardest hit areas after Katrina. She founded several nonprofits, including NOLA Tree Project — which is reforesting New Orleans after the devastating storm — and St. Paul’s Homecoming Center — which started as a welcome center at her house.

After seeing the devastation from Hurricane Harvey, Uddo quickly packed up her recovery van, which is equipped for gutting and mucking houses, and drove straight to Houston just a few days after the storm hit.

“I knew I had to go,” Uddo said.

In the past, Uddo has organized as many as 200 volunteers at a time to help people demolish homes and hopes to bring more to Texas post-Harvey. She is also trying to help Houstonians avoid mistakes that many experienced in New Orleans during the recovery by warning them about contractors who try to defraud them by citing outlandish prices for tasks like black mold removal.

But, more importantly, she is sharing her message of hope with survivors.

“We can tell you ‘We’ve been through this and you’re going to be okay. You are going to be better than okay. You are going to find you are going to be stronger, more resilient,’” she said.

Uddo is not the only New Orleans resident who remembers Katrina and the kindness of Houston. Henry Heaton was just 15-years-old when his family was evacuated in 2005. At the time, Heaton's family owned a ranch house near one of the breached canals. After the storm, the property was entirely underwater.

“My family had some friends in Houston and they found them a temporary home,” he told TODAY. “Friends who took them and made them feel at home.”

When Heaton returned to New Orleans, he met Uddo’s daughter, Stephanie, and they became close. When Uddo was looking for volunteers for this weekend's trip, he signed up immediately.

“My heart went out to Houston because I know exactly what was going on,” he said. “New Orleans wouldn’t be what it is without all the volunteers who got on a plane and went down there.”

He, too, remembers seeing his waterlogged home for the first time and not being able to stay long because it felt too overwhelming. He also remembers how small but kind gestures made a huge difference.

“A hug goes a very long way,” he said. “Talking to someone who has been in your place and saw what you have been through, it will help.”

For others, being able to give people a meal or a bottle of water feels powerful. Ryan Fitzmorris and his brothers, Jim and John, who are all survivors of Hurricane Katrina, remember how Houstonians provided so much support to New Orleans as it was being rebuilt.

“I got to do something,” he told TODAY. “I have two beautiful sons and if I was in this situation I want someone to help me.”

Fitzmorris, who has since moved back to New Orleans and now owns a recovery business, recently started a GoFundMe campaign to raise money to buy supplies for Houston. Over Labor Day weekend, he filled a 26-foot truck with food, water, diapers, and wipes, along with specialty requests like bug spray, citronella candles and chainsaws, and took it to Port Arthur.

He's currently accepting donations to fill the truck again to take to Rockport on Sunday, Sept. 10.

“It is overwhelming. All I did was step up,” he said. “I think it’s more than just kind of going there and dropping off the valuables. It is letting them know you are not by yourself.”

Beyoncé Teams Up With Houston Pastor to Help Harvey Survivors

By Gwendolyn Quinn
NBCNews
September 9, 2017

Global superstar Beyoncé returned home to Houston on Friday and joined the survivors of Hurricane Harvey at her home church, St. John’s United Methodist Church, with Senior Pastor, Rudy Rasmus - affectionately known to the global community as Pastor Rudy.

Joining Pastor Rudy and Beyoncé were her mother Tina Knowles Lawson, daughter Blue Ivy and bandmate Michelle Williams of Destiny’s Child, among others who were on hand to provide support and aid to the victims of Hurricane Harvey, which has profoundly impacted the region.

The Houston native and her foundation, BeyGOOD partnered with Pastor Rudy, the founder of the Bread of Life, Inc., a non-sectarian, non-profit organization, which started 25 years old ago through St. John’s United Methodist Church. The Bread of Life was set up to specifically respond to crises and disasters such as Hurricane Harvey. Beyoncé has previously partnered with her pastor on global outreach initiatives, including her highly-publicized anti-hunger campaigns and food programs in conjunction with her concert tours.

“I’m home, this church is my home. I was maybe nine or ten years old the first time I sat there where my daughter [Blue Ivy] is sitting. I sang my first solo here,” she said, emotional as she spoke to a packed church.

Looking to Pastor Rudy, she added, “I just want to thank you for lifting up my family and praying for me and for being such an incredible example of what life and love is.”

Speaking to the audience full of survivors, she continued. “Today is a celebration of survival. Y’all are my family. Houston is my home. I thank God that you’re safe, and your children are safe. The thing that really matters is your health, and your children, and your family. And I just want to say I love you. I’m so, so

thankful to God that I've been blessed, so that I can bless other people, and I ask God to continue to do that for other people."

Though Pastor Rudy would not disclose the financial donation that Beyoncé made on behalf of Hurricane Harvey, he did say that it was sizable. "Over the years, I've worked with Beyoncé to help coordinate various humanitarian opportunities to impact places in the states and all over the world," says Pastor Rudy. "She has partnered with Bread of Life to do food drives. We have addressed food insufficiency around the world, including countries in Africa and India, where people are really suffering. We've done great work with her."

His relationship with the superstar goes back many years. "I've known Beyoncé since she was a little girl," Pastor Rudy continued. "She grew up at St. John's. I've known her mom [Tina Knowles Lawson] and dad [Mathew Knowles] before they had kids. Beyoncé has been an amazing friend and generous supporter. She has helped us do some significant work in the Houston area and she is totally committed to the recovery efforts on behalf of Hurricane Harvey."

He noted that Houston has long benefited from many contributions made by Beyoncé and the extended Knowles family, including the Knowles-Rowland Center for Youth, which started in 2002 through St. John's Church. "I often say that the Knowles-Rowland Center was built on Destiny's Child hit single, 'No, No, No.' Destiny's Child came through and help [Bread of Life] to build up a gymnasium as an outreach center for young people in our community," says the pastor.

With tens of thousands of people displaced and adversely affected by days of torrential rain and flooding in Houston and the surrounding areas, Pastor Rudy and the Bread of Life team have already begun outreach and recovery efforts. Hurricane Harvey is now considered one of the most devastating natural disasters in American history; with the damage spanning Texas and Louisiana, damages to date are estimated to cost more than $100 billion in clean-up and repair.

Related: Saving Grace: Faith Community Unites to Help Harvey Victims

The Bread of Life has set up a disaster case-management component to walk individuals and families through the process of getting back on their feet. The organization is now receiving support from all over the country, including donations of money and non-perishable essentials and supplies, including personal hygiene products, cleaning supplies, diapers, wheelchairs, blankets, pillows, and other items people we need for the long haul.

Further, Bread of Life is providing temporary and permanent housing and financial support to many, and has coordinated disaster relief cleanup crews, ground transportation needs for individuals and families; cleanup kits; and household appliances. Displaced families will also have access to a tool bank, where they can borrow a variety of construction tools and do the necessary work on their homes themselves.

"One of the things we are finding is that people are going to need transportation to move around and to get their lives back on track," says Pastor Rudy. "We [the Bread of Life] have been in the business of working with the homeless community for 25 years. There are a lot of people who never imagined themselves being homeless, who are homeless right now, and our goal is to help soften the blow as much as we can for those men, women, and children."

The Bread of Life has prepared a Hurricane Harvey Recovery Guide as a resource for those impacted by the storm. The organization is also building and utilizing relationships in the mental health community for people who will experience post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as a result of Hurricane Harvey.

“The recovery process won’t be a sprint, it will definitely be a marathon,” says Pastor Rudy. “We’re carefully building capacity around some areas we believe are vital to individuals and families. Our goal, and our promise to our donors, is to make sure that people who need the help will actually receive the benefit of the dollars being donated.”

Though separate entities, both the Bread of Life and St. John’s United Methodist Church are committed to providing assistance and normalizing the environment for the people of Houston, the nation’s fourth largest city, as the recovery process continues.

“Social justice has been the foundation of the ministry [at St. John’s] from the beginning,” says Pastor Rudy, who adds that this month marks the 25th anniversary of St. John’s and Bread of Life. “We focused on healing the needs of people in pain and that’s where we established our mark in this town. Our mantra from day one has been tearing down the wall of classism, racism, and sexism and building a community of recovery with unprecedented hope. When we think about classism, racism and sexism, those are the lines of demarcation that have historically presented themselves in faith communities and in churches; from the beginning, our goals were to eradicate those lines.”

St. John’s United Methodist Church has church locations in both the downtown and the Northwest sections of the city. Pastor Rudy co-pastors with his wife of 32 years, Juanita; the couple are parents to two daughters. Culturally and ethnically diverse, St. John’s has more than 9,000 members with 95 percent being people of color. The congregants span every strata of the social-economics spectrum: 30 percent of its members own franchises or have lucrative jobs and positions; another 30 percent are struggling to get by, and another estimated 30 percent are transitioning out of homelessness, prison, or other precarious situations. In fact, the housing and health and human services divisions of the Bread of Life owns and operates three apartment buildings under the Temenos Community Development Corporation; these were specifically constructed for the chronically homeless, defined as men and women who have been homeless for at least a year.

The first property built under the corporation is the Knowles Temenos Place Apartment, a 42-unit, single occupancy permanent housing unit financially supported by the Knowles family. The corporation constructed two other buildings with help from other donors. The second building is a $14 million project with 80 single units and the latest is a 15-single-unit apartment building.

Bread of Life has already start to assist many of the displaced families and individuals with temporary housing. “As the result of this crisis [Hurricane Harvey], the Bread of Life is mobilizing to house people and get people out of the city-operated shelters and into safe, decent and sanitary alternatives,” says Pastor Rudy. “The big challenge for our agency and other agencies that do similar work in the community is to find adequate and sufficient housing for residents with nowhere to go. Our goal today is the same as it was 25 years ago, which is to provide the quality of residential environment that anyone would want to live in, not just the homeless; it’s first class.”

A global humanitarian and the host of the popular radio show, “Pastor Rudy’s Love Evolution,” which airs weekly on Sirius XM’s Kirk Franklin’s Praise channel (Sirius 64 – XM 33). He is the author of “Touch: Pressing Against The Wounds of a Broken World;” “Jesus Insurgency: The Church Revolution from the Edge” with co-author Dottie Escobado-Frank; and “Love Period: When All Else Fails.” Pastor Rudy is currently working on his fourth book, which will address the issues of privilege and scarcity, and is completing his doctoral work at United Theological Seminary in Dayton, Ohio. He previously attended Southern Methodist University’s Perkins School of Theology and the Houston Graduate School of Theology.

As a leader, one of Pastor Rudy's strengths is the ability to mobilize and aid in crisis situations. But Hurricane Harvey has created a challenge for Houston and the nation. "It's a human tragedy of epic proportions," Pastor Rudy concludes. "What we discover in moments like these is how many people are living from one day to the next financially and how many people have no one to call. We often take for granted how many contacts are in our phone and how many numbers we can dial when we are in distress. But imagine, there are hundreds of thousands of people in Houston who has no one to call in the moment of distress and that's what we see. And those are the people we are trying to help."

Kimora Lee Simmons bringing aid to Houston Harvey victims

ABC13
September 9, 2017

HOUSTON (KTRK) -- Fashion designer and entrepreneur Kimora Lee Simmons is in town to help Harvey victims in Houston get back on their feet.

Simmons will visit the Aldine Family Hope Center today to hand out relief supplies.

She announced she has made a $25,000 donation to The Unmentionables, a non-profit that provides undergarments and toiletries to displaced people around the world.

From Texas, Simmons will head back to New York City to show her Spring Summer 2018 collection during New York Fashion Week on Wednesday.

Relief Effort Needs Better Planning

Victoria (TX) Advocate
September 9, 2017

Two weeks after Hurricane Harvey blasted through the Crossroads, relief and recovery efforts appear to be finally synchronizing.

Immediately after the storm, people jumped in to start helping, which is typical of Texans. But the problem was there appeared to be no planning and little communication so those coordinating the cleanup would know where to send people for social services and vice-versa.

This caused unneeded confusion in an already-difficult situation.

Disaster relief is being coordinated by the Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster. The social services organizations, such as the United Way, Victoria Christian Assistance Ministry and Community Action Committee, also are helping people find needed supplies.

The efforts are also helping local businesses coordinate their assistance.

For a while, they were working mostly in isolation from one another.

But after conversations began last week, the efforts have moved together. Phone banks are in place, and people are trained to answer the phone and direct people in the proper direction. A central area for seeking assistance has been established.

VOAD is still coordinating the efforts but has more voices and resources available. This will increase the availability of services long after the out-of-town workers have left to go help at another disaster.

The Crossroads is fortunate to not have major disasters on a frequent basis, but when it does, such volunteer efforts need to be coordinated and ready to go as soon as the affected area is safe.

Leaders of social services groups, who work with disaster contingency plans and whose daily work is to know the available resources, are invaluable components of the recovery effort.

The VOAD needs to be expanded to include social service organizations. They are the boots on the ground and will provide a more complete treasure trove of resources.

In coming months or years after the region has recovered from this disaster, the VOAD needs to remain active and prepared to respond. The group needs to meet on at least a quarterly basis to make sure all necessary resources are accounted for. When a disaster hits, all need to be prepared to hit the ground to help.

The relief workers and volunteers have provided tremendous amounts of help that will be remembered for years to come.

But the job is enormous and requires more than kind hearts and willing hands. For it to succeed, we must have coordinated efforts of all local, state and federal resources.

5 ways to avoid charity scams exploiting Hurricane Harvey

Market Watch
September 10, 2017

Hurricane Harvey has inspired a huge outpouring of support in the days since the natural disaster displaced thousands of people, with corporations such as Apple AAPL, -1.63% Facebook FB, -1.30% Google GOOG, -1.01% and Microsoft MSFT, -0.48% donating more than a combined $113 million to rebuilding affected areas in Texas and helping victims. Celebrities including Miley Cyrus, Oprah, Lady Gaga, and Kevin Hart have also personally donated hundreds of thousands of dollars to the cause.

But a number of scams have also been unleashed on consumers in wake of the disaster. On Thursday, the Federal Bureau of Investigation released a warning about emails and calls requesting donations for duplicitous charity organizations. The Federal Trade Commission also warned would-be donors about the increasing risk of fraud.

“It’s heartbreaking to see people lose their lives, homes, and businesses to the ongoing flooding in Texas,” Colleen Tressler Federal Trade Commission wrote in an alert to consumers on Monday. “But it’s despicable when scammers exploit such tragedies.”

Actively seek out legitimate organizations rather than donating when contacted by phone or email, said Melanie Ulle, chief executive officer of consulting firm Philanthropy Expert. “Donors should not give reactively during disasters like Hurricane Harvey,” she said.

Here are some other tips to avoid being scammed:

Vet a charity before you give them money

Some have also advised against donating to the Red Cross at all, after a ProPublica investigation raised questions about charity's response to Hurricane Sandy and the 2010 Haiti Earthquake.

When donating to smaller charities, it pays to do your research. Search the charity's name with the Better Business Bureau's (BBB) Wise Giving Alliance, Charity Navigator, Charity Watch, or GuideStar to see how much of its money actually goes towards helping victims. And be suspicious of funds that sprang up shortly after the natural disaster.

Alan Brill, Senior Managing Director in Kroll's Cyber Security & Investigations practice, also suggests following the advice of local news organizations that have vetted charities, like the Houston Chronicle, Texas Tribune and news station ABC13.

Designate your funds to the disaster

If you do choose to donate to a national organization like the Red Cross or Americorps, be sure to label your donations as being for Hurricane Harvey. Donate through their verified websites and not through any unsolicited emails.

Don't always trust what you see online

Scammers are getting more and more sophisticated, Brill said, making it hard to tell if a website advertising a charity is legitimate. Often they can create fake emails, phone numbers, and even entire websites to mirror those of legitimate organizations.

"Sometimes these sites will have a name linked to the disaster – something like 'Houston Pastors For Relief' – and will likely borrow imagery stolen from legitimate sites," he said." The bad guys are also very good at registering names that are almost the same as legitimate organizations. Maybe there is a slight misspelling. Maybe where a legitimate site ends in ".org" the criminal site ends in ".com" or ".us." In fact, the bad guys can copy an entire legitimate site and just change where the payment goes."

Usually these sites have a URL that is just slightly changed from the real website. Make sure you are going to redcross.org rather than donateredcross.org or redcross.com, for example.

Don't donate cash

Most legitimate charities will not ask donors to mail in cash or checks. To ensure the security of your donation — and to get it to those in need faster, stick to donating online through an encrypted website with a secure URL — one that begins with "https://."

Check receipts

Be sure to check your bank statements to ensure you donated the intended amount of money. Donating by text message means the contribution will show up on your phone bill, which often takes longer to post than credit card transactions. Don't forget to check that as well, Brill said, and make sure you donate exactly as much as you intend to: "If a 'charity' offers to send you a receipt for more than your actual donation

(because, for example, they have an "anonymous donor" who matches your contribution), that should be a waving red flag," he said. "Offering to violate tax laws is not a positive indicator."

Help with more than just money

While many find writing a check is the easiest way to help the cause, there are a number of ways to help that don't involve money.

Experts recommend not sending clothes or supplies until the area is stabilized, but services are needed. Those who live near the affected area in Texas can host families or help with cleanup efforts through resources listed by the Texas Tribune. Many animals evacuated from Hurricane Harvey need places to stay across the country, whether they have been displaced from shelters or temporarily separated from evacuee pet owners. Check with your local animal shelters to see if any displaced pets need help in your area.

From nurses to animal rescuers: Coloradans make way to Houston to aid the drowned city

Denver Post
September 9, 2017

Quinn McGee opened her front door, four days after she left. She closed it behind her and fell to her knees, sobbing for two hours.

It was last Sunday and she'd just gotten back from Houston. While there, she put on a tough face, leading her team and pulling them together when they broke down. But she couldn't be emotional while on the job. She needed to stay in control. So she waited. And when she got home and saw all her belongings, after leaving an area with nothing, she let go.

McGee was one of the many Coloradans who went down to help after Hurricane Harvey hit. She's not the only one.

Her group, No Kill Colorado, focused on rescuing animals. Others, like Rachel Kuker, were sent through organizations to work at surrounding hospitals. And then there were people like Mike Staffieri, who made sure people had access to life-saving medicines.

And at the same time people like them piece back together a city that had turned into a chain of islands, Hurricane Irma descended on Florida, pounding more cities with water and wind.

Houston and surrounding areas were devastated. From Aug. 25-31, rain fell across the widespread city, dropping almost 45 inches in one area, according to preliminary data from the National Weather Service.

The day after the storm, only 30 of Denver-based DaVita's 106 clinics were open in Houston, said Staffieri, chief operating officer at the kidney-care company. Some patients couldn't leave hospitals because they had nowhere to go, said Kuker, a UCHealth nurse.

And people who lost their homes and cars sobbed as they handed over pets, knowing they couldn't take care of them, McGee said.

People worked to create order in chaos. Staffieri, who arrived Tuesday, Aug. 29, described it as a big project management with different workstreams. For people on the ground in Houston, like Staffieri and McGee, the key was creating a central command center that directed side groups.

DaVita had over 500 people head to Houston, including more than 40 from Denver. Teams located patients, helped overwhelmed hospitals and transporting people to hospitals, clinics and homes. Those without specialized skills helped local DaVita staff whose homes were hit by the storm, clearing away dry wall and the like.

No Kill Colorado sent nine people, and then joined a group of people with boats, making their crew grow to 12. The group worked with Austin Pets Alive. Volunteers responded to calls of trapped animals, picking them — and stranded people — up in boats. Others helped with the intake and outtake of animals as they came in. Some animals that were given up were brought to Colorado.

Meanwhile, Kuker has been working 13-hour shifts straight since Aug. 31 and will continue until Wednesday. Her organization sent about 300 nurses to the area, 10 of whom are working with Kuker at the Conroe Regional Medical Center north of Houston. She works a variety of roles, relieving local nurses who have been impacted and helping with the extra flow of patients being relocated out of Houston.

Volunteers in Houston work long hours. And when they catch some sleep, it's either at a friend's house, in a clinic or hospital and a few in some of the rare open hotel rooms, according to the three Coloradans.

"I've been saying a prayer every morning that God can continue to give me energy to keep going," Kuker said. "There are parts of the day where I am ripping my hair out and there are parts where it's super easy."

People are appreciative of the help, she said, adding, "I think that keeps you going, too, because you know it's needed."

She wasn't the only one to express those sentiments. Both Staffieri and McGee said they were moved by what they've seen.

"Being on the ground there, it's very heartbreaking and a very tragic thing," Staffieri said. "But at the same time, if you go around and meet the people, it's a very heartwarming experience."

Although Kuker is still in Houston, both Staffieri and McGee have returned to Denver. They still keep in contact with teams on the ground, though. And in the meantime, another storm was expected to hit Florida early.

McGee said she's been too consumed with Houston to look elsewhere but others in the organization are offering housing for Floridians who want to escape the storm with their pets. Kuker said she wanted to go help but couldn't take any more personal time off work. DaVita is sending more people to help with Irma, although they've concentrated their efforts on the surrounding areas that are getting overwhelmed with evacuees.

"You bring up Irma and it just makes me cringe," Staffieri said. "Harvey was such a tough thing."

J.J. Watt Taking the Field in Houston for First Time Since Hurricane Harvey Will Give You Chills

By NFLMemes

DailySnark
September 10, 2017

In the span of a few weeks, J.J. Watt went from being a larger than life football star in Houston to a hero the city will never forget.

After the devastation Hurricane Harvey left, the face of the Texans raised over $31 million for the storm's victims and relief efforts.

Watching him the the field for the first time since the disaster will give you chills.

Houston football wearing 'Texas Strong' helmets to show support after Hurricane Harvey

By Alysha Tsuji
USAToday
September 9, 2017

The Houston Cougars postponed their first game of the season vs. UTSA that was supposed to be last Saturday because they wanted to focus on helping with Hurricane Harvey recovery efforts.

This Saturday, the team will be playing Arizona in Tucson, but the Cougars aren't forgetting all the people home in Texas. They'll be wearing these helmets that have the Texas flag inside the Houston Logo and a "Texas Strong" decal on the back.

Houston football wrote on Twitter, "As always, we are playing for our city and our state."

Other college football teams also wore helmet decals as a tribute to victims of Hurricane Harvey last week.

Additionally, this week Houston Athletics announced that for every ticket sold for the Cougars' game vs. Texas Tech on Saturday, Sept. 23, they'll be giving area first responders a free ticket to the Rice game next Saturday, Sept. 16.

Houston couple takes shelter in Omaha following Hurricane Harvey

KETV
September 9, 2017

OMAHA, Neb. — Steven Brown and LaRhonda Taylor said they evacuated their East Houston apartment ahead of Hurricane Harvey. With few of their belongings, they hopped on a Greyhound bus and ended up in Omaha, where they now plan to stay.

"I saw the Coast Guard lifting people out of houses and I was like, 'Oh my God, that could have been us,'" Brown said.

In two weeks' time, Brown and Taylor went from living in Houston to the Siena Francis House in Omaha.

"We're out of funds, thank god they're helping us," Taylor said. "I (don't have any) washed clothing, but we're safe and we're dry."

Just before the wrath of Hurricane Harvey hit Houston, the couple took a Greyhound to Wichita, Kansas and then continued on to the Omaha metro.

"(We) just grabbed what we could, and we got out of there," Brown said. "It's a good thing we did because a lot of people didn't make it out of there."

Taylor and Brown spent their savings on bus tickets and a week's stay at a motel in Bellevue. When money ran out, the American Red Cross referred them to Siena Francis.

"(Siena Francis) went out of their way to accommodate us so that we wouldn't be separated," said Brown.

Brown is currently staying in the shelter's building for men and Taylor is staying at the women's shelter across the street. The couple said they've been at Siena Francis for four days.

Brown and Taylor are hoping for assistance but has not heard back from FEMA.

"It's getting better, but ... I know FEMA is backed up because of Florida and it's just so much going on," Taylor said.

The two, both handicapped and on social security, are expecting quite the wait before financial help becomes available.

"I'm just blessed that were not in Texas," Taylor said. "Only thing I can think is if it hasn't killed me yet, it's making me stronger for something else."

The couple said they plan to make Omaha their new home and hope to be back on their feet soon.

They said FEMA told them it could be 10 to 14 days before they hear back.

MISCELLANEOUS

Fight Flooding Now

Houston Chronicle
September 9, 2017

With the sun shining, floodwaters receding and attention shifting to another part of the country preparing to do battle with its own giant storm, it’s easy to grow complacent about the knottier and more resistant challenges that confront Houston and southeast Texas in the wake of Hurricane Harvey. Now that cleanup and reconstruction are in full swing, we must not lose focus on the long-range view.

If the nation’s fourth-largest city and the surrounding region are to emerge stronger and more resilient, we have to rethink, re-imagine and rebuild with the future in mind. We have to be better prepared for storms to come. And make no mistake: They will come.

This is our "seawall moment," not unlike a time more than a century ago when our Galveston neighbors responded to the greatest natural disaster in American history by changing their form of municipal government, by literally lifting their city up and by raising a sturdy protective barrier that has stood the test of time. We must be just as farsighted and ambitious. In the spirit of Galveston's long-range view, we offer a dozen action items that we believe are vital if Houston and the region are to come back stronger, safer and more resilient than ever.

The list isn't necessarily comprehensive, but we hope it provokes an ongoing conversation among elected officials, business leaders, community activists, social-service providers, academics, charitable foundations, environmentalists, engineers – in short, every resident of the greater Houston area who cares about the future of this vibrant region.

1. Establish a regional flood control authority

Floodwaters ignore city-limit signs and county-line markers. We can't adequately address drainage issues with a mélange of municipal efforts and flood control districts split between local jurisdictions. Instead of dividing these disaster-prevention efforts into provincial fiefdoms, we need a single authority with the power to levy taxes that will take charge of all of our area's drainage issues. Gov. Abbott should call a special session of the Legislature and set up such an authority.

Although we are skeptical about whether lawmakers obsessed with divisive social issues can turn their attention to urgent needs, establishing this authority requires action from Austin. Our governor and our Legislature need to get this done immediately.

2. Build a third reservoir

Addicks and Barker dams, reservoirs and spillways, constructed more than 60 years ago, are dangerously inadequate. The U.S. Corps of Engineers rated both as "extremely high-risk" infrastructure years before Harvey. Houston environmental attorney Jim Blackburn maintains that at least one new reservoir should be constructed in northwest Harris County that can help flooding along Cypress Creek, Bear Creek and Buffalo Bayou. He urges the construction of additional upstream locations on virtually every stream in our region. Harvey shoved us uncomfortably close to catastrophe. We need a third reservoir, and probably more, to avoid unimaginable consequences the next time. Some experts estimate this could be a half-billion-dollar infrastructure project. It is a small price to pay to avoid catastrophe and should be part of any federal relief plan.

3. Build the coastal barrier system

If Hurricane Ike in 2008 had steered straight up the Houston Ship Channel, its powerful surge would have wrought catastrophic damage not only on the Johnson Space Center and the Bayport Industrial Complex, but also on the nation's economy. This area is responsible for more than half the nation's jet fuel and almost a third of its oil-refining capacity. It's also the leading supplier of energy products to the U.S. military.

Texas Land Commissioner George P. Bush has asked President Donald Trump to dedicate $15 billion toward construction of a coastal barrier system that would protect the upper Texas coast from hurricane storm surges. It's time to stop talking about this project and get to work building it.

4. Buy the Westwood Golf Club

One of Houston's worst recurring flood problems may have a relatively simple solution. Phil Bedient, director of the SSPEED Center at Rice for Severe Storm Protection, contends that most of Meyerland would

be protected from future flooding if the Westwood Golf Club along Brays Bayou was converted to a storm-water detention space. Harris County flood control officials must acquire this golf club and convert it into a detention pond. They should, if necessary, use condemnation powers.

5. Approve new funding streams

We need money. A lot of it. Current local budgets are inadequate to cover the costs of the massive infrastructure investment we'll need to keep this region safe from floods. The Harris County Flood Control District has a capital improvement budget of $60 million per year. Mike Talbott, the district's former executive director, estimated that we need about $26 billion for necessary infrastructure updates.

Potential funding sources include a Lone Star State version of the Dutch national tax for flooding abatement. The Dutch tax goes into that resourceful nation's comprehensive and innovative approach to flood protecting.

Other revenue-generating ideas: as we said above, create a regional flood control district to levy new taxes, as Harris County did after the deluges of 1929 and 1935; impose a countywide sales tax dedicated to flood prevention; and, of course, expand the drainage fee the Houston City Council implemented in 2011 for a pay-as-you-go Rebuild Houston infrastructure plan (assuming it survives a state court challenge).

The Legislature should compel the unincorporated areas of Harris County, home to about 2 million people, to establish local municipalities that levy their own sales and property taxes. At the state level, Abbott's special session agenda must also tap the $10 billion Economic Stabilization Fund, also known, appropriately enough, as the Rainy Day Fund, to help pay for one-time infrastructure expenses. The federal government's recovery legislation can be a resource to both rebuild what Harvey destroyed and establish new resiliency for regional flooding and storm-surge protection along the coast.
"Like the Dutch," Blackburn told the Chronicle, "we need to be willing to tax ourselves to raise the needed money. We have a solid industrial base. We have a generally wealthy and vibrant community. We can do this, but not without proper funding."

6. Require more effective land-use regulations

Adopting new regulations at both city and county levels to better control runoff would include restrictions on expanding impervious surfaces, investment in green infrastructure and stronger flood-detention standards. If the county refuses to act, politicians at City Hall should not be reluctant to use their authority in the extra-territorial jurisdiction to impose land-use regulations beyond city limits.

Prairies and wetlands in west and northwest Harris County must be preserved either through direct purchases or deals with landowners. New construction should be subject to higher building-elevation standards perhaps with detention ponds. The ploy of paving over Houston and putting up parking lots that are just under a 10-acre regulatory threshold to avoid mandatory flood-mitigation requirements is the sort of loophole our politicians must close. Houston also must reduce the need for impervious parking lots by lowering or eliminating parking minimums.

7. Reform the National Flood Insurance Program

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) must update its flood maps to better reflect the true risk, and cost, of living in a floodplain. Developers have a vested interest in keeping flood zones as small as possible to hide that risk and the eventual expense to owners. People and politicians must push back.

We cannot keep rebuilding homes that flood over and over again. Buyouts must take priority over repairs for "repetitive loss properties," where the federal insurance program has paid multiple claims within a 10-year span. Congress has to act to prevent federal flood insurance from expiring on Sept. 30, and our representatives can use the opportunity to implement much-needed reforms. Any change to the program should involve forgiving FEMA's $25 billion debt to the Treasury.

The county and city must fill in the gaps for buyouts of routinely flooded properties not covered by FEMA. Local governments must also work to use reclaimed property in flood zones for both flood mitigation and functional urban greenspace.

8. Insist on a transparent Corps of Engineers

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers often serves as the most important line of defense between people and floodwaters, but a broken political system leaves far too many in the dark about what the Corps does. Local neighborhoods remain ignorant about Corps projects throughout the region and about the risks and threats posed by floodwaters. Just look at the homeowners surprised to find themselves flooded near Addicks and Barker reservoirs. People who deal with the Corps say that responsiveness varies by region.
Congress fails to maintain stringent oversight or proper funding for the Corps. Our elected officials, particularly U.S. Sens. John Cornyn and Ted Cruz, have a duty to ensure that the Corps of Engineers is working to keep Houstonians safe.

9. Reinvigorate our politics

Harvey wasn't the first. Houston, Harris County and beyond have repeatedly had to deal with assorted natural disasters, including devastating hurricanes, and yet our elected officials are too often unresponsive. At the county level and in other jurisdictions without term limits, we re-elect the same people for years, decades even, despite what seems to be their unwillingness or inability to respond to long-range needs. We urge local political parties to shake things up, recruit new candidates with fresh ideas and an eagerness to rattle the status-quo. We need engaged citizens who vote, who demand that politicians respond to real needs, not transgender bathroom restrictions.

At the federal level, gerrymandered congressional districts are unexpected contributors to flooding problems. The Corps of Engineers takes its direction from Congress, where U.S. Rep. Ted Poe's tadpole-shaped district stretches from the Addicks Reservoir to Atascocita and his colleague Michael McCaul's from Austin to the Katy Prairie. These sprawling, ungainly districts are drawn to reelect incumbents, not to reflect the interests of constituents. The politics of place, unfortunately, takes a backseat to partisan primaries. Texas needs a nonpartisan redistricting commission.

Speaking of responsive elected officials, Congress needs to restore earmarks. The tradition may have gotten a bad name over the years, but as our two Green congressmen – Al and Gene – have pointed out, earmarks are a useful mechanism for meeting local flood needs rather than relying on the parochial whims of an often recalcitrant Congress.

10. Protect renters

In addition to new infrastructure, we have to build economic resilience to help Houstonians, especially renters, weather the financial burden that floods impose. Apartments must be required to offer flexibility on rent payments and late fees during disasters. Leases must be easier to break for renters who endure a natural disaster. Property owners can't be allowed to discriminate against flood victims who rely on Section 8 vouchers to pay for new housing.

11. Help schools rebuild

Harvey cost the Houston Independent School District $700 million in damages, Superintendent Richard Carranza says. Abbott should provide HISD the funding it needs to rebuild by calling upon the Legislature for a one-time payment from the Rainy Day Fund.

Texas Education Commissioner Mike Morath should help by waiving the academic accountability ratings for public school districts and charter schools in counties declared disaster areas. A waiver will give ravaged campuses the opportunity to rebuild and to focus on the emotional needs of students. For a while, schools can do without the constant drilling students must endure to pass standardized tests.

12. Establish a national emergency website address

We need a national 911-style emergency information web address, a standard and easily remembered internet site where people can find up-to-the-moment intelligence on everything from road closures and rising floodwaters to web cameras and weather radar. FEMA needs to take the lead on this idea, establishing the web address and ensuring that county governments aggregate all their emergency data feeds on their local sites. Residents should rely of state-of-the-art technology and up-to-the-second information from government not from social media.

First Harvey and Now Irma; Relentless Storms Strain Rescue Workers: NPR

NPR
September 9, 2017

Carlos Calvillo and more than 70 other members of the Los Angeles Fire Department were on their way home when they got the call.

After almost two exhausting weeks of water rescues, home inspections and cleanup in flood-ravaged southeast Texas, as part of a FEMA Urban Search and Rescue Task Force, they were getting deployed again – this time for Hurricane Irma.

“We made it as far as El Paso before we got turned around,” says Calvillo, an assistant chief. “We’ve been traveling now quite a bit so that’s getting tiresome, but as a whole, the team is in great spirits. I think it’s really actually harder on the people at home.”

Calvillo’s team is one of the many storm-weary emergency response units that are bracing for the one-two punch of Hurricanes Harvey and Irma.

The back-to-back storms – coupled with massive wildfires in the West – are straining the nation’s first responders, government agencies and aid organizations that deal with natural disasters.

Earlier this week, there were even concerns that the Federal Emergency Management Agency would run out of money just as Irma is forecast to make landfall in South Florida. A $15 billion disaster relief package, passed Friday by Congress and signed by President Donald Trump, has quelled those concerns.

But it does little for the on-the-ground crews who are still drying out from a massive response to Hurricane Harvey just a couple of weeks ago.

"We had deployed some of our teams and mobile kitchens from Florida [for Harvey]," says Lt. Col. Ron Busro, of the Salvation Army. "So a few days ago we had to release them to try and get them back." Busro, who's done disaster response work for 40 years, says he's never experienced something of this magnitude – potentially two Category 4 Hurricanes striking two major metropolitan areas within two weeks of each other. South Florida is projected to take a direct hit from Irma.

"Are we prepared? No," he says. "None of us are prepared, but by God's grace we're going to get in there and do the best we can in this terrible situation."

After rescuing more than 11,000 people and more than 1,000 pets during Hurricane Harvey, the U.S. Coast Guard has redeployed resources, readying for the aftermath of Hurricane Irma on the U.S. mainland. "This is what we train for in the Coast Guard," says Ben Barrett, who's stationed in Mobile, Ala. "It's just unfortunate that it's happening so quick – you know, one after the other – but our guys are ready to go." The potential scale of the disasters is worrying some that there won't be enough resources to go around. In Texas, where more than 500,000 people have registered for help from FEMA, there are concerns that Irma could hamper relief efforts. Texas Gov. Greg Abbott told reporters Thursday, that federal officials assured him that Texas would continue to receive resources for Harvey recovery regardless of what might happen with Irma.

"There is no doubt in my mind that they are extremely stretched at this point in time and that folks are starting to get tired," says Jason McNamara, former FEMA chief of staff.

He's confident, though, that people in Florida and Texas will get the help they need. It helps, he says, that the two events – at least for now – are in different stages of disaster, because they require different resources.

In Florida, emergency personnel and supplies like food, water and cots are immediately needed. In Texas, where floodwaters have receded, McNamara says, "Now you need caseworkers, you need folks to assess the infrastructure damage, you need engineers, you need cost-estimators."

Those needs are going to remain for a long time, he says. And the number of people, places and towns that need them could significantly grow after Irma has run its course.

The federal government is committed to handling them, but McNamara says it's important that people know there are going to be disasters that the government system just can't handle.

"It's not just about the federal government," he says. "It's all about the communities and the neighborhoods that are impacted, and the states and the surrounding states. This is everybody's responsibility as an American to pitch in."

Harvey's aftermath might have killed thousands of Texas cattle

By AP/New York Daily News
NYDailyNews
September 9, 2017

HOUSTON — Texas agricultural officials fear thousands of cattle may have died in the aftermath of Harvey, resulting in losses to ranchers of tens of millions of dollars.

The counties that sustained damage when Harvey first came ashore Aug. 25 were home to 1.2 million head of cattle, representing 1-in-4 of all beef cows in Texas, the nation's largest producer.

Sales of beef cattle and calves in the state averaged $10.7 billion annually between 2011 and 2014, according to the Texas A&M Agri-Life Extension Service and Agri-Life Research.

Most ranchers don't insure their herds because of the cost, so a rancher could be out hundreds of thousands of dollars if an entire herd drowned, the Houston Chronicle reported. The Oklahoma National Stockyards, branded as one of the world's largest stocker and feeder cattle markets, sold beef cows for an average of $1,500 in May.

Jennifer Lawrence says Mother Nature angry over Trump

Officials are still in the process of tallying the damages.

"We're finding cattle in waist-deep water," said Sid Miller, Texas Agriculture commissioner. "But when we try to drive them to dry ground, many of them just collapse they're so exhausted."

Cattle standing in water will have weakened skin and hooves that are susceptible to infection, said Dr. Dan Posey, a veterinarian and clinical professor at Texas A&M. Prolonged standing, lack of food and lack of drinkable water could make the cattle susceptible to respiratory disease, he said.

Texas A&M economists estimated that Hurricane Ike in 2008 caused about $13.3 million in cattle losses, with an additional $23.3 million in damages to fences, hay and other farm equipment.

Harvey may be more costly because it affected a larger area, said David Anderson, an A&M professor and agriculture economist.

However, Anderson said he doesn't expect the losses to affect meat prices, because the number of cattle lost in Harvey won't be enough to impact the national beef market, which is expected to yield a record amount next year.

The beef cows in the coastal regions are mostly raised for breeding, so their loss won't be immediately felt by meat packers. Coastal region calves are sent to Texas Panhandle feedlots where they grow to full size before going to slaughterhouses.

Editorial: Price-gougers, Scammers Take Advantage Of Storm Victims, Our Desire To Help

Longview (TX) News-Journal
September 9, 2017

Unfortunately, it’s not easy to distinguish. The Federal Trade Commission has posted a series of tips on how to spot the signs of a charity scam, as well as a checklist for vetting any organization before donating. You can find that online at bit.ly/

We always marvel at the inspiring tales of heroism, generosity and hope that surface in the wake of natural disasters like Hurricane Harvey. It is a given in this nation that when our fellows are in need, we roll up our sleeves and do all we can to help those who are suffering.

Unfortunately, another given is that such disasters also prompt the bottom feeders who see in them an opportunity to re-victimize storm survivors through price gouging, scams and fake businesses.

The problem has become so bad that, after Hurricane Katrina, the Justice Department established the National Center for Disaster Fraud, which receives hundreds of calls every month — even without a disaster.

And the calls are starting to roll in from Houston. The center is hearing about unscrupulous repair and removal contractors, FEMA "inspectors" charging for their services, and robo-calls about phony insurance schemes.

The Texas attorney general's office said late last week it already had received more than 3,200 complaints about scams, fraud and price gouging since Aug. 25. Some of those came from East Texas, where a handful had been reported through Friday from the Longview area.

Price gouging becomes a problem when immoral business people try to take advantage of desperate hurricane victims. We have seen stories about people charging $99 for a $5 case of bottled water; $300 per night for an $80-per-night motel room; even $20 for a gallon of gas.

Attorney General Ken Paxton has put out the word he will prosecute anyone caught price gouging in the aftermath of Harvey, but he will need your help. If you hear about someone attempting to illegally profit from Harvey-related misery, file a report online at texasattorneygeneral.gov or report it to local law enforcement officials.
Such ripoffs are bad. Even worse are schemes that take advantage of our desire to help. And every disaster like Harvey sees scam artists crawling out of the woodwork in search of a quick buck.

In this era of online fundraising, such scams are even easier to pull off. One victim of Hurricane Harvey, whose family's rescue from their flooded apartment via helicopter airlift was aired by the local ABC affiliate, found multiple GoFundMe.com fund-raising web pages created in his name. Only one was created by the family. The others may very well have had people with good intentions or they could have been fakes. But how can you tell?

Unfortunately, it's not easy to distinguish. The Federal Trade Commission has posted a series of tips on how to spot the signs of a charity scam, as well as a checklist for vetting any organization before donating. You can find that online at bit.ly/2xKKZr7

The impulse to help is a worthy one but be cautious of those who want to use your generous and compassionate heart to make a quick buck. If you think you have spotted price gouging or other scams, report it to authorities.

Body of Houston hotel worker trapped in flooded elevator during Harvey discovered after weeks long search

By Terence Cullen
NYDailyNews
September 9, 2017

The body of a Houston hotel employee who volunteered during the worst of Harvey was found nearly two weeks after she made her final call for help.

Jill Renick's remains were discovered earlier this week in the basement of the Omni Houston Hotel, where she worked as a spa manager.

An employee found the 48-year-old Houston resident's body in the ceiling near the elevators on Thursday, according to the Houston Chronicle. She was one of more than 70 killed when the devastating Harvey battered Texas' gulf coast.

She got into an elevator on Aug. 27 before 6 a.m. as Houston was a nearby bayou flooded over from Harvey's torrential downpours.

SOCIAL LISTENING

Hurricane Harvey – Social Listening Report – 9/9/17 1830 ET

This report is being distributed to FEMA External Affairs at Headquarters and Region 6, FEMA Office of Response and Recovery, NRCC Situational Awareness, Louisiana state, Red Cross, USCG, and HHS/ASPR.

Summary: The volume of Harvey discussions continue to decline slowly with recovery efforts due to the noise from Irma. Conversations continue on animal shelter efforts and people looking for ways to help with debris clean up. There has been an increase in frustration of being declined FEMA assistance. Curfews continue to get lifted in multiple counties. The public continues to share recovery tips for survivors.

FEMA Conversation

Public conversation:

- There is an increasing amount of frustration being shared by residents who have been denied FEMA assistance, especially people who were denied after a house inspection deemed their residence habitable. These residents have been sharing their experiences on community pages and discussing how to raise awareness about the denials. (Example 1) (Example 2) (Example 3)
- The conversation continues to be low surrounding FEMA hotel vouchers for Hurricane Harvey. There is one news article that is receiving positive reactions to the Rio Grand Valley Hotels accepting FEMA vouchers.
- Throughout the day, there have been occasional excitement from residents that they are about to, or just finished, meeting with FEMA inspectors. (Example 1) (Example 2)

Operations

Animals/Agriculture:

- A resident of Houston shared that his dogs were diagnosed with bacteria-borne illness due to their exposure to floodwaters, cautioning other pet owners to wipe their pets down after being outside.

Recovery:

- As of today at 14:15 ET Harris County Precinct 4 Debris drop-off site opened at 9 a.m. for local residents.
- Various locations throughout Houston continued to talk about clean up volunteer efforts throughout the day. (Example 1) (Example 2) (Example 3)

Public Health:

- As of today at 12:02 ET the Mayor of Houston stated that the free replacement of medical equipment/supplies lost in the flood will be distributed today.
- As of today at 14:26 ET the Orange County Office of Emergency Management announced that Military C-130 will be used to treat the area for mosquitos.

Public Safety:

- As of today at 11:03 ET the Mayor of the City of Katy lifted the curfew.
- As of yesterday at 18:30 ET the City of Bridge City announced that the curfew is now 11pm-5am.

Mass Care:

- As of today at 14:21 the Texas Commission on Environment Quality lifted the boiling water notice.
- The Houston NRG shelter continues to seek volunteers this afternoon.

Public Perception

- Facebook community groups are increasingly becoming central locations for residents to seek and share information about all recovery topics. Many of these groups have small followings made up of local residents interested in hyper local information. (Example 1) (Example 2) (Example 3)
- A moderate amount of local Refugio County residents continue to discuss that they are looking for places to help with debris cleanup in the area. (Example 1)
- There continues to be conversations about new animal shelter openings and how others can help displaced pets. (Example 1) (Example 2) (Example 3)