

TCEQ’S ROLE IN HURRICANE

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ABSTRACT

This discussion is an inside look at the ongoing process of hurricane preparedness from the perspective of the State’s Environmental Agency

1. TCEQ’S ROLE IN THE STATE OF TEXAS EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT PLAN AND HURRICANE RESPONSE PLAN

The State of Texas Emergency Management Plan (EMP) lays out the responsibilities of the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) and each state agency in preparing for responding to and recovering from natural and/or manmade disasters and emergencies. TCEQ’s responsibilities include being the primary agency for Annex Q in the EMP, Hazardous Materials and Oil Spill Response, and a support agency eleven other annexes.

The TCEQ also has responsibilities under the State’s Hurricane Response Plan, a supplement to the State of Texas EMP, including oversight of water and wastewater infrastructure, fuel waivers, and participation in re-entry operations.

Included among TCEQ’s actions to respond to the damages caused by hurricanes is to support the objectives of restoration of the essential functions of government, including priority restoration of water and wastewater systems, as well as providing interoperable communications.

2. TCEQ’S COORDINATION WITH STATE AND FEDERAL RESPONSE PARTNERS

Based on situation-specific requirements, TCEQ may provide staff to the State Operations Center, affected Disaster District Committee Emergency Operations Centers, the State Communications Coordination Group Headquarters in Austin, the Joint Field Office, field-deployed incident command posts, and/or the State Emergency Response Commission. TCEQ representatives may serve in both a primary agency and/or support agency role for several Emergency Support Function groups. To facilitate accomplishment of assigned responsibilities, the number of agency personnel operating from each location will be based on operational requirements and coordinated with the appropriate primary agency.

3. TCEQ’S ANNUAL AGENCY-WIDE HURRICANE PREPAREDNESS MEETING

At the beginning of each hurricane season, TCEQ convenes an annual Agency-wide Hurricane Preparedness Meeting to provide situational awareness and updates on new initiatives and developments; identify issues to be resolved to improve TCEQ hurricane preparedness and response; and confirm essential staffing.

4. TCEQ HURRICANE-SPECIFIC COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

As needed for a hurricane that is expected to make landfall along the Texas coast, TCEQ prepares a Hurricane-specific TCEQ Communications Plan to enable clear communication pathways for each disaster. Current information from the Texas Division of Emergency Management relating to the affected area, actions of response partner agencies and entities, and a discussion of fulfilling unmet needs are included in the daily internal conference calls.

5. LESSONS LEARNED

The TCEQ has carried lessons learned from previous hurricanes into the agency's response preparations. TCEQ has developed internal guidance documents--the TCEQ "All-Hazards" and Hurricane Preparedness Plans, as a repository for maintaining updated information related to TCEQ responses, to enable continuing improvements in our response actions.

6. TCEQ OPERATIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES IN DISASTER RESPONSE

TCEQ is responsible for continuing its own business operations in emergency situations, for providing strategic state assets to support state and local operations, and for assisting its regulated facilities in their efforts to continue to provide essential services to the public. TCEQ has organized special teams and participates in statewide coordination groups to achieve its emergency/disaster responsibilities in the aftermath of a hurricane. Essential activities the TCEQ undertakes in responding to hurricanes include:

- Ascertaining the operational status of water and wastewater systems in the strike zone; tracking Boil Water Notices issued by affected systems; and coordinating with the Texas' Public Works Response Team and other entities to provide assistance;
- Providing guidance and oversight of appropriate disposal of storm debris, including providing burn guidance, providing authorizations for appropriate temporary debris management sites, and inspecting the temporary storm debris management sites while they are in operation;
- Inspecting landfills sites in the hurricane impact zone;
- Conducting on-site investigations of the integrity of facilities that handle hazardous materials;
- Locating and providing for the disposal of orphan drums and containers dislocated by the storm;
- Providing oversight for household hazardous waste disposal;
- Conducting air monitoring as appropriate to determine responder and community safety, including restoring the operation of air monitoring network sites;
- Conducting dam safety investigations as needed;
- Coordinating with the Texas Division of Emergency Management, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the U.S. Department of Energy and the Texas Fuel Team to provide assurance for the availability of fuel for evacuations and response;
- Activating a storm-specific special (hot topic) section on the TCEQ external website with information and guidance for hurricane response and cleanup, including information relating to safe drinking water, managing storm debris, status of landfills, and air permit guidance; and
- Inspecting State and Federal Superfund Sites in the impact zone for storm damage.