

**MAINTAINING CONSUMER AND REGULATOR CONFIDENCE IN
DRINKING WATER FOLLOWING NATURAL DISASTERS – A LOOK BACK
AT THE CITY OF HOUSTON’S RESPONSE BEFORE AND AFTER
HURRICANE IKE**

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Abstract

On September 12, 2008, Houston and the surrounding area endured a direct strike from Hurricane Ike. The strong category 2 storm caused massive power outages, flooding, and significant infrastructure and property damage. On September 13, due to a loss of system pressures, the City of Houston’s Drinking Water Operation staff issued a system-wide boil water notice before any indication of contamination or being required to do so by the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ).

The City of Houston’s (COH) Drinking Water Operations (DWO) Branch implemented a Water Quality Response Plan that required a coordinated effort between Operations personnel within the Branch. The objective of the sampling plan was to provide the greatest possible confidence-level of its water system by collecting a sufficient number of samples from the distribution system in a timely manner. The sampling plan effectively captured data from a comprehensive area of the water system and incorporated sampling points from each Production-Service Area.

Effective communication within the Operations Branch from the sampling teams to senior management was critical to ensure that a consistent and timely message was conveyed from the Mayor’s Office to the Public. It was also critical that the TCEQ was informed of all pertinent information in order to ensure regulatory compliance with the State.

Since the challenges of Hurricane Ike almost 9 years ago, Houston Water has made numerous improvements to both the water system and its workforce so that the Utility will be even more resilient when the next storm or emergency event strikes. The presentation will describe these changes and how the nation’s fourth largest city is prepared to deal with the next natural disaster.