



Hurricane Harvey: Inside the Facilities Division

TDCJ's Facilities Division is responsible for planning, design, construction, maintenance and environmental quality compliance assurance for agency facilities, and each state-owned-and-operated facility has a Maintenance office. Regional offices have specialty crews who make construction repairs, and facilities' employees are among the first responders who evaluate, assess and repair the damage caused by storms, hurricanes and other events.

Like other TDCJ storm-response groups, Facilities' command communications were routed through the command center in Huntsville during the storm. Facilities' staff kept in voice contact using both land lines and cell phones that were issued to both regional managers and maintenance supervisors, supported by email and text communications sent by staff members with cell phone or computer access.

Before Harvey hit, Facilities' emergency response staff members were made available "on-call" to assist with storm preparations and help fulfill any urgent needs. Emergency purchase credit limits were increased for regional staff to allow for quick acquisition of critical supplies, and emergency contact lists were updated and distributed. A comprehensive list of all transportable assets was compiled and uploaded to the agency's One-Drive information storage system, allowing staff to quickly and easily find and relocate

emergency response resources to where they were most needed.

Facilities' major response activities during Hurricane Harvey included deployment of portable generators and water tankers, response to power and water outages throughout the state, relocation of all equipment

the performance of both unit and regional employees went far beyond their standard job duties. Even while employees were losing their homes and belongings, they remained on the job to perform preventive maintenance and to make sure emergency equipment was ready for use before Hurricane Harvey impacted the area."



Flooding at the Ramsey Unit.

located in the flood zone impact area, and filling and deployment of sandbags where necessary. The director of TDCJ's Facilities Division, Frank Inmon, described the emergency preparation and response actions of his staff as outstanding, saying, "Many maintenance employees never left their units, and

Standby generators were checked to make sure they were operational and filled with fuel, and regional staff made sure all portable generators were operational, installation cables were available and transport trailers were ready for deployment. Enclosed tool and material trailers were prepared to be

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sent into storm-impacted areas, as were Federal Emergency Management Agency trailers, and FEMA reporting logs were distributed to staff. Water tankers and generators were deployed to areas where they were most likely to be needed, and all state vehicles, to include heavy haul trucks and equipment, were kept fueled and ready for use.

Unit and regional staff made sure all fuel tanks were filled, tree limbs were trimmed to keep them clear of transformers and power lines, and sandbags were filled and sent to flood-threatened areas. In areas where the storm was expected to hit, buildings were boarded up and TDCJ staff members living in employee housing were instructed to secure any loose items.

As soon as possible, Facilities' staff moved in and quickly assessed and began to repair storm damage. It took only three days to restore unit wastewater plants to full operation, and five days to test all water-delivery systems in the impacted areas to make sure they could provide safe drinking water. In the interim, water tankers and bottled water remained available for use on affected units. All emergency response equipment, including water tankers, had been returned to its original assigned location one week after the storm.

Based on his experience dealing with weather-related emergencies, and that of his staff, Facilities Director Inmon offered advice for other administrators and managers who might have to deal with a natural disaster, "Always have an emergency command staffing and response plan, and make sure it includes regular mock emergency disaster drills. Keep up with preventive maintenance so your emergency response equipment is ready for use, and perform regular tests on that equipment to make sure it's operating correctly."

Inmon also stressed the importance of collaboration, saying "Always team up with stakeholders from other groups in your organization, and keep in mind that you're not acting alone. Each division and every employee should be part of the coordinated emergency response, so preplanning, regular practice and maintaining good communications before, during and after the storm are the foundation for an effective emergency response and quick recovery." ▲