

**Southern and Caribbean Regional Meeting
Austin, Texas
October 29, 2008**

**Hurricane Recovery and Community Post-Disaster Planning Panel:
Questions and Answers**

This panel discussion had two objectives:

- 1) Provide expertise on state and federal programs
- 2) Discuss needs and issues at local level (short- and long-term)

Among the discussants were Guy Jackson, the mayor of Anahuac; Alton Porter, the mayor of La Porte; and Carlos Cascos, the county judge in Cameron County.

Jackson commented that immediately after the storm the city was pleased with the FEMA personnel that assisted them. There was a big difference between Ike and Rita. However, since the storm, bureaucracy has thrown up roadblocks that are proving difficult to overcome. The storm destroyed 300-350 homes in Anahuac. Numerous others were substantially damaged (more than 50%). Some were at or above the base flood elevation. Residents who lost their homes were sleeping in cars and tents. He said that it was going to take at least another 30 days to set up a trailer park; some individual trailers have been coming in. Temporary housing in the floodplain is a problem. Housing and coordination issues are their biggest concerns. There is too much red tape.

In Chambers County, where Anahuac is located, 90-95% of those affected by the storm surge were uninsured for flood; 70-75% were uninsured for wind.

Porter commented that 200 homes were flooded in La Porte. He agreed that the initial FEMA response was good. He felt that the city had been well-prepared and had its fuel needs. At this time, housing is still a problem. There is no place to put the trailers and short-term permits to put trailers in driveways are needed. Contractors are in town, but there's no place for them to sleep.

Greg Pekar, the state hazard mitigation officer, concurred and noted that people are starting to get insurance money, but contractors can't get in to do the work because there are people in hotels taking advantage of the temporary housing. He suggested that a solution to this problem might be to do a 20 home buyout and convert the land to a temporary RV work park (authorized use of open space deed). One challenge to such a project is the required local match (Beaumont does not have).

Texas is waiting to see how much money they will get from HUD and then will need to make decisions about how to spend it and where. They may get \$4 billion. Some of this money may be able to be used toward local match.

Ivy Frances, FEMA Region VI, noted that governments work in singularly objective programs and that numerous pots of money are available. We need to be innovative in our planning, be more holistic.

Jim Albritton, FEMA Region VI Public Assistance, told the locals that as part of the public assistance pilot, salvageable debris can generate money that can be put toward the match. There is a market for broken concrete/asphalt, etc. Cities should have recovery/debris plans that state what they are going to do with debris, how they can put it to beneficial use.

Susan Ivester Rees, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, worked with the Mississippi Department of Transportation after Hurricane Katrina (MDOT). Trees that were destroyed or removed were used for environmental restoration purposes. Bridge debris was used for offshore breakwaters. MDOT required contractors to use materials beneficially. However, too much debris, especially woody debris, could quickly oversaturate market the market. We need to broaden our thinking about how these materials can be used.

Houston sponsored a nationwide contest for how to best recycle tree debris.

In some places, sand overwashed roads and rights of way. FEMA said they would help remove the sand but wouldn't help with sifting and putting it back on the beach. In the past (Alabama), FEMA has tasked the Corps to do it (with match), but only on public beaches. Albritton doesn't think it applies in this case, but will check with FEMA headquarters.

There still remains the question about debris in coastal waters. The GLO has issued a request for qualifications for side scan sonar of Galveston and Trinity Bay to identify and remove debris in the near-beach zone. They intend to employ shrimping fleets over the next couple of years to remove the debris.

In navigable waters, the U.S. Coast Guard is responsible for removal of debris. For nonnavigable waters, the GLO has asked the federal government for supplemental funding for debris removal.

Greg DuCote from Louisiana stressed the importance of reading, understanding, and teaching the Stafford Act. He found that there was little knowledge, at least among this crew, of the act and what it covers. It is available online at <http://www.fema.gov/about/stafact.shtm>.

Following Hurricane Dolly, Judge Cascos felt that some things went right, but noted that, in general schools serving as shelters need to be better built and equipped, most public buildings did not have generator power, cell phone service was lost. Small communities don't have cash reserves to continue business for 60-75 days while waiting for FEMA reimbursement. He also pointed out that Dolly was a weak category 2 storm and Ike was a strong category 2 storm. Communities were not prepared for Ike. They underestimated the meaning of "category 2."

According to Rees, we need to do a better job of educating people about potential impacts, focusing not just on the category, which measures wind only. We can't equate storm surge to category. The Interagency Performance Evaluation Task Force is engaged in efforts to better forecast storms as they.

In the long-term, Judge Cascos asserts that it's all about resources. His key message is to teach people when they are young and ensure resources are available to keep city government running

in the event to a disaster (e.g., grants and low interest loans for generator power). We should build schools in anticipation of using them as shelters, include showers and a commissary, make them storm strong, and conduct mock drills. We need to do more long-term planning, educate the public to take responsibility for themselves (the government shouldn't be the first responders and communities can't count on the federal government to be there as quickly as they'd like them to be), do a better job of getting people to leave, make accommodations for pets (define "pet"), preposition contracts for services like debris management and mosquito control, and secure financial resources to house people. Communities should adopt the principles of No Adverse Impact. Government officials need to be stricter, even when their actions are not popular. Prepositioned contracts are very important, debris, mosquito, etc.

Frances introduced Emergency Support Function 14 Long-Term Recovery, which helps communities grapple with issues. Resources include planners, architects, planning guides, economic development expertise, grant writers, etc. The effort is underway, working through the councils of government, but it requires a delicate balance between immediate and future needs. Nevertheless, it is important to recognize that what we do today will affect how the coast will recover.

Known high-risk communities should institute recovery ordinances that describe how they want to be organized for long-term community recovery in the event of a future event. But, typically, planners are so busy with permits that they have no time to look at long-term community recovery issues. Texas communities should be careful not to miss this opportunity.

Opportunities that can be taken advantage of during recovery include the burial of power lines. Buried power lines cost more, but they may incur less damage and allow power to get back on quicker. Hazard Mitigation Grant Program money can be used for power line burial (what about public assistance?).

Rees pointed out that while we can make a structure storm-resistant, we can't do the same for infrastructure. She suggests that some areas should just not be rebuilt. In coastal Mississippi, there are still people who can't go home (because of Katrina). The big postdisaster costs are associated with repetitive rebuilding of infrastructure. Dauphin Island is the poster child of such expenditures. It is politically difficult to tell people they can't move back, but people are starting to get it in Mississippi since the additional strikes of Gustav and Ike.

Jim Weatherford from the General Land Office (GLO) noted that hazard mitigation plans are being updated. The state is looking at regional planning and strengthening plans to better secure federal funding for mitigation projects. Walt Peacock from Texas A&M said that his group was looking at hazard mitigation plans in coastal Texas (regional, county, and city) and examining them in terms of quality based on existing literature to determine where and how they be improved. He noted that most of the proposed actions are structural (levees) and not issues like wetland restoration, natural resources, and education.

Ryan Fikes from the Gulf of Mexico Foundation pointed out that the foundation funds community-based restoration projects, and its board of directors is looking for projects to fund.