



The Litaker Group • Case Study

Assessing the Texas Health and Medical Response to Hurricanes Katrina and Rita

Background: In August 2005, Hurricane Katrina struck the United States Gulf Coast resulting in over 1,300 deaths. As part of the response effort, Texas received over 450,000 Katrina evacuees from Louisiana, requiring 177 shelters statewide. One month later, in September 2005, Hurricane Rita threatened the Texas coast, resulting in a mandatory evacuation of citizens living in 22 coastal counties — including Houston Texas, the fourth largest city (by population) in the United States. Overall, Texas cared for millions of evacuees from Louisiana and Texas due to the hurricanes.

As the state agency in charge of health and medical preparedness, the Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) was responsible for public health and medical relief efforts during the response. These responsibilities included identifying, evacuating, and sheltering special needs populations; serving the public health needs of evacuees; and providing mental health services. During the most severe phase of the response, DSHS activated its emergency command center for four weeks and worked directly with local, state, and national officials.

Client Needs: DSHS sought an independent evaluator to: (1) document and analyze the DSHS response to Hurricanes Katrina and Rita; (2) evaluate the agency's capacity to support such a response by the Texas public health system; and (3) provide recommendations for improving future response activities. This independent evaluator was charged with identifying the public health response needed to limit the mortality, morbidity, and economic consequences during a health and medical emergency.

This project required a company with demonstrated experience in evaluating public health preparedness and emergency response activities. In December 2005, after a competitive procurement, DSHS selected The Litaker Group (LG) to complete this project.

Services Rendered: The LG collected and analyzed data from three sources: (1) a survey of DSHS employees who participated in the response; (2) findings from 15 focus groups conducted across Texas; and (3) personal interviews with senior officials at the state and national level who participated in the response. In addition, The LG hosted a one-day summit in Austin, Texas to report on the findings and to generate ideas and feedback on future response activities.

Results: The final After Action Report and Improvement Plan identified specific deficiencies and corrections to be enacted in order to improve future disaster responses. Areas of improvement included information management, roles and responsibilities, resource management, continuity of operations, and pediatric issues. The LG also worked with DSHS to implement corrective measures identified in the Improvement Plan.

A copy of the final report is available at: litakergroup.com/reports_articles.cfm.

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