Hurricane Katrina Response
Hurricane Katrina Causes Destruction and Large Loss of Life

On the 28th August 2005 a warning was issued predicting severe damage to New Orleans and the surrounding areas from the approaching storm. Hurricane Katrina presented catastrophic and long lasting effects on New Orleans and surrounding areas. The center of the storm passed east of New Orleans on the 29th August 2005. It is estimated that by the time Katrina came ashore, approximately 1 million people had fled the city and surrounding areas with a further 25 to 30 thousand remaining in the city.

By the 31st of August 2005, 80% of New Orleans was flooded with some areas under 15 feet of water. The extensive flooding stranded many of those that chose to stay behind, some were trapped on the roof tops of houses, some inside houses and some trapped inside attics unable to escape. Most major roads were damaged.

Initial reports from the incident indicated that the loss of life from the hurricane was expected to be in the thousands, with media reports that bodies could be detected floating in the flooded streets particularly in the eastern regions. There was no clean water or electricity in the city and communication infrastructure was severely affected which affected telephone, cell phones and internet, all local TV stations were disrupted.

Katrina was the most destructive and costliest natural disaster in the history of the United States. The damage was estimated at over $80 million. US the death toll of direct and in direct deaths was over 1,800 people, with the greatest number of deaths occurring in Louisiana.

On the 7th of September, Kenyon responded to a FEMA request for assistance. At a meeting on the evening of the 7th September attended by the respective response agencies, Kenyon nominated that it had the capacity and capability to commence deceased recovery operations on the following day the 8th September, eliminating the impasse that existed regarding recovery responsibilities.

In the early stage of the operation there was lack of clarity between parish, state, federal agencies and organizations, private and non-government organizations (NGOs) regarding roles and functions.

Coordination between a number of the respective response agencies was not at an optimum level, resulting in a disconnect to the free flow of the operation response.

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Solution

Due to the total lack of facilities in New Orleans, Kenyon managed operations from its Incident Management Center (IMC) in Baton Rouge.

Kenyon was responsible for initiating deceased search and recovery operations of local hospitals and nursing homes; responding to calls from individuals; reports of remains from searching military units; secondary searches of homes. The Louisiana Air National Guard, local, state and federal police officers, as well as law enforcement officers from various other states supported the search teams.

Kenyon provided mobile mortuaries and associated equipment in support of the recovery process including vehicles, boats and personal protective equipment.

Kenyon, under the direction of the Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals, was responsible for setting up and staffing a Family Assistance Center (FAC) to support and assist the families affected by the disaster.

Kenyon created a database to assist incident management and to assist in the identification of the deceased; collecting ante mortem information from family members regarding missing persons.

Kenyon had 10 recovery teams in operation with each team comprised of 10 team members. Overall Kenyon had over 300 personnel involved in the operation.
Results

Kenyon recovered 800 deceased persons.

Kenyon ensured that it did not work in isolation from the other response groups. Daily updates of operations and status reports were provided to the Incident Command Team. Kenyon senior incident management personnel regularly attended group meetings attended by the response agency leaders, providing input to the decision-making processes.

Kenyon ensured that thorough risk assessments were conducted on all operations. All staff was issued with appropriate personal protective equipment during the operation and ample supplies of bottled water was always available to ensure proper hydration.

Kenyon was able to provide a tailored disaster response service to the Katrina response operation, which was not currently available.

Eight hundred families were provided confirmation of the death of their loved ones.

The local government authorities acted in a positive and proactive manner in engaging the services of Kenyon, a private disaster response provider, who offered a solution to major response issue.

The subsequent government inquires into the Katrina response operation have set the framework to mitigate the challenges encountered in the early stages of the operation in relation to roles and responsibilities for future crises.

Further Information

If you would like to know more about Kenyon International Emergency Services and how we can complement your existing emergency plan please email at kenyon@kenyoninternational.com or contact any of the Kenyon worldwide offices.