

Corps of Engineers key player in Hurricane Rita response

FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY

AUSTIN, Texas – Under the National Response Plan, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers provides support to the Federal Emergency Management Agency by executing assigned missions, such as providing water, power, debris removal, ice, temporary housing, temporary roofing and logistical support. Before Hurricane Rita's arrival, hundreds of active duty and retired Corps personnel were placed on alert, including dozens who eventually became storm victims themselves.

The Corps' Fort Worth District, under the command of Col. John Minhan, coordinated initial response to allow the Galveston District to focus on restoring navigation channels. After two weeks, Col. Steve

Haustein, commander of the Galveston District and task force commander of the Recovery Field Office in Beaumont, assumed the effort, which included support from the U.S. Coast Guard, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, U.S. Geological Survey, U.S. Department of Interior, Army Military Command and others representing a combined force of 1,100 personnel.

Teams comprised of various disciplines deployed to staging areas ready to respond to the most devastated communities. Within 48 hours after Hurricane Rita came ashore, the Corps delivered 180 truckloads of water and 127 truckloads of ice to Reliant Stadium in Houston. When those missions were closed out in October, the Corps had dispatched 3 million pounds of ice (744 truckloads

and 4.5 million gallons of water (909 truckloads).

The day of Rita landfall, the Trinity River Authority called upon the Corps for advice when wind and wave action displaced rock from the Lake Livingston dam located 75 miles northeast of Houston. Emergency repairs averted serious problems.

The Corps conducted pre-storm surveys of 12 Texas channels. When conditions permitted following the storm, the Corps and the GIS conducted aerial surveys of the state's hardest hit areas and gathered statistical data. The Corps also launched boats, sometimes under arduous conditions, to assess the impact on critical shipping channels.

A preliminary analysis revealed that Rita had deposited more than 7.9 million cubic yards of material into

waterways essential to commerce and industry along the Texas Gulf Coast. Corps engineers inspected dozens of channels before certifying them navigable. Eleven channels were open within 48 hours of Hurricane Rita's landfall. The Sabine-Neches Waterway was opened within six days.

The Hurricane Rita generator mission was the largest in FEMA history. By the end of its mission, the power team had completed 594 pre-installation inspections, installed a total of 289 generator sets and demobilized more than 280.

The Corps' Power Planning and Response Team provided four generators to Texas and installed five, including one to power the city of Bridge City's lift stations, which the Corps monitored and serviced until power was restored.

A major power mission success was restoring a grid serving Jasper County and the area's critical needs facilities by restarting units at the Sam Rayburn Powerhouse, one of only three hydroelectric generating facilities operated by the Corps in Texas.

One of the Corps' most visible missions was Operation Blue Roof, a FEMA-sponsored program free to all qualified homeowners in the 22-county disaster area. The program provided temporary blue plastic sheeting installed over storm-damaged roofs until homeowners could make permanent repairs. The first blue roof was installed Oct. 5. The Corps and its contractors completed their mission Dec. 29 after installing nearly 21,000 blue roofs.

Debris removal by the Corps was a FEMA-assigned mission involving the removal of downed trees, wood debris and other materials from public property and streets in 13 counties. The Corps' mission was a synchronized effort that included contractors as well as city and county authorities. Together, they removed more than 8.7 million cubic yards of debris.

Sergeant

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"The Kevlar helmet saved my head and neck; my ballistic glasses saved my eyes; and my vest had glass shards all over it," he said. "I honestly, truly believe that the training we've had no doubt got us through this."

He also said that God was watching out for him and everyone in the convoy during those first moments of his son's new life. Not one person was injured.

After the mission, Myers called his wife to get news about the birth.

"I was thinking about how I was going to tell her about the day Jackson was born because I knew she was going to ask," he said. Opting for honesty, he told her everything.

"I believe the PRT mission is worth the risk," Myers said. "We're here to rebuild, reorganize and regroup the government of Afghanistan."

"I'm hoping that everything I tell my son about Afghanistan makes him more proud to be an American, and he will stand up and defend his country when the time comes," he said.

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