

***Hurricane Katrina
Gulfport Deployment
After-Action Report***



***South Florida
Urban Search & Rescue
Task Force 2***

August 28th to September 11th 2005

***City of Miami Department of Fire Rescue
Sponsoring Agency***



Florida Task Force 2 Katrina – Gulfport Deployment August 28th to September 11, 2005

Executive Summary

FLTF-2 was deployed to the Gulfport Mississippi region on August 29th 2005 at 1200 hrs. The Team traveled for 30 hours and arrived in the City of Gulfport at 2000 hours on August 30th 2005.

While staging and the lead vehicle looked for the Emergency Operations Center (EOC), FLTF-2 immediately went to work when a passing vehicle flagged down our task force. From that point on FLTF-2 worked by providing the standard operational component of search and rescue. In addition, FLTF-2 provided logistics services for the other Task Forces and IST at the Base of Operations (BoO).

Forms were also created by FLTF-2 for the recording of casualties and the location of Natural Gas leaks. IST was able to use these forms to document and forward information in an organized, timely manner to the proper authorities. They are enclosed.

The team was demobilized on September 9th and arrived at it's POA on September 11th 2005 at 2000 hours.

Task Force Operations

Activation – Florida Task Force 2 was activated on Monday, August 29th at 1200 hours.

08/29/05

Florida Task Force 2 traveled to hurricane strike area, destination thought to be Camp Shelby, Mississippi. Routes plotted and alternate routes planned as well. Stopped several times to perform safety checks, to allow drivers to trade off on driving duties, and to allow the Task Force to eat. Final destination determined to be Gulfport, Mississippi.

On Site deployment

08/30/05

OPS: Florida Task Force 2 (FLTF-2), upon arrival in Gulfport, was assigned to provide rapid recon/search efforts for viable subjects in a search area running east and west from Hwy 49 between the waterfront and the railroad tracks, working in conjunction with firefighters from Gulfport Fire Rescue. This effort was based on reports of possible live subjects in the area. Initial efforts lasted for approximately 4 hours until increased awareness of the hazards affecting night operations forced cessation of operations.



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RESULTS: No live subjects found. One deceased victim located by joint FLTF-2 and Gulfport Fire Rescue based on reports from local civilians. Find was documented, photographed, and GPS coordinates logged. Additionally, FLTF-2 medical personnel provided initial medical care to a Gulfport civilian with a suspected cardiac event secondary to heat/dehydration when convoy was flagged down by the patient's relative. After initial treatment, care was transferred to Gulfport Fire Rescue and an AMR unit dispatched for transport to a local facility. FLTF-2 also made contact with a displaced person in need of food, water, and shelter and again, care was transferred to Gulfport Fire.

08/31/05

OPS: FLTF-2 continued to search Gulfport city limits from Biloxi to Long Beach, from waterline to railroad. Additionally, Gulfport Fire Rescue personnel worked in conjunction with FLTF-2 and other state and regional assets to search additional areas of Gulfport.

RESULTS: FLTF-2 established full search efforts from Hwy 49 working east and west from Hwy 49 to city limits as dictated by Gulfport FD. Initial efforts moved quickly due to complete devastation in first portion of search area. Approximately 65% of area was searched by 1500 hrs, and 85% was completed by the end of the operational period. In addition, AL-TF1 searched several areas of the city, establishing contact with numerous local residents. One group of 15 residents with non-acute medical needs were located, Gulfport Fire was notified and responded. One hurricane related casualty was located by a joint Gulfport FD and Task Force unit, FLTF-2 also responded to an additional deceased person, non-hurricane related. Both were documented, GPS logged, and in the case of the non-hurricane death, the Gulfport EOC was notified. Approximately two dozen gas leaks were capped; several dozen others were located but could not be safely accessed or capped. All underground gas leaks were documented, GPS logged and locations turned over to Gulfport EOC.

09/01/05

OPS: FLTF-2 continued searching assigned area. Gulfport FD team provided recon efforts for Bayou View West, Biloxi River Estates, The Island, and Fritz Creek.

RESULTS: FLTF-2 completed search of assigned area. Remaining 15% of assigned search area included both compromised terrain, and additional highly difficult areas not previously searched. Four deceased subjects were located, documented, and GPS coordinates logged; only two of these victims were able to be photographed as per IST protocol. Additional gas leaks were located, with approximately 25% capped. Gulfport FD recon results indicated a need for full search efforts in ALL areas explored.

FLTF-2 assumes major support/logistics role for IST and BoO. Gulfport Fire Rescue continues to provide tactical input to FL-TF2 to assist in SAR operations



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09/02/05

OPS: FLTF-2, AL-1 and Gulfport FD Battalion Chiefs meet to evaluate status of SAR efforts in the City of Gulfport. Based on previous recon and meeting results, FLTF-2 and AL-1 were assigned to search Bayou View West, Biloxi River Estates, The Island, and Fritz Creek areas using information provided by Gulfport Fire Rescue reconnaissance operations.

RESULTS: At the conclusion of the operative period, it was determined that through the cooperative efforts of Gulfport Fire Rescue and Florida Task Force 2 personnel, and in addition to local, regional, and state assets; the areas assigned to FL-TF2 SAR squads have effectively been searched.

9/03/05

FEMA Florida Task Force 2 (FLTF-2) was tasked by the FEMA Incident Support Staff to make contact with appropriate authorities in Pearl River County, including municipalities within the county boundaries, to assess needs for Urban Search and Rescue efforts.

OPS: FLTF-2 Task Force Leader Juan Mestas made contact with staff members of the Pearl River County Emergency Management Team at the Pearl River County EOC in Poplarville, MS. After initial contact, more extensive conversations were held with Tom Wagner (Emergency Manager Aide), Keith Brown, the Chief of Picayune Fire Department, a chief from a county volunteer Fire Department, a captain from the Pearl River Sheriff's Office responsible for road patrol, and the contractor for road debris clearing for the northern region of the county.

Based on these discussions, several areas potentially needed in-depth evaluation emerged. One of these areas was along the Pearl River north and south of Walkiah Bluff Road. Additional areas with either multiple mobile homes or greater damage as based on tree debris were also identified. The area along the Pearl River meshed with aerial evaluations made.

FLTF-2 sent two search teams composed of multiple squads, and accompanied by local Fire Department members, into the areas identified along the Pearl River, North from Walkiah Bluff Rd to Pine Grove Rd, and South to Ulman Stockstill Road, from the river's edge to Route 43. In addition, helicopter overflights with search team members and local Fire Department members were made of the areas for possible greater damage.

RESULTS: All search squads reported extensive contact with residents, and were able to establish that there were no persons believed to be missing in the search area. In addition,



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they used the opportunity to pass out water and MRE's when need was noted. The entire search area identified was searched. No needs for additional search efforts were indicated.

Helicopter overflight results also found that in all areas previously identified, while having moderate to extensive tree damage, there were no signs of major structural damage suggestive of ANY need for urban search and rescue efforts. Additional areas were also searched, covering the majority of the county, with identical findings.

Task Force Leader Mestas returned to the Pearl River EOC, and appraised staff, including Keith Brown and Cris Carr, of the search efforts and findings. At this time, our findings suggest that no further US&R efforts are needed in Pearl River County. We notified FEMA Incident Support Staff of findings, and included a more general finding that Pearl River County's Emergency Operations Team appeared to be functioning effectively, but required additional FEMA support in the form of supplies, especially fuel, food, and water. Pearl River County has an extensive infrastructure network with both paid staff and local volunteer Fire Departments, and can fully utilize this network if appropriate support can be provided.

09/03/05 to 09/04/05

Over this initial period after the hurricane had passed, US&R teams performed primary searches covering the majority of land area within several blocks of the shoreline (generally from the shoreline to the railroad tracks) in Pass Christian, Long Beach, and adjacent areas. These primary searches included visual and audible scans of the areas searched, as well as entry into those structures deemed safe for search crews to enter. To the greatest extent feasible, unsafe structures were searched using K9 units. Active teams included Ohio FEMA Task Force 1, Pennsylvania FEMA Task Force 1, and Utah FEMA Task Force 1.

09/05/05 – 09/06/05

During this phase of operations, the chief US&R activity in Pass Christian, Long Beach, and adjacent areas was in the form of response to specific requests to check known locations, including those locations where casualties had been identified during the previous period of active primary search. Any remaining areas requiring primary search were identified for targeted search efforts. Where necessary due to safety concerns or heavy debris, US&R teams also assisted coroner's teams in removing casualties. Active teams included Utah FEMA Task Force 1, Nebraska FEMA Task Force 1, and Florida FEMA Task Force 2.

09/07/05 – 09/08/05



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For the final phase of operations, US&R activity focused on continued response to specific requests to check known locations, as well as focused operations in areas of extremely heavy debris known to have originated from occupied dwellings. As well as attempting to identify and search any remaining areas requiring primary search, US&R teams attempted to identify and search any areas with search markings which were non-standard or not identified as belonging to FEMA or state assets known to have been working in the area. US&R teams, as needed due to safety concerns or heavy debris, continued to assist coroner's teams in removing casualties. In addition, efforts focused on developing tactical information to be used by local authorities as they engage in recovery and debris removal operations. Active teams include Florida FEMA Task Force 2 and Alabama State Task Force 1.

Demobilization

09/09/2005

Stand down day. Package of BoO by Logistics and Ground Support unit. Vehicle inspections were completed and prepared for departure.

09/10/2005

Travel day. Task force will only travel 10 hours per travel plan. Team stayed in the Cabot Lodge in Gainesville.

09/11/2005

FLTF-2 was demobilized on arrival at POA in Miami was on Sunday, September 11, 2005 at 2000 hours

Task Force Support

Florida Task Force Two received outstanding support from home. The participating agency Chief William (Shorty) Bryson fast tracked any requests for logistical support. As a good example, once the issue of BoO security was identified, a team of Miami Police officers was put on the road immediately to provide force protection for not only our task force, but the entire BoO. Another example was a request for additional personnel to assist with the kitchen that was put into service to feed all personnel at the BoO.

The Gulfport Fire Department was an outstanding resource to the team. From our arrival, and assignment by IST, we were assisted by Gulfport firefighters of all ranks. The value of having a local "scout" is immeasurable in the context of time saved identifying and locating priority locations. After our assignment in Gulfport terminated, many Gulfport



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firefighters accompanied us to other communities, no longer as local guides, but as co-workers assisting with our search and rescue efforts. Our relationship with the Gulfport firefighters went much further, establishing bonds that exist to this day.

Alabama Task Force 1, a State Team was an invaluable asset. They were assigned to us by IST to use in any manner we chose. Not knowing their capabilities, they were initially assigned outside the priority search and rescue areas performing welfare checks. Having proven themselves by their attention to detail, and familiarity with the Federal system they progressed to working side by side with Florida Task Force 2 in future assignments.

Finally, IST while severely limited in the resources available assisted us with strong, clear leadership and unending praise for our efforts.

Overall Issues

The sheer magnitude of this disaster magnified all logistical issues encountered. The entire system was at one time mobilized, stretching resources to the breaking point. While seemingly all of the attention was focused on New Orleans, task forces working in other locations had to “fend for themselves”. At times like these, it is left up to the creativity of the IST and each task force to make things work. Florida Task Force two was allowed a great degree of flexibility by IST, the Program Office and the Participating Agency Chief.

Best Practices/Lessons Learned

Florida Task Force Two makes it a practice to bring as much Logistical Support as possible from home. This has partly been in the form of vehicles and heavy equipment such as Four Wheel Drive Pickups, Bobcats, an Extending Boom Forklift and even a Rescue/Ambulance vehicle. While the inclusion of this many vehicles presents a challenge to the task force while traveling to the disaster site, once on scene, the benefits and options available far outweigh the challenges posed while traveling.

A critical issue on deployments has been the availability of fuel at the disaster site. Another of our practices has been to contract with a fuel company prior to travel to have a fuel vehicle meet the team on the way to the disaster and continue on as part of the convoy. While this practice has been of great benefit in other disasters, the sheer magnitude of Hurricane Katrina kept us from doing so; FLTF-2 has planned for this contingency by purchasing a trailered fuel tank that will be taken on future deployments.



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Another critical issue was that of decontamination of personnel and equipment at both our work sites and the BoO. We were able to put together a Mobile Decon unit using generators pumps, hoses brushes, chlorine solutions, soap and buckets which allowed us to Decon the troops in the field prior to getting back to the BoO while maintaining sanitary conditions in the vehicles used for travel.

FL TF2 also designed and implement a permanent Decon Corridor for all of the Task Forces at our BoO as well as a Corridor for the all vehicles returning from the field.

The role of Decon was also extended to the sanitary needs of the bathroom areas as well as the showers and kitchen for the entire camp. We set up all of the above and as time went on, were able to get support from the other Task Forces as our manpower began to feel overwhelmed.

Forms were also created by FLTF-2 for the recording of casualties and the location of Natural Gas leaks. IST was able to use these forms to document and forward information in an organized, timely manner to the proper authorities. They are enclosed in an attachment.

Cache Management/Equipment Performance and Recommendations

These comments are in response to our experiences with hurricane Katrina, but address issues that are recurrent with all hurricane responses. Florida Task Force 2 responded to four hurricanes in 2004 and six hurricanes in 2005, both as a national and a local team. We have become an all-hazards force that responds to emergencies where resources are scarce and task forces have to make do with what little is available. A re-assessment of the existing cache and corresponding flexibility in cache makeup should be considered..

The concept of a static force working at one relatively small location, with resources just a phone call away has not been the experience during our hurricane responses. Hurricane responses require a force that is capable of responding to many options and is self contained not only in food, water and shelter, but also in equipment and most importantly, fuel.

Perhaps a “Super Logistics Team” that arrives at the emergency with those logistic items that are hard to come by at emergencies is the answer.

Realizing that this challenges the notion of a light, fast moving force, it does answer the logistical needs when those needs cannot be filled by the resources available on hand.