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# Hurricane Sandy Vs Hurricane Katrina Communication Problems

## Introduction

A disaster is defined as an event bringing great damage, loss, or destruction. An emergency is an unforeseen combination of circumstances or an urgent need for assistance; such as a multiple car crash on I-4. A disaster typically affects a large number of people; whereas, an emergency usually affects only a local community.

Communication is a fundamental part of emergency management and yet an inherent struggle during disasters; however, there is typically not a breakdown in communication during an emergency. Unfortunately, when a catastrophic storm occurs there are blackouts with radio channels, towers are down, and sometimes the information is not relayed to the public and they just don't know where to find it. Almost all major disasters have had communication problems; Hurricane Katrina seemed to have the most problems, but Hurricane Sandy was not exception.

The major problem during Sandy was communication with first responders and surrounding counties. Interoperability was a large problem which led FEMA to make improvement in the GIS system. During Sandy the importance of social media was realized; it played a big part in getting out crucial information to residents. (Bultam, 2013)

Hurricane Sandy cannot begin to compare itself to the problems that occurred during Hurricane Katrina. Starting with Shamealle Hurricane Katrina has been the topic of our group. I guess being the last contributor I won't break our trend. It reflects this week topics in so many ways; especially when discussing leadership performance in minimizing catastrophes and weak leadership making matters worse and compounding the damage.

"On August 29, 2005 Hurricane Katrina struck New Orleans. The storm had been building in the Caribbean for several days and city residents and officials were all well aware of it. Two days before it hit, the Governor of Louisiana recommended that residents evacuate. The day before it hit, the city's Mayor, Ray Nagin, issued a mandatory evacuation order. A majority of the city's population got out, almost all of them by car, but about 10,000 out of an estimated 455,000 were trapped (Levy, 2017)."

The social side of planning for the catastrophe was not implemented. No one considered or communicated that most people living in the lower lying parts of the city were poor and did not

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own cars. Those whom did own cars did not have gas because they lived paycheck to paycheck or relied on public assistance, which was not due to be dispersed for another couple of days.

“The city’s vulnerability had been known for years. “The Mississippi River had a long history of flooding and from time to time even changing its course after major floods. In 1927, a catastrophic flood inundated 23,000 square miles and led Congress to pass the Flood Control Act of 1928. The Army Corps of Engineers then embarked upon a massive levee-building program which was largely successful in preventing subsequent floods (Levy,2017).”

“Drainage and then development of the city’s back swamps over the past century has led roughly half of New Orleans’s land to sink below sea level. The levee system has also prevented the Mississippi from flooding and, in turn, nurturing the surrounding coastal wetlands that act as a buffer to storms here (The Guardian, 2015).”

“Between 1932 and 2010, about 1,900 square miles of such land disappeared from southeast Louisiana, according to the US Geological Survey: a 25% decrease in aggregate area. Louisianans, who tend to scale the disappearance in terms of their favorite sport, put the rate at about a football field every hour (The Guardian, 2015).”

“Massive communications damage and a failure of an inadequate contingency plan impaired response efforts, command and control and situational awareness. Communications were limited at all levels due to infrastructure problems, insufficient interoperability and lack of equipment. This lack of communications kept the media confused about isolated incidents and put them in a position to report misinformation. Lacking access to critical communications assets government and assistance organizations could not dispute media reports or defend their efforts. They had no valid intelligence (Meeds, 2006).”

“In addition, proper response efforts could not be coordinated by local, state or federal agencies during the first two days due to extensive communications failures in the affected areas. This lack of communications led to a slow response, which then led to more misinformation and a protracted chaotic response. The lack of fully operable communications and intelligence increased death, destruction and human suffering (Meeds, 2006).”

Mayor Ray Nagin and Governor Blanco could not get on the same page and started playing the blame game. New Orleans did not have enough shelters nor buses to assist evacuees. Another major issue was that the National Guard was called in after the fact to aid in search and rescue.

“After Katrina, the Army Corps rebuilt the metropolitan area’s 133-mile flood protection system – earthen levees, floodwalls, gates, pumps – with \$14.5bn (£9bn) from the US Congress. The new system takes a “military approach”, the army recently explained, as “the perimeter

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has been pushed out and is now more heavily defended”. Levees have been reinforced to limit the chance of being washed away if overtopped by an especially high storm surge – a key improvement since Katrina. Construction on an enhanced drainage system, initially authorized in 1996, continues (The Guardian, 2015).”

“A plan by the state’s Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority calls for \$50bn in investments over the next 50 years to halt the loss of wetlands and restore those already swallowed by the gulf. The authority’s most recent framework, released in 2012, projects that it can halt the loss of land in 20 years and build or sustain up to 800 square miles of wetlands and barrier islands, another important defense, over the next 50 (The Guardian, 2015).”

“One method of building new land, for which the agency proposes \$20bn, is to dredge the Mississippi riverbed and then pump that material to areas in danger of being submerged. “Marsh creation projects will build most of their land as soon as the project is constructed,” the CPRA says, making them important options to protect areas “in dire need” (The Guardian, 2015).”

“The more difficult, but possibly more effective, route is to mimic the natural process through which the Mississippi created land over the past 7,000 years. “Sediment diversion” entails controlled flooding that allows the river to deposit silt in surrounding areas. The state would essentially cut through natural levees and replace their earthen material with gates to allow some water to pass through. “Channel realignment” would go one step further, redirecting the river in a wholesale fashion. The CPRA proposal argues that “sustainable restoration of our coast without sediment diversions is not possible”. But there’s one major catch. “A river sediment diversion has never been built anywhere,” says Graham (The Guardian, 2015).”

“In the meantime, it will continue with more short-term measures. As of July, the state had about \$520m in wetland restoration projects under way, Graham says, the most at any point in its history. Still, adds Chip Groat, president of the Water Institute of the Gulf thinktank, “how much we’re making in the way of gains is not very spectacular at this point. There’s not much in the way of large-scale projects being implemented (The Guardian, 2015).”

## Conclusion

The government had so many failures during Katrina that it led to the Post Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act of 2006 which states that “in the event certain requirements still cannot be met, state governors, with assistance from Emergency Management Assistance Compact (EMAC) can make a request to the President to declare a state of emergency. Once the President declares a state of emergency, federal assistance is immediately available to the state. This federal assistance includes the engagement of personnel and equipment from

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organizations such as Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), the Army Corps of Engineers, Department of Defense (DoD) and Department of Homeland Security.”

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