
The Impact of Hurricanes on the Logistics and Freight Enterprise in America

Hurricane Season Hits Trucking Business Hard

Disaster struck the United States' trucking business in the form of hurricanes Harvey and Irma, single-handedly affecting 10 percent of the U.S. trucking industry. Effects on the industry are expected to last until January, a devastating blow to not only trucking companies, but their consumers, who rely on supplies, food, and other essentials regularly delivered by these trucks. According to local sources, 60 percent of the transportation business is behind schedule. Destruction and flooding in areas affected by hurricanes Harvey and Irma means mass delays and rescheduling of trips.

Many consumers may be wondering how this will affect them. Not only are the roads destroyed, but Harvey and Irma have also obliterated some of the products the trucks are expected to deliver. This has caused food and transportation prices to skyrocket, leaving many consumers with limited resources during this time of recovery. Local grove and trucking company owner Thomas E. Oakley has high hopes for the trucking industry despite the hurricanes' implications. "We are doing everything possible to save our products." Thomas Oakley is the owner and CEO of Oakley Trucking, a commercial transportation business that focuses on transporting citrus out of Florida. "Hurricane Irma affected our citrus farm to a level we didn't predict, and with over half our crops gone, our trucking business is starting to show losses on the financial statements." Located in Dade County, Florida since 1961, Oakley Transportation is the largest citrus transporter in Florida, and they were forced to shut down all operations for a week due to Irma. Drivers are also suffering as they wait for producers to regrow crops and regain composure during this trying time.

Since Irma destroyed more than half of Oakley's crops, it was difficult at first to keep his trucks running, since the product was unavailable. Irma affected many other crops in Florida, causing shipping efforts to remain stagnant. According to The Packer, Florida took a \$760 million hit to citrus alone in 2017. Florida's Agricultural Commissioner Adam Putnam stated, "The path of Irma could not have been more poorly chosen to more effectively destroy our agricultural crops," Putnam said at an Orlando news conference. " ... If that [December crop] window closes, it may be filled by foreign competition — Mexico, Costa Rica Honduras, and they'll be out of luck for the whole year" (Gillespie). Crops in Florida are not even likely to return in time for Thanksgiving. Rising transportation and consumer good costs and the destruction of crops are effects we will see for a decent amount of time.

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FEMA caused an increased demand for trucking in areas affected during the two hurricanes as supplies are being distributed to victims, but road closures are a huge factor in delays. The trucking industry is however benefitting from the increased price of delivery as they are in such high demand, which counteracts some of the complications caused by these natural disasters. "Due to the already tight nature of the truck environment, that means that loads could be left on the docks, according to Noel Perry, one of FTR's partners. And though the largest ripple effects of Hurricane Harvey will be "regionalized" where freight shipments are concerned, transportation managers across the entire U.S. "will be scrambling," he added" (Fleet Owner).

Along with the hurricane crisis and its impact on trucking, there is a driver shortage. "The driver market remains very challenging," said Kirk Thompson, president & CEO of J.B. Hunt. "The supply of qualified drivers continues to be constrained due to alternative jobs to truck driving that are available in today's economy. Our company continues to focus on driver quality-of-life issues, such as developing more driving jobs with more frequent home time, providing drivers with newer trucks, and maximizing mileage productivity within HOS regulations" (Cullen). All of these factors lead to a mass amount of trucks sitting in the loading docks shortly after hurricanes. Once the trucks do get back on the road, the dock will likely become backed up due to the large amount of shipments needing to be made.

New technology coming soon in the trucking industry called Electronic Logging Devices will track how many hours drivers are on the road and once they reach their limit they will not be able to work anymore. This is to combat against fatigue but it also means slower recovery from Irma and Harvey. This means victims will have to continue waiting for relief efforts to reach them. Trucking activity is projected to be negatively impacted for an entire year. ?

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