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Region VI

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Hurricane Pam Exercise Concludes

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BATON ROUGE, La. -- Hurricane Pam brought sustained winds of 120 mph, up to 20 inch in parts of southeast Louisiana and storm surge that topped levees in the New Orleans area. More than one million residents evacuated and Hurricane Pam destroyed 500,000-600,000 built structures. Emergency officials from 50 parish, state, federal and volunteer organizations faced this scenario during a five-day exercise held this week at the State Emergency Operations Center in Baton Rouge.

The exercise used realistic weather and damage information developed by the National Weather Service, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the LSU Hurricane Center and other state and federal agencies to help officials develop joint response plans for a catastrophic hurricane in Louisiana.

"We made great progress this week in our preparedness efforts," said Ron Castleman, FEMA Regional Director. "Disaster response teams developed action plans in critical areas such as search and rescue, medical care, sheltering, temporary housing, school restoration and debris management. These plans are essential for quick response to a hurricane but will also help in other emergency situations."

"Hurricane planning in Louisiana will continue," said Colonel Michael L. Brown, Deputy Director of Emergency Preparedness, Louisiana Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness. "Over the next 60 days, we will polish the action plans developed during the Hurricane Pam exercise. We have also determined where to focus our efforts in the future."

A partial summary of action plans follows:

Debris

- The debris team estimates that a storm like Hurricane Pam would result in 30 million cubic yards of debris and 237,000 cubic yards of household hazardous waste
- The team identified existing landfills that have available storage space and locations for hazardous waste disposal sites. The debris plan also outlines priorities for debris removal.

Sheltering

- The interagency shelter group identified the need for about 1,000 shelters for a catastrophic disaster. The shelter team identified 784 shelters and has developed plans for local remaining shelters.
- In a storm like Hurricane Pam, shelters will likely remain open for 100 days. The group identified the resources necessary to support 1000 shelters for 100 days. They plan to provide staff augmentation and how to include shelterees in shelter management.
- State resources are adequate to operate shelters for the first 3-5 days. The group is working on how federal and other resources will replenish supplies at shelters.

Search and Rescue

- * The search and rescue group developed a transportation plan for getting stranded out of harm's way.
- * Planners identified lead and support agencies for search and rescue and establish command structure that will include four areas with up to 800 searchers.

Medical

- * The medical care group reviewed and enhanced existing plans. The group determined to implement existing immunization plans rapidly for tetanus, influenza and other diseases to be present after a major hurricane.
- * The group determined how to re-supply hospitals around the state that would face patient loads.
- * The medical action plan includes patient movement details and identifies probable locations such as state university campuses, where individuals would receive care and then transported to hospitals, special needs shelters or regular shelters as necessary.

Schools

- * The school group determined that 13,000-15,000 teachers and administrators would be needed to support affected schools. The group acknowledged the role of local schools and developed strategies for use by local school officials.
- * Staffing strategies include the use of displaced teachers, retired teachers, emergency teachers and others eligible for emergency certification. Displaced paraprofessionals also be recruited to fill essential school positions.
- * The group discussed facility options for increasing student population at undamaged and prioritizing repairs to buildings with less damage to assist in normalizing operations.
- * The school plan also calls for placement or development of temporary schools near housing communities built for hurricane victims.

The Hurricane Pam scenario focused on 13 parishes in southeast Louisiana-Ascension, Assumption, Jefferson, Lafourche, Orleans, Plaquemines, St. Bernard, St. Charles, St. James, St. John the Baptist, Tangipahoa, Terrebonne. Representatives from outside the primary parishes participated since hurricane evacuation and sheltering involve communities throughout the state and in other states such as Arkansas, Mississippi and Texas.

On March 1, 2003, FEMA became part of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. FEMA's continuing mission within the new department is to lead the effort to prepare the nation for and effectively manage federal response and recovery efforts following any national incident. FEMA also initiates proactive mitigation activities, trains first responders, and manages the National Insurance Program and the U.S. Fire Administration.

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