Conducting Elections in the Aftermath of Hurricane

Sherri Wharton Hadskey – Commissioner of Elections
Nick Meyers – Election Program Manager
Louisiana Emergencies 101

- Mostly hurricanes, but also tornadoes, floods, ice storms, COVID, etc.
- Hurricane Season - June 1 to November 30
  - Heaviest activity between August and October
- 23 hurricanes since my first election in 2007
- 2005 – Katrina, Rita
- 2008 – Gustav
- 2012 – Isaac
- 2016 – Unnamed
- 2020 – Cristobal, Marco, Laura, Delta, Zeta
- 2021 – Ida
Louisiana Elections Context

• Heavily Top Down System
• Primarily an In Person Voting System
• Election Schedule
  • 4 elections per year minimum
  • Odd year Fall (Oct/Nov) vs Even year Fall (Nov/Dec)
• Emergency Statutes – LA R.S. 18:401, 18:1308 A. 2. j. ii
Human and Personal Element
Flooding – Comprehensive Destruction
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Wind and Rain – Comprehensive Destruction
Preparing for Elections and Hurricanes

• Disasters are overwhelming – Preparation is key
• Yearly maintenance of high level contact information and partnerships with emergency preparedness personnel across the state
• Land lines are critical – see who still has them and maintain numbers
• Maintain communication with Clerks, Registrars and Warehouse staff in highly likely affected areas
• Testing of emergency hotline for election information
Preparing for Elections and Hurricanes

- Trucks – rented throughout the hurricane season
- Generators purchased
- Reminders to local election officials of manual methods of voting without power and network for voter check-in
- Training staff is key – must be fundamentally sound to be able to adapt to disaster mode
Disaster Imminent

- Moving equipment away from doors, upstairs if possible
- Gas trucks ready from other states if necessary and possible
- Water for staff, MREs, Tents
- Take care of your family and each other
Challenges Faced in the Aftermath of Hurricanes

- Physical Access
- Health Risks
- Damage Assessment
- Emergency Measures
- Legislative Action
- Lack of Resources
Mitigation in the Immediate Aftermath of Disasters

Department Responsibilities

• Created emergency task force in 2005, revived in 2020, 2021
• Legal – submit emergency plan, approval by legislature & governor
• Purchasing – timely rentals of tents, temp lights, fans, heaters, tables, chairs, port-a-lets, ramps, forklifts, temp electrical boxes
• Auditor – FEMA reimbursements in federal declaration of emergency
Mitigation in the Immediate Aftermath of Disasters

Elections Department Responsibilities

- Postal System Status, and Physical Voting Locations
- Assess safety of staff and families across affected localities
- Acquiring necessary credentials to access affected areas
- Cell towers likely down, use landlines
- Power outage possibly for weeks
- Begin assessing polling location and warehouse damages
  - Fire marshal inspections, parking lot debris, lighting, etc
Mitigation in the Aftermath of Hurricanes

- Call in voting machine vendor to get equipment re-certified if damaged
- Start process of locating local election officials, staff and voters – FEMA can help here also
- Deliver hotline signage to affected areas
  - Inform through GeauxVote app for evacuees
- Visit common evacuation states – TX, GA, FL, MS, etc
- Utilize other state and local election officials to communicate
  - NASS, NASED, NCSL, Election Center, NCSL etc.
- Staffing elections hotline – over 27,000 calls after Katrina
Mitigation in the Aftermath of Hurricanes

- On the ground, secure large hotel as headquarters if possible for daily operations
- Phone service still intermittent, so used State Police radios as back up
Mitigation in the Aftermath of Hurricanes

- Signage for voter awareness
- More than 2,000 signs put out for Katrina
- Mega polling locations set up with greeters to direct to correct precinct with offline poll list if necessary
- Several mega sites are still in use today that were created as a result of disasters
Partnerships in the Aftermath of Hurricanes

LOUISIANA SECRETARY OF STATE
Polling Location Movement Example for Laura
Post-Disaster Advice

- Be ready to put your plan to work!
- Two most important pieces of advice: Secure equipment, moving if necessary, and make contact with staff
- If have power and equipment, or paper ballots, can hold an election
- Maintain relationships with those who have helped before or could help in the future
- Think about food, water and restrooms for staff when setting up mega sites
- Encourage states anticipating bad weather to push early voting, and if possible, tell voters to vote early before evacuation
- Work closely with governor, state legislators and local election officials
Disaster Resources

• National Homeland Security Conference
• ResCon – Resilience and Disaster Management
• PDN – Portable data network hardware options
• Mobile Command Centers – CSG and other vendors
• National Disaster and Emergency Management Expo
• IAEM – International Association of Emergency Managers
• Louisiana Emergency Management Conference
• Search “Emergency Management Events”

• Sherri.Hadskey@sos.la.gov
• Nick.Meyers@sos.la.gov