

EMAC, Katrina, and the Governors of Louisiana and Mississippi

Part II—The Responders: Official and Grassroots Actors in the Aftermath of the Hurricane

State and local governments along the Louisiana and Mississippi coasts were overwhelmed by Hurricane Katrina and lacked the capacity to function without outside assistance. Mutual aid agreements are common among communities and provide essential surge capacity when catastrophes strike. The Emergency Management Assistance Compact (EMAC) is just such a mechanism for sharing resources. How well or how poorly governors use EMAC depends on their familiarity with the system and how prepared their state and local agencies are to integrate EMAC personnel and other resources. Governor Kathleen Babineaux Blanco of Louisiana was less familiar with EMAC than was Governor Haley Barbour in Mississippi and had less assistance in using the system. State and local officials in Louisiana were also less familiar with mutual assistance compacts than their counterparts in Mississippi. The integration of EMAC assets into state and local operations was easier in Mississippi because officials had set up an area command to coordinate operations.

Coastal communities in Louisiana and Mississippi bore the brunt of Hurricane Katrina's winds and storm surge. Residences and businesses were destroyed, and local officials were unable to address the needs of residents. Emergency management offices were overwhelmed, and in some cases, they lacked the resources to support their own personnel. The severity of the damage required extraordinary measures to rebuild state and local capabilities, and it was imperative that the governors act quickly to minimize loss of life and to provide basic services to constituents in the affected communities. The Emergency Management Assistance Compact (EMAC) provided a mechanism to bring in outside resources quickly in response to specific

requests from the governors of Louisiana and Mississippi. There were differences in how quickly and how effectively the governors of Louisiana and Mississippi accessed the EMAC system and got personnel and equipment into the disaster areas. This article examines the EMAC process, the roles of governors' offices in requesting EMAC assistance, and the particular problems experienced in Louisiana and Mississippi during the Katrina and Rita disasters. The analysis is based on a review of the EMAC after-action reports and similar reports issued by the state of Louisiana and other participants in the Katrina response.

It is common in major disasters for communities to seek outside assistance as their first response and emergency management agencies become overwhelmed and personnel need time to rest. Communities typically have mutual aid agreements with neighboring communities so that they can borrow fire services, law enforcement, emergency medical services, and other personnel and equipment in the event that their own capacities are overwhelmed. Formal agreements establish how such resources can be requested and the responsibilities of both the donor jurisdiction and the receiving jurisdiction. Because of the scale of the Hurricane Andrew disaster in 1992, the governors of the Southern states organized a regional mutual aid system to facilitate the sharing of resources among their states. The EMAC system was created to supplement state and local resources

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and to provide essential manpower and equipment in the early stages of disaster.

In 1995, the compact was expanded into a national state-to-state mutual aid agreement, and it has

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become a critical resource for dealing with catastrophic disasters. Its also serves as a mechanism for collaboration at the local, state, and federal levels (Waugh 2006a). It facilitates the sharing of resources across state borders and encourages similar arrangements within state borders. In all, EMAC was activated 10 times in 2005 to deal with wildfires, a flood, winter storms, a tropical storm, and five hurricanes (Bell 2007, 31). The state of Florida received assistance in the form of material and emergency personnel and was able to deal with four hurricanes in a matter of weeks and with a minimum of federal assistance.

To date, EMAC has played the biggest role during the Hurricane Katrina and Rita disasters in 2005. Close to 66,000 EMAC personnel were deployed in the course of those disasters. Within 36 hours of Katrina's landfall, 6,335 personnel were deployed to the affected states (EMAC 2006a, EX-4). The personnel provided essential services in the states of Louisiana and Mississippi and, to a lesser extent, in Alabama. While more than 6,000 were deployed quickly, others waited for deployment orders that were slow to arrive. Governors Kathleen Babineaux Blanco of Louisiana and Mark Warner of Virginia issued a message on September 8 asking that responders wait to be mobilized under EMAC rather than self-deploying. Those arriving independently were not eligible for reimbursement of expenses, were not integrated into the state and local emergency management systems, and were potentially at risk of legal liability. As was noted in the after-action reports, the status of those who self-deployed created some complications as EMAC personnel moved into emergency operations centers and into other roles. There were also delays because of concerns about violence in the disaster area, although it later became apparent that the reports of gunfire and other violent acts had been exaggerated (Waugh 2006b).

The compact made the sharing of resources easier, but there were still problems determining needs, requesting assistance, deploying personnel and equipment, and ultimately, demobilizing personnel. The challenges were to determine state and local needs when communication between coastal areas and capitals was poor; to translate real, defined needs into requests for assistance; and to oversee the integration of the EMAC teams into state and local operations. Some of the issues were anticipated when EMAC was created, and processes were created to facilitate the requests, negotiation of terms, and integration of outside assis-

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tance into state and local operations, but even a seemingly simple procedure proved difficult in the chaos that followed Katrina's and Rita's landfalls. Requests for assistance were delayed when governors and their staffs did not understand the EMAC system. Deployments were also slowed when officials in the donor and recipient states did not understand the system. Some federal officials did not understand EMAC and tried to use the system themselves.

The EMAC system requires that governors formally request assistance and that funding be available—or at least anticipated—to cover the negotiated expenses. The program's after-action report following the devastating 2004 hurricane season pointed out the crucial role of the governors in requesting assistance. In 2004, the personal experience of officials with EMAC greatly facilitated the activation of the system and timely requests for assistance. Governor Jeb Bush of Florida had been actively involved in EMAC, and requests for assistance quickly followed his declarations of state emergency. Governor Bob Riley in Alabama was less experienced, but the state emergency management director, Bruce Baughman, had 30 years of experience and had served as a senior disaster response official in FEMA. Needs were anticipated, damage assessments were made, and formal requests followed. Notwithstanding the successful use of the EMAC system by some state officials, some state executives experienced serious problems in initiating EMAC assistance during the Katrina and Rita responses. The Louisiana governor's office was slow to formulate and issue its requests. The disconnects between the governor's office and local emergency management and emergency response agencies made it difficult to identify needs and to determine what kinds of EMAC resources to request. Louisiana officials were much less familiar with the system than their counterparts in other affected states. Mississippi governor Haley Barbour fared better and had the assistance of Governor Bush.

Clearly, Hurricane Katrina was a catastrophic disaster. In some measure, the very scale of the disaster complicated the response and continues to complicate the recovery effort. Along the Louisiana and Mississippi coasts, entire communities were destroyed. Access to the region was limited by debris and by damage to bridges and other infrastructure. In many communities, local emergency response and emergency management capacities no longer existed. Even where emergency management offices survived wind and water, personnel were often without the necessary tools to communicate with other agencies and the

public and to assist victims. In some cases, emergency management and response personnel were without food and water themselves. They, as well as their families, were the victims of Katrina (Waugh 2006b). That lack of capacity to deal with the catastrophe necessitated outside intervention. State officials tried to assess damage and determine emergency medical, shelter, and other needs in communities along the coast. National Guard troops, state and local police, and other response assets were deployed from elsewhere in the state, and the governors' offices had to seek assistance from outside the state to restore order and to respond to the needs of residents. National Guard resources were greatly reduced because of deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan. Indeed, the deployments included nearly 4,000 National Guard and Reserve troops from Louisiana and more than 5,200 National Guard and Reserve troops from Mississippi (DOD 2005), but the value of National Guard assistance in disasters was reduced when the Guard was reorganized to facilitate integration with reserve and regular military forces. In simple terms, combat troops are less useful in disaster operations than support troops. Nonetheless, the deployment of military police units, in particular, did reduce critical assets that could have been mobilized by state officials. As a result, EMAC became the second line of defense and an essential resource for state officials.

EMAC Origins and Process

Following the Hurricane Andrew disaster, the Southern Governors' Association created a regional compact in 1993 to facilitate the sharing of resources. That compact proved successful in subsequent disasters, and the governors voted to open the compact to other states in 1995. In 1996, EMAC was approved by Congress (P.L. 104-321, 110 Stat. 3877) (Bea 2006). The compact saw limited service until the 2004 hurricane season, when four storms ravaged the state of Florida in a six-week period. That year, 800 EMAC personnel representing 38 states were deployed to assist in disaster response activities (EMAC 2005). By the time of the Katrina disaster in 2005, 48 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands had all become members of the compact. Now, all 50 states are members.

EMAC is administered by the National Emergency Management Association, the professional organization for state emergency management directors, through its National Coordination Group. EMAC supports a broadcast system for the sharing of information, processes requests for assistance, and provides

a Web site with the operations manual, points of contact for state contract officers, and other information (EMAC 2005, 2–3). When governors declare states of emergency, EMAC deploys Advance Teams (also known as “A-Teams”) to assist with the process for requesting assistance. The request is communi-

cated to member states by e-mail, the EMAC broadcast system, the EMAC Web site, and other means. Member states consider available resources and costs and contact the state needing assistance. The requesting state considers the offers, makes its choice, and negotiates the terms of the agreement. Changes in mission require further negotiation. In short, it is a reasonably simple process, although determining needs and negotiating the terms of contracts may

be somewhat complicated. The last step in the process is the demobilization of EMAC personnel and reimbursement of the assisting states.

The After-Action Reports

The Katrina and Rita operations involved 1,300 EMAC search and rescue personnel from 16 states, 2,000 health care personnel from 28 states, 377 human services personnel from 20 states, almost 3,000 fire and hazardous materials personnel from 28 states, 61 public works personnel from 5 states, 20 engineers from 9 states, 6,880 law enforcement personnel from 35 states, 112 animal rescue personnel from 4 states, more than 5,400 emergency management personnel from 38 states, and 46,503 National Guard personnel from 47 states (EMAC 2006a, 2–7, 2–18). A task force from Indiana deployed in Mississippi included 213 personnel in 110 vehicles drawn from 9 sheriff's departments, 14 police departments, 5 fire departments, 10 county health departments, 8 hospitals, and 3 mental health facilities—from 50 separate jurisdictions (EMAC 2006a, 4–2).

Table 1 lists the number of missions, missions completed, number of personnel deployed, and reimbursable costs. Clearly, the overwhelming majority of missions, deployed personnel, and costs went to Louisiana and Mississippi, the states with the greatest damage. Deployments were for prescribed numbers of days, and not all missions were completed. Federal disaster assistance dollars were used to reimburse state costs in order to reimburse donor states. In short, slow reimbursement by the federal government slowed reimbursement to those states that had assisted Louisiana and Mississippi.

As the 2005 after-action report concluded, the compact process was not without significant problems.

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Table 1 EMAC Deployments during Hurricane Katrina

Louisiana	Mississippi	Alabama	Florida	Texas
1,028 missions	911 missions	5 missions	3 missions	1 mission
700 completed	743 completed	5 completed	2 completed	0 completed
37,466 personnel	23,973 personnel	51 personnel	3 personnel	0 personnel
\$426 million*	\$346 million*	\$210 million*	\$0.00	\$0.00

Source: EMAC (2006, EX-1).

*Estimate, rounded to the nearest million.

The specificity of requests was not always sufficient to avoid confusion. In simple terms, requesting states did not always know what they needed and how to ask for it. The lack of a standardized resource typing protocol caused some problems (EMAC 2006, 4–5), although use of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security’s Target Capabilities was evident in at least one of the medical after-action reports (North Carolina 2006). Costing out the requests, dealing with state legal and operating protocols (which differ widely from state to state), and reconciling actual and negotiated costs were also problems (EMAC 2006, 4–8). The EMAC after-action report does suggest measures, including keeping estimated cost figures, to resolve these difficulties, but maintaining detailed cost figures over time would be a problem for most states.

More practical issues included the anticipation of needs and identification of resources to fill those needs. Early state disaster declarations facilitated the process, and Governor Barbour in Mississippi asked for an EMAC National Coordinating Group very early on (EMAC 2006a, 4–9). The early declaration provided more lead time for the definition of needs, development of the requests, and consideration by potential assisting states. Early requests also made it possible to get EMAC personnel on site early enough to support emergency response operations and to establish long-term work arrangements. By the time relief arrived in some jurisdictions, local responders and local emergency management personnel had been working night and day for extended periods of time and were exhausted. They had little energy left to orient the new personnel and to effect the transition.

As the EMAC after-action report concluded, from the compact point of view, the 14-day deployments of its personnel were made all the more stressful by the manpower shortage early in the operation (EMAC 2006a, 4–13). From the local agency point of view, relief personnel arrived late and needed attention just when agency personnel were ill equipped to provide it. It should be noted that 14 days is a com-

mon limit for the deployment of personnel to disaster areas. The American Red Cross and other nongovernmental organizations also limit such deployments because fatigue and stress generally become serious problems in longer deployments. By contrast, local first responders and emergency management personnel, as well as clergy and other support personnel, may spend weeks or even months under very stressful conditions and may literally be worn out by the time the disaster operations conclude and recovery begins.

The EMAC after-action report, like almost all of the other after-action and assessment reports, noted serious command and control problems within the requesting states (EMAC 2006c). Poor communication between state emergency management offices, including governors’ offices, and local agencies meant poor situational awareness and poor response to local needs. However, Florida and Mississippi established an area command in the coastal counties of the latter state and the unified command structure served to coordinate logistical support for responders and to provide a command structure for those deployed under EMAC (2006a, 4–14, 4–17). Florida also assisted Mississippi in defining resource requirements and prepared resources to deploy in response to Mississippi’s requests. By contrast, the Louisiana after-action report concluded that command and control structures were lacking in the state’s Katrina response and that efforts should be made to strengthen everything from the communication links among state and local officials to the organization of emergency operations centers and the training of responders and officials in the Incident Command System and National Incident Management System. The task force from Indiana pointed out the value of operating as a large group in terms of maintaining operational control over its EMAC personnel. In fact, they declined missions that might have left personnel without connection to the task force (Indiana 2006).

The state of preparedness in the requesting states also had significant impact on the integration and use of EMAC teams. Problems resulting from the lack of strong intrastate networks to support operations were noted in the EMAC Katrina report, but with little detail about where the problems had been encountered and their nature.

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and use of EMAC teams. Problems resulting from the lack of strong intrastate networks to support operations were noted in the EMAC Katrina report, but with little detail about where the problems had been encountered and their nature. However, the state of Louisiana's after-action report (2006) did identify problems with regional coordination and the lack of a statewide mutual assistance program (A2–A3), although at least one coastal region had a mutual aid program in place during the disaster (C-4). One recommendation in the Louisiana report was to create regional “hurricane managers” to coordinate operations. Ensuring communication links between state officials, including the governor and the legislature, and parish officials is also a priority. The White House report on Katrina (2006) also pointed out the need for regional coordination, including the development of homeland security regions (see the summary of recommendations concerning “Department of Homeland Security: A Regional Structure for Preparedness”).

Interestingly, one participant in a coastal region after-action conference pointed out that “Pre-incident networking and relationship building greatly improved coordination” (Louisiana 2006, C-5). That observation is consistent with the literature on collaborative management and leadership (see, e.g., Kapucu 2006; Mitchell 2006; Waugh and Streib 2006). The national emergency management system is made up of networks of public, private, and nonprofit organizations, and relationship building is necessary to ensure effective interaction (Waugh 2003). Indeed, the newly introduced “principles of emergency management” include the development of “intimate” relationships that build trust and facilitate open communication and collaboration (Waugh 2007). Building relationships is a critical element in multiorganizational operations and has been an argument for decentralizing the operations of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), as they were under the Clinton administration, and reestablishing strong relationships between FEMA regional offices and state emergency management agencies.

One problem identified in both the EMAC after-action report and the White House report was the ignorance of EMAC that was common among local, state, and federal officials (see, e.g., EMAC 2006a, 5–19). EMAC is not mentioned in the National Response Plan, although it should be mentioned when the revised document is released, and had not been mentioned in state emergency plans (Waugh 2006a, 14). Indeed, the Louisiana after-action report indicated that roughly half of the state and local officials surveyed (464

people) did not request EMAC assistance because they did not know about the compact or did not know the process to request assistance (Louisiana 2006, B-14). The EMAC after-action report called for more training and education for deployed EMAC personnel, receiving state officials, the public, and even federal officials. The White House report (2006) called for better training of federal officials concerning the compact and giving federal officials more experience in intergovernmental assignments so that they understand how to work with their state and local counterparts (see Recommendations regarding “Homeland Security Professional Development and Education”).

There were also delays when assisting states had not identified available resources ahead of time, and the process was more cumbersome when receiving states did not have intrastate mutual aid agreements to facilitate the sharing of resources among local governments. Some part of the delay in responding to requests for assistance was attributable to the fact that state officials often did not know what resources they had. Better information on capabilities and resources would help them respond to disasters in their own states, as well as provide assistance elsewhere. As a result, a year after Katrina, 35 of the 53 EMAC members had implemented intrastate mutual aid agreements, and six others had proposed legislation to create such agreements (EMAC 2006b). The state of Mississippi had an intrastate mutual aid compact prior to Katrina's landfall; the state of Louisiana did not. The Mississippi compact (2000) may explain the relatively easier time that EMAC personnel had dealing with local governments in the state. There was also greater understanding of the process in Mississippi because the state system was very similar. Even non-EMAC responders noted the “command” linkages in Mississippi (see Nebraska Urban Search and Rescue Task Force One 2006; Nevada Hospital Association 2006).

Conclusions

Disaster responses are very visible and compelling evidence of the efficacy of elected leaders, and failures can have a tremendous effect on electoral fortunes (Waugh 2006b). Local officials can even be held legally accountable for such failures when they are exercising their own discretion. They do not enjoy the same sovereign immunity that state and federal officials have. The costs of failure in the responses to Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, as well as the problems in implementing recovery programs afterward, were clearly evident in the national elections in 2006 and the subsequent decision by

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Louisiana governor Blanco not to run for a second term (Nossiter 2007). It might also be argued that the success of the U.S. Coast Guard in launching its search and rescue efforts in the early hours after Hurricane Katrina's landfall and the levee breaches in New Orleans greatly increased that agency's political capital. Coast Guard commanders were chosen to fill top FEMA posts. Homeland security officials, on the other hand, have not regained public confidence.

Evaluating performance on the basis of after-action reports is difficult at best. EMAC personnel were hesitant to criticize their counterparts in Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida. The EMAC survey data are not state specific, although the largest numbers of respondents were deployed in Louisiana and Mississippi. As a consequence, drawing general lessons from the deployments is easier than drawing more specific lessons. General lessons, in fact, may be of more use in future operations. There is also a concern that officials may be reluctant to request assistance if it could result in criticism of their decisions. Legal liability, as well, may result if EMAC or other outside responders blame officials for poor decisions.

What can be surmised from the after-action reports is that the delayed disaster declaration by Governor Blanco likely slowed the requests for and deployment of EMAC assets. From the governor's office to parish offices, officials in Louisiana were less familiar with mutual assistance systems because the state lacked its own. The lack of state coordination in Louisiana may also have affected both the effectiveness of the response and the integration of EMAC personnel into the operations. However, although the state of Mississippi seemed better organized to deal with the disaster, judging from the reports, there may be other explanations of its relative success. Governor Bush's help may have been a very large factor in Governor Barbour's efforts. Florida officials have continued to provide assistance to communities in Mississippi as they recover from Katrina and are applying what they have learned from hurricanes in their own state (Shenot 2007). Barbour's strong linkages to private industry were cited in media accounts as well.

Command and control rests on good communications, and both states lacked interoperable and dependable communications during the early days of the disaster. Some Louisiana National Guard units were using Vietnam War-era radio equipment (Moniz 2005). Neither Louisiana nor Mississippi had effective communication between its state emergency operations center and local agencies; consequently, assessing damage and determining resource needs was difficult at best.

The EMAC system was effective during the Katrina response. The compact provided sorely needed surge

capacity for Governors Blanco and Barbour. However, the lack of understanding of EMAC among officials at all levels was a problem that needs to be addressed. There do seem to be some differences in how Louisiana and Mississippi used EMAC during the Katrina disaster, but it is uncertain from the after-action reports and other literature that the differences were substantial or resulted in greater property damage or loss of life. What is clear is that EMAC is an important tool that can expand state capabilities to deal with catastrophic events. While there were other problems with EMAC, such as the lack of attention to the sharing of disaster recovery assets (Waugh and Smith 2006), it was a critical resource during the Katrina disaster.

As the after-action reports conclude, more funding is needed for EMAC to engage in "forward planning" (Bell 2007, 30). In 2004, FEMA provided a three-year grant to support the program and to encourage intra-state mutual aid agreements nationally. As a result, EMAC's infrastructure was greatly improved prior to Katrina. In 2006, Congress authorized funding to further expand and enhance EMAC in the 2007 Department of Homeland Security budget, but funding has not yet been appropriated (Bell 2007, 32). Federal funding will reduce the states' reliance on FEMA and other federal programs. The encouragement of intra-state emergency assistance compacts, too, will reduce local reliance on national resources. The development of the National Emergency Management Network by the International City/County Management Association and the Public Entity Risk Institute will facilitate the sharing of information and resources among communities, thereby enhancing state and local capacities to deal with catastrophic disasters (ICMA 2007). Emergency management in the United States has slowly evolved from a "cavalry" approach in which there was an expectation that local resources would be quickly overwhelmed and federal and, perhaps to a lesser degree, state agencies would have to come to the rescue to an approach based more on the encouragement of disaster resilience in which communities and states are better able to address their own hazards, deal with the disasters that occur, and recover more quickly. EMAC, state mutual aid systems, and state and local capacity-building efforts are enhancing capabilities to deal with disaster without resorting to a more reactive national system for managing disasters.

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