Gov. Perry Touts Texas Approach to Disaster Management
Addresses the National Hurricane Conference

*Note - Gov. Perry frequently departs from prepared remarks.

**Wednesday, April 08, 2009**

Thank you, Max [Mayfield]. You know, most times when we see and hear you on TV, there is a hurricane bearing down, so don't be offended if the folks in this room start getting antsy as you speak.

It is good to be here with people who have devoted their lives to dealing with the worst that Mother Nature sends our way. When that worst arrives, it demands our best and the abilities of every discipline present in this room.

Being here with weather experts, first responders, local leaders, private sector partners, military forces, and volunteers...the folks who devote their time and effort to protecting our citizens...is a distinct honor and a great encouragement.

I am encouraged because the experience represented at this conference is being shared to make everyone better.

I'm encouraged because that information exchange will give us a better understanding of the challenges we face and yield valuable improvements to our strategy.

Mother Nature certainly didn't take it easy on Texas during the 2008 hurricane season, but I think we handled it pretty darn well. Texas responded to three hurricanes and a major tropical storm, all in less than two months.

If that weren't enough, we had a potentially catastrophic flooding event in the border town of Presidio, right in the middle of Hurricane Ike. Despite their focus on Ike, Jack Colley and his team in our state operations center got resources to Presidio and helped save the town.

---

**Related Content**

**Texas Declared America's Top State for Business**

**Gov. Perry Appoints Three to State Board of Trustees of the Texas Emergency Services Retirement System**

**Gov. Perry Appoints Three to Advisory Council on Emergency Medical Services**

**Gov. Perry Appoints Five to the OneStar National Service Commission**

**Gov. Perry Activates State Resources as Flooding Threatens South Texas**
There's nothing like two major emergencies, 700 miles apart, to test your system.

Ours worked just fine and illustrated the strength of our approach here in Texas.

We start by looking to local officials, who know their area better than anyone else, and getting them the resources they need, when they need them.

When you think of a county judge, you might picture robes and a gavel, but, here in Texas, ours are just as likely to be calling the shots in an emergency operations center…and they do a great job.

In addition to local control for local challenges, the other hallmark of our approach in Texas is proactivity. In a word, as soon as we get a bead on where the storm is coming ashore, we start moving people out of the way and activating our statewide shelter system.

Our philosophy is simple: a storm can't hurt people that aren't there.

Because lives are the bottom line, Hurricane Ike didn't make us question our strategy for a second, but that storm sure did a dance before it came ashore. As it approached Texas, models indicated constantly shifting landing zones for Ike, ranging from Beaumont to Brownsville and back.

So we did a little dance of our own, shifting our pre-staged resources multiple times, moving emergency response personnel and vehicles as well as mass care materials where they were needed.

As Ike came ashore, the storm surge caused massive flooding that destroyed buildings and trapped a lot of folks who had ignored warnings to get out.

I’m all about the independent Texas spirit, but we expended a lot of resources, and our first responders risked their lives to move more than 3,500 people folks to safety.

Made up of Texas Military Forces, Texas Task Force-1, Texas Task Force-2, Texas Parks and Wildlife and our Mass Care team, our rescue team went the extra mile.

In all, we rallied more than 1,500 rescue personnel using 549 vehicles, 63 aircraft and 253 boats. I’m told that represented the largest search and rescue operation ever undertaken in our state.

At the same time those brave men and women were saving lives, our electrical crews were gearing up to restore power to more than 2.8 million customers who had lost power.

Those electrical crews were just part of an overall storm response that succeeded because local leaders had the resources they needed to execute their plans and decisions at the point of impact.

Another key contribution to our success comes from our private sector partners in the fuel, retail and transportation industries, who are fully integrated in our planning and response.

Based on our experiences in Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, we kicked open the door to our State Operations Center, and invited in the experts, folks with the resources and know-how to get things moved to the right place on time.

As soon as the barometer starts to fall, the State of Texas Fuel Team starts working, getting fuel where it’s needed, mostly in the impact zone and along evacuation routes so our citizens can gas up and go.

Dealing with demand that spiked up more than 400-percent at times, the Fuel Team did a great job getting gas where it was needed.

On the commodity side, we’ve partnered with companies like Wal-Mart, Lowes and Home Depot along with our
The state’s main grocery chains, HEB, Brookshires and Brookshire Brothers.

They move product across the state every day, better than any government entity could once a year, and they are essential to our success when it comes to meeting our citizens’ needs in crisis.

As storms approach and we encourage people to leave the impact area, evacuees often interact with our Mass Care Team that is also coordinated out of the State Operations Center.

The Mass Care Team coordinates our volunteer organizations that provide compassionate care to evacuees who are scared, tired and unsure of what lies ahead.

The point-to-point shelter network that we developed after Hurricane Rita matches coastal communities with inland communities to coordinate and plan for evacuations.

This cuts down on surprises and provides significant support.

Not everyone can get out on their own, so we contracted more than 1,300 buses during Ike to give people a ride if they needed one.

Every person who gets onto one of our vehicles is tracked from point-to-point with an encoded wristband, so we know the location of everyone in state care during an event.

We also track critical special needs vehicles with a GPS device in real time so those folks get where they need to go as directly as possible. During Ike, Texas evacuated over 12,500 special needs residents and sheltered more than 42,000 evacuees in our statewide network.

With shelters all over the state, some coastal folks even ended up in places like El Paso. To give you a sense of Texas’ size, that is roughly the same distance as a trip to Jacksonville, Florida.

You might wonder if all the effort and expense is worth it, but the folks in this room can give you their own answer.

Talk to someone who looked into the eyes of terrified people as they pulled them into a boat or helicopter, or a shelter worker who reunited evacuees with their families, or a church member who gave someone their first hot meal in days.

They’ll tell you that lives were saved when all hope seemed lost. That’s worth it to me.

207 days have now passed since Hurricane Ike made landfall, and many Texas gulf coast communities are still putting their lives back together.

My Commission for Disaster Recovery and Renewal has been working with local, state and federal partners to help these communities recover and return to normal life as quickly as possible.

We still have work to do, but we will not relent in getting our folks what they need to complete their renewal.

That is why four of my six emergency items at the beginning of this legislative session had to do with storm issues. As you may know, our legislators only meet once every two years, so we need to make best use of their time here in Austin.

In this case, I hope they will agree with me and devote the necessary funds to not only complete the recovery from the 2008 storms, but also prepare us for whatever disasters might hit Texas in the future.

One bill I do look forward to signing is Senate Bill 769, sponsored by Tommie Williams, which better enables electric utilities to recover restoration costs after natural disasters.
2008 was a tough year in the storm business, but I believe we held up our end of the deal. In 2009, I think we’ll do even better.

Just this week, the newest predictions for the 2009 season came out, and we’re hoping they’re right about it being a little quieter. I won’t go into the La Nina factor and predicted surface temperatures, but I hope they all combine for a no-storm season in Texas.

The Colorado State University report says there’s still a 31-percent chance for a major storm in the Gulf, so we’ll do what we always do: Prepare for the worst and pray for the best.

With the people in this room standing at the ready, I am confident that whatever trial comes our way, we will be prepared, we will act decisively, and we will do what it takes to protect our people.

Thank you for all you do to make that happen, here in Texas and beyond. Yours is a noble calling and I commend you for your dedication.

May God bless you all and, through you, may He continue to bless the great state of Texas.