

VOLUNTEERS AND DISASTER RESPONSE: HOW VOLUNTEERS CAN FILL KEY ROLES DURING AND AFTER A DISASTER

Law enforcement volunteers can play a vital role in providing relief and support to first responders. This issue of *VIPS in Focus* highlights agencies that have plans in place for when a disaster strikes. Their plans include providing volunteers with the training and resources necessary to respond to a disaster.

Sacramento County, California, Sheriff's Department

Sacramento County covers approximately 994 square miles in central California and is home to 1.8 million people. The sheriff's department serves the unincorporated areas of the county with 1,600 sworn officers, 400 civilian employees, and approximately 1,550 volunteers. Volunteers serve the following programs under the Sheriff's Volunteer Services Bureau: the Sacramento Regional Citizen Corps Council, the Sacramento Regional Medical Reserve Corps, the Sacramento Regional Community Emergency Response Team, Volunteers in Partnership with the Sheriff, the Sheriff's Mounted Search and Rescue, the Drowning Accident Rescue Team, the Sheriff's Posse, the Sheriff's Youth Program, the Sheriff's Aero Squadron, the Sheriff's Reserve Officer Program, the Sheriff's Amateur Radio Program, and the Community Service Reserve Corps. The bureau is managed by one lieutenant and two sergeants and volunteers who help manage the programs.

Spontaneous Volunteers

The volunteer programs and emergency response efforts in Sacramento County have

undergone considerable review and reorganization since the events of September 11, 2001. The sheriff's department was charged with creating a plan for the entire county to use and manage spontaneous volunteers during a disaster. The plan was developed to provide valuable and cost-effective volunteers and resources to the community. The primary agencies that may use the plan include the Sacramento Regional Office of Homeland



Security, the Sacramento Regional Citizen Corps, and the local volunteer center, Hands On Sacramento. The Sacramento County Sheriff's Department, as the executive sponsor of the Regional Citizen Corps programs, manages all Citizen Corps and affiliated program volunteers who may be called on during a disaster. Hands On Sacramento maintains the spontaneous volunteer management plan and coordinates any countywide mobilization of volunteers. Officials can activate the plan in response to a disaster that is restricted to a single city in the county, a countywide disaster, and a disaster

that extends beyond the county limits. A number of events could trigger the activation of the spontaneous volunteer management plan, including media coverage that is likely to cause spontaneous volunteers to converge at the scene, a shortage of workers, and a need for volunteers with particular skills or special knowledge. When the plan is activated, an emergency volunteer center is set up to coordinate and refer volunteers to the appropriate relief agencies.



Reporting for Duty

Emergency volunteer centers can be physical locations where officials greet and process volunteers as they walk in, Web sites where volunteers can register themselves and receive assignments, or phone banks that volunteers can call to notify officials of their availability and willingness to help. Emergency volunteer centers should be established close enough to the disaster site to receive communications and deliver supplies quickly but at a sufficient distance to keep spontaneous volunteers away from the disaster site until they have been processed. The Sacramento County plan directs officials to divide physical emergency volunteer centers into three stations. At the first station, reception, volunteers sign in and are directed to the second station, intake and referral, where they are screened. If their services are needed, they are referred to the appropriate agency. If

they are referred to an outside relief and recovery agency, they then report to that agency. If they are assigned to help with the county response efforts, they continue to the third station, registration, where the intake process is completed and the volunteers are sworn in as State Disaster Service Workers, a designation that makes them eligible to participate in a state-funded program that provides workers' compensation and medical compensation benefits to volunteers who are injured during disaster response.

Risk Management

The spontaneous volunteer management plan recognizes that all individuals involved in disaster relief and recovery may be placed in danger due to the nature of their responsibilities. Sacramento County assumes liability for all volunteers working in the jurisdiction, reinforcing the necessity of properly screening volunteers at the emergency volunteer center. The screening process looks at the suitability of volunteers for the specific activities. While the county assumes liability, the plan instructs local jurisdictions and first responder agencies to add additional protection. They should also take steps to reduce the stress and fatigue of first responders. Many volunteers with the sheriff's department are trained to support the first responders. They provide food and water to first responders, inform first responders of the status and location of their families, and provide other support services.

After the Disaster Is Over

In Sacramento County, volunteer efforts are scaled back or reallocated as the relief and recovery activity decreases. Once all volunteer activity has ceased, the staff at each emergency volunteer center debrief and prepare an after-action report that lays out the lessons learned. County officials review the lessons learned and make any necessary changes to the spontaneous volunteer management plan to improve relief and recovery efforts should they be needed in

the future. By evaluating the plan and integrating lessons learned, all agencies involved have the opportunity to assess themselves, their actions, and their reactions during the disaster and can make changes to improve in the event of another disaster. Evaluation also allows agencies to expand the plan to account for events that happened unexpectedly during the disaster.

Coral Springs, Florida, Police Department

Coral Springs, in Broward County, Florida, is approximately 20 miles northwest of Fort Lauderdale. The city supports a population of 131,257 and is part of the South Florida metropolitan area, which is home to almost 5.5 million people. The Coral Springs Police Department Volunteer Services Unit uses community members to assist the department by participating in a wide variety of duties including parking enforcement, community-assisted patrol, fingerprinting, data entry, and disaster response. Last year 95 volunteers contributed 12,945 hours.

Involving Volunteers in Disaster Planning
Volunteers for the Coral Springs Police Department are included in the county's emergency operations plan. The point of contact between the county and the volunteers is the volunteer coordinator for the police department, who also serves as the city's volunteer coordinator. The function of volunteers within the scope of the emergency operations plan is supported by the Coral Springs Police and Fire Departments, the Coral Springs Damage Assessment Teams, the Coral Springs Community Emergency Response Teams (CERT), the Coral Springs Squadron Civil Air Patrol, the Broward County Community Services Department, the Broward County Voluntary Organizations Active in Disasters (VOAD), and the American Red Cross.

Training for a Disaster

The Coral Springs Fire Department is in charge of training the city's CERT volunteers. The CERT program was developed by the Los Angeles City Fire Department in 1985, and the Federal Emergency Management Agency made the training available nationwide in 1993. The CERT program teaches people about disaster preparedness for hazards that may affect their neighborhoods and communities and trains them in basic disaster response skills, such as light search and rescue, fire safety, team organization, and disaster medical operations. The classroom instruction and exercises are designed to teach CERT volunteers how to assist others after a disaster when professional responders are not immediately available to help. In Coral Springs, the fire department maintains a roster of all active CERT volunteers and can notify them when their assistance is needed. CERT members are called upon to evaluate the immediate needs of their neighborhoods when a disaster strikes. They report that information to the city's emergency operations center, and officials can dispatch help from there to the places where it is needed the most.

When a Disaster Strikes

The primary responsibilities of the police department's Community Involvement Unit are to collect and disseminate food, clothing, and other donated items as relief to people and communities affected by the disaster. The unit relies on the assessments done by the damage assessment teams and CERT volunteers to know where goods need to be distributed, and it uses the assessments to prioritize the distribution of food and water and clothing. The city and county distribute press releases to tell the general public what goods are needed for relief, what goods are not needed, whether volunteers with specific skill sets are needed, and what agencies are providing services. The unit and the volunteer coordinator facilitate and coordinate transportation of donated goods to

warehouses, distribution sites, or individual households if members of those households are unable to come to the distribution site. The community involvement unit inventories, counts, and categorizes every donation so that the items can be easily distributed to the public.

The city has established disaster staging areas and directed the public to drop off all donations there. Volunteers are on hand at the staging areas to disseminate water, food, ice, and other goods to recipients as they drive through the staging area. The city's emergency manager coordinates with the county emergency operations center to determine which staging areas will be in use, and the center relays that information to Florida's toll-free information line. This telephone line is activated immediately after a disaster to accept incoming calls of donations and volunteers.

The community involvement unit refers unaffiliated or spontaneous volunteers to another relief agency, as the volunteer coordinator has a list of agencies that need volunteers during a disaster. The volunteer coordinator maintains a list of all relief and volunteer agencies and they are included in disaster planning.



Preparing for a Hurricane

The volunteer coordinator maintains a hurricane supply checklist that includes nametags, t-shirts,

safety vests, and hats for volunteers; permanent markers; pens; scissors; duct tape; wire or lightweight rope; a written plan to provide food and beverages to volunteers that includes names and phone numbers of local restaurants; printed sign-in sheets; applications for spontaneous volunteers; a clipboard; a printed roster of volunteer names and contact numbers to activate the volunteer or to perform a welfare check; chalk or spray paint to mark the ground or make signs; zip ties; sunscreen; flashlights with orange cone covers; walkie-talkies; batteries; first aid kits; and bug spray. The list of hurricane relief volunteers includes each volunteer's name and phone number, the voluntary organization each volunteer is affiliated with, and where each volunteer will be assigned. The roster is amended after relief efforts to include the volunteers who assisted, which days they were available, and how many hours they contributed that day. After Hurricane Wilma, the staging areas were open for seven days and had 274 volunteers contribute over 1250 hours in four-, six-, or eight-hour shifts, and many volunteers came back day after day.

Hurricane Wilma Relief

Hurricane Wilma caused widespread destruction of critical infrastructure, including power, water, and sewer systems to South Florida in 2005. Florida Power and Light, the largest electricity utility in the state, reported more than 6,000,000 people had lost power. Broward and Palm Beach Counties were hit particularly hard by the many tornadoes in the western portion of the hurricane. In downtown Fort Lauderdale, just 20 miles from Coral Springs, there was significant damage to buildings built before stricter building codes implemented after Hurricane Andrew. Damage in Florida totaled \$20.6 billion. At least 35 Hurricane Wilma-related deaths were reported in Florida, three in Broward County. Volunteers in the community involvement unit were activated after Hurricane Wilma struck the city.

At the city staging area, in a large park, volunteers loaded ice, water, and food into residents' cars. The staging area featured mobile traffic signals that run on generators to keep traffic moving safely when the power is out. Residents were desperate for power, and the police department assigned officers to guard the generators. Volunteers were able to take over for officers and guard the generators and allow the officers to tend to other pressing needs in the city.



Lafourche Parish, Louisiana, Sheriff's Office

Lafourche Parish, on the Gulf of Mexico, southwest of New Orleans, is home to approximately 90,000 people. The parish sheriff's office, where the motto is "Do whatever it takes," has approximately 350 employees and maintains a roster of approximately 130 volunteers, including 31 law enforcement explorers (Law Enforcement Explorers Post 323). The Parish's Explorers are best known for conducting a child identification program and assisting with the parking of vehicles at large public events. Volunteers include state-certified reserve deputies, intermediate trained deputies, and auxiliary deputies with no enforcement powers. Reserves assist in all sections of the sheriff's department, including patrol, police social services, range safety, hunter's education,

mounted patrol, motorcycle patrol, and water patrol. The explorers and volunteers together contributed 16,005 hours last year.

Back-to-Back Hurricanes

Hurricane Katrina made landfall on August 29, 2005, near the border between Louisiana and Mississippi. Hurricane Rita was the next major hurricane to make landfall in the United States, on September 24, at Johnson's Bayou in Louisiana, near the border with Texas. Those two storms, less than a month apart, created one of the deadliest and most destructive natural disasters ever in the United States. In the aftermath of Katrina, almost 900,000 people in Louisiana lost power. Louisiana Governor Kathleen Blanco reported that 700,000 homes lost power in 41 of the state's 64 parishes after Rita. Close to 2,000 people lost their lives either as a direct result of the storms or in events that occurred due to the storms; nearly 1,600 of the fatalities occurred in Louisiana.

Providing Relief to Their Own

In the immediate aftermath of Katrina, sheriff's deputies and reserves spent a few days ensuring the safety and security of the parish and its residents. Shelters were opened for those who were without power or had to evacuate due to flooding, and those shelters filled within a few hours of opening. Reserve deputies conducted patrols, provided security at the shelters, prepared meals for deputies and other relief workers, organized relief supplies, and performed many other tasks that needed to be done in the weeks and months that followed the storm. Reserves also worked to keep the parish safe from looters and assisted with water patrols. A shelter was set up at Nichols State University that became home to 1,700 evacuees from the Louisiana Superdome and the convention center in New Orleans. Reserves provided security, ensured the safety of evacuees by keeping order between two rival gangs, and aided in the identification of a convicted sex offender who had taken refuge

among families and children. Several members of the law enforcement explorer post assisted in their own flooded neighborhoods by picking up debris, pulling up and removing wet carpeting from damaged homes, and moving piles of trash so it could be picked up by trash removal services. Two explorers each volunteered more than 80 hours during the two weeks after Katrina.



Providing Relief to Others

Once the parish was secure, the sheriff's office's Crisis Management Unit, made up of deputies and reserve deputies, was sent to assist law enforcement agencies in New Orleans, St. Bernard Parish, Plaquemines Parish, and other locations that needed assistance in relief and recovery from Katrina. Many communities from around the state and elsewhere were sending trucks filled with water and food; however those trucks needed to be protected from looters. Five reserve deputies provided security for a convoy of trucks carrying water and food to Algiers Point, a section of New Orleans across the Mississippi River from the French Quarter. Once the supplies were distributed, those same reserve deputies provided security to the buses transporting evacuees from Algiers Point to the New Orleans airport for evacuation. Five of the sheriff's office's reserve deputies provided security and transported food to law enforcement and rescue workers in St. Bernard Parish after the storm.

The Second Storm

Much of Lafourche Parish was flooded from Hurricane Rita, but it came through both storms much better than many of its neighbors. Terrebonne Parish, west of Lafourche Parish, was hit harder. The Lafourche Parish Sheriff's Office's Crisis Management Unit and the water patrol team conducted search-and-rescue operations in Terrebonne Parish, much of which was under water. Some reserves from Lafourche helped provide security and peace of mind to the residents of their own neighborhoods. Two reserve deputies took on the duties of cooking hot meals and delivering them to the deputies working checkpoints and patrols, as those deputies worked 12-hour shifts for as many as 40 consecutive days. Reserves also provided food and water to evacuees passing through the parish, as many New Orleans evacuees ran out of gas in Lafourche Parish on their way to Houston.

Every reserve deputy brings their own talents to the sheriff's office. Some by virtue of their full-time job bring specific talents that can assist them in their job as a reserve deputy. One reserve deputy whose responsibilities include ensuring that emergency vehicles are supplied with fuel for their mission was able to continue to do that after the storms. Two other reserves who are members of the U.S. Coast Guard conducted evacuations, convoys, patrols, and rescues. After deputies felt it was safe and secure, they helped transport evacuees from the shelter at Nichols State University back to the New Orleans's Ninth Ward to assess the damage and attempt to retrieve personal items from their homes.

Do Whatever It Takes

The state-certified reserve deputies, the intermediate trained reserves, the auxiliary deputies, and the members of the exploring post have acquired, through training and exercises, many skills to help the sheriff's office every day. Some of these skills were integral in the relief

and recovery efforts after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, as were the skills that these volunteers brought with them from their full-time jobs or in other aspects of their lives. In a time of crisis, the volunteers did whatever it took to ensure the safety and security of Lafourche Parish and surrounding communities.

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VIPS Products and Resources

VIPS and Disaster Response Course

The Volunteers in Police Service (VIPS)

Program offers a one-day, no-cost training, called VIPS and Disaster Response, for law enforcement volunteer coordinators.

Responding to a disaster can strain a law enforcement agency's limited resources. Recent disasters have shown that law enforcement volunteers can play a valuable role in supplementing disaster preparation, response, and recovery efforts. Participants will come away from this training with specific information about disaster preparedness, the role of volunteers during disasters, CERT operations, and pandemic response. Visit the Web site, www.policevolunteers.org, for more information, including dates and locations.

VIPS and Disaster Response

This eight-minute video demonstrates how law enforcement volunteers can help their communities in preparing for and responding to disasters. View the video and order copies of it at the VIPS Web site, www.policevolunteers.org.

The Volunteers in Police Service (VIPS) Program works to enhance the capacity of state and local law enforcement to utilize volunteers. VIPS serves as a gateway to resources and information for and about law enforcement volunteer programs. VIPS is a Program Partner of Citizen Corps, an initiative helping to make communities across America safer, stronger, and better prepared for emergencies of all kinds. The International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) manages and implements the VIPS Program in partnership with and on behalf of the Bureau of Justice Assistance, U.S. Department of Justice.



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