

Texas Baptist disaster relief workers join drill, provide special-needs assistance

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DALLAS—Forecasters predicted Hurricane Brett would hit the Texas coast in less than 72 hours. But the impending disaster was only a lesson in survival, as Texas Baptists and hundreds of city, county and state disaster response teams raced through Texas' first simulated hurricane under its revamped state disaster and evacuation plan.

In the wake of Hurricanes Rita and Katrina, Texas emergency management officials reworked the state's response plan to make it more effective. In the recent drill, crews rushed to coordinate the simulated evacuation of more than 1 million people along the Texas Gulf Coast.

Working the drill from the group's Dallas headquarters, Texas Baptist Men Disaster Relief Director Gary Smith lined up units and volunteers.

"Our role in this mock disaster drill was to support each of the eight hub

evacuation cities along with some of the larger point to point shelters,” Smith explained.

As the simulated hurricane landfall deadline loomed 22 hours away, Smith designated locations for the organization’s 11 mobile disaster units, food supplies and volunteer crews who would provide 125,000 meals a day.

To handle the needs of about 200,000 people in the region who cannot evacuate themselves, Smith said the state contracted thousands of buses to ferry them to evacuation sites. But many of these people who cannot evacuate themselves will be moved from hospitals, nursing homes and assisted living homes. They will need transportation such as ambulances to carry them to shelters. Once there, many of them may be unable to feed themselves without help.

Texas Baptists have stepped in to address these “special-needs” evacuees. Partnering with Baptist Child & Family Services, TBM is developing a unit to address medical and dietary concerns.

“For the first time ever, we will have a special-needs feeding unit,” Smith said. “We’re ready to provide 16,000 meals a day at the San Antonio unit.”

Directing special-needs emergency care for the state, Baptist Child & Family Services opened and operated 12 special-needs shelters and cared for 1,700 people with medical, emotional and physical needs after Katrina and Rita hit.

The agency purchased a used 18-wheel tractor-trailer rig that will be stationed in San Antonio for special-needs individuals. TBM is equipping the unit with commercial tilt skillets, convection ovens and pots and pans. The group’s volunteers will prepare the meals.

Working with SYSCO Corporation, nutrition experts developed diets for people with medical and physical needs. Baptist Child & Family Services

also plans to provide nurses, psychiatrists, physicians and other medical personnel.

Other major disaster concerns such as food, fuel and electricity also were addressed during the hurricane drill. One of the most significant positive developments, Smith noted, is the state's arrangements to provide a refrigerated 18-wheel tractor-trailer rig to store food supplies. In the past, food often spoiled before it could be used. Texas emergency officials also have secured an 18-wheel tractor-trailer freezer rig, and a trailer to hold non-perishable goods.

A contract is in place with a fuel vendor who will deliver diesel to TBM sites so the group does not have to hunt for fuel to stay in operation. To help motorists trying to get to evacuation sites, the state has also designated service stations that will be equipped with commercial generators so pumps can be accessed.

The Baptist General Convention of Texas disaster response team is prepared to provide a frontline response with a team of crisis interventionists who are specially trained and certified by the National Organization for Victim Assistance. The convention also provides family and church assistance, as well as disaster relief grants.

Baptist churches who want to serve as shelter sites for hurricane or storm victims are encouraged to become certified by the Red Cross, Smith added.

For TBM disaster response or to volunteer, visit www.tbm.org . For BGCT disaster response assistance or to donate, go to www.bgct.org/disaster. Churches that want to provide special-needs shelter or volunteers , see www.bcfs.net

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