

Hurricane Katrina & Rita

Video Program Script

4/04/07

1. Stock footage of the Hurricane Katrina and Rita impacting the Gulf Coast: high winds, waves, and residents evacuating are shown as the narrator begins.

Narrator: On Monday, August 29, 2005 Hurricane Katrina made landfall near Waveland, Mississippi. Packing 140 mile winds and a 30 foot surge, the category 4 storm battered the coasts of Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana.

Considered the largest natural disaster in the history of the United States, Katrina displaced an estimated 1.5 million people, obliterating entire communities and racked up more than 200 billion dollars in damage.

In New Orleans, the storm breached levees holding back Lake Ponchartraine, flooding 80 percent of the city to depths up to 25 feet.

Then, less than a month later, on September 24th, the gulf region was belted again when Hurricane Rita roared ashore, sparking an exodus of 3 million more residents.

2. A animated title screen reading: “USEPA, Hurricane Katrina, Hurricane Rita, A Coordinated Response” is shown. As the narrator continues we see a FEMA logo, a USEPA logo and text reading: “ESF 10, Oil and Hazardous Materials” and “ESF 3, Public Works and Engineering.”

Narrator: Under the Federal National Response Plan, FEMA was tasked as lead agency for the recovery effort. USEPA supports FEMA through ESF, or Emergency Support Function 10, which addresses oil and hazardous materials. EPA also supported ESF 3, which addresses Public Works and Engineering

3. Cindy Brown, USEPA Region VI Financial Section Chief is introduced and continues.

Cindy Brown: In this instance, since this is a FEMA event, we have to work very closely, because we get our money from FEMA. And we have to pay close attention to getting the job done but staying within the mission assignment, the limits and parameters to the best

of our ability, and use the money in the best way to make the most of the taxpayers' money.

4. An already existing animated ICS organizational chart is shown as the narrator continues.

Narrator: On August 31st the Department of Homeland Security declared the hurricane response an Incident of National Significance, the first ever use of this designation under the new National Response Plan. The National Response Plan is the new blueprint describing how the federal government coordinates with state, local, and tribal governments and the private sector during national emergencies.

Under the National Response Plan, responding agencies must operate using the National Incident Management System, or NIMS mandated in Homeland Security Presidential Directive - 5. As part of NIMS, all agencies, including EPA utilize the Incident Command System, which provides a common organizational structure and language for multi-agency responses. The system can expand or contract to accommodate incident needs.

5. An animated map containing video images which illustrate the 3 key EPA locations is shown as the narrator continues.

Narrator: To best manage the massive undertaking, which covered two EPA geographic regions and 4 states, EPA called in Federal On Scene Coordinators, or OSC's from around the countries 10 regions.

Incident Management Teams, or IMT's, were then positioned in 3 key locations.

Region 6 operations were headquartered in the Dallas, TX Regional Response Center.

Region 4's response was lead from the US Coast Guard's Gulf Strike team's Headquarters in Mobile, Alabama.

Both regions also communicated on a daily basis with the EPA headquarters Emergency Operations Center in Washington, DC.

6. Video shots of the Washington, D.C. Emergency Operations Center are shown as the narrator continues

Narrator: The D.C. Emergency Operations Center is a new state-of-the-art analysis, communication, and meeting space where senior Agency decision makers can anticipate or assess a situation, then communicate with governmental partners and the public to craft an appropriate response.

7. Shots of the response centers communicating via conference calls are shown as Jim Mullins, USEPA Region 6 Operations Section Chief explains.

Jim Mullins: Each day we have a series of conference calls, usually one in the morning with headquarters and FEMA, one at noon with the other removal managers around the country, and then one at 4 o'clock in the afternoon, that's our operations call. Those all have different purposes and they're attended by different groups for different reasons, and they're essential to make this thing run.

8. Shots of the Region 6 Regional Response Center are shown as Jim Mullins continues.

Jim Mullins: We began work here at the Region 6 Regional Response Center on the day before landfall, I believe it was August 28th. It's a place to organize and support a big field response. And we're doing exactly that here. The role at this center is to provide as

much support as we can for a field response effort. We mobilized an incident management team to the field within a day or two after landfall, when it became apparent that the city was going to flood and the devastation was very great.

9. Shots of the Region 6 Unified Command in Baton Rouge are shown, along with Stock Footage of New Orleans levee flooding as the narrator and Craig Carroll, USEPA Region 6 Incident Commander explain.

Narrator: Region 6 also established a Unified Command field team in the Baton Rouge headquarters of the Louisiana Department Of Environmental Quality.

Craig Carroll: We knew it was going to be big when the reports came back that the levees had broken and that the entire city was essentially getting flooded. So we prepared what we thought was a big ramp-up of personnel to get down there and get our IMT in place.

Little did we know how big it was actually going to be.

10. Video and still images of EPA assisting with search and rescue are shown as Craig Carroll and the narrator continue.

Craig Carroll: The very first call that was put out by FEMA was not for anything that we traditionally do. It was search and rescue. If you have the capabilities as a federal agency to bring resources to bear to save lives, we want you to do that. EPA has that capability.

Narrator: Through EPA's efforts, over 800 people were safely rescued from the New Orleans floodwaters.

11. Aerial and ground footage of the devastated Region 4 coast along with shots of the Mobile, AL Unified Command Post are shown as the narrator and Terry Stilman, USEPA Region 4 Incident Commander explain.

Narrator: Unlike the flooding in New Orleans, the primary damage from Hurricane Katrina in Region 4 resulted from the storm surge, high winds, and the rainfall that accompanied the hurricane.

At the Mobile, Alabama Unified Command Post, EPA teamed with the US Coast Guard, EPA's federal partner in Emergency Response, and the two state Environmental Agencies.

Terry Stilman: We quickly formed up into one unit covering the coast of Mississippi and Alabama, and also joined up with the Coast Guard into a unified command. And at this point there is an

incident commander for EPA, an incident commander from the Coast Guard and from the state of Alabama and the state of Mississippi into a unified command.

12. An animated map of the 3 Region Four divisions is shown as the narrator continues.

Narrator: Region 4 field activities operated under three divisions. Division A encompassed Hancock, County Mississippi. Division B covered Harrison County, Mississippi, and Division C comprised Jackson County Mississippi, and Mobile and Baldwin counties in Alabama.

13. Aerial shots of the Region 4 coast line are shown as the narrator and Carter Williamson, USEPA Region 4 Division A Supervisor explain.

Narrator: Using helicopters, EPA began a rapid needs assessment of residential areas and industrial and municipal facilities to identify and prioritize the response.

Carter Williamson: It also helps us determine logistical concerns as far as egress points, what parts of a town or a city we can get into. A lot of times we want to know that before we put ground

troops on the ground to get them into areas knowing full well that maybe that bridge is out or this part of the community can't be assessed at this point.

14. Shots of RV trailers used for EPA housing are shown as the narrator and Jim Mullins continue.

Narrator: The severity of the storm made logistics difficult. Responders were required to live in tents and RV's during much of the recovery.

Jim Mullins: Typically we're accustomed to going to work very rapidly, but having pretty traditional support structures like food and water and hotels that we can rent and restaurants that are open. All of those were destroyed by the hurricane and/or the subsequent flooding.

15. Shots of the debris fields from the air and ground and shots of Carter Williamson and a Coast Guard member assessing debris are shown as the narrator and Carter Williamson explain.

Narrator: The volume of debris left in Katrina and Rita's wake was massive. Trees were torn from their roots and countless homes and

business were lifted from foundations and pushed into immense piles, choking roads and slowing relief.

Carter Williamson: I think the collective opinion of a lot of the teams and everybody that's come into this hurricane response is a sense of awe. Every time we come down through here in these affected areas, we're awestruck. It's just total destruction. It's hard to describe. The coastline being basically devoid of life. So, it's complete. The devastation is complete and absolute.

16. Shots of debris removal, along with shots of EPA teams assessing and collecting orphan containers are shown as the narrator and Matthew Huyser, USEPA Region 4 OSC explain.

Narrator: An average of 200,000 cubic yards of debris was collected and removed per day in Mississippi alone. One of EPA's key roles was the identification, collection, segregation, and management of hazardous orphan containers and hazardous household waste within the debris.

Matthew Huyser: Most of the challenges we faced are getting to the containers that we've found blocked by roads with boats in them. We've encountered several of those. But nothing that we're

looking for is necessarily on the side of the road. We need to get into the woods, we need to get into the water and we need the right equipment to get to that.

The types of things we're finding are mostly drums from the marinas, either oil drums or drums that were containing any other materials that the Shrimping boats might have been using or the marinas were keeping in stock. The waves just kind of flooded the whole area

We can remove any containers that might be sunken or floating in the water. So we can just clear this whole area of any environmental hazards or any threatening hazards so that other people can come back in and clean up their boats, clean up their homes and anything else they have out here.

17. Shots of a Region 4 Collection / Staging area are shown as the narrator continues.

Narrator: Once collected and loaded, the containers were transported to centralized staging areas where they were unloaded, then segregated and staged by waste stream before being hazard categorized and bulked for final disposal or recycling.

18. Shots of a Region 6 team collecting orphan containers are shown as Chris D’Onofrio, EPA Region 2 OSC explains.

Chris Donofrio: What we're doing out here is trying to recover orphan containers. Something that's been upset by the water and now has no owner. It's just mixed in with the debris. So we're finding drums, cylinders, containers of solvents, paints, oils, gasoline, propane cylinders, that kind of thing.

19. Shots of Region 6 staging area and a technician running HAZCAT tests in a mobile lab are shown as Michael Brescio, Region 2 OSC.

Michael Brescio: We bring them to this pad. First thing they do is inventory. From that point, then all the corrosives, anything that we kind of know what it is, we'll go to a segregate area in this pad. Then anything above that five gallons will be sampled. And then that goes to a HAZCAT trailer. The chemist there will run tests. We're not testing for a chemical, we're testing for a characteristic most of the time. Based on those results, they can do further testing, and that will categorize the waste so we can bulk all these thousands and thousands of containers into larger containers, and then we just dispose of one fifty-five instead of a hundred smaller containers.

20. Shots of staging area with large storage tanks are shown as the narrator continues.

Narrator: Additionally, large above and below ground fuel and chemical storage tanks that broke free during the storm surge were collected and staged for recycling or disposal.

21. Shots of debris being burned is shown as the narrator continues.

Narrator: EPA also provided the affected states with guidance on recycling, disposal, burning, and air monitoring of non-hazardous debris.

22. Shots of Gulf Coast refineries and chemical facilities, and booms being deployed are shown as the narrator and Jim Mullins explain.

Narrator: The Gulf region is home to hundreds of chemical and petrochemical facilities. EPA and the US Coast Guard worked closely to respond to spills and releases caused by the hurricanes.

Jim Mullins: The emergency responses have been really remarkably few. The industry was smart enough to make as many preparations

as they could, doing things like filling tanks to prevent them from blowing over and being disturbed. However, there certainly some of those. On almost all of these, we were able to stabilize them or have the owner and operator stabilize them.

23. Aerial and ground shots of affected Gulf communities are shown as the narrator and Craig Carroll continue.

Narrator: Many communities' drinking water and waste water systems were affected along the coast. To bring these critical infrastructure systems back on line quickly, EPA's Superfund Program collaborated with other media programs within the agency.

Craig Carroll: I think from a very high level, even at the administrator level, the decision was the Superfund program shouldn't be in this by themselves. This is bigger than the Superfund program. We need to engage every media.

24. Shots of the "Environmental Units" at the RRC's and field teams addressing drinking and waste water issues are shown as the narrator continues

Narrator: To expedite the communication between Superfund and these other EPA divisions, “Environmental Units” were set up in the response centers, which could efficiently channel resources to the field. Working with officials and contractors to assess damage, and provide solutions, the “Environmental Units” proved to be invaluable in bringing environmental based infrastructure systems back on-line.

25. Shots of EPA OSCs taking IC training in CA dissolve into shots of OSCs working with the IC system at the hurricane response as the narrator, Kenneth Clark, and Chris Russell, USEPA Region 4, Division B Supervisor explain.

Narrator: EPA has dedicated valuable time and resources in recent years implementing the Incident Command System and developing Incident Management Teams. The investment paid large dividends during Katrina and Rita. ICS’s robust but flexible organizational structure worked effectively within EPA and streamlined communication with collaborating agencies.

Kenneth Clark: We didn't really have to worry about how we were going to organize, we just had to figure out exactly where we wanted

to prioritize our resources and be able to ramp that up. So we were able to focus on getting work done.

Chris Russell: It really allows us to streamline and do our job in the field by having the planning, logistics come out and handle it from the backside. And then the overall direction, by the IC, in this case, the UC, Unified Command, allows us to concentrate on our division.

26. Stock footage of residents wading through flood waters in New Orleans, as well as shots of EPA sampling teams collecting water samples are shown as the narrator and Craig Carroll continue.

Narrator: In the aftermath of the flooding in New Orleans, standing water became a major health concern for residents and responders alike. EPA contractors sampled water in the city, as well as levee outflows for over 100 biological and chemical pollutants.

Craig Carroll: The way it all started was their initial reports and concern throughout the media and the public that there was a toxic stew, if you will, now bottled up inside the levees in New Orleans. So the first mission environmentally was to sample the flood waters to

see what it was the people were swimming in, walking in, wading in, what the responders were dealing with.

27. Shots of EPA contracting teams collecting sediment samples are shown as the narrator and Craig Carroll continue.

Narrator: As flood waters then began to recede, sediment left behind also became a concern. Like the flood waters, the sediments were tested for a large suite of biological and chemicals pollutants.

Craig Carroll: There were lots of questions about the toxic sludge or the residual and residue as it called. So the next round of sampling was to determine okay, well what is that? Is that sludge, is it just sediment, is it a problem, is it any different then the sediment in the lake? And so we initiated a round of sediment sampling.

28. Shots of the EPA ASPECT Plane and TAGA vehicle are shown as the narrator continues.

Narrator: To measure air quality along the Gulf coast, EPA utilized a number of highly specialized environmental tools.

The Agency's ASPECT, or Spectral Imagery of Environmental Contaminants Technology airplane gathered environmental screening data.

EPA's TAGA, or Trace Atmospheric Gas Analyzer mobile laboratory provided real-time air monitoring and sampling data. The TAGA can collect samples while driving, mimicking multiple monitoring stations. Specialized instrumentation on the bus also analyzes compounds at ultra low concentrations.

29. Shots of the REAC air team prepping equipment and performing air monitoring are shown as the narrator and Bill Albrecht, USEPA Environmental Response Team explain.

Narrator: Prior to residents returning to homes in suspect neighborhoods and communities, EPA contractors also performed more traditional air monitoring activities.

Bill Albrecht: What we're doing is we're conducting activity-based air sampling. That is to represent typical activities that individuals going back to their neighborhoods would conduct, and we're trying to estimate what sort of exposures they might be subject to in doing those activities. The four items that we're looking at today are volatile

organic compounds. We're also looking at asbestos, which is a fiber that will be in the air. We're conducting some personal sampling for particulates, using a direct-reading instrument. We're looking at poly-nuclear aromatic hydrocarbons, which are byproducts of combustion. And last, we're looking at metal, particularly lead.

30. Shots of a Level C team donning PPE, then making an entry into a school meat locker are shown as the narrator and Crater Williamson continue.

Narrator: During the recovery of any large natural disaster, responders need to stay flexible, Katrina and Rita were certainly no exception for EPA.

Carter Williamson: A lot of times it's a different kind of media or a different kind of situation that we're not tested in or we don't have the technical ability in, but that's where the rubber meets the road. We've had issues with rotten meat in freezers in schools that posed a biohazard issue that we didn't anticipate with the hurricane response that we reacted to. We try to find that avenue or find that way to get our foot in the door and at least provide some type of solution.

31. Shots of large piles of home contents in front of a house, along with shots from a white good staging area are shown as the narrator continues

Narrator: Contents of many flood-damaged homes were considered worthless. EPA teamed with the Corps of Engineers to collect thousands of discarded appliances, known as white goods. At collection sites, EPA ensured that Freon, compressor oil, mercury switches and even rotten food were removed from the white goods, preventing these substances from potentially contaminating the environment.

32. Shots of grounded boats and contractor teams removing fuel from vessels are shown as the narrator and Terry Stilman explain.

Narrator: Katrina and Rita affected thousands of small businesses in coastal communities. Especially hard hit was the fishing industry. The US Coast Guard Strike Team and their contractors lead the effort to recover grounded fishing vessels.

Terry Stilman: There's about 450 vessels that, through the storm surge, were either run aground or capsized or partially sunk. And the operation is such that we remove the fuel from the vessel, remove the oil, pump out the ballast, take off the batteries, really take out every sort of HAZMAT that we can. And those vessels that

can be—that can be saved will be saved. Some of the vessels are insured. I would say most are not.

33. Shots of USEPA Administrator Steve Johnson surveying damage in the area and visiting the region 4 command post are shown as the narrator and Terry Stilman continue.

Narrator: EPA Administrator Steve Johnson visited the Gulf region numerous times to get ground knowledge of the damage and check on the recovery progress.

Terry Stilman: It's a real morale boost for the folks in the field. We also had the Regional Administrator stop in several times over the last few weeks. And I think it shows us that what we're doing here is important and important enough for the Regional Administrator and the Administrator to stop in. And they've shared with us that we're doing a good job, and we certainly appreciate that and certainly appreciate the attention.

34. A montage of shots from throughout the program are shown as the narrator, Carter Williamson, Chris Russell, and Craig Carroll make closing comments.

Narrator: Responder realize that there's still much work ahead. It will take months, and even years for some communities to rebuild homes, businesses and municipal services. But the people of the Gulf remain undaunted.

USEPA and their contractors are proud to play a part, not only in providing needed environmental expertise, but even in smaller ways, to renew the economy and spirit of the region.

Chris Russell: I think one of the key elements of the high morale out here is the fact that every responder, every contractor, every Coast Guard, every state rep, everyone here has a piece of ownership in this response. Just the fact, that a resident can walk down to their slab -- not their house, their slab -- and know they can walk up there safely with no HAZMAT there, they're happy. They know they can to up there and just have their moment of time, their inner peace with what's happened. In a small way, we're opening that door for them to get there.

Carter Williamson: Every time we respond to something, there's always something that comes along that tests us. And I think the mentality of the federal OSC is to be tested. We like that challenge. That we can go out and be paid by the federal government to

witness history and to make changes in people's lives that benefit the whole collective. There's a lot of job satisfaction in this job. It is a very rare OSC that would want to give up that role.

Craig Carroll: We're essentially a living laboratory here. We're doing stuff that's never been done by the agency. This is really the first time that the NRP has come out of the chutes. So I think people are actually having an experience that when they have some time to look back on it will be amazing, absolutely amazing. We'll be setting policy, precedent; we're defining the way the agency responds to large events. And, I think when everybody has time to look back, they're going to realize that the things EPA has been able to do through ICS and through the field-based knowledge that comes from the response program and some of their scientific support behind that program, is just incredible.

Fade to black. The text then appears over black:

"The preceding video was shot during the third week of the Katrina/Rita response, and therefore does not include all of the activities and personnel that were involved as the response developed over the following months into the largest response operation in the history of the Environmental Protection Agency. This effort will continue until the EPA mission is completed. "