



Cumberland County Fire Chief's Association

"Preservation of Life and Property through Organization"

Minutes of the October 2, 2018 **Hurricane Florence**



Special - After Action Review – Meeting

The special After Action Review meeting of all fire departments was hosted by the Pearce's Mill Fire Department. We thank Chief Marley and his staff for their hospitality and snacks.

- Call to Order:** The meeting was called to order by President Johnson at 7 pm.
- Opening Prayer:** Fire Chief Wayne Lucas provided the opening prayer.
- Pledge of Allegiance:** Fire Chief Gary Brock led the membership with the pledge of allegiance.
- Roll Call:** Roll call was conducted with 17 departments and 9 associate members present.
- Members Absent:**

Fire/EMS Departments: Fort Bragg FD, CFEMS, Bethany

Associate Members: Fort Bragg EMS, Retired Fire Chiefs, Hazmat, and Sheriff's Office

Background:

On September 14, 2018 Hurricane Florence affected Cumberland County, Municipalities within and Fort Bragg, North Carolina. Throughout the declared State of Emergency, Florence brought heavy rainfall along with unprecedented creek, tributaries and river flooding of both the Little and Cape Fear Rivers as well as flooding in all our low lying and flood borne areas. With lessons learned from Hurricane Matthew in October 2016, Emergency Services throughout Cumberland County took coordinated protective measures, consisting of orchestrated response efforts. These endeavors were augmented throughout the storm period in order to enhance water related rescues and related emergency response operations. After the storm passed and flood waters receded all efforts transitioned into the recovery phase of Hurricane Florence.

Meeting Guidelines:

Chief Johnson set the ground rules and stressed constructive points, related to the response period of Hurricane Florence. Each fire department or agency present spoke to issues they encountered during Hurricane Florence which can be found below. The below text is taken verbatim from input provided by each fire department and agency. Each department was urged to address both strengths and perceived weaknesses in order to evaluate our weakness and propose corrective action if possible or warranted.

Station 1 – Eastover (Chief Cannizarro)

Areas Needing Improvement:

800 MHZ issues. Programing issues with base and mobile radios. Radios would indicate out of range.

Station 2/8 – Vander (Chief Bradshaw)

Areas Needing Improvement:

County needs a backup radio plan to ensure communication is not interrupted. This needs to be coordinated and in place. The VIPER system did not work well.

Not a fan of VIPER radio system.

IMT (split) worked well and are in favor of doing it again. It was a good choice to split the county into two areas. The county IC needs additional personnel with him/her.

Outside resources need liaisons assigned with them to ensure they arrive where needed. There was an issue with SWTs NOT arriving where assigned due to non-familiarity.

Outside resources require radios. Need to be able to communicate with us.

Boats need an accurate numbering system. Ghost numbers for additional boats that are stood up.

Fire departments need LNOs at the EOC.

County Fire departments need representation at all news conferences.

Fire departments should be involved in all planning stages for the event.

Boat numbers need to be addressed in the apparatus numbering policy to include additional boats brought in from outside agencies.

Flood evacuation notices are important.

STRENGTHS:

Buses were great.

Fuel trucks were good, but under staffed to run station to station.

Military support was much better this time. High water vehicles worked well.

Fuel truck prepositioning was great, but didn't have manpower to run it.

Station 3 - Pearce Mills (Chief Marley)

Areas Needing Improvement:

AVL needs to be pre-coordinated.

STRENGTHS:

Request for extra personnel needs to be in the system before the storm.

Station 4 – Cotton (Chief Harris)

Areas Needing Improvement:

Miscommunication on dam break in Hoke County prompted the station evacuation.

Multiple swift water resources responded to the area when the dam breach was announced which would have worked well if the breach would have occurred.

Area command needs to be done sooner.

Co-locate county and city fire operations in one place for county-wide events

Confirm and locate all water assets located in the county. Identify capabilities of each asset.

County needs to acquire high axle vehicles for evacuations.

Establish a fire rep and a rescue rep in the EOC.

Better pre-staging of resources, boats, high axle vehicles etc.

Incorporate GIS mapping for affected areas.

STRENGTHS:

Activity Buses was a great resource.

Station 5 - Cumberland Road (Chief Parrish)

Areas Needing Improvement:

Communications

Too many units utilizing the ground channel as opposed to MCTs

Freedom App/iPads were ineffective and essentially useless.

Relying on cellular data or Wi-Fi provided somewhat ineffective.

I AM RESPONDING seemed to have some issues.

Missed communications when the Viper came back up.

Still believe that pre-staging barricades in areas/roadways known for flooding would help prevent driving through these areas.

Notification times for conference calls during operational periods.

Did not find out there were personnel staged to provide manpower until late Sunday and not being utilized, and department staff very fatigued.

STRENGTHS:

Communications

Communications plans established pre-storm.

Predetermined TAC channels.

Predetermined EM/EOC channel.

The ability to communicate via MCTs with CAD 11 and 12

Operations

Conference calls pre-storm.

Holding down tree and wire calls unless a life hazard existed.

Pre-staged buses for transportation of evacuees.

Station 12 – Bethany – (Email from Chief Autry)

Areas Needing Improvement:

800 MHZ radio system was proving to need some work.

Lack of communication through the storm passed down from the EOC to our local departments.

When we were going to have a conference call, we had to a delay in notification.

We had not internet and no email.

Slow cell service.

Swift water rescue team responded to the wrong location (Maxwell Street in COF versus

Maxwell Road in Bethany)

May need to have Cumberland County personnel with each boat team.

Need CCEMS Paramedics that are trained in swift water with each rescue boat. We had a trauma patient that had been in the river for two days after a wreck and their policy states they have to be swift water trained to get on a boat in moving water.

Different information was passed on to rescue teams than to the fire departments.

Translators are needed in the EOC or on call. Had a patient that spoke Korean at one of our water rescues.

Station 13/19 - Stoney Point (Chief Johnson Sr.)

Areas Needing Improvement:

Conference calls. Timely notification was lacking and no roll call resulting in information breakdowns by stations not on conference call.

County Press releases during storm affected VFD's while VFD's had no knowledge of information made public nor was PRESS Conference information provided for public officials press releases to VFD's – Representation COF only.

800 MHZ issues – repeat issue from Matthew

Area commands for swift water teams established mid-stream, but created issues for us due to many established moving parts both internally and externally when we were required to change frequencies mid-stream and we were not on the conference call that facilitated the change – with no follow up from EOC.

No feedback on submitted requests.

Law assets during disaster assigned to FD

Set area command early moving forward.

Utilize public emergency messaging alerts.

Initially kept in the dark on shelter information.

Inaccurate info on dam failures created a social media nightmare.

Assign Liaison from CCFCA (Chief Officer) in EOC per 12 hour ops period – rotated by FDs

Procure – programs designated to handle disaster management that is compatible with county and state EM (WEB EOC)

Stay ahead of social media – bad information.

STRENGTHS:

No known ES worker injuries or deaths

Pre-Staging School Activity Buses every VFD and HM & SL for mass transportation
Storm provided time to plan and monitor storm.

Initiated coordination conference early –

Pre-staged SWTs

Re-routing tree down calls to DOT and Power line calls to utilities

Used MCTs or tablets for communications with dispatch and interagency worked well and provided timely responses.

Pre-assigning tactical talk groups / channels to VFD's

Internal area coordination communications – Stations 3, 4,5,13 & 21

Being able to utilize COF 800MHz as a back up to county VIPER

Stations 15/20 & 25 – Westarea (Chief Bowen)

Areas Needing Improvement:

While initial planning was beneficial, emphasis was not placed on allocation of resources. This could somewhat be attributed to the process for requesting resources as the county chiefs are responsible for their individual requests. However, at the onset of the event, the placement of resources (boats, water rescue teams, high wheeled vehicles, fuel trucks etc.) throughout the county was not adequate. Planning on a more macro scale would prove beneficial, even if this manifested through suggestions to chiefs in a group forum so that they can make these requests. It does not appear as though much if any thought was given to the overall placement of resources prior to the event. The busses were a benefit, but they are people movers, not rescue vehicles. Westarea has roughly 50 miles of river frontage. Spring Lake has a considerable amount as well. Both districts have previous history of flooding issues during Matthew, however no resources were allocated nor suggested north of Fayetteville whatsoever until they were requested on our end. Staging of fuel and response equipment in the area of Andrews Road would be a good idea going forward. It can service us, Spring Lake and get across 295 to Wade and Godwin-Falcon (river conditions permitting).

While the original communications plan was well thought out, weaknesses were identified early on, before the onset of the incident with the possibility of site-trunking with our coms plan. When these issues came to pass, there was no communication or guidance from EOC other than “go to VHF”. This was not just inconvenient it was dangerous and sold our response capability short. We do not feel as though it would have been prudent to undertake any operations in an IDLH environment under this backup coms plan. The lack of ability to communicate and

maintain accountability of resources during dangerous storm conditions was dangerous enough, but we lost the ability to perform menial everyday responses without a reliable communications plan. At one point, we were relaying communications from Spring Lake to the EOC because they could not communicate at all. These things will happen during extraordinary events, systems will fail. However, there seemed to be an attempt on EOC's part to fix the problem. The problem was fixed when in an unrelated phone call with Chief Hill, Chief Bowen mentioned the radio system failure. Within 30 minutes, we had moved over to city channels, trunking issues were gone. And we were back to our original coms plan, albeit on different channels. EOC's posture within the context and many others seemed to be a wait and see if it fixes itself. Overall communication once the incident commenced was ineffective. We had great input and feedback prior to the incident, but once the green flag dropped, our EOC was ineffective. There was no communications in regard to road closures or pertinent information out to the individual stations. Harnett County, by comparison, was great in this area. They provided great feedback with road closures, trees down etc. We work with both agencies and the comparisons may not be apples to apples, but a county of our size and population should be on top of our game.

The initial plan of forwarding calls for trees down to DOT was not effective. At several points during the incident, the majority of roads in our district were blocked at multiple points. We as a department cleared all roads within our district. We did not see a DOT truck through the duration of the incident.

The process for closing roads/bridges was not effective. We received no guidance for closing bridges other than "use your judgement until at least Monday. We are not engineers. Once the bridges at 217, Wire Road, Elliot Bridge Road and those in Spring Lake were closed, Highway 401 was the only bridge open between Harnett and Cumberland Counties. Couple this with the fact that I-95 and 301 were shut down. Highway 401 at this point became a major thoroughfare. In addition to a lack of guidance for when this bridge should potentially be shut down also, there was no support for this portion of the event. We requested law enforcement to assist in traffic control at the 401 bridge. This request was initially denied outright. Harnett County Sherriff Wayne Coats reached out to Sherriff Wright and asked again. We received two deputies to assist. They responded to the wrong location and had to be moved to the bridge to keep traffic moving along. Once they were in place, the blockages cleared and traffic flowed smoothly with no backups. This lasted two hours and at that time we were told that SO would not be assisting with traffic or crowd control. Both SO units cleared the scene. Once this occurred, traffic was backed up in both directions as much as 10 miles, mostly due to rubber necking at the bridge. Couple this with the fact that the bridge could have been shut at any moment and you would have had 10 miles worth of cars, trucks, and tractor trailers to turn around on the road and move back in the opposite direction. We understand that resources were spread thin, but the outright denial to perform any traffic or crowd control is a failure of the system.

The planning and support for the river evacuations were totally ineffective. On Friday evening, we were notified by Harnett County EOC that they would commence a mandatory evacuation at 0630 on Saturday morning. At this time, we notified EOC and requested guidance as to whether we would be conducting evacuation on our side of these same rivers. We were told that EOC was monitoring the situation. On a conference call a couple hours later, we asked about the evacuation and were told that we would not be discussing evacuation during this call. Saturday morning at 0630, Harnett County commenced evacuation with a planning meeting, handing out maps, individual address points, evacuation notices and flyers. They also provided 150 people

from Harnett County Fire Departments, LEO etc. Many of these evacuations occurred within our contracted response area (which we understand was not the responsibility of Cumberland County). This was a streamlined operation accomplished with 12 hours of lead time. Harnett County asked at the completion of their evacuations if we would like to utilize their personnel to assist with our evacuations. We had no guidance from EOC at this point. At 2PM, we were notified that Cumberland County would be issuing a mandatory evacuation order with evacuations to be completed by 3PM on Sunday, the same time as Harnett County evacuations, with nearly 24 hours less lead time. We received no support or guidance from EOC for this event. There was no plan, no documentation, no address points, no evacuation notices, no flyers etc. We were told to evacuate one mile from the center of the Cape Fear and Little Rivers. That is all. This includes nearly 50 miles of river frontage in our district. We were allocated two high-wheeled vehicles (one of which we sent to assist Spring Lake) and 6 SO deputies. We arranged plans, briefings, notifications, flyers etc. for the event. During the operation, 6 more deputies were sent to assist. They were not told to report to us and were freelancing riding around, two or more miles from the river evacuating any house they came across. The overall process for the evacuation was from start to finish, planning to execution, totally ineffective and inadequate from EOC's perspective.

STRENGTHS:

Initial communication and organizational planning was a strength. As a county, everyone took this storm much more seriously than Matthew and prior planning reflected this. Initial assignment of TAC channels for departments was beneficial. Activity bus placement prior to the event was also a benefit.

Station 16 – Wade (Chief Hill)

Areas Needing Improvement:

ICS/IMT training for county leaders and response Chiefs

Communications (both internal and external) – remember that not every Chief lives by smart phone.

Preplanning for large scale events.

Resource allocations – should be requested county-wide, not by the individual departments.

CCFCA representative in the EOC.

Pre-staging of road barriers at fire stations.

Coordination of food/housing for responders.

Need for Unified Command of the incident.

Evacuation zone was not establish by inundation maps.

We were better during this storm than Matthew.

STRENGTHS:

Initial communication and organizational planning was a strength. As a county, everyone took this storm much more seriously than Matthew and prior planning reflected this. Initial assignment of TAC channels for departments was beneficial. Activity bus placement prior to the event was also a benefit.

Pre-deployed resources

Area command concept

Centralized coordination of specialty assets.

Ability to utilize FFD and Viper radio system interchangeably as back ups

Pre-notification of flood prone areas.

Non-fire response to tree and power lines down.

Shelter transportation.

Station 17 - Godwin Falcon Fire (Chief Lucas)

Areas Needing Improvement:

With the loss of commercial power, stations functioned with generators but no internet.

Also, the loss of public telephone (landline, fax, alarm service)

Loss of county Viper. Attempts made to provide emergency service via City of Fayetteville System

Public shelters were designated, but some had no generators.

Buses were provided to assist people getting to shelters, but took manpower from the respective stations to take people to shelters.

When I-95, Hwy 13, US 301 etc. closed, vehicles were dumped on rural town streets with no places to go. They came to the rural fire stations for food, water, shelter etc.

Lack of signage and barricades by DOT.

Food and water was provided, but not until after the greatest need.

Informed by Sherriff's Office that traffic control was not their responsibility, but a responsibility of SHP. Advised they would help after they took care of their other responsibilities.

Called for fuel truck. Provided by another fire department and not the county school tanker.

Believe that rural fire departments are pretty much on their own in disasters such as Hurricane Matthew and Hurricane Florence due to being isolated by debris, water, and roads out of service.

Station 18 - Grays Creek (Chief Herndon & Matthews)

Areas Needing Improvement:

Communications.

Holding tree and power line calls didn't work for us. Resulted in citizens not receiving service.

STRENGTHS:

SWTs supported us well.

Using a front end loader/backhoe to clear trees worked well for us. All should consider doing this.

Station 21 - Hope Mills (Chief Hodges)

Areas Needing Improvement:

Town Hall lost power which rendered email and phones useless (EM was contacted and advised to contact us via cell phone no further information was disseminated to HMFD, HMPD or town management.

Communications lost power requiring fire departments to switch to city talk groups.

Even though HMFD walkie-talkies had city channels in the same frequencies, they were denied when keyed up.

We were not aware of an East and West Command until I heard same on the radio.

Not sure who was directing water resources.

FFD personnel showed up at the Hope Mills Lake Dam to film same without any notification to town personnel.

Press conferences only included Cumberland County and City of Fayetteville.

Bus and HMFD personnel were sent to Sanders Road on the other side of Hwy 301. Occupants were not there. When we contacted EOC, no one knew anything about same.

Information regarding Lake Upchurch was not relayed to departments downstream by Emergency Management.

Miscommunication with road closures.

Responder with Task Force not vetted, we don't know what we need to do about that.
Cajon Navy

STRENGTHS:

Got the fuel truck ahead of the storm.

Got the buses to use for evacuation ahead of the storm.

Got FEMA USAR team ahead of the storm.

Stations 3, 4, 5, 13 and 21 met before the storm for planning purposes and contacted each other daily.

Not dispatched to tree and power line calls.

We were contacted by Mike Naylor with Cumberland County.

Set up our own control room.

Owned our own Tac Channels.

Went out early to encourage evacuations

Station 22 - Spring Lake (Chief Richardson)

Areas Needing Improvement:

Unable to use FFD channels on mobile radios. Portable radios worked.

Fuel staging in our area – we were able to get fuel out of Ft. Bragg, but they had a limited supply.

Unaware of some of the conference calls – the establishment of the area commands (east/west) and the channel changes.

Staging of resources on our side of the county for Stations 15, 20 and 25, Ft. Bragg and Spring Lake.

No mapping provided for potential flood effects when the Little River would crest. This resulted in the Town Public Works Director making our own maps.

Work to confirm power restoration at fire departments and town facilities. Received no answer from Duke Power (twice) on emergency tickets. Received some info from a Duke Power supervisor during evacuation of an apartment complex.

PAR checks on boats – FFD boat 2 was not checked on for approximately 1 ½ hours between 2 and 4 AM while doing a rescue/evacuations in Spring Lake.

Boat and water rescue channels had too much traffic on a few channels.

No representation from NCDOT at all about shutting down 210 and North Bragg Blvd until it happened.

Need Inundation maps for flooding to identify areas for Evacuations.

Power restoration didn't work so well. Numerous calls were not fruitful.

PAR checks for boats need address. Units were overwhelming each other.

High water trucks didn't communicate when they were on the move leading to a loss of accountability.

STRENGTHS:

Started notifications around the Little River three to four days in advance.

Buses were a great benefit to SLFD. Transported evacuees until the Friday after the storm.

Coordinated with Moore County EM for estimated water effects from Wood Lake and the Little River since Woodlake Dam was breached during Matthew.

Liked no wire or tree calls.

Station 23 – Stedman (Capt. Jeff Fogle)

Areas Needing Improvement:

Needed more info on shelter status.

Create contracts with hotels for EOC personnel.

EOC needs to update the county shelter numbers for occupant loads and when future shelter will be open.

STRENGTHS:

Assigned liaisons for outside units. Worked well.

Assigned radios to outside units.

Station 24 - Grays Creek (Chief Marsh)

Areas Needing Improvement:

Changing frequencies caused issues.

Our boat didn't get put on the resource list.

EM channels didn't work.

Needed disabled capable bus and was unable to get one.

We should use VHF for backup during storms.

Requested LE for overdose and cardiac arrest and didn't get assistance.

Station 26/27 - Beaver Dam (Chief Brock)

Areas Needing Improvement:

Lack of positive notification or schedules, and not using all available sources of communications to notify Chief's and staffing or conference calls.

Not willing to provide requested water and food prior to storm's arrival.

Lack of up to date DOT road conditions and closures in district and county wide.

Lack of printed list of strike teams and resources on hand and their locations.

Lack of communication between agencies in EOC when resources being supplied or removed, i.e. got OSFM to supply MRE's and water to us on the second day. A CCSO truck showed up and took 2/3's of the MRE's to take to Mac Williams shelter due to the shelter running short of food. This reflects bad planning on shelter managers.

ID's for strike teams.

EOC needs to update emails

FFD radios were out of range for our department.

A rep from each agency having the correct information needs to be present in the EOC.
Fuel trucks need to be equipped with AC/DC pumps.

Communications need to be established and maintained with other counties.

STRENGTHS:

Hotline to EOC for fire departments.

Holding down tree and line calls.

Use of Tactical channels and remote command centers.

Buses and fuel trucks availability

Forestry (Ranger Gottfried)

Worked logistics for EOC

National Guard worked well.

EOC (Director Jackson, G. Booth & A. Johnson)

Raised points and thanked everyone. Addressed WebEOC and how it will be forthcoming.

Addressed the emergency manager/emergency service director hiring briefly.

Gene Booth spoke to the conference call issue and said he would work toward resolution. He stressed attending the FEMA webinar so all understand what's necessary and how to get funds.

Adam thanked all for the feedback. He stressed a preplan for radio backup. Will need the out of county contacts for future operations. Please pass to Adam.

Sean Johnson asked about the national public safety talk groups. Sean has worked with the Viper guys on the radio issue. He realizes there are issues with the system. He explained the value/benefits of Viper for use and addressed the over-usage of the system. Weather effects on the towers can affect communications.

Fire Commissioner: (Commissioner Keefe)

Commissioner Keefe thanked the Chiefs and their perspective departments and Emergency Services and spoke of partnerships set up with the hospitals and Fort Bragg to provide medevac coverage in case the Cape Fear River flooded to the point where transportation between the two sides would be cut off. He talked about the bigger picture, from the commissioner's perspective and discussed the interagency cooperation between both the county and municipalities. In closing he appreciated everyone working together and asked that all the chiefs to return to their perspective stations and pass on his and the board of commissioners appreciation.

Adjournment:

The meeting was adjourned at 2058 by President Johnson Sr.

Respectfully Submitted:

Assistant Chief Murphy/1903/16 Oct 18