

EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS CHECKLIST

Hurricane Harvey roared ashore in 2017 with winds of 130 miles per hour, dropping more than 34 trillion gallons of water. In its wake, the storm left 200 million cubic yards of debris spread out over hundreds of square miles. More than 210,700 homes — single-family, multiple-family and mobile — were damaged or destroyed. At the height of Harvey, more than 39,000 people were housed in shelters throughout the state. The massive displacement of people, and the intense and widespread damage to private property and public infrastructure, made Harvey a truly unprecedented event.

While the skies have cleared and the news media has moved on, Texas' Gulf Coast communities are still recovering. Some areas of the state have suffered from inadequate resources. A lack of state and federal assets have impacted and delayed recovery efforts.

We can't stop the next storm from happening, but with the lessons learned from Hurricane Harvey, we can be prepared.

▶ STEPS TO TAKE



EMERGENCY HOUSING after a disaster is essential.

Nearly a year after the storm, the pace of the biggest housing recovery effort in modern history remains slow. Displaced families remain in temporary housing far from their homes and the distribution of trailers is mired in bureaucratic delays.

Housing recovery is a critical step in limiting the long-term economic impact of a disaster. Studies show it can take up to four times longer for economically disadvantaged disaster victims to recover than those with more financial resources. When workers and their families cannot return home, it damages the local economy.

▶ **On emergency housing, the state should:**

- ✓ Prioritize identifying and addressing housing needs immediately after a storm.
- ✓ Connect residents with temporary housing such as trailers within days, not weeks.
- ✓ Prioritize housing for low to moderate income workers—such as apartments and multi-family units—for damage appraisal and grants or loans.



DEBRIS REMOVAL is essential to securing the safety of residents, restoring utilities, providing access for emergency vehicles and promoting the recovery of public services and private businesses.

Counties often lack sufficient local reserves to adequately respond to this immediate need. Debris removal is slow in some counties. After Harvey, contractors abandoned commitments for larger contracts in urban areas and other states, and because of FEMA's slow contract review process.

Any reimbursement is often months or years away, and the immediate expenditures can leave a county in financial peril. For example, San Patricio County spent \$4.5 million on debris removal after Harvey but has received only \$65,000 in reimbursements as of April 2018.

▶ **On debris removal, the state should:**

- ✓ Maintain a disaster relief fund to provide immediate support to local entities for debris removal and other needs.
- ✓ Ensure there is sufficient state funding to support local disaster recovery efforts even when federal participation thresholds are not met.
- ✓ Pre-qualify debris removal contractors to prevent contract defaults and price-gouging.
- ✓ Pool debris removal assets to ensure proper allocation and prevent over-promising.



A STRONG STATE AND LOCAL PARTNERSHIP saves time, money, and most important of all, lives. We need a streamlined system that cuts out bureaucratic hurdles, provides timely and accurate information, and empowers local communities.

During the immediate aftermath of Harvey, county officials had to spend excessive time seeking accurate information from different responding agencies—time that could have been better spent on recovery efforts. At times, different counties in East Texas were receiving conflicting information from state and federal agencies.

There is no question that Texas will face more storms and other natural disasters in her future. Together we can be ready. State agencies and local governments can take a proactive stance ahead of the next disaster.

▶ **On closer coordination, the state should:**

- ✓ Designate a single state agency to be responsible for training local officials and providing immediate response specialists to assist local officials in coordinating with the state and FEMA.
- ✓ Ensure this same state agency provides a hotline for immediate consultation and instruction for local officials on proper documentation to qualify and implement recovery efforts and expenditures.
- ✓ Designate a trained individual or team familiar with the grant process to serve as a coordination point for jurisdictions regarding grant opportunities, grant guidelines, data requirements and assistance with finding opportunities to access recovery funds.
- ✓ Incentivize private participation in recovery efforts through state tax credits against the margins and severance taxes.
- ✓ Not restrict the financial flexibility of counties to plan for, respond to and recover from disasters. Restricting revenue diminishes emergency response by limiting access to necessary training and supplies such as boats for rescue and evacuation facilities.



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