After Action Report / Hurricane Isaac / August 28 - 29, 2012

01 Oct 12 / Version 1.0.0

INTRODUCTION:

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HURRICANE ISAAC BACKGROUND:

Hurricane Isaac was a slow-moving tropical cyclone that caused extensive damage along the Louisiana and Mississippi Gulf Coasts. On August 28, prior to becoming a hurricane, Isaac attained one of the lowest barometric pressure measurements for any storm below hurricane strength, with a pressure of 976 mbar.

The ninth tropical cyclone, ninth named storm, and fourth hurricane of the 2012 Atlantic hurricane season, Isaac developed from a tropical wave on August 16th. On August 21 it strengthened into a tropical storm. Isaac passed over Hispaniola on the 25th and then moved over Cuba as a strong tropical storm, killing at least 34 people in Hispaniola, before it entered the Gulf of Mexico.

Once Isaac got into the gulf, it was forecasted to become a strong category 2 hurricane. However, the land interaction with Hispaniola disrupted the system and prevented a solid core from developing until just before landfall. Due to its size, a high storm surge and a large area of tropical storm force winds was observed.

Isaac reached hurricane strength the morning of August 28. The storm made its first U.S. landfall at 18:45 CDT that evening near the mouth of the Mississippi River. It made a second and final landfall at 02:00 CDT the next morning at Port Fourchon, Louisiana. At least 9 fatalities were confirmed in the United States - 5 in Louisiana and two each in Mississippi and Florida.

LDS COMMUNICATIONS BACKGROUND:

With the projected path of Isaac hitting the Florida coast, the initial idea was to form a triangle with Orlando, Washington DC and Bridgeton as the three points. To that end Dan Goodson NE3Z was asked to head the effort to organize a net. As it became apparent the path would be to the west and would impact the Louisiana coast, Washington DC was dropped in favor of Houston and Eric Nelson WN9E took over the organization of the net.

The first communications check occurred at 21:00 ET 25 Aug 12. There was an ongoing contest on the 26th that created a wall of RF and the contacts were difficult at best. Also on the 26th Sam Neal was asked by Doug Reneer to be the contact point in Houston and Washington DC stood down and Eric WN9E became the net manager.

On the 29 Aug 12 net operations were suspended and put on a stand-by mode. The net was terminated on 01 Sep 12.

LESSONS LEARNED, FINDINGS, SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. HURRICANE IRENE AFTER ACTION REPORT: First and foremost, the recommendations of the Hurricane Irene AAR have not been discussed since September 2011 nor have they been appropriately implemented.

Recommendation: A training program based around the Irene & Isaac AAR's must be created and implemented. (CCP) (Action item for CCP)

2. CURRENT ERC-EAST EMERGENCY COMMUNICATIONS GUIDELINES: Dated 29 Jul 12 / Version 1.0.5 need to be re-written to reflect a number of changes including dropping the mileage numbers and going to days to landfall, net times and frequencies and durations.

Recommendation: Make changes to the Emergency Communications Guidelines an immediate priority. (CCP) (Action item for CCP)

3. IT WAS REPORTED THAT THE USE OF LOCAL TIMES LED TO CONFUSION DUE TO TIME ZONE DIFFERENCES: This could be further aggravated by a more widespread situation that involved more stateside and foreign stations.

Recommendation: Where appropriate, for all nets other that local nets, the use of UTC time would eliminate any confusion that could be caused by multiple time zone involvement. (DMH)

4. MULTIPLE ISSUES OCCURRED USING THE GENERAL PORTION OF THE BANDS: 40 meters was the worst with all the broadcast station above 7.2MHz. Contesting was a huge problem on Sunday afternoon and evening on 26 Aug 12. Most frequencies on 40 and 20 meter were in use. The Carolina nets were invited to participate Sunday evening. Several began to check in and contesters quickly piled up overwhelming the NCS.

Recommendation: Consider the use of the Extra portion of the bands or the WARC 17 or 12 meter bands for use. (DMH) (WTM)

5. NET SCRIPT: The net script was unduly long for the type of net in use. Short and brief should be the goal to minimize the time required to call the net, avoid interference to or from other operations and contests in particular.

Recommendation: A short and concise net script will communicate the intention of the net in a much clearer and more easily understood form. Also, a short script will allow for quicker net operation which may become vital in a major situation. (WTM) (Action item for CCP to review script)

6. COMMAND STRUCTURE: The command structure was very evident with Dan NE3Z and Eric WN9E at the beginning of the event. When we got into Monday & Tuesday when Dan and Eric went to work and we had Storehouse NCS filling in it was difficult finding decision makers in the system that could be contacted quickly. (WTM)

   We have no protocol for what to do with messages, who to call or who to relay too. I could have gotten on one of the NTS nets and moved the traffic if needed, but to whom or to whom at Church headquarters? (CW)

   Tom N6WTM said he would report locally to his storehouse manager for the welfare side of the church. I don't recall there being any local contact with the priesthood side but I could be wrong. I just remember thinking how familiar that was; being in contact with several church operators but with no solid connection with church leaders. That's unfortunately, a common characteristic in church ERC. Hopefully, we're getting better at connecting the dots with time. (DMG)

Recommendation: In order to preclude this from happening again, a clear line for the flow of information needs to be established at the beginning and maintained throughout by reinforcing with each new NCS how and where to flow the information. (CCP) (Action item for CCP)

7. NET TIMES The process worked pretty well, except checking into the net every hour and running local nets every half hour was tiring. We may want to consider 4-hour nets at the beginning while monitoring the National Hurricane Net and Local EOC nets. Once the Hurricane makes landfall we could begin running on the hour. (TMC)

Recommendation: The EmComm guidelines need to be rewritten to incorporate the lessons learned from Irene and Isaac. (CCP) (Action item for CCP)