

After Action Report – Hurricane Milton Response

Date: October 24, 2024

Time: 1330 hrs.

Location: Hendry County EOC / Teams Meeting

Facilitator: Robert Pastula

Attendees

Robert Pastula, Roberta Garrett, Jennifer Davis, Shawn Reed, Allen Hudson, David Theroux, Lisa Sands, Tito Nieves, Shane Parker, Kristy Archer, R.D. Williams, Ioannis Gountas, Kevin Nelson, Jorge Hernandez, Tracy Nobles, Tom Levins, Don Burkhardt, Tom Lewis, Dan Brophy, Curtis Clay, Brenda Barnes, Emily Hunter, Ryan Alexander, Amy Perez.

Hurricane Milton Overview

Hurricane Milton was a historic and unprecedented storm for Florida. On October 9, 2024, it generated **15 tornadoes across the state**—including **four in Hendry County**, marking the largest tornado outbreak in Florida since 1950. The storm’s wide-ranging impacts included:

- **Statewide fatalities:** 14 lives lost.
- **Severe property damage:** More than **\$50 billion in losses** across Florida.
- **Historic rainfall:** St. Petersburg received **18.31 inches of rain in 24 hours**, classified as a **1-in-1,000-year rainfall event**.
- **Power outages:** Over **3 million residents** experienced power loss.
- **Wind damage:** Sustained winds of 120 mph caused tree falls, structural damage, and partial roof loss at Tropicana Field.

Hendry County Impact:

- Localized tornado touchdowns that required rapid response.
- Strong coordination and preparedness kept casualties low within Hendry County, despite the storm’s intensity.
- Effective early actions, such as **sandbag distribution, generator readiness, and shelter operations**, played a critical role in limiting disruption.

Purpose

This debrief was convened to:

- Celebrate the **effectiveness and professionalism** of the response teams.
 - Identify **lessons learned** in the spirit of continuous improvement.
 - Capture recommendations to further strengthen countywide preparedness.
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Key Strengths and Highlights

1. Leadership & Coordination

- Facilitators and agency leads kept operations **well-structured and collaborative**.
- Coordination between Hendry County and partner agencies (local, regional, and state) ensured resources and support were aligned quickly.

2. Rapid Adaptability

- The sudden tornado outbreak was an **unprecedented event**. Despite this, responders adapted calmly and decisively, protecting lives and minimizing injuries in the county.
- Flexibility in decision-making allowed for adjustments such as **modifying shelter times and consolidating sandbag locations**.

3. Public Communication

- Shelter schedule updates were **quickly communicated through Everbridge, Facebook, and email**, keeping residents informed and reducing confusion.
- Strong communication partnerships with schools and community agencies ensured messages were consistent and widely distributed.

4. Resource Management

- New generators, purchased ahead of hurricane season, arrived on time and were **essential in maintaining power at critical facilities**.
- Sandbag distribution centers were reorganized to maximize efficiency, and staff adapted processes mid-response to better serve the public.
- Donations of sand from private partners demonstrated the **value of community collaboration**.

5. Professionalism & Team Performance

- Teams across all agencies were praised for their **calmness, professionalism, and cooperation.**
 - Compared to previous events, the atmosphere of collaboration was stronger and more unified.
 - Staff worked long hours with unwavering dedication, ensuring public needs were met under difficult conditions.
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Opportunities for Enhancement

While the response was widely successful, the debrief identified areas where continued investment and small refinements could make operations even stronger:

1. **Public Messaging**
 - Simplify and standardize communication to avoid confusion when operational adjustments (e.g., sandbag locations) are made.
 - Promote resources like the **211 storm hotline** more aggressively to reduce call volume at the EOC.
2. **Training & Preparedness**
 - Expand scenario-based training to better prepare for rare but high-impact events like tornado outbreaks.
 - Train **dedicated shelter teams** of 10 personnel per site for 24/7 coverage, supported by standardized checklists.
3. **Resource Expansion**
 - Continue stockpiling sand ahead of hurricane season.
 - Acquire additional generators and finalize transfer switch upgrades to match shelter requirements.
 - Purchase traffic barrels and a county pickup truck for logistical support.
4. **Community Engagement**
 - Increase public outreach about shelter requirements, especially for special-needs shelters where caretakers must accompany clients.
 - Update the WINK Hurricane Guide with Hendry County maps and distribute widely before hurricane season.
5. **Technology Improvements**
 - Enhance WebEOC usability for smoother situational awareness.
 - Integrate **real-time power outage reporting** from utility providers into WebEOC for improved operational decision-making.

Next Steps

The following actions are already in progress or scheduled:

- **Facility Readiness:** Nobles Center drainage improvements; generator upgrades for the jail.
- **Operational Policy:** Agreement on uniform wind-speed thresholds for suspending first responder activity.
- **Shelter Operations:** Updated occupancy tracking, integration of animal control officers into shelter operations, and transfer switch replacements for school shelter generators.
- **Logistics:** Purchase of a county pickup truck to reduce reliance on borrowed vehicles.
- **Community Resources:** Broader promotion of the United Way 211 storm hotline and updates to the WINK Hurricane Guide.

Conclusion

The response to Hurricane Milton highlighted **the strength, professionalism, and resilience of Hendry County's emergency management system**. Despite a historic storm and unprecedented tornado outbreak, impacts were minimized, services were maintained, and the community was supported through coordinated action.

This event showcased how **preparedness investments, cross-agency teamwork, and adaptability under pressure** lead to successful outcomes. By implementing the few enhancements identified, Hendry County will be even more equipped to safeguard residents in future events.

Prepared by: Robert G. Pastula

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