

Northeast Museum Services Center



EXPERIENCE
YOUR
AMERICA

Disaster Recovery: Working Within a Government System



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- Hurricane Isabel – September 18, 2003
- An 8' storm surge flooded the Visitor Center of the Jamestown unit of Colonial National Historical Park flooding the collection storage space with 5' of brackish water
- By September 20, the Northeast Museum Services Center had personnel on the ground at the site to begin the rescue of the collection



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- Lessons learned:
 - Need to integrate cultural resources concerns into the Incident Management structure
 - Need to make disaster plans something more than a doorstep
 - Need to convince those in power that it's better to take action and be embarrassed if the storm doesn't hit
 - Need to know who to call when it hits (and it will!)

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- Surprises
 - The walkie-talkie feature of our cell phones worked when no other system did
 - “Disaster kits” are not worth the money
 - Disaster recovery companies have scouted the area and know what resources are available before you even get there
 - Almost nobody responds to a disaster like you expect

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Hurricane Ivan September 16, 2004

Fort Pickens, Gulf
Islands National
Seashore



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- Lessons learned:
 - Need to **improve integration** of cultural resources concerns into the Incident Management structure
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Hurricane Katrina
August 25-29, 2005



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• Lessons learned:

- Need to **continue to improve integration** of cultural resources concerns into the Incident Management structure
- Need to make disaster plans something more than a doorstep
- Need to convince those in power that it's better to take action and be embarrassed if the storm doesn't hit
- Need to know who to call when it hits (and it will!)

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• Logistics

- New Orleans accessible only with law enforcement escort
- Curfew
- No hotel rooms close to site (staging first from Houston then Lafayette)
- Usual contractors already under contract to FEMA



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- **Safety**
 - Public health officer determines the amount of time for exposure
 - Some level of PPE required
- **Choices**
 - What is significant?
 - What are the risks?



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What is
the cost?

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- **Surprises/Other Lessons**
 - You can prepare based on your prior experience, but no two disasters are the same
 - After the news cameras leave town, it's very hard to maintain support for the longer-term recovery effort
 - It's expensive to prepare – it's prohibitively expensive not to



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- **What do we still need to learn?**
 - Keep collections out of basements
 - Make some hard decisions about the significance of items in the collection and have an evacuation plan ready to go
 - Rehearse
 - Partner with someone outside your “danger” zone
 - If you are going to respond, make sure you are in appropriate “condition.” It’s wonderful that you’re helpful, but don’t be a burden.
 - Get training
