

DISASTERCOM



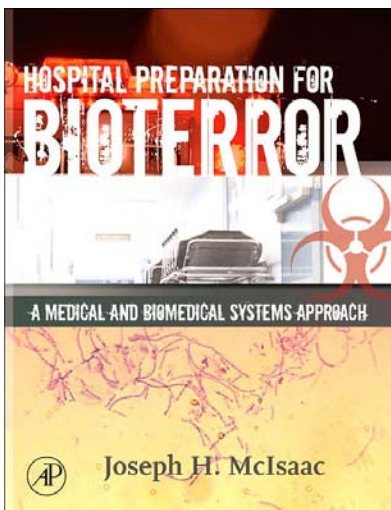
DERA Newsletter

45 Years of Service

March 2007

DERA Annual Membership Meeting

Highlights of DERA's annual meeting in Orlando on Feb. 11 included DERA member Robert Rathbone presenting his experience and tips on forming a hospital emergency radio service, and DERA member Don Banks of Global Disaster Management, Inc. sharing insights into providing DMORT services following Katrina.



Also this beautiful hardcover book was DERA's 1st place door prize at the International Disaster Management Conference. The author, Dr. Joseph McIsaac, included chapters on the adaptability of ham radio to hospital response programs and the often overlooked implications of electromagnetic interference. DERA's thanks to Dr. McIsaac for his generous donation.

Report from the Field

Sal Meloro is DERA's NE Regional Coordinator. This report shows his area of service reaches much farther than the NE.

Within hours of deadly tornados touching down on Feb. 2 in the Lady Lake area of Central Florida, my Network Operations Center notified me of the situation. I evoked an "Alert 1" status to all my all senior management to join a conference bridge.

By 1 AM a conference bridge was open, and soon I would be on a plane to the affected area. Meanwhile my team readied equipment and gear for deployment, including a 48 ft. network operations center recovery unit with 200 mobile devices and 120 internet-ready laptops, and deployed a converted mobile home capable of supporting 7 people with living quarters and supplies.

Continued on page 3



The Lake County Fire and Sheriff temporary transmitter site after the February 2 tornados.

Photo by Steve Fluker, director of engineering for Cox Radio Orlando.

Members Make Big eBay Donations

Claude Baker from Houston, Texas donated a professional camera outfit that sold on **eBay** for \$760.00, with all proceeds going to DERA. Thanks, Claude for your generosity.

A big thanks to Larry Wilcox of Denver who donated all proceeds from a \$950.00 business telephone system.

You can help also! To benefit DERA through your **eBay** sale, you need only select "DERA Disaster Resource Center" from the charity donation drop-down menu, found just after the auction starting price on the ebay listing page.

Both Claude and Larry donated 100% of their sales price, but sellers may select amounts between 10% and 100% of the final sales price. DERA is a registered eBay charity and may be designated by any eBay auction seller.

If you have items that would sell on eBay, please help us: Donate a portion to the DERA Disaster Resource Center to support the vital programs of your association.

Tornado Volunteers

LADY LAKE, FL – Governor Charlie Crist commended Florida's disaster relief agencies and volunteers for their work assisting victims of the February 2, 2007, tornadoes in Central Florida. More than 6,340 volunteers have recorded over 174,783 hours of volunteer service and provided the manpower to secure 640 roof tarps and serve 69,417 meals, among many other tasks. Our heartfelt thanks to the many DERA members who contributed to this relief effort.

DisasterCom is the quarterly newsletter of DERA International. News items and articles are always welcome.

ISSN 1521-1592

Editor: Catherine Lawhun

Membership in this Nonprofit Association is open to all who share our commitment to effective disaster preparedness and response.

See Back Page for Membership Application

The Disaster Preparedness and Emergency Response Association, International

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DERA International

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Partnerships & Affiliations Include



From Your

Editor's desk

The International Disaster Management Conference this Feb. 8-11 was great! DERA has partnered with the Emergency Medicine Learning and Resource Center for many years now. Each year the conference grows, the contacts that DERA makes allow us greater interaction and service opportunities in the disaster response community.



This year DERA members Don Banks and Robert Rathbone spoke at our Strategic Planning Workshop, and we had our first open board meeting, which was well attended.

DERA had a booth in the exhibit hall where we projected a slide show scrolling in the background featuring the pictures that our members sent in of their many activities. We also worked to develop relationships with other organizations that were exhibiting as well. The two that were most strategic by far were ESRI and Regional Information Systems Sharing (RISS).

ESRI designs and develops advanced geographic information system (GIS) technology. They have provided innumerable resources in mapping functionality to and for disaster response. Visit their website to learn more and access white papers on the state of the art involving utilizing GIS in Disaster Response at: www.esri.com

DERA recently joined a Department of Justice funded information exchange portal called RISS ATIX. Here you can post information to be shared among other community members in a secure environment, send secure email and collaborate between agencies among secure communities. This is a free service to registered members of approved communities, and may be accessed at: www.rissinfo.com

Currently communities exist for Fire/Emergency Management, Public Utilities, Law Enforcement, Government, Public Health, and Disaster Relief, to name a few.

Please continue to support our fundraisers and efforts on your behalf. We still need members to volunteer to serve as regional coordinators in several areas of the country. We have rewarding service opportunities at every level. If you would like to lend your talents and become more involved, please contact me.

God Bless,

-Catherine Lawhun
editor@disasters.org

Business Consultant Assists DERA Board

DERA board member Al Manteuffel recently spent many hours developing an outline for the DERA Board to assist with strategic development initiatives. An integral part of the Board, Al has lent his business expertise to our cause by formally outlining current trends and considerations for making funding decisions in disaster response and prioritizing objectives. The 7-page document categorically outlines several major issues that the board is currently addressing.

Thank you so very much, Al.



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Report from the Field

(Cont'd from page 1)

I arrived onsite early that morning and met with city and state officials to determine how we could best help. After checking with my Network Operations Center, I learned that 3 cell towers in the area were on generator backup power and had only 32 hours of fuel left to power those generators. We called the outsource contractor to start delivering fuel ASAP to these locations. All tower locations were tracked by GPS, so the fuel trucks knew how to locate them. (My Network Operations Center can track all fuel levels and uptime of the cell towers.)

Later that afternoon my team and all the gear arrived. Onsite were 4 SUVs for transportation; a 48' Mobile Network Operations Center nicknamed "Autobot". (An AUTOBOT transforms from a normal vehicle to a fully operational network operations center); and a mobile home living quarters (sleeps 6) with supplies and a gas BBQ grill.

All equipment and gear were put in place behind the local police station. By 10 PM the team was fully operational. At 11 PM we handed out all 200 mobile devices to city, state, local and hospital officials. We also had 10 handsets plus our own sets.

Three SUV's went on a tour of the area that night to find anyone that needed help. We offered those in need the opportunity to make calls to loved ones and/or access the internet. We also handed out water and MRE's (Meals Ready to Eat) and offered rides as needed.

After a long night, half my team members slept while the other half set up our Internet cafe with 75 laptops, 20 mobile devices, and tables and chairs for people to use the equipment. We also offered bottled water. We had 34 cases of water and more supplies on the way.

By Day 3, tornado survivors started showing up to make calls and access the Internet, sending emails to inform loved ones that they were OK. We had a line of about 100 people by midday and tried to give everyone as much time as they needed. Many of the people we assisted were over 65, many were grandparents, and many had lost everything: homes, autos and belongings.

After the first week, most displaced persons had found temporary shelter and reported their loss to their insurance

company. FEMA had arrived by then and was on location to add help.

Once local phone service and power had been restored and the clean up had begun, life began to return to normal - well, somewhat normal. I stayed onsite until that Saturday, and then started packing up gear for the return home.

Recommendations for Future Disasters-- Were Money No Object:

- Place units with satellite communications/ cell communications by all city locations especially firehouses, city centers and all residential developments so that everyone could access communications.
- Have on-call 2 reserve mobile units to be deployed as needed
- Have mobile food canteens available to cook hot meals as needed. (Trust me, after two days of eating MRE's or cold sandwiches, a burger never tasted so good.)
- Everyone should make up a Home Disaster Kit because disasters can strike anywhere and everywhere.

Thanks!
Sal Meloro

DHS Awards \$194 Million to States

WASHINGTON –The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has released \$194 million to help states and local governments prepare and implement emergency management activities through the Emergency Management Performance Grant (EMPG) program. Emergency managers have been awarded more than \$750 million since fiscal year 2004 through the program.

State emergency management agencies use EMPG funds to enhance their emergency management capabilities in a range of areas that include planning, equipping, and training, conducting exercises, and providing for all-hazards emergency management operations. In addition, EMPG funds are used to pay for personnel who write plans, conduct training and exercise programs, maintain emergency response programs, and educate the public on disaster readiness.



New Member Roster

Kim D. Gadsden-Knowles
Stone Mountain, GA

Jacqui Wilmshurst
Sheffield, S. Yorkshire, UK

Robert Rathbone, AG4ZG
Tampa, FL

Stephanie Timberlake
Plymouth, MN

Paul Lovendale
RADêCO, Inc.
Taftville, CT

Bradley Schoening
Lancaster, PA

Mark H. Krueger
Schertz, TX

Alan M. Brown
Camp Parks, CA

Welcome to DERA!

*It is our sincere aim to help you
achieve your professional and personal
goals*

We are counting on

you

to

send in your news!

REPORT: EIIP Forum

"Getting Down to Business"

BENS Task Force Plan for Improving Public-Private Coordination

Kiersten Todt Coon

Vice President for Policy
and

Ern Blackwelder

Senior Vice President, Business
Force

Business Executives for National
Security (BENS)
Washington, DC

BENS is a national, non-partisan, non-profit organization comprised of more than 500 business executives committed to volunteering their time and talent to improve the nation's security. BENS has a 24-year track record of applying business skills and best practices to achieve measurable, demonstrable improvements in government practices.

The BENS Business Force is an innovative model for regional public-private partnerships, designed to help close gaps in homeland security that neither government nor business can fill alone. BENS helps states and urban areas build regional partnerships and mobilize private sector support in four general categories:

- **Organized Collaboration:** Businesses link to state and local government emergency operations centers and information "fusion centers" to improve communication before, during and after a crisis. This collaboration helps identify threats and minimize bureaucratic roadblocks to get the right resources to the right places faster;

- **Surge Capacity/Supply Chain Management:** Businesses pledge their resources (warehouse or office space, trucks, equipment, skilled personnel, etc.) through regional, web-based registries that can be quickly tapped by first responders
(www.businessresponsetnetwork.org)

- **Mass Vaccination/Treatment:** Business Force companies contribute volunteers and skilled management to assist state and local governments in the design, testing, and execution of plans to dispense medications from the Strategic National Stockpile in the event of a pandemic or biological attack;

- **Leadership and Strategic Support:** Business Force partnerships offer best business practices and civic leadership from some of the nation's top executives to help government improve homeland security capabilities.

For the complete transcript see
www.emforum.org

DHS: \$34.6 Million in Equipment and Training Grants

Washington — The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) announced in March 2007 the award of \$34.6 million in equipment and training to first responders across the nation as a part of the Commercial Equipment Direct Assistance Program (CEDAP). DHS has already awarded more than 2,000 direct assistance grants to ensure that law enforcement and emergency responders receive specialized equipment and training to meet their homeland security mission.

"CEDAP is yet another mechanism for the department to work with our local homeland security partners in strengthening this nation's ability to prevent, protect, respond and recover from a natural disaster or terrorist attack," said George Foresman, Under Secretary for Preparedness. "This program enhances state and local communities' capabilities as well as arms their first responders with the tools to build stronger regional coordination."

CEDAP offers equipment in the following categories:

- personal protective equipment;
- thermal imaging, night vision, and video surveillance tools;
- chemical and biological detection tools; information technology and risk management tools; and
- interoperable communications equipment.

This program also focuses on smaller communities and metropolitan areas not eligible for the Urban Areas Security Initiative grant program. Awardees are required to receive training on their awarded equipment either on-site or at a CEDAP training conference.

DHS has provided more than \$69.7 million in equipment and training to law enforcement and fire departments through CEDAP since the program's inception in 2005.

For more information on CEDAP and other DHS grant programs visit
www.dhs.gov.

SALVATION ARMY RESPONDS TO DEADLY MARCH STORMS

Friday, March 2, 2007

Salvation Army emergency disaster services personnel responded after a violent storm system stretching from Minnesota to the Gulf Coast brought tornadoes and thunderstorms to the southern states and blizzard conditions to the northern states.

The Salvation Army in Henry County, Missouri brought relief to emergency responders and residents after a tornado touched down in the county. In Linn County, Kansas, the Salvation Army sent an assessment team to areas where a tornado destroyed multiple homes and killed a seven-year-old girl.

Salvation Army emergency disaster services teams were deployed to Enterprise, Alabama, after the deadly storms moved through the area ripping apart buildings including a local high school where eight students were killed.

The Salvation Army provided warm meals and support to residents as well as emergency responders dealing with the aftermath.

"Our hearts go out to those affected by the recent flurry of tornadoes. The Salvation Army has responded to each of the areas and will provide whatever relief we can to those who have been touched by this disaster," said Major John Jones, who oversees the Salvation Army's work in Alabama, Louisiana and Mississippi.

Major Darryl Kingsbury, a Salvation Army officer, is stationed at the Alabama State Emergency Management Center to provide support and to coordinate Salvation Army efforts throughout Alabama.

Aussie Radio Club Report

The State of Victoria has been facing unprecedented wildfire conditions. With the latest, including details of amateur radio's involvement, here's Jim Linton, VK3PC:

For 50 days fires raged in Victoria burning out more than a million hectares with the loss of homes, property, livestock and wildlife.

Responding agencies are stretched to the limit. They have imported fire-fighters from New Zealand, Canada and the United States.

In the midst of it all are WICEN operators assisting with communications systems for the Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE).

WICEN Victoria State Coordinator, John Kerr VK3BAF advises that operators were first stationed at Swifts Creek.

The activation, after a short while, was escalated with WICEN operators also deployed at Benalla and Mansfield. Rain that fell on Thursday eased the situation somewhat - but there's more of summer ahead.

The previous occasion on which WICEN Victoria provided assistance to DSE was in the 2002-03 Bogong bushfires in the state's north-east.

WICEN Victoria provided refresher training courses for its members in December on the operations of the DSE trunked radio system. Excellent forward planning indeed!

Earlier the Red Cross communications arm RECOM, with radio amateurs as volunteers, provided communications in December at the bushfire relief centre that was set up at Bairnsdale in Gippsland.

And also in mid-December, WICEN had 15 operators activated in Tasmania when fire swept along that's state's east-coast causing extensive damage.

With no end in sight to the fire situation as Australia remains in the grips of its worst drought for century, we're certain to see more involvement of radio amateurs as they uphold the long tradition of providing emergency communications in times of natural disasters.



Free 2007 NFPA 1600 Available On-line

The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) has released the 2007 edition of NFPA 1600 -- The Standard on Disaster/Emergency Management and Business Continuity Programs.

The 57-page document is available for free download at www.nfpa.org

The 2007 edition of NFPA 1600 is the first major revision in three years and it incorporates guidelines for preparedness programs as well as incident command during emergencies.

NFPA standards, as a rule, become required practices throughout the U.S. and many other countries, when they are incorporated by reference into governmental regulations. A local zoning regulation might say, for instance, that businesses employing over 10 people must comply with planning and emergency response provisions of NFPA 1600, while larger businesses must also comply with the business continuity provisions.

NFPA standards, themselves, are simply recommendations and guides that NFPA committees develop through a consensus of volunteers and professionals representing a wide range of fire protection, emergency management and safety disciplines.

NFPA has been involved in planning for response to mass destruction incidents since the first World Trade Center bombing in 1993. After the Oklahoma City bombing, and reinforced by the events of September 11, NFPA has been in the forefront of planning for an integrated approach to emergency management and business continuity.

Firefighting with Robots

Washington University's Mobile Computing Laboratory in St. Louis, MO, has now bridged a safety gap using wireless sensor networks to equip robots to assist in firefighting.

Computer engineers use wireless sensor networks that utilize software agents (specialized pieces of code that are self-contained and mobile) to navigate a heat seeking robot through a simulated fire and actually spot a fire by seeking out heat. A fireman can then communicate with the robot's sensors via a personal digital assistant (PDA).

The university's computer scientists have further developed software to enable software agents to move across and between sensor networks connected via the Internet and to clone themselves, thus forming complex communities of cooperating agents.

Source: Washington University in St. Louis, By Tony Fitzpatrick

Infrastructure Protection Grants Info Now Online

The DHS Infrastructure Protection Program (IPP), designed to strengthen the nation's ability to protect critical infrastructure facilities and systems, can now be found online at the DHS website: www.ojp.usdoj.gov/odp

IPP is comprised of five separate grant programs:

- Transit Security Grant Program (TSGP)
- Port Security Grant Program (PSGP)
- Intercity Bus Security Grant Program
- Trucking Security Program (TSP)
- Buffer Zone Protection Program (BZPP)

PROGRAM	FY 2006	FY2007
TSGP	\$143,240,948*	\$171,780,000
PSGP	\$168,052,500	\$201,170,000
IBSGP	\$9,503,000	\$11,640,000
TSP	\$4,081,500	\$11,640,000
BZPP	\$72,965,00**	\$48,500,000
TOTAL	\$398,562,948	\$444,730,000

*This included the FY06 Intercity Passenger Rail Security Grant Program (\$7,242,855) that was awarded as a separate program

**FY06 included a one-time Chemical Buffer Zone Protection Program (\$25,000,000)

Points of Light Tornado Hero Awards Nominations

TALLAHASSEE – Governor Charlie Crist recognized Pastor Larry Lynn of Lady Lake Church of God as one of the Honorary Tornado Heroes and Points of Light Award recipients. The award honors Pastor Lynn's commitment to his community in the wake of the February 2 tornadoes. Governor Crist also will recognize three additional tornado heroes. Floridians are invited to nominate individuals for consideration by going to www.VolunteerFloridaFoundation.org.

The non-profit Volunteer Florida Foundation manages both the Governor's Points of Light Awards program and the Florida Disaster Recovery Fund.

"Pastor Lynn's church was completely destroyed by the February 2 tornadoes, yet he has persevered in leading his congregation to help neighbors in need," said Governor Crist. "He has become an icon of dignity and determination in his community and sets an example for all of us. I invite Floridians to nominate other tornado heroes in the coming weeks."

The awards will be presented on April 4, 2007, at the Governor's Mansion, during a benefit hosted by Governor Crist and the Tallahassee Symphony Orchestra. A portion of the proceeds will benefit the Florida Disaster Recovery Fund, formerly known as the Florida Hurricane Relief Fund. The fund is dedicated to assisting tornado survivors in Central Florida with long-term recovery.

The Governor's Points of Light Award, sponsored by Royal Caribbean International and Celebrity Cruises, each week recognizes a Florida resident who demonstrates exemplary service to his or her community. A panel of judges composed of leaders in the areas of volunteerism and service evaluate all nominations and make recommendations to Governor Crist.

For more information, or to make a nomination go to www.VolunteerFloridaFoundation.org.

After tornado heroes are selected, the Points of Light Award will continue each week to honor exemplary individuals who volunteer in their communities. Volunteers come from all walks of life and represent all ages.

To volunteer as a reviewer of nominations, contact the Points of Light program director, Alicia Joyner, at Alicia.Joyner@VFFFund.org.



Governor Charlie Crist Presents Honorary Points of Light/Tornado Hero Award to Pastor Larry Lynn, Lady Lake Church of God

COORDINATED ASSISTANCE NETWORK DEPLOYED

The Coordinated Assistance Network (CAN) Steering Committee authorized the deployment of CAN to support the recovery efforts related to the rash of tornadoes that struck the southeast from February 2, 2007 - March 2, 2007. The request was submitted by Ken Skalitzy, FEMA Volunteer Agency Liaison (VAL) with input from many other service organizations and communities.

The CAN portal offers a secure web based tool to share client and resource data among the many agencies involved in the response and recovery efforts.

Many enhancements have been made to the CAN system and website. Some of the recent enhancements include:

- An interactive secure website
- A single site for agencies and case workers to download registration forms to gain access to CAN
- Regular training offered on line via web-ex technology. (Click on Register for Training)
- Comprehensive user support
- Systemic opportunities for feedback on future enhancements to the system
- Document posting and file attachment capabilities.

Work is currently underway with the FEMA Volunteer Agency Liaisons (VAL's) and local information and referral agencies to use the resource directory part of CAN to share the resources which they have identified with case managers.

CAN will also work closely with the Long Term Recovery Centers (LTRC) and participating agencies to further develop procedures that will assist those agencies that serve those affected by disasters.

For more information contact:

Liz Bowen
Field Operations Manager
Coordinated Assistance Network
202-409-1565
Liz@can.org

2007 Hurricane Season

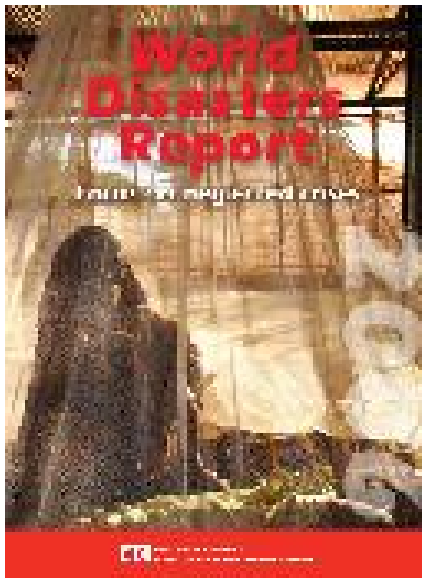
The Tropical Storm Risk (TSR) March forecast update for Atlantic hurricane activity in 2007 continues to anticipate an active hurricane season. Based on current and projected climate signals, Atlantic basin and US landfalling tropical cyclone activity are forecast to be about 75% above the 1950-2006 norm in 2007.

This is the highest March forecast for activity in any year since the TSR replicated real-time forecasts started in 1984. There is a high (~86%) likelihood that activity will be in the top one-third of years historically. The forecast spans the period from 1st June to 30th November 2007 and employs data through the end of February 2007. TSR's two predictors are the forecast July-September 2007 trade wind speed over the Caribbean and tropical North Atlantic, and the forecast August-September 2007 sea surface temperature in the tropical North Atlantic. The former influences cyclonic vorticity (the spinning up of storms) in the main hurricane track region, while the latter provides heat and moisture to power incipient storms in the main track region. At present TSR anticipates both predictors having a moderate enhancing effect on activity. Monthly updated forecasts will be issued through August 2007.

Further information about TSR forecasts, verifications and hindcast skill as a function of lead time may be obtained from the TSR web site <http://tropicalstormrisk.com>. The next TSR monthly forecast update for the 2007 Atlantic hurricane season will be issued on the 5th of April 2007.

FOCUS ON NEGLECTED CRISES

Free Book online: *World
Disasters Report*



Which people are missing out on humanitarian aid because no journalists report on them, no donors are interested in them, no agencies have assessed their needs, or because their governments ignore them?

The 2006 *World Disasters Report* ventures into the shadows lying behind the more publicized disasters of 2005-2006. It combines first-hand reporting from the field with critical analysis of aid flows and donor preferences to highlight places and issues starved of attention. The report calls on aid organizations, journalists, governments and academics to work together to address the symptoms and causes of neglected humanitarian crises.

World Disasters Report: Focus on Neglected Crises. International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. ISBN 92-9139-122-0. 2006 252 PP. View this book free of charge at Kumarian Press Online at :

www.kpbooks.com

The World Disasters Report 2006 features:

- * Neglected crises: partial response perpetuates suffering
- * Hunger in Malawi: a neglected emergency
- * Unsafe motherhood: Nepal's hidden crisis

* Hurricane Stan lifts the lid on Guatemala's vulnerability

* Death at sea: boat migrants desperate to reach Europe

* Adequate? Equitable? Timely?
Humanitarian aid trends in 2005

* "Please don't raise gender now - we're in an emergency!"

* Disaster data: key databases, trends and statistics

Plus photos, tables, maps, graphics, Red Cross, Red Crescent contacts and index.

IAEM Members:



Mark your calendar:

June 10-13, 2007 - **National Citizen Corps Conference** at the Hilton Mark Center, Alexandria, VA, USA

June 13-14, 2007 - **IAEM Mid Year Meeting** at the Hilton Mark Center, Alexandria, VA, USA

November 11-14, 2007 - **IAEM Annual Conference & EMEX Exhibit** at the Silver Legacy Hotel in Reno, Nevada

CALENDAR

5th Annual Medical Reserve Corps (MRC) National Leadership and Training Conference – Providence, Rhode Island: April 17-20, 2007
www.medicalreservecorps.gov

9th Annual Midwest Emergency & Preparedness and Response Conference – Rockford, Illinois: May 9-11, 2007
www.winn-lepc.org

2007 Conference of the Association of State Dam Safety Officials (ASDSO)
West Region – Omaha, Nebraska:
May 20-22, 2007
www.damsafety.org

2007 Conference of the Association of State Dam Safety Officials (ASDSO)
Northeast Region – Manchester, NH:
June 5-7, 2007
www.damsafety.org

Celebrate Hope Conference – 25th Anniversary of Engineering Ministries International
Jackson Hole, Wyoming, July 5-8, 2007
www.emiworld.org

17th World Conference on Disaster Management
– Toronto, Canada, July 8-11, 2007
www.wcdm.org

Association of Public Safety Communications Officials (APCO)
Annual Conference and Exposition – Baltimore, Maryland
August 5-9, 2007
www.apco.org

National Fire Protection Association America's Fire and Security Expo – Miami Beach, Florida
July 24-26, 2007
www.americasfireandsecurity.com

2007 UCOWR/NIWR Conference: Hazards in Water Resources
– Boise, Idaho, July 24-26, 2007
www.ucowr.siu.edu/Boise.CFP.2007.pdf

International Conference on Lightning and Static Electricity – Paris, France
August 28-31, 2007
www.icoise.org

REMINDER

2007 Membership Dues

are now past due.

Please check your mailing label to see if you're current.

(Thanks).

DERA assisted member Nancy Thomas in her rescue operation to Monroe, LA, following Hurricane Katrina.

ANIMAL RESCUE MISSION: SEPTEMBER 2005

By Nancy Thomas

The call came on a Sunday night. By now the whole world had been watching the situation in New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina. When the hurricane first struck, my thoughts immediately went to the animals left behind. I kept saying to myself, "But what about all the animals?" as I did not see any in the pictures of the convention center and the people being loaded on buses. Slowly the scene evolved to reveal our worst nightmare...the animals were being left behind! For almost 2 weeks I stared in disbelief at the television screaming... "Somebody do something"! Then the call came.

I write this on the anniversary of Hurricane Katrina with difficulty as this is not a story overflowing with joyous emotion and sense of victory; however, this is a story that I could not have been part of, had not been for the generosity of DERA who kindly made a contribution to my expenses to undertake this mission.

In addition to the assistance DERA gave, I owe a great deal to the training I received through United Animal Nations (UAN), a non-profit organization of mostly volunteer members. One component of UAN is the Emergency Animal Rescue Service (EARS)—a nationwide network of trained volunteers to assist with animal rescue in disasters. I first trained to become an EARS member in 1991 in Denver. I went about my business, reading the UAN website, preparing my "go" kit, but never was called. I attended the training again in February 2005 in Cheyenne, this time making more contacts. As before, I went about my business, reading the website, preparing my "go" kit. Then, as we all know, on Labor Day weekend 2005, the moment of truth came. That "go" kit had better be prepared!

Three of us EARS volunteers in the greater Denver area could leave immediately. Ultimately, several other Coloradoans made the trek. The Three Musketeers (I and two other women) as I will call us for this story, met in Aurora. Two cars, three people, tent, sleeping bags, coolers, the usual detritus of a mission fraught with unknowns—where will we stay, what job will we be doing, how long are we expected to stay, how hot is it going to be anyway?

That first day we drove into Oklahoma. In the wee hours when it became too dark to proceed and a major thunderstorm loomed, we took refuge in a La Quinta--our last luxurious accommodation for weeks to follow. Late the following day we rolled into Monroe, LA. Without much trouble we found the 4-H barns behind the convention center. The shelter had been set up by the citizens of Monroe with a veterinarian in charge. Most of the animals housed here were brought in by people in the nearby Red Cross shelter. This was a perfect example of what EARS does--sets up a shelter adjacent to a human shelter. The owners then participated in their animals feeding, walking and socialization. However, there were animals in this shelter with no known owner. Several had been brought in from the New Orleans area by caravans of rescuers, or individuals that saw a loose dog, picked it up and found an open shelter. Some dogs had collars and tags but, of course, when the listed phone numbers were called, there was no longer a phone, a house, a person. The cats mostly had known owners.

The Three Musketeers rolled in hot, tired, but ready to jump in and make a difference. We were somewhat taken aback by the situation presenting itself: A handful of volunteers from all over the country; one front desk person sans computer--just a folding desk, chair, 3-ring binder, and Polaroid camera; the commander at a meeting in Gonzales, LA--no one else in charge; no designated camping area; National Guard for security--during the day, not at night; and animosity running rampant among the ranks. In fact the next morning three volunteers from Florida pulled up stakes, leaving one-half a handful to walk, feed, and clean-up about 40 dogs and a dozen cats. Later that night a staff meeting was held, as the commander had returned. We three new people were not introduced. A shouting match ensued amongst the ranks. No specific tasks were assigned. Ultimately we talked to our cohorts and pitched in where needed. The shelter was due to be closed within a few days as a fair was about to commence. (State fair, county fair, who knows?) The veterinarian in charge of the original set-up was in the process of fostering out the animals to his known customers. Disagreement flowed over who was in charge--the local veterinarian, or EARS, who, by the way, was called in by the state to assist. EARS never self-deploys. Ultimately the owned animals were claimed or placed in foster homes and the ones with no known owners went home with local

people or volunteers. The Three Musketeers did end up in a room (with blessed air conditioning) as we didn't know what else to do. None of us was prepared for two-week's worth of hotel bills. The next night an extra EARS-paid-for room was available, mercifully. We truly wondered what kind of situation we had stumbled into. We, as did all the others, made the trek thinking we were going to be in the front lines of an amazing rescue operation. Granted, we were realistic and knew that shelter work was what we would be mainly doing but our training had taught us to expect a much more organized undertaking with clearly assigned duties; however, little about the Katrina response went as expected. We bowed to the absurd and pressed on.

Throughout the weekend we saw to the closure of this shelter as a new shelter was being erected on the outskirts of town. This was to be an EARS run shelter in preparation for the arrival of some 300 dogs from Gonzales--the main shelter outside New Orleans. We could not accommodate cats as they require air conditioning and we had none at this site. We Three Musketeers set up our tent at the new site. The place was similar to the previous one. The "barns" were small but better ventilated. There was even a shower of sorts on site. The task at hand was immense. Chain link fence, donated by the local Kennel Club, had to be turned into pens; crates had to be assembled and stacked; and donated dog food had to be mixed into large trashcan-sized barrels. The food was mixed to try to eliminate digestion problems with the dogs. Large fans were set up to try to make the temperatures tolerable for the dogs. Quarantine as well as bathing areas had to be set up. The task was immense.

Ultimately, the little tent city that had grown out behind this new shelter was ordered to disband by the Red Cross. The discovery of brown recluse spiders was the main culprit; and there was something about snakes...I didn't want to know any more about that! The Red Cross then assisted with obtaining housing/rooms for the volunteers. We had 4 to a room, and ultimately a couple of dogs, too. Other new recruits were flowing in now as EARS headquarters in California had gotten the word out. Needless to say we were not well rested. And the heat was formidable. Red Cross and local people also assisted by providing ice and food. There was no kitchen on site. And, of course, the generosity of the volunteers looking out for each other was our main source of supplies.

The first wave of dogs was to arrive Monday night or rather early Tuesday morning. The shelter was ready, or as ready as it was going to be at that time. We were sent home around 7 PM to get a few hours shut-eye. The trucks were expected between 1-3 AM. At midnight the phones started jingling. The trucks were en route. Dogs were packed into airline crates and stacked in refrigerated trailers. We scrambled in various dazed states of wakefulness to the shelter site. The local veterinary and a staff member were on hand. The EARS national coordinator was there. A plan was hatched as to the logistics of unloading dogs, passing them through in-take where their pictures were taken and ID numbers recorded, perfunctory vet checks, then on into another airline crate where we would water them but no food. As I tell this story, one year later, the vivid impressions come flooding back as if it were yesterday. The anticipation, fear—what were we going to see when those truck trailer doors opened--dead dogs?

We volunteers lined up, steely postures, not a word said. A dark summer night. Stars out, crickets chirping, an occasional frog in the distance. Then the trucks came crawling down our dirt road, trailers fully lit. One waited on the road, lights blinking, the other slowing backing in. Volunteers scrambled to guide the trucks and keep the overhead wires from being knocked down. The drivers climbed down and walked over; some cried. I don't know who these drivers were. I'm guessing they were tractor trailer owners who donated their time and equipment. I wish them long and happy lives for the need they filled that dark night.

The trailer doors opened. The smell is what we all will remember the most. The smell of dog feces, the smell of fear, the smell of the rich earth around us, stagnant water somewhere in the distance, all of it rolled into an olfactory assault. And then the noise. A deafening barking that didn't stop, ever.

One black lab type dog greeted us at the doors; he had somehow managed to chew out of his crate. He was immediately dubbed Houdini. Designated volunteers scrambled up into that trailer and started moving the crates, handing them down to more folks on the ground. Then dogs were taken out of the crates and the process began. The first dog handed to me was an emaciated Chihuahua with chemical burns on his feet. It was love at first sight. He was christened "Winky."

There were more tear jerkers--a German shepherd pulled from a roof, emaciated and chemically burned as well. He went right into hospital at the veterinary clinic. I heard he fully recovered. Elder dogs, tiny dogs, huge pit bull types, chow types with matted hair, labs, and the baying beagles. These dogs had been triaged at Gonzales shortly before and then shipped up to us. They were completely confused, terrified, sick, hungry and hot.

I had a section at first with mostly small dogs, which was to my liking. By the time all dogs were unloaded from one crate and into another, it was dawn. Before that day was over we had worked 22 hours straight. After a couple hours break we had to come back to the shelter and begin the never ending tasks of watering, feeding, cleaning cages, walking and as much TLC as time allowed, which was almost none.

I left home on a Tuesday, September 13 and departed Monroe on a Friday, the 23rd. The saying "I spent a year one week" in Louisiana was a truism. We walked, fed, cleaned, erected more kennels, and moved crates around for more ventilation (we had them stacked three high). The frustrations mounted. Plans hatched in the morning were changed by afternoon. One of the Musketeers had had enough and went home. While I took the other Musketeer to the hotel room to recover from heat exhaustion, a meeting was held and all the sections were changed and reassigned. Not knowing this, when I returned I proceeded to start the watering, feeding, cleaning of my little dogs. I was immediately chastised and ordered to work on the kennels containing up to four big dogs each. "But what about my little guys?" I asked. Supposedly they had been taken care of. Upon inspection I learned they had not been taken care of, so I proceeded to do so, but not without words flying around. I share this as a small example of the level of frustration that was running rampant.

Another area of consternation was the issue of fostering. Two of us getting ready to head-out filled out the forms and expressed interest in fostering some of the dogs we had been taking care. We thought it would be good to get those dogs out of crates and into a home, at least temporarily until owners could be located. All dogs were numbered, photographed and put on the Petfinder website. Fostering was denied to us. I was told I might be a hoarder. I told them I had been called a lot of things over time but never a hoarder! Being a member and donating time and money to get to

Louisiana was evidently not enough to qualify us to foster dogs. I have never really gotten over that one, as the little Winky was first on my list. I searched Petfinder for months afterwards and to this day do not know where he went. He may have gone home with another volunteer. I guess that person wasn't a hoarder. All of the dogs that owners didn't come for, which were most, were again put in crates and shipped all over the country. Many came to the Denver Dumb Friends League. Only bonafide rescue groups were qualified to foster/adopt dogs.

Friday, the 23rd came--departure day for me. I had a bus ticket that would take me to Shreveport, Texarkana, and finally to Little Rock, AK. There I met my husband who was attending a conference. I rode home with him on our Harley, yes, as in Davidson. (Knowing that I was traveling home in this manner I had packed my gear accordingly). But that is another adventure, another story for another time. The bus ride was a story unto itself. The buses were full of people fleeing the next storm – Rita. And yes, we rode the Harley home in torrential Rita rains through Arkansas & Missouri.

Well, there it is. The names have been changed or omitted to protect the innocent, and the not -so-innocent. Ultimately it was a life changing experience. I would do it again. I did renew my membership with UAN. And have since taken further disaster rescue training with the American Humane Association in Denver. I understand that I was on the front-end of a major operation and that after I left Monroe, things did settle down and run the way they're supposed to.

I will never get over Winky, though. Since then I have gone to Table Mountain Animal Shelter in Golden in hopes of finding another Chihuahua that "called" to me. I have adopted Lilly. She's a great little family member. But I shall always remember Winky, and a couple other little faces that won't fade away. The remaining Musketeer ended up staying a month. We do not stay in contact. I do remain in contact with a fellow rescuer from California. We searched Petfinder for almost a year, but neither of us had any success finding our special dogs.

Nancy Thomas
Disaster Reservist for FEMA
Golden, Colorado

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Disaster Preparedness and Emergency Response Association (DERA)

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DERA was established in 1962 and is a Nonprofit 501(c)(3) Disaster Service, Educational, and Professional Organization



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Work phone number:	
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License Class:	

Please indicate bands and modes that you can operate.

Show Home (H), Mobile (M) Portable (P) or Flyaway (F) for each

MODE	HF	6 meters	2 meters	222 MHz	440 MHz	Others
SSB						
CW						
FM						
PACTOR						
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PSK-31						
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APRS						

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| Can your home station be operated without commercial power? | Yes | No |
| Are you registered with your local ARES? | Yes | No |
| If you have a mobile or portable station, would you be willing to drive to an assignment? | Yes | No |
| Would you be willing to drive your vehicle to provide transportation for other operators? | Yes | No |
| If you have a portable or flyaway station, would you be willing to fly to an assignment? | Yes | No |
| Do you have a passport and would you be willing to travel outside the U.S.? | Yes | No |
| Would you be willing to be a team leader/coordinator? | Yes | No |

Please use the reverse side and tell us anything else we need to know.

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Professional Affiliation
Membership Application



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Please Select Membership Classification
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