

OVERVIEW

For communities that attract a sizable tourist population during the peak vacation seasons, the influx of vacationers can double or triple the resident population.

The population of Myrtle Beach, South Carolina swells from approximately 25,000 people in the winter to about 300,000 during the peak tourist season.¹ The increase in population can pose challenges for emergency managers, especially in areas vulnerable to natural hazards, such as the coast.

Tourists can be more vulnerable to disasters due to unfamiliarity with the area including evacuation routes and local communication outlets such as radio, television, or newspapers. High staff turnover in the service industry also reduces community preparedness for disasters.

Many of the factors that make tourists more vulnerable to disasters apply to newcomers as well. People who are new to an area may be unaware of the natural hazards that occur and the steps that can be taken to reduce the risks of disasters.

The strategies summarized below are designed to help emergency managers and those in the service industry become better prepared for disasters. Strategies include developing a training package for tourism employees and formulating a plan with clearly defined responsibilities.



A hotel in Pensacola, Florida damaged by Hurricane Ivan in 2004.

Source: Bill Kopliza for FEMA

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REDUCING VULNERABILITY TO DISASTERS

Emergency managers and the service industry should coordinate their planning and response efforts before a disaster strikes. Engaging in advanced planning will make an emergency situation easier to manage for planners and service workers alike. A number of different approaches can be taken to reduce the vulnerability of tourists and newcomers to disasters. For example, in communities with a sizable tourist population, emergency management plans should address the needs of tourists during a disaster.

WHEN DISASTER STRIKES – PROMISING PRACTICES

St. Lucia, in the Caribbean, established a crisis management center to control the evacuation of tourists. The center, which is located on high ground and in a building that can sustain hurricane force winds, communicates with hotel managers and government officials on the conditions of evacuation routes. A summary of the plan for St. Lucia is included in the Profiles section.

Emergency management plans should be flexible since what works well for one disaster, such as an earthquake, may not apply to a different disaster, such as a chemical spill.

PREPAREDNESS

Other strategies for preparing for disasters in tourist towns or resort areas include the following:

- α Develop individual emergency management plans. Each hotel should develop its own plan. Hotels are competing entities, but should coordinate their disaster planning efforts. This is especially crucial if the buildings are in close proximity to one another, since the building owners can share food and resources during an emergency.
- α Compile a list of all tourists staying in the area, including their name, hotel location, emergency contact, and place of origin. Similar information could be gathered for newcomers to the area. This will allow officials to keep track of people after the disaster strikes. If someone is unaccounted for, officials should notify the emergency contact. Communities will have to set up a system to gather this information. One option is to ask guests at the time of check-in if they'd like to register with the community's emergency database. At a minimum, hotels will have some of this information on file via reservations.
- α Train service employees on how to accommodate guests during an emergency. Since the service industry has frequent turnover and a fluctuating staff, training should be at the time of hire. In addition to the initial training, hold periodic refresher sessions. A disaster training package, which includes a video and short presentation, was created for Australia's islands. It is outlined in the Profiles section.
- α Establish modes of communication prior to an emergency. Phone systems may be disabled, so communicating through a CB radio is a more reliable option.



Road crews clear away sand in the wake of Hurricane Dennis in Navarre, Florida, 2005.

Source: Leif Skoogfors for FEMA

RESPONSE

Shelter use tends to be higher in areas with a large tourist population.² Such communities should be prepared to accommodate more people during peak seasons by opening more shelters and having a plan in

WHEN DISASTER STRIKES – PROMISING PRACTICES

place. Staggering an [evacuation](#) can help alleviate traffic congestion and sends a message to permanent residents that the threat is real.

Service industry employees should relay information about imminent threats to tourists in an explicit manner. Tourists usually learn of threats from hotel staff and from other tourists who may downplay the threat, resulting in delay.

The hotel manager or a city official should draft and issue timely, multi-lingual notices to each hotel room explaining the latest developments from the National Weather Service or local officials. Information should also be posted at hotel entrances.

During a disaster, communities should decide whether to shelter in place or evacuate. If given adequate warning, tourists can return to their permanent residence or to the nearest safe area. However, airplane service may be unreliable in the event of a disaster. For coastal or island communities it may be more feasible to move newcomers, tourists, and resident populations by boat. People may also be assisted in evacuating to an inland location.

Disaster studies have identified many reasons why people avoid shelters, including inability to find the shelter location, fear that shelters are unsafe, and overcrowding.³ To encourage the use of emergency shelters, local officials should:

- α Assist tourists in finding shelters. This may include providing maps and transportation to the shelters.
- α Avoid overcrowding. Ensure shelters will have sufficient capacity to handle evacuees.
- α Provide a safe environment. Staff shelters with police to reassure evacuees that they will be safe.

Refer to the [Sheltering](#) section for more information.

RECOVERY

While guests may be anxious to leave a shelter and return to their vacation or their homes, local officials and hotel managers must take precautions to ensure their safety. This includes accounting for all guests at hotels, motels, rental properties, camping areas, etc. Hotel managers will have the names and telephone numbers of guests who were on the premises.

If the hotel sustained damage, relocate guests to a building deemed safe by the crisis management center.



Left: Debris litters beach in Biloxi, Mississippi, after Hurricane Katrina. Right: Same beach just before Hurricane Katrina

Source: Mark Wolfe for FEMA

WHEN DISASTER STRIKES – PROMISING PRACTICES

Local governments should inform guests that it may not be safe to walk around the area due to downed power lines and other hazards. If the disaster occurred in a coastal area, the beaches will likely be filled with debris. The hotel staff will likely be limited, as many employees will have evacuated.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

U.S. Department of State

Information for Americans about protecting themselves if faced by a natural disaster while traveling abroad.

Accessed at: http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/emergencies/emergencies_1207.html

Coping with Natural Disasters: Tips for Travelers

Suggestions for travelers including insurance and ensuring safe return.

Accessed at: <http://edition.cnn.com/2008/TRAVEL/traveltips/07/02/natural.disasters/index.html>

Interactive Disaster Preparation Website

The City of San Francisco's interactive web-tool gives clear, concise advice on preparing for natural disasters.

Accessed at: <http://www.72hours.org/index.html>

Tourism Crisis Management Institute of the University of Florida

TCMI is a University of Florida-based research institute working to develop disaster preparedness, planning, response and recovery solutions for local, regional and national tourist economies.

2008 Annual Report can be accessed at:

<http://hhp.ufl.edu/trsm/tcmi/pdf/TCMI%20Annual%20Report%202008-print.pdf>



PROFILE: DISASTER TRAINING

Program:	Emergency Management of Off-Shore Tourist Resorts
Organization:	North Queensland, Australia Department of Emergency Services Counter Disaster and Rescue Services
Keywords:	disaster training, service industry
Source:	Warren G. Bridson, Regional Director of North Queensland, Queensland Department of Emergency Services www.ema.gov.au/agd/EMA/rwpattach.nsf/viewasattachmentpersonal/ (63F21BC6A4528BAE4CED2F9930C45677)~DC+bridson+Canberra+paper.pdf/\$file/ DC+bridson+Canberra+paper.pdf
Brief Summary:	A training package developed by the Queensland Department of Emergency Services used in Australia to train senior employees on disaster management. The package was designed for cyclone preparation, but other packages could be composed for different disasters.

The Queensland, Australia Department of Emergency Services has a training package on disaster management for employees in the service industry. The Department met with key stakeholders including hotel managers, government officials, police, and a meteorologist to assemble the best information for the area's disaster training package.

Disaster planning officials should consider creating a similar package for their communities. The package should be cost-effective and generic for use by many people in different places, including people who do not have access to computers. The training package developed for North Queensland focuses on cyclone preparedness. Different packages could be assembled for different disasters.



PROFILE: DISASTER MANAGEMENT

Program:	The Hospitality Industry Disaster Management Plan
Organization:	St. Lucia Tourist Board, St. Lucia Hotel and Tourism Association, St. Lucia Ground handlers Association, National Emergency Management Organization (NEMO)
Keywords:	service industry, tourism, hurricanes
Source:	http://www.geocities.com/CapitolHill/Lobby/6075/tourism.htm
Brief Summary:	This document outlines a crisis management plan. The program created a crisis management center and committee.

St. Lucia established a crisis management plan with the following objectives:

Establish an institutional mechanism for quick, coordinated and effective management of disasters within the hospitality industry.

Provide guidelines for the operations of a hospitality industry crisis management center.

Identify persons, agencies, and resources required for effective response to the crisis management needs of the industry.

Define and delineate the roles and responsibilities of the various parties involved in crisis management within the hospitality industry.

Elements of the plan include a crisis management committee, crisis management center, hotel operations and others. The responsibilities of each entity are outlined below. More detailed information can be found on the St. Lucia Emergency Management Organization's website www.geocities.com/CapitolHill/Lobby/6075/tourism.htm.

Hospitality Industry Crisis Management Committee

This committee consists of 11 people, including a coordinator, NEMO Liaison (note: NEMO is the National Emergency Management Organization in St. Lucia. It is the equivalent of FEMA in the U.S.), Head of Crisis Management Unit, and Head of Communications Unit. The committee meets semi-annually, once in January to review the previous year, and once in April to plan for the coming hurricane season. During the meetings, the groups ensure hospitality establishments will prepare, test, and review their own plans. Simulation exercises are organized to test the hospitality crisis management plan and

identify shelter areas. The specific responsibilities for each member of the committee are detailed on the plan's website.

Hospitality Industry Crisis Management Center (CMC)

The center is composed of a crisis management unit and a communications unit. It is equipped with a generator, telecommunications capacity, and radio communication. The CMC is located in a structure able to withstand hurricane force winds and not subject to flooding. As soon as NEMO and the crisis management committee issue an alert, the center is activated. The center is also responsible for the evacuation of hotel guests.

The CMC should be able to maintain operations with no phone or Internet services. A detailed list of resources can be found in Appendix 2 of the plan

<http://www.geocities.com/CapitolHill/Lobby/6075/tourism.htm>.

REFERENCES

¹ <http://www.cityofmyrtlebeach.com/faq.html>

² Rogers, R. O., et al. (1990).Evaluating Protective Actions in Chemical Agent Emergencies. Oak Ridge National Laboratory.

³ “Tourism Disaster Strategies: Prerequisites and Ingredients.” Asia Disaster Management News. 7.2-3. Apr-Sep 2001
<http://www.adpc.net/irc06/Newsletter/2001/theme-2.html>