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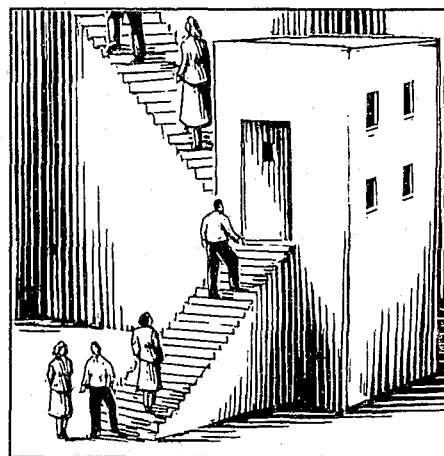
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Responding to Disaster

Hurricane Andrew

F.P. Sam Samples

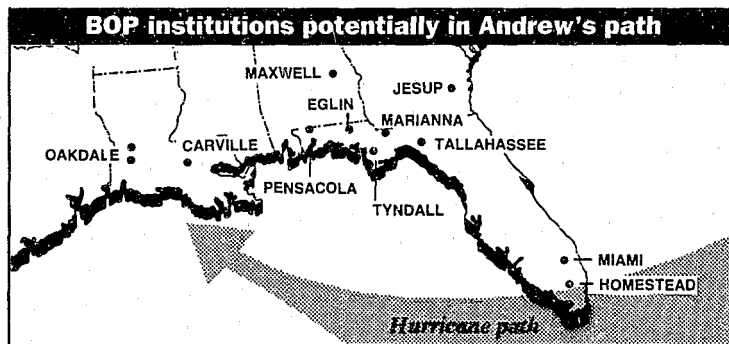
In late August 1992, Hurricane Andrew struck an unprecedented blow to South Florida, leaving in its wake death, billions of dollars in property damage, and disruption of virtually every aspect of civic, business, government, and personal life. The hurricane did not spare correctional operations in the Miami area. Two Federal Bureau of Prisons institutions—the Federal Prison Camp located on Homestead Air Force Base and the Metropolitan Correctional Center in Miami—suffered major damage.

What the Bureau did in the hours before the hurricane struck and its actions in the aftermath show that, while an agency cannot prevent a natural disaster, effective planning, training, and decisionmaking can reduce the degree of disruption the disaster causes.

Before the hurricane

Hurricane Andrew did not arrive unannounced. Beginning August 23, Bureau staff at MCC Miami (actually located in a southern suburb of Dade County) and the prison camp on Homestead Air Force Base (about 30 miles south of Miami) began busily preparing for the storm.

That evening, it became apparent the hurricane would make landfall just south of Miami and that Homestead would receive the brunt of the storm. FPC Homestead Superintendent Sam Calbone organized the movement of all 146 Homestead inmates and 63 institution staff to MCC Miami. Bureau staff, working with Air Force officials, made some efforts to reinforce the facility, but



because most of the buildings had wooden frames, little could be done to protect them against winds that were expected to reach 150 miles per hour.

MCC Miami staff and inmates worked all day and into the night to fortify the buildings on the prison compound. The buildings' reinforced walls were expected to provide substantial protection from winds, but windows and other design features appeared vulnerable and were reinforced with plywood.

Staff established a ham radio link with the Bureau's regional office in Atlanta. Although inmates were reassured of the precautions being taken to safeguard them, several resisted being placed in their rooms as they anxiously awaited Andrew's arrival. Staff quickly brought the resisting inmates under control, and all inmates were secured.

With the addition of staff and inmates from FPC Homestead, 1,402 inmates and more than 300 staff members were at MCC Miami on August 24. In addition, more than 200 family members of staff had gathered in the institution's visiting room and training center, seeking shelter from the coming storm.

Even during sustained hurricane-force winds, staff moved through the facility, reviewing security features and calming inmates. As the hurricane progressed,

they cleared inmates out of damaged and flooded cells and evacuated areas that were extremely unsafe. At great personal risk, staff heroically ensured the safety of other staff members and inmates during the height of the storm.

The Atlanta office followed the progress of the growing

storm as it moved toward the mainland. As its increasing intensity became evident, staff reviewed emergency procedures contained in contingency plans at each facility and prepared to deal with the expected high winds, rain, and other adverse conditions. What they could not know was that Andrew would be far stronger than anticipated, that it would last for nearly 4 hours, and that it would pass through MCC Miami with exceptionally violent wind and rain.

The hurricane reached Miami at about 4 a.m. on August 24. At 4:10 a.m., winds destroyed the prison's ham radio tower, and at 4:15 a.m. all electrical power failed. Although command centers had been activated at the regional office in Atlanta and the central office in Washington, D.C., without communications, staff in these cities could do nothing but wait to hear about the hurricane's impact.

The aftermath

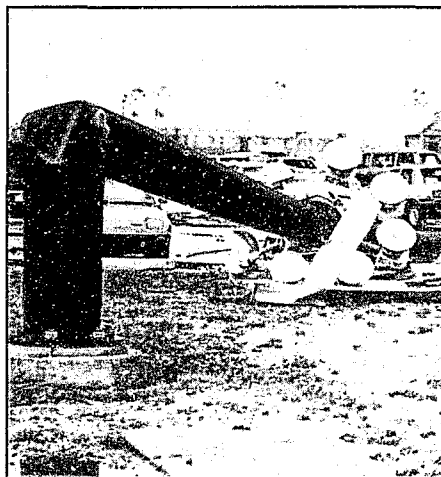
Even while the high winds and torrential rains continued, staff at MCC Miami—at risk to their personal safety—began assessing the damage and setting up procedures to ensure security. When communications from the prison to the regional office were temporarily restored, the news was sobering.

While no staff, inmates, or family members suffered serious injuries, the hurricane caused major damage to MCC Miami's buildings and support facilities. The wind flattened the prison's two perimeter fences, destroyed the perimeter detection system, and seriously damaged all buildings throughout the institution. Flying debris destroyed non-ballistics-resistant glazing, and other major security features were rendered inoperable. Water, electricity, and phone service were cut off, leaving the institution totally dark and causing sewage to back up into the buildings.

The wind ripped roofs from buildings and toppled numerous trees in the compound. Wind and flying debris ripped from their mounts or otherwise destroyed virtually all building accessories and security features, including yard gates, air ventilation units, high mast lights, antennas, and sun shelters on the yard. Debris from other buildings near the institution blew into the compound, and the contents of a hazardous waste receptacle were strewn about.

Two inmate transport buses and a tractor trailer were rolled over. Almost all cars were literally picked up and thrown through the air or bounced about like tennis balls, sustaining heavy damage. A trailer housing the associate wardens' offices was flattened and destroyed, and a portable inmate housing unit was damaged beyond repair.

Homestead Air Force Base, including the prison camp, was totally destroyed. The hurricane dismantled the facility's buildings and wrecked all vehicles and property that had been left on the site.



One of MCC Miami's mast lights, blown down.

The Bureau response

Maintaining security at MCC Miami was the first order of business. To restore the perimeter, staff pulled the outer fence upright with heavy equipment and set up temporary generator-powered lighting. Armed MCC Miami staff surrounded the compound on foot and in the few private vehicles that remained operable. Staff conducted a count of employees and inmates to ensure that everyone was safe and secure. The count revealed that no inmates had escaped and that only three people had minor injuries.

By this point, it was obvious the institution would not be habitable for some time, and the Bureau began an evacuation.

The Bureau had been preparing emergency evacuation procedures before the hurricane struck, positioning Bureau buses and U.S. Marshals Service airplanes around central and north Florida. Once the storm passed, the buses and Marshals' planes began moving in, carrying supplies, water, and Bureau staff—including Special Operations Response Teams (SORT's)—to the facility.

With the arrival of outside staff, inmates from MCC Miami and FPC Homestead were evacuated to these locations: Federal Correctional Institution (FCI) Tallahassee, Florida (278 inmates); Lake County Jail, Tavares, Florida (213); Duval County Jail, Jacksonville, Florida (200); FCI Marianna, Florida (150); FCI Talladega, Alabama (149); FCI Jesup, Georgia (149); USP Atlanta, Georgia (80); FPC Maxwell, Alabama (63); Dismas House Community Corrections Center, Dania, Florida (61); FPC Eglin, Florida (55); and other locations (4).

The evacuation was accomplished through hours of hard work and team effort. MCC Miami Warden Joel Knowles and FCI Jesup Warden Bob Honsted took primary responsibility for orchestrating this massive transfer, with the assistance of Homestead Superintendent Calbone and Larry Cox, warden of the Bureau's not-yet-opened Metropolitan Detention Center in Guaynabo, Puerto Rico, who flew to the scene with 30 staff members.

By 10 p.m. on August 26—just 2 days after the hurricane hit—Bureau staff had safely transported 1,402 inmates to other Federal and non-Federal facilities throughout the southeast United States. The bus crews and others who managed to get to MCC Miami soon after the storm overcame numerous obstacles in their efforts to transport inmates. They were forced to travel through inclement weather—maneuvering around trees, overturned vehicles, power lines, and telephone poles strewn across roadways—without many road signs or even familiar landmarks.

What made the evacuation even more remarkable was that communication between the command center in Atlanta

and MCC Miami was cut off. Staff carried out the entire operation with very little information exchanged between the primary points of control.

In the hurricane's aftermath, senior Bureau staff became involved. On August 31, a task force of five Bureau assistant directors traveled to Miami to provide additional support to the regional director. The Executive Staff task group was to develop a detailed plan of recovery for MCC Miami and its staff, further assess the damage sustained at Homestead and Miami, develop a plan to continue detention services for the Federal law enforcement community in south Florida, and address many other hurricane-related issues. In addition, many staff and SORT personnel from other Bureau locations arrived on the scene to offer assistance and expertise.

Of the 408 staff at the two institutions, 138 suffered the total destruction or condemnation of their homes and 185 had their homes severely damaged. About 140 staff had no insurance on their homes, and 170 staff had no insurance on damaged household goods. One hundred cars were destroyed and 263 were badly damaged; 96 employees had no car insurance. A total of 185 staff needed immediate financial aid.

On September 10 and 11, staff participated in organized small-group discussions about the effects of the hurricane and ways to cope with the toll it took on their personal lives. Throughout the week, special tents were set up to help staff in areas such as legal problems; pay, leave, and transfer issues; employee assistance; and spiritual or emotional guidance.



Like many structures at MCC Miami, the institution warehouse sustained major damage. Rebuilding it cost more than \$1 million.

While their peers assisted Homestead and Miami staff with personal and work issues, other employees from Bureau institutions around the country were detailed temporarily to Miami, joining FPC and MCC staff in efforts to repair the damage.

News of the employees' plight brought tremendous material and financial support from the Bureau and the Department of Justice. Bureau staff nationwide donated funds, food, clothing, and personal care items to help staff at Miami. Truckload after truckload of clothing, nonperishable foods, and personal care items donated by Bureau staff around the Nation were trucked and airlifted to Miami in the weeks immediately following the hurricane. Surplus items were donated to local relief organizations who, in turn, distributed them to other needy families in south Florida. Miami Warden Knowles remarked, "General Colin Powell would have been impressed with the supply line."

In the weeks and months that followed, Bureau staff at institutions around the Nation displayed creativity and ingenuity

by sponsoring events such as golf tournaments, auctions, bake sales, and spaghetti dinners to raise relief-fund money. Their resourcefulness and generosity underscore staff commitment to help families and friends in times of crisis. A total of \$295,000 in assistance for prison staff at Miami and Homestead had been donated to the Hurricane Andrew Relief Fund by the end of 1992.

Rebuilding and renewal

On February 23, 1993, a scant 6 months after Hurricane Andrew devastated south Dade County, the Metropolitan Correctional Center was rededicated.

In the intervening months, a pressing need for the Bureau was to provide detention space to assist the Federal courts and the U.S. Marshals Service. A secure housing unit for 150 pretrial detainees was established at the Immigration and Naturalization Service's Krome Detention Center. This unit operated from October 13 until November 15, 1992, when high-security inmates were returned to the MCC.



Above: The recreation yard behind E and F units. Right: Warden Joel Knowles and Bureau Director Kathleen M. Hawk at the rededication ceremony for MCC Miami, February 1993.



In addition, two units at the MCC were activated to house up to 200 pretrial inmates, secured with a double fence, razor wire, and an electronic detection system, enhanced by stationary armed posts.

Restoring the physical plant required quick action by the regional office in Atlanta, awarding major construction contracts before local companies were committed to other projects in the devastated area and before the costs of major construction escalated. This saved many thousands of dollars and probably as much as 6 months of construction time.

The major projects contracted for included repair and replacement of all roofs, all high mast and perimeter lighting, all glass, the entire perimeter fence and alarm system, and a new warehouse. While these projects were underway, facilities staff worked inside

most buildings, repairing damaged sheet rock, rewiring, painting, and repairing plumbing. Staff and inmate landscape crews cleaned up and restored the grounds.

While staff labored to rebuild the MCC, most were rebuilding their personal lives as well. While many have been able to return to their homes, many more still live with family or friends, or have found temporary housing in distant apartments.

At the February 23 rededication ceremony, Bureau Director Kathleen M. Hawk paid tribute to the efforts of Miami and Homestead staff: "The real story of this dedication ceremony isn't the quick, skillful rebuilding of a prison. The heart of this ceremony is a tribute to the Miami staff. No one who was not here when Hurricane Andrew hit can fully understand what you went through that day. And perhaps worse than anything that nature put you through was the fact that there was no way to know what was happening to your loved ones. Yet you stood by your posts. You fulfilled your

duties to safeguard the inmates in your charge and to protect the public. At this ceremony, I want to recognize the debt we all owe to you—and to tell you that today we really are rededicating this institution to you, in recognition of your heroism and professionalism."

Although much remains to be done, only a few of Hurricane Andrew's scars are visible inside the perimeter today. According to Warden Knowles (who recently left the MCC to become warden of the Bureau's new detention center in Miami), "Life in Miami has changed. But we are, I believe, stronger and better prepared to meet our personal and professional challenges in the future." ■

F.P. Sam Samples, Ed.D., is Regional Director of the Southeast Region of the Federal Bureau of Prisons. An earlier version of this article appeared in the December 1992 issue of Corrections Today, published by the American Correctional Association.

Bureau emergency procedures

To cope with major emergencies or other significant interruptions of normal routine (such as those in Miami), all Federal Bureau of Prisons institutions have contingency plans that provide guidance to staff in various situations. These plans include information for dealing with a riot or fire, conducting mass evacuations in the event of a natural or man-made disaster, responding to a bomb or bomb threat, or managing other significant emergency conditions.

While every emergency situation is different, and requires differing responses, these plans provide a blueprint that can be applied to almost any emergency situation. Typical emergency plans include information on notification of command staff, containment of the situation, notification of and coordination with local authorities, providing interim and followup medical care, and other key issues.

An outdated plan can actually handicap an effective response, and every facility's emergency plans are reviewed and updated each year by top management staff. Employees are also required to review the plans each year. Training on many aspects of emergency plans is conducted on a regular basis.

The Bureau's regional and central offices also have emergency response plans to assist them in supporting field operations in the event of a crisis. These plans include necessary contacts and liaison functions with other Federal, State, and local agencies. When



City public safety officer directs traffic during Duluth neighborhood evacuation.

the emergency is prolonged, staff from regional and central offices and from other Bureau locations are often sent to the site.

This system-wide response capability was put to good use in the Hurricane Andrew crisis, and also has served the Bureau well in other major incidents, such as the 1987 Cuban detainee uprisings in Atlanta, Georgia, and Oakdale, Louisiana, and the 1991 hostage situation in Talladega, Alabama. A near-disaster that occurred just 2 months before Hurricane Andrew struck Florida illustrates how staff flexibility is essential in implementing even the best-planned emergency responses.

At 4 a.m. on June 30, 1992, a train derailed south of Superior, Wisconsin, causing a spill of benzene-based liquid into the Nemadji River. A cloud of benzene gas formed over the cities of Superior and Duluth, Minnesota, and both were declared disaster areas. At one point, the cloud of noxious gas came within 4 miles of the Federal Prison Camp in

Duluth—one of the largest minimum-security facilities in the Bureau.

The emergency plans for evacuation were initiated, and the command centers at FPC Duluth and the North Central Regional Office in Kansas City were activated. However, because of the overwhelming scale of the emergency, plans had to be modified. Originally, plans called for the use of Duluth city buses to evacuate the facility and transport inmates to specific evacuation sites, but—because 80,000 Duluth and Superior residents were being moved from their homes—the buses and evacuation sites were not available.

Fortunately, about a month before the incident, a mass casualty drill—which included participants from FPC Duluth, the St. Louis County Sheriff's Department, the Duluth Police Department, and the 911 Emergency Command Center, as well as emergency medical personnel and preparedness officials from the surrounding area—was conducted at the institution. As a result, staff at the FPC worked efficiently with local officials to establish alternate transportation arrangements and evacuation sites. Two other Bureau institutions, at Sandstone and Rochester, Minnesota, provided staff and institution buses to prepare for the possible evacuation.

The cloud of toxic gas did not reach FPC Duluth, and Minnesota Governor Arne Carlson declared an end to the emergency at 6:30 p.m. The institution was able to maintain normal operations throughout. ■

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