

# Hurricane Ike Wreaks Havoc on Texas Gulf Coast

## Nearly 200 reservists assist following huge storm

Story and photos by PS1 Kevin Rofidal, USCGR

**A**s one of the worst storms on record roared toward the Gulf coast, members of the Coast Guard were charged with protecting those in its path, while moving their own families to high ground in anticipation of the furious storm named Hurricane Ike.

Ike was the third major hurricane of the 2008 Atlantic hurricane season. Starting as a tropical disturbance off the coast of Africa in late August, it became a tropical storm west of the Cape Verde islands by Sept. 1.

During the early morning hours of Sept. 4, Ike reached Category 4 strength with sustained winds peaking at 145 mph. At one point, the diameter of the storm was 550 by 220 miles, making Ike the most massive Atlantic hurricane recorded. It also had the second highest Integrated Kinetic Energy of any Atlantic storm in the past 40 years.

In the past, most in Texas would try to ride out a storm, even some hosting hurricane parties. This storm was different, with a National Weather Service bulletin warning residents may face “certain death” if they do not heed evacuation orders. Hundreds of thousands fled Texas as Ike roared toward the coast.

Ike slowed in intensity to a Category 2 hurricane by the time it made landfall at Galveston, Texas on Sept. 13, with winds of 110 mph. After wreaking havoc over Southeast Texas, the storm turned north and made its way across the northeast United States and eventually to Canada, leaving behind massive flooding as far north as Pennsylvania and Illinois.

With extensive experience preparing and responding to hurricanes like Ike, the Coast Guard and other local, state, and federal agencies sprung into action preparing for the arrival of the hurricane as well as pre-positioning assets for the quick response once the hurricane passed. CAPT William Diehl, Captain of the Port for Houston-Galveston, set Port Condition X-ray on Sept. 10 — 48 hours before the anticipated landfall, urging mariners to prepare for hurricane conditions in the Houston-Galveston ports. This coincided with CAPT John Plunkett, Captain of the Port for Port Arthur, setting the same port conditions.

Coast Guard personnel from Port Arthur also braced for the storm, positioning 85 members onboard the vessel MARAD at Point Beaumont; including personnel from Station Sabine, ANT Sabine and MSU Port Arthur. These crews acted as our first response teams immediately following storm passage, working closely with Texas Task Force One — a DHS funded Urban Search & Rescue Team. Coast Guard crews also assisted in a house-to-house search for survivors immediately following the storm. There were 25 boat rescues (USAR), in some cases rescuing people trapped in their attics by storm surge.

Having just activated hurricane emergency response plans less than a

month earlier for Hurricane Gustav, things would roll even smoother for Ike. Coast Guard members from around the country, coordinated by the Maintenance and Logistics Command, were brought to pre-staging areas in Dallas, Austin and San Antonio before Ike made landfall. An Incident Command Post (ICP) was stood up prior to IKE making landfall. It was established in Katy, Texas the morning of Friday, Sept. 12. Prior to this, the ICP (briefly) was established at the Sector. The ICP was staffed by active duty, reservists, auxiliaries and partners from fellow federal, state and local agencies.

The National Strike Force, working closely with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Texas General Land Office (TGLO), and the Texas Commission of Environmental Quality (TCEQ) investigated over 240 pollution reports... Ninety five people were rescued in the first day alone, with a total of one million evacuated. Reports said as many as 40 percent of those in the path of the hurricane along the Texas gulf failed to evacuate, despite warnings. Those staffing the ICP found rest, only for a few hours at a time, on cots setup in a gymnasium. Reservists played a key role fitting into the National Incident Management Systems (NIMS) as the response was ramped up once the magnitude of the storm was understood.

A second wave of Coast Guard members were brought in after the ICP was moved on Sept. 17 to Clear Lake, Texas — closer to the damaged areas. The new ICP was established in the storm damaged Hilton Hotel, just blocks from the Johnson Space Center in Houston and directly on Galveston Bay. The hotel was recovering from an estimated \$4-5 million damage as rooms were dried out to house those working in the ICP.

As Incident Commander, CAPT Diehl, held regular tactics, planning and situation meetings — in concert with Deputy

Incident Commander, CAPT Marcus Woodring. Personnel from National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) were on hand to help map the storm damage and pollution cases as new maps were printed every few hours with updates. The Coast Guard Deployable Operations Group (DOG) sent members to the area to enforce security zones and to assist stressed crews already working around the clock. Sector Field Office Galveston, home of many units such as Station Galveston, Aids to Navigation Team (ANT) Galveston, two Patrol Boats, and CGC DAUNTLESS, suffered significant damage as Ike slammed into the station. Except for a ride-out crew, the facility had been evacuated, but that did not stop Ike from tearing apart the buildings. Buildings were knocked off their foundations, crew member’s personal vehicles, not evacuated in time for the storm were a total loss, and the crew barracks were also drenched as the waves crashed into the buildings. The CGC HARRY CLAIBORNE, CLAMP, HATCHET, Station Motor Life Boats, ANT Galveston 55’ TANB all rode out the







**LTJG Jon Bernhardt, a reservist from MLC LANT, samples chlorine at Station Galveston as ad-hoc housing and water treatment was established by a team from MLC. The station's housing was wiped out by Hurricane Ike.**

storm in the Houston ship channel. The station small boats were moved to Katy, Texas along with the ANT Galveston trailerable boats, while the faster moving cutters outran the storm and took refuge near Morgan City, La. Because of proper planning and training, operations were quickly realigned as crews maintained Continuity of Operations (COOP).

By Sept. 17, limited access was allowed in the Houston Ship Channel, with full access by Sept. 24. There were 1,394 storm discrepancies and by the latest report, 1340 were temporarily or permanently repaired. The Houston Ship Channel is responsible for over 322 million dollars of revenue per day.

Coast Guard members in Port Arthur helped establish the FATCAT (Family Assist Team — Community Assist Team) — assisting with debris removal, transporting evacuees, staffing food banks, the Bridge City cleanup and the Sabine Pass cleanup.

This single event thrust Texas and the Coast Guard into the spotlight, and included visits from President George W. Bush, DHS Secretary Michael Chertoff, VADM Robert Papp, Atlantic Area Commander; RADM Joel Whitehead, Eighth District Commander, RDML Thomas Atkin, Deployable Operations Group Commander; RADM Dan Lloyd, DHS Advisor; and media outlets from around the world.

Interagency partnerships established before the storm, enhanced the response and ensured success dealing with Hurricane Ike.

“Our Port Coordination Team efforts with port stakeholders are essential for a quick and efficient assessment of all Captain Of The Port zone waterways,” said CAPT Diehl. “Partnering with industry to restore navigation on waterways is essential in the process of reopening this economically critical port. An emphasis on safety is paramount to eliminate any further marine casualties during this period of navigation uncertainty.”

During the height of the operation, 545 active duty, 188 reservists, 78 civilians and 11 auxiliaries took part in helping the people of south Texas recover from one of the worst storms in our history. The support received from the Coast Guard greatly aided Texas by providing exceptional operational support to the unified command. President Bush, U.S. Transportation Secretary Mary Peters, and Texas Governor Rick Perry all extended a sincere thanks to the Coast Guard for their response to this tragic event.

**Ed's note:** *LT Mark Molavi, Sector Houston-Galveston, and ENS Kimberly Kaiser, MSU Port Arthur, contributed to this article.*

## D8 and ISC NOLA COOP to ISC St. Louis before Hurricane Gustav hits

ST. LOUIS — More than 60 Coast Guard Reservists were mobilized in support of operations in response to Hurricane Gustav. At ISC St. Louis, several reservists responded to lend a hand with orders and with the COOP (Continuity of Operations) process as well. Over 200 Coast Guardsmen from D8 and ISC New Orleans temporarily relocated to St. Louis and occupied several parts of the building as part of the COOP/ Emergency Relocation Plan.

The Incident Management Team and Incident Commander occupied converted conference rooms in ISC St. Louis spaces as well as ESU St. Louis' computer training room and conference room. Meanwhile, the day-to-day operations teams from ISC NOLA and D8 utilized the COOP spaces on the 8th deck of the Federal Building. The COOP area seats over 60 members and is kept ready 24/7 in the event an emergency requires a Coast Guard command to temporarily relocate. The space was built in March 2007 by the ISC St. Louis Reserve Reconstruction Team.

— *By MCPO Steven Daugherty, USCGR*

