

iCAR Blog: A disaster within a disaster—the need to plan on multiple fronts; Hurricane season is coming. Pandemic with a side of tropical storm

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‘The usual natural disasters still loom: the need to plan’

Floods, tornados, and hurricanes don't stop or “stay at home” during a pandemic. They also don't cause pandemics, however, they do have the power to exacerbate the situation. What happens when a “stay at home” order changes to an evacuation order? The act of social distancing that many already find difficult becomes even more challenging when evacuating and/or entering a public shelter from the storm is required. How do I help my neighbors prepare while distancing? Will supplies be available and how will I get them? What about an already strained health care system? And that all-important question, will someone come if I need help? The potential is that these more common disasters like hurricanes and tornados become threat multipliers exacerbating the current COVID-19 pandemic. While the greatest impact will be to the area impacted directly by the storm it should be clear to the world by now that failing to contain a highly contagious virus anywhere is a threat everywhere. While this sounds ominous it does not have to be. We must develop plans now to deal with other disasters we know are coming and have already come in some cases (i.e. Tornadoes).

This will come at a time when many government entities have exhausted their budgets dealing with immediate pandemic impacts. As hurricane season is fast approaching many of FEMA's resources have already been consumed and need to be replenished. Individuals who are no longer receive a paycheck might have difficulty purchasing supplies and unable finically to evacuate to a hotel which are mostly empty at this time. These people will need shelter – so COVID 19 related social distancing if implemented we will need many more shelters to accommodate the same number of people as in the past – with an increasing number of people needing shelter due to economic downturn – will

again increase the need for shelters (and shelter and hospital capabilities to help people with special need).

There is constant talk of the “new normal” or what the new normal will be? We suggest that going forward we not simply adjust to a “new normal” but define and reimagine a “better normal”. One way we do this is by creating a preemptive plan for the coming hurricane season. Many of us are living lives and continue to work and go to school with the aid of technology.

So perhaps technologies could be used to identify needs at neighborhood levels and then try to match needs with resources. These resources could aid in finding shelters with neighbors by connecting neighbors to neighbors like AirB&B for hurricanes. The apps could be used like Next Door and people offering rooms as a shelter could receive payment from FEMA (but these rooms would need to meet certain criteria for safety). However, to protect people offering shelter and people seeking shelters – we need to run tests including antibody and to create matches with the lowest probability of viral spread. Additionally, houses that are not within typical evacuation zones should be identified as potential alternate shelters – however, fire departments or hospitals located in these neighborhoods should be able to serve as resources for COVID-19 and quickly implement an isolation plan for anyone who shows signs.

Additionally, temporary hospitals during hurricanes may not work. New Orleans – one of the hard-hit areas of COVID-19 is also vulnerable to hurricanes and tornados. Florida also has an added risk with an elderly population.

We also need to think about people who become infected with COVID-19 in the middle of a disaster – where can they go? What protocol do friends and family need to follow? How will the public be informed of this protocol? Usually, people are asked to evacuate and then all services stop. People have to register for special needs shelter (long before the event to have access to it). Not all shelters have capabilities for isolation and proper ventilation. What is the protocol for separation at the large public shelter? What is the protocol for in-house quarantine (in-house is easier to manage than large public shelters without a plan).

There must be a contingency plan and supply of test kits, medical equipment, and professionals ready to be deployed in any region that is experiencing a natural disaster and COVID-19 cases simultaneously. Since all of the states

within the US will not be needing all of these contingent resources at the same time – an efficient and proactive scenario-based logical operation plans can be useful and easily simulated by integrating hurricane prediction models and pandemic spread models (from its epicenter) and resource allocations (availability and needs assessment).

ICAR presents these issues for the public and policymakers to be prepared. While we can't always stop disaster we can lessen their impact with proper preparation and execution.

Please check out the CRIS - Community Resiliency Information System located at <http://cris-community-resiliency.org/> . CRIS provides information and resources to help you prepare for a disaster. It also includes an embedded survey. It will only take a few minutes to fill out but the information you provide will help local and state emergency planners know how to target resources based on your needs so everyone in your area can be better prepared and able to recover during extreme weather events, flooding, and hurricanes. Your response, when completed by you and others, will help communicate your information and resource needs to decision-makers. This fosters communication between government and communities and helps build resiliency.