LESSONS FROM WORKING FOR FEMA IN RESPONSE TO HURRICANE MARIA IN PUERTO RICO





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Outline

- My Background
- FEMA Surge Capacity Force
- Puerto Rico
 - Issues
 - Resiliency Factors
 - Lessons



My Background

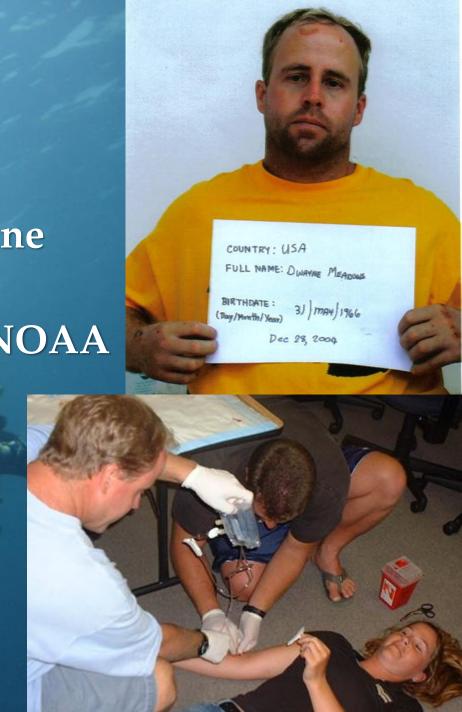
Conservation Ecologist

 Work on Coral Reef Restoration and Marine Debris from storms, oil spills, tsunamis

Tsunami advisor: Hawaii Civil Defense, NOAA

First Responder

Survivor

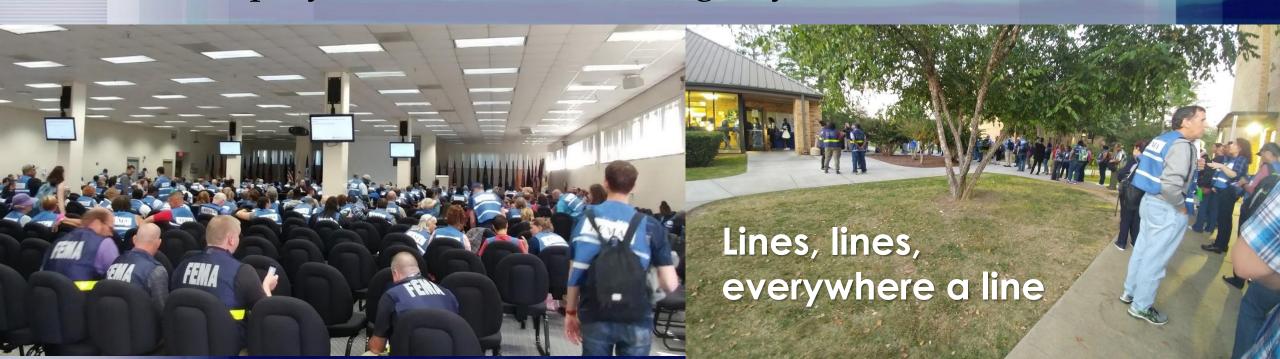


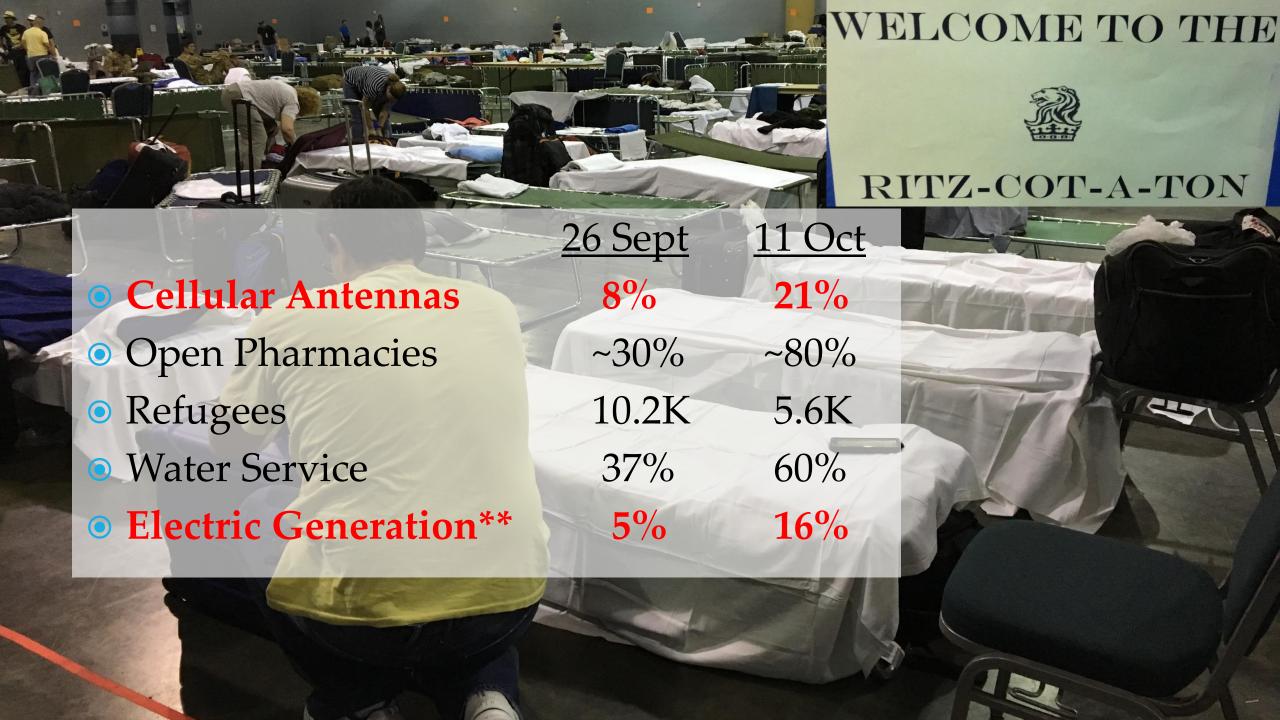
FEMA's Surge Capacity Force

- From Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act
 - deploy Federal employees to help "rapidly" respond to disasters and acts of terrorism
 - "Ensure...a sufficient number...
 - "appropriate and continuous training"
- FEMA failed to implement the program
 - Government Accountability Office warns in 2008, 2015 for inadequate staff (26%), training, recruiting, outcomes
 - 2016-2020 Human Capital Plan not even mention SCF

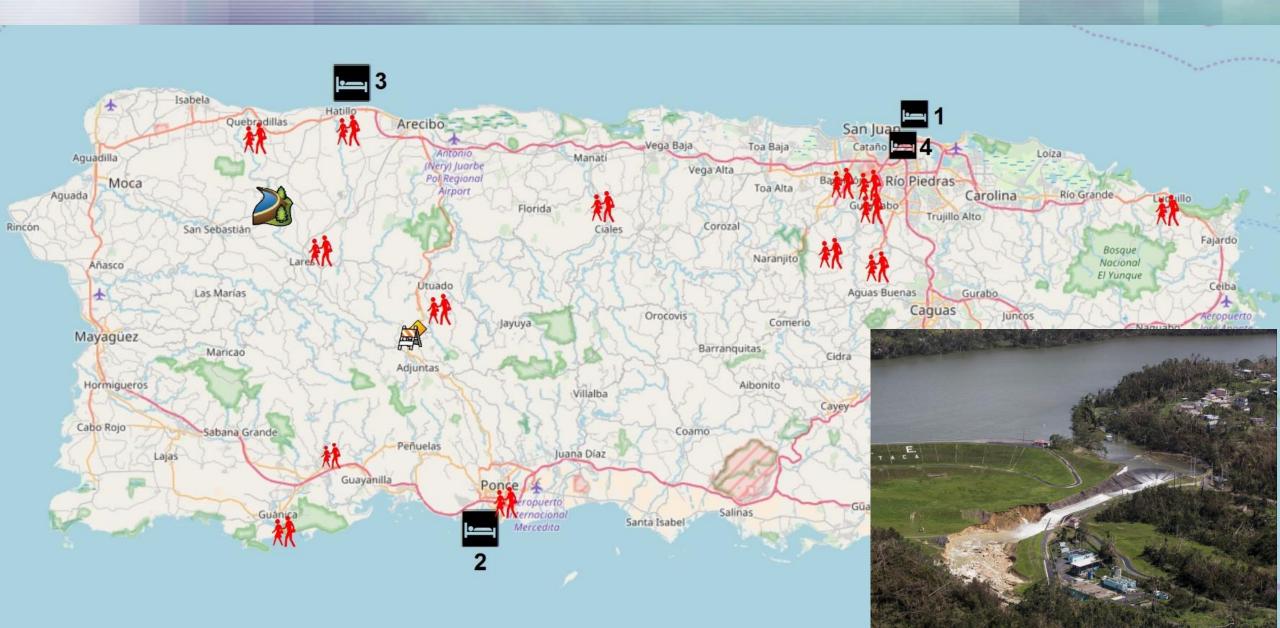
2017 Activation

- Harvey August 26th, Irma Sept 6, Maria Sept 20th
- SCF Activated August 28th (DHS), Sept. 12 (other Feds)
- Ultimately ~5000 Feds (supposed to have 15,400 ready!)
- I deployed Oct 2 for 4 training days. then to Puerto Rico





My Deployment: Disaster Survivor Assistance





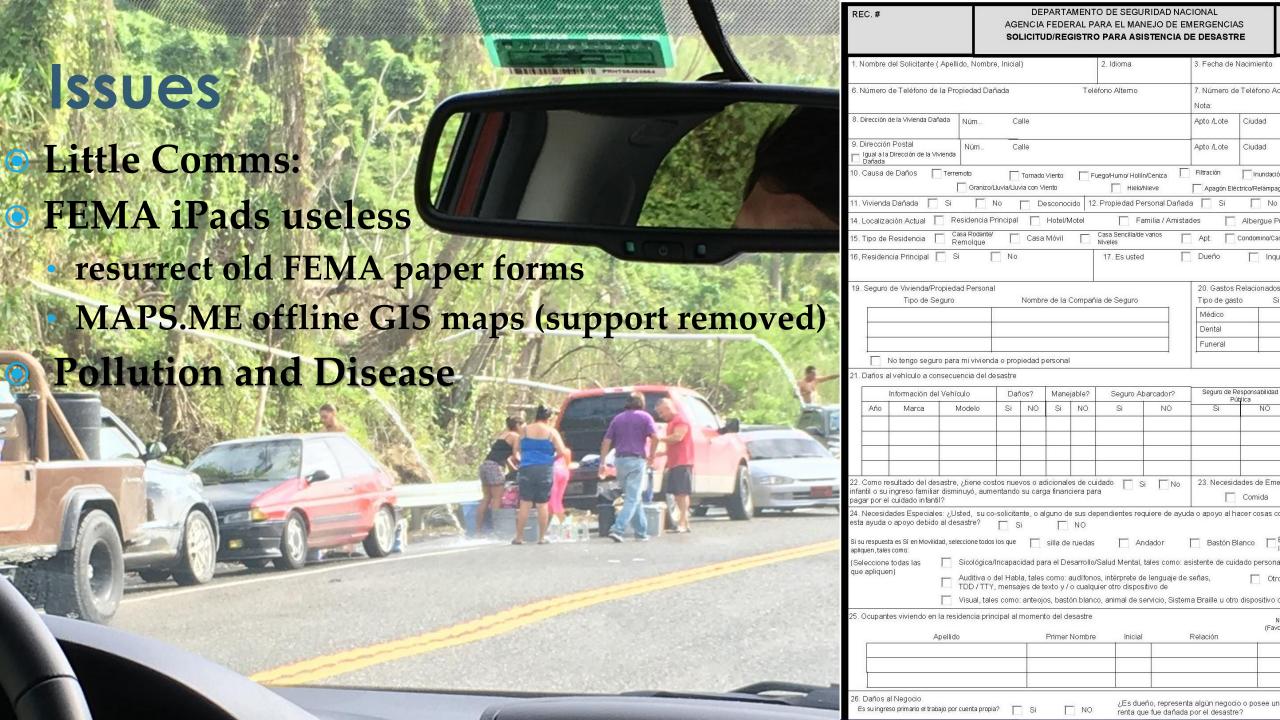
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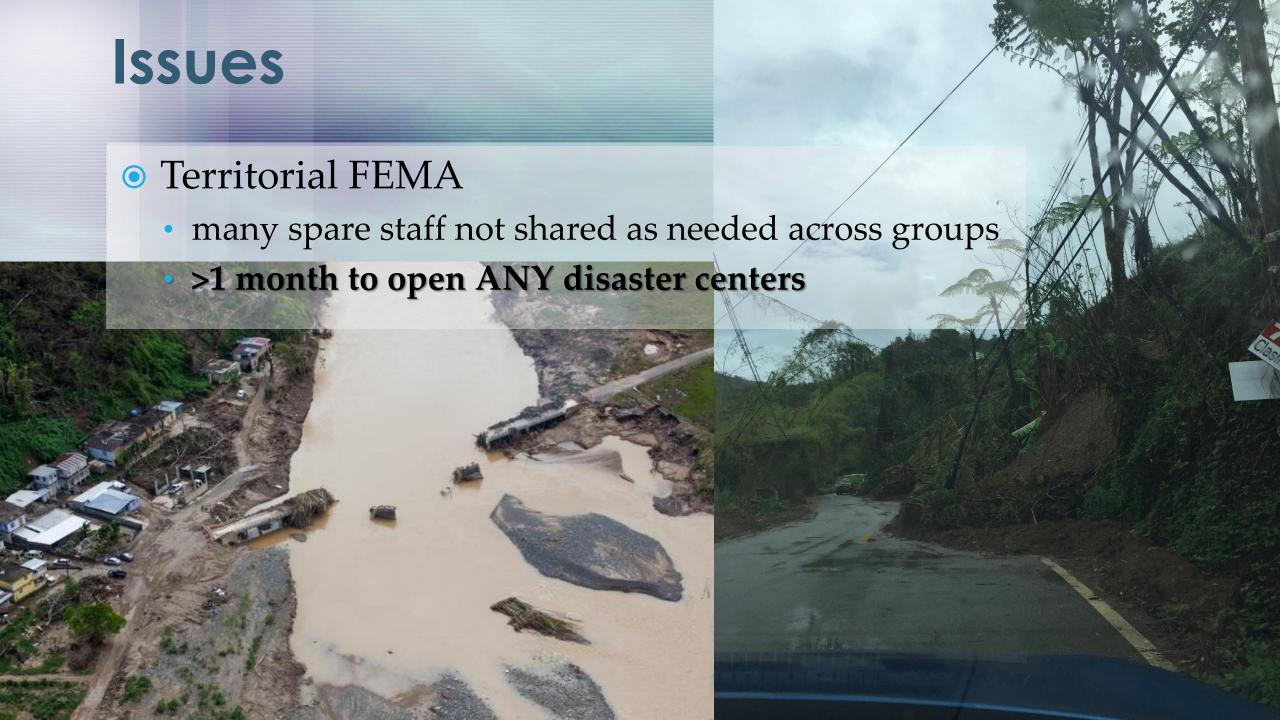
- Last of 3 storms: depleted resources
- Local/Commonwealth first responders overwhelmed - Bankrupt finances
- Underprepared
 - FEMA Stockpiles sent to USVI for Irma, few local stocks
 - Only tested CAT 1 plans
 - Little sub-city organization
 - Rural Addressing

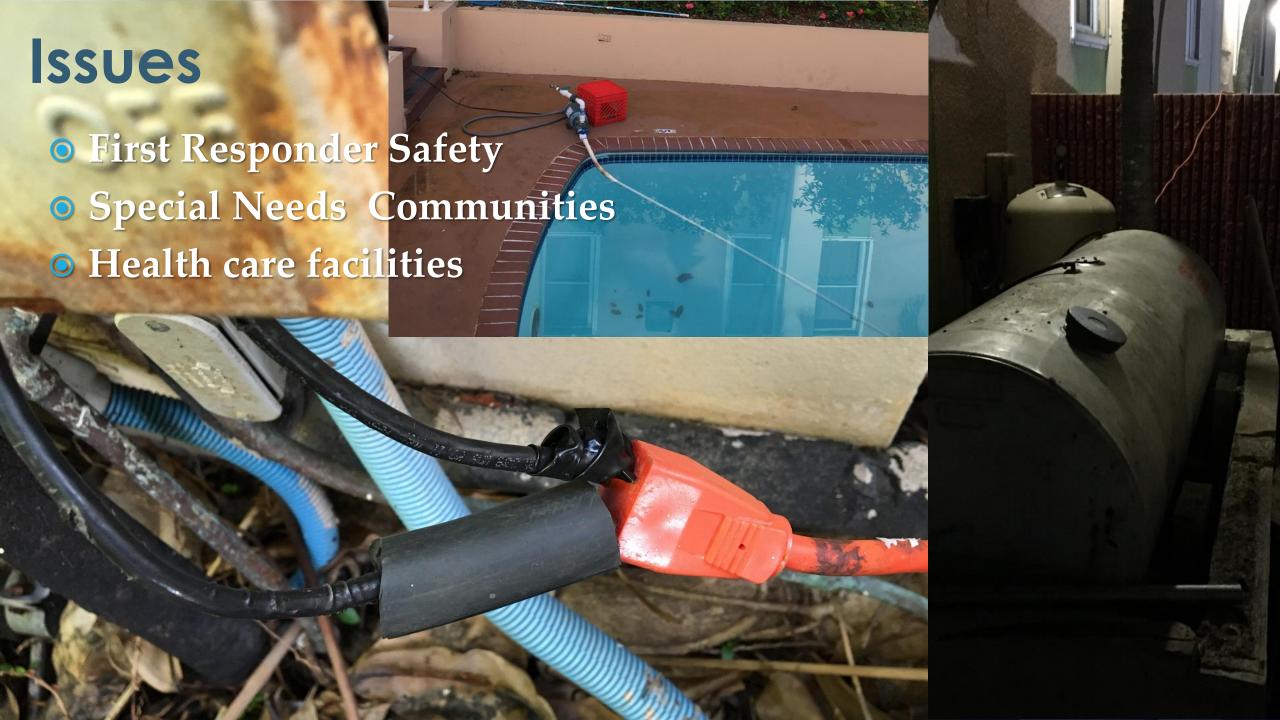


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- Strong social bonds: family, long-term neighbors, etc
- Collaborative, optimistic spirit
- Dedicated visitors
- Diaspora



Lessons

- Politicization of Response and Aid
 - Federal AND Local
- Redundancy at ALL levels
- There are no lanes: resiliency ACROSS levels
- Local and Neighborhood Organization
- Decentralize
- Mental Health
- Special Needs







