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# Texas stands ready for hurricane season — can you help when Texas needs you?

Remember the pre-Katrina summer of 2005? Sure, Texans knew hurricanes were always a possibility along our 370 miles of coastline — more coastline than any state except Florida. And DSHS EMS knew we might be called upon to help when local resources were burdened. But back then, the EMS response to hurricanes was mainly local. Then came September of 2005 and the storms that would test the resourcefulness of statewide emergency response like nothing before.

Katrina, the first of the season's monster storms, hit New Orleans in September, followed ten days later by Hurricane Rita slamming into the Texas-Louisiana border. The combination of the two catastrophes produced the perfect storm: too few evacuated before Katrina, resulting in chaotic rescues and the loss of many lives when the levees broke. And too *many* left Houston as Rita approached, causing a meltdown of the evacuation system — even as those who fled Katrina sheltered in the Astrodome. And then fickle Rita turned north on the last morning before landfall, slamming into an area of Texas that was less prepared. As anyone who worked those storms can attest, emergency systems were strained from the one-two punch of thousands of people needing to escape the storm's fury and many more needing shelter until it was safe to return. It was a mess.

Fast forward to 2009. Emergency response in Texas has come light years from those fumbling and frantic days after Katrina and Rita. Since then, we've had many hurricanes (including four last summer alone), a Child Protective Services raid in West Texas and a flu pandemic scare. Yet, each time the emergency response system has been activated, it's been a little smoother — firing up for the most recent flu response was almost like turning on a switch. So that's the good news — we're definitely more prepared and ready for whatever comes our way this summer. But we still need more help. Texas needs EMS providers willing to sign our memorandums of agreement to respond in disasters such as hurricanes. Not only will you be helping your fellow Texans when they need you, signing the MOA guarantees payment for your services when you return home. If you'd like to be on our list of responders to call when Texas needs help, go to our website ([www.dshs.state.tx.us/emstraumasystems](http://www.dshs.state.tx.us/emstraumasystems)) and click on the MOA icon at the top of the page. Or call us if you have any questions.

June 2 found most folks at DSHS breathing a sigh of relief as another legislative session wrapped up. The staff at DSHS spent countless hours analyzing bills and waiting at the Capitol to testify when a bill was heard in a committee. Several times, staff had to stay until the wee hours of the morning — just in case the committee had a question. We've recapped the legislation passed pertaining to EMS and trauma systems beginning on page 26. We may add to the list as the summer goes on, and in at least one case, we've got to get a legal opinion on how to implement some of the changes. We will keep you updated on our website and in the magazine.

May's GETAC meetings were cancelled due to the flu response, so we'll try again in August. Turn to page 12 for the committee meeting schedule.

And about our website ... We're getting a new one — again. We've been informed that the DSHS website will be completely revamped this summer and launched in the fall. We don't know what it will look like, but we'll try to keep the same links so you won't have to go hunt for the things you normally use. At least, that's the best information we have for now. We'll keep you updated via the website — whatever it looks like.



## FROM THIS SIDE



**Kelly Harrell**  
Editor