

JULY 2023 SMALL COMMUNITY WATER INFRASTRUCTURE EXCHANGE (SCWIE) E-MAIL NEWSLETTER

Supplement on WARNs

WARNs using the Hurricane Michael event that occurred in 2018 is described in this supplement.

After Hurricane Irma, staff from SERCAP attended a workshop where lessons learned from Hurricane Irma were reviewed using WARNs. SERCAP had participated in that one. It was discussed that all were shorthanded during Irma and additional help had been needed. SERCAP offered to setup the WARNs.

Soon after WARNs had been set up for Florida, a trial run tabletop exercise had been planned. On October 10th, however, tropical storm Michael hit. This was a category 5 hurricane, with winds of 160 mile per hour so the practice event ended up being a real event where SERCAP staff participated.

The damage was extensive. Staff from the University of Florida at Gainesville headed up the group which consisted of the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, Florida Rural Water Association and SERCAP (the trio group). Other staff that were included were from USEPA, the Army Corps of Engineers, many large and small utilities and other people on the ground who also assisted.

The way it worked was, calls from systems that had a need which were followed up with other utilities throughout the state to determine who had what was needed. A lot of times it was for generators or pumps that were out or assistance from electricians. Sometimes it was just a skill sets.

This event was so massive that it took weeks to do, and so even in the small systems their personnel was burned out and they could not function anymore. Calls of what was needed would be received and then meetings would be held throughout the day to follow up with other utilities throughout the state

to implement what was needed and where to send people. Many challenges had to be overcome.

Cell phone towers were down in southern Florida. There was no way to communicate with people. There were no regular telephone lines.

There were no cell phone lines. There was no Internet.

Fortunately, Florida Rural Water Association had a satellite phone, so all communication was going on from the field site through satellite phones to the trio group and then the University of Florida. And then it would follow to the utilities.

The mutual aid agreement is voluntary, but some systems, unless they have that guarantee that they are going to get reimbursed for coming to provide assistance, would not do it. So in order to be able to assist communities, the mutual aid agreement had to be on hand. People had to be tracked down to get things signed, but some of the roads were impassable; there was no communication. What should have been an hour drive to get from where one was staying to the site took them from 5:30 in the morning to 9:30 just because of the conditions of the roads.

Tracking had to be done. There were several tracking systems that further complicated matter. Initially there were several tracking systems that further delayed matters.

There is now one joint tracking system with a shared database where one could find out what the needs are and put it out there. Utilities throughout the state can now go on to the site and say, oh, I see that you need a generator piece of equipment. We have got it. We can help. And so that is how it is coordinated in Florida.

There were several state tracking systems in existence. So everyone was spending a lot of time and putting the same data over and over and again into different databases. The year after the above event, everyone came together

to come up with one system, called Water Tracker, where there is only tracking in one location.

In conclusion, information on mutual aid agreements can be found on USEPA's website mentioned previously in the main body of the newsletter where one can learn more about WARNs, how to join and how to start one.