



COUNTY JUDGE ED EMMETT
DIRECTOR

Business Commodities Plan

A Private/Public Sector Best Practice

Summary

The Harris County Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Management (HCOHSEM) helps prepare, safeguard and protect the residents and property of Harris County from the effects of disasters through effective planning, preparation, response and recovery activities. To accomplish this mission, HCOHSEM develops, maintains and coordinates a comprehensive emergency management plan; activates and staffs an Emergency Operations Center (EOC) to coordinate and support efforts to respond to, and recover from, emergencies and disasters; develops and assists in the delivery of effective public outreach programs; collects, provides and disseminates information for elected officials, the media, our residents, partners and other stakeholders; trains, educates and prepares for emergencies through the development and delivery of effective classes, drills and exercises.

Background

During recovery efforts in 2008 immediately following Hurricane Ike, the Harris County Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Management identified the need to develop and utilize partnerships with commodities providers to determine retail availability of necessary life sustaining commodities after a disaster that affects the county. Since that time, HCOHSEM has been working towards building those relationships. A Business Commodities plan was designed to work in conjunction with the Harris County Points of Distribution (POD) plan. The Business Commodities Plan establishes how a Business Commodities Report will be created to provide a real-time operational decision making tool with the necessary information to support local government response efforts, specifically to assist in determining the need to open or close POD locations in Harris County.

Through the partnerships we have developed, HCOHSEM is now able to contact major retailers in the region immediately following an event to ascertain the availability of resources for the community. Due to the ever changing nature of most disasters, it is important to have a format that allows for standardized reporting to assist in critical decision making post disaster. Creating and maintaining a Business Commodities report provides an effective way for command to quickly evaluate and understand the extent of damage to Harris County and how best to direct response and recovery efforts.

HCOHSEM's Business Commodities report is designed to include the following criteria:

- Which major commodities businesses are open or closed?
- If there are businesses open, where are they located?
- Are the businesses located close to assigned POD locations?
- Are there ample businesses open to accommodate the surrounding communities or are POD operations still critical in the area?
- Which major commodities businesses are preparing to open and what is the estimated timeframe for resumption of operations?
- Are the open businesses operating at normal levels or are commodities limited?

Understanding where commodities are readily available to communities is critical during times of recovery. The Business Commodities report helps to identify areas where communities are still in need of assistance to obtain life sustaining commodities. By identifying these areas, recovery efforts can be more effectively directed to areas still in need.

Goals and Objectives

- Develop and maintain partnerships with private sector commodities providers and utilize those partnerships to better serve our communities.
- Immediately following a disaster, it is important to identify communities that have been affected and to determine the extent of damage. A key element during the assessment phase is the availability of life sustaining commodities.
- Compile Business Commodities reports in a timely and efficient manner based on information derived from our partnerships to provide county officials with essential information used during response and recovery efforts.
- Provide regional partners with information to assist in their recovery efforts by providing them with plans and helping them adapt the plans to the specific needs in their jurisdictions.

Description

The Harris County Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Management will establish and maintain relationships with the major commodities businesses in Harris County through frequent communications. The Planning Section is responsible for periodic verification of contact information and for testing response times for requests for information from the businesses. It is imperative that good relationships are established and maintained so that the necessary information to compile the report can be obtained during times of disaster. Also, by periodic testing of response times, HCOHSEM will be able to establish and improve upon timeframes for responses following a disaster. Since accurate and timely information is critical to response operations, working closely with business partners prior to a disaster is an integral part of the plan.

The Incident Commander is responsible for Business Commodities reporting immediately following a disaster. The Incident Commander will assign initiation of Business Commodities reporting to the

Planning Section Chief, who in-turn will assign a Business Commodities report coordinator to compile the necessary information for the report. The report will be completed for each 24 hour operational period and turned in to the Incident Commander by 08:00 each day until the Incident Commander notifies the Planning Section Chief that the report is no longer needed for the event. The report will be given to the Incident Commander once it is completed so that the report can then be supplied to the Harris County Judge as well as any other officials the Incident Commander deems necessary.

The Business Commodities report coordinator will contact appropriate representatives from business commodities vendors in Harris County in order to compile the Business Commodities report. Contact will be made at least once a day, but may need to be made more frequently depending upon the nature of the event. The list of contacts for the commodities businesses will be maintained and updated by the Planning Section.

The coordinator will be responsible for asking the businesses to identify their store locations that are open for business, whether or not the stores are fully operational, and what limitations they may be experiencing (limited hours of operation, limited commodities available, etc.). In addition to determining which stores are open, the coordinator will need to ask which stores are ready to open and what the expected timeframe is for the stores to open.

Once the coordinator has a comprehensive list of stores that are open, closed, or about to be open, the coordinator will provide the necessary information for a map of these store locations to be prepared by the G.I.S. coordinator. The map will be coded to identify the status of each store, open, closed, or soon to be open (within a specified timeframe). The map, once completed, will be included in the daily report for the Incident Commander. This map will provide a clear overview of available commodities in communities throughout Harris County which may then be used to assist in determining which POD locations should be opened or closed. When the Business Commodities report has been completed, the report will be given to the Planning Section Chief for further dissemination.

Resources

The Harris County Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Management has developed partnerships with all of the major retail commodities providers in Harris County. These partnerships are an integral part of helping prepare for, respond to and recover from disasters.

Training and Exercises

The Harris County Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Management's Planning Section periodically tests response times with our business commodities partners to ensure a timely response will be possible following an event. The Planning Section also verifies contact information for the individual points of contact with each of our partners during our periodic tests. Contact with our commodities providers is included during a regional hurricane exercise.

Communication Tools

The Harris County Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Management utilizes the following methods of communication with its public/private partners: email alerts, in-person meetings, conferences and other events, Internet websites, teleconferences, and video conferences.

Links

www.hcoem.org

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