

Evacuations

Even though we would like to remain in this area in the event of an emergency, there are scenarios in which the risk is too high for us to remain. Hurricanes are the first events that come to mind, but HazMat incidents or even acts of terrorism can require us to evacuate. Hurricanes provide a relatively long lead time but a HazMat incident will not. There will be cases that even the EOC's will be evacuated. For instance, the standard hurricane procedure for Johnson Space Center is to shut down the center except for the "hurricane rideout crew", which will stay during hurricane conditions and perform damage assessment/control after hurricane conditions end. However, before Hurricane Rita in 2005, JSC management ordered even the hurricane rideout crew to evacuate the center due to the forecast severity of this hurricane. Therefore, it is important to have an evacuation plan, including supplies necessary for the evacuation before one is called, in the event that it is required.

Since there are incidents that can cause evacuations with zero lead times such as HazMat incidents, the preliminary steps for preparing for an evacuation should already been taken. In addition to the radio "Go Kit", you should also have important papers such as property deeds, vehicle titles, and insurance policies should be in a container ready to go immediately. You should also have a store of cash in denominations of \$20 and lower since in the event of a hurricane, there will be a run on banks. The banks in turn will limit the amount of withdraws and the lines will be very long. Cash is king in an emergency since the normal infrastructure such as communications and electricity can be disabled by the emergency. This will effectively shut down all credit/debit card transactions. This was a major lesson learned from Rita. The rule during hurricane season about never letting your gas tank go below half full should be observed all the time since it may not be possible to obtain fuel during the evacuation. You should also have non-perishable food and water available to be loaded into the evacuation vehicle when necessary. You do not want to be in the middle of panic buying. It is sight you never forget.

Two more things I would carry in my Go Kit are a battery operated NOAA Weather Radio with Specific Area Message Encoding (SAME) and a battery operated AM/FM radio. Both are useful means to receive official bulletins. Even though NOAA Weather Radio is most often used for weather information, it is also considered "All Hazards Radio" since local, state and Federal emergency management authorities have plans to use NOAA Weather Radio for non-weather emergency broadcasts. The AM/FM battery powered radio is used to monitor local Emergency Alert System (EAS) broadcasts. The two Local Primary stations for the Houston Area are KTRH-AM (740 kHz) and KUHF-FM (88.7 MHz). The Texas Association of Broadcasters has posted on their website (<http://www.tab.org/emergency-systems/EAS>) the state EAS plan as well as local plans for the Houston area, the Metroplex, Austin, and San Antonio.

Communications during the evacuation can be useful to local and state emergency management. If you have mobile HF capabilities, then check in to the State ARES Net on 7285 kHz (day) and 3873 kHz (night) and advise the net on the road conditions you are seeing, including traffic jams and traffic hazards such as disabled vehicles and accidents. If you see an immediate threat to life, such as a car fire or accident with injuries, then report this as emergency traffic. Even if you do not have mobile HF capabilities, with a VHF/UHF mobile rig, you can still be useful if you know and/or program the county VHF/UHF ARES frequencies along the route of travel. Even an HT can be used in a bind if you have an

external antenna and a 12 Volt adapter so you can run at maximum power. Since in a major incident, the cellphone system is pretty much saturated, I would not depend on a cellphone as a means of communications.