

NACo Reports on Texas flooding: How counties are helping

By [MARY ANN BARTON](#) Aug. 28, 2017



Fairfax County, Va. Virginia Taskforce 1 search and rescue team prepares to drive to Texas Sunday. Photo courtesy of Fairfax County.

Counties across the country are lending a hand – responding to the catastrophic flooding that began over the weekend in southeast Texas, after rain from Hurricane Harvey inundated Harris County and the surrounding area with 30 inches of rain in 72 hours, stranding thousands of residents.

“We have not seen an event like this,” William “Brock” Long, administrator of the Federal Emergency Management Agency, said Monday morning at a news briefing. “You could not draw this forecast up. You could not dream this forecast up.” More rain is forecast through Wednesday.

Harris County had to evacuate a county jail, a county hospital and Constable Mark Herman’s office due to flooding, Harris County spokesman Francisco Sanchez said Monday afternoon. The county is making use of social media during the disaster, getting a good response from the public when they put out a call for extra boats for rescues. “We’ve assembled quite an army of boats,” he said. “We just asked them to keep the ice chests and beer at home.” The county also got the word out on its readyharris.org site. All county offices, such as libraries and courts, will be closed this week.

President Donald Trump also declared a state of emergency for Louisiana, ordering federal assistance to supplement response efforts there. Louisiana Gov. John Bel Edwards had asked Trump in a statement on Sunday for assistance, citing the National Weather Service’s warning that coming rainfall could pose “serious danger to life and property of the citizens of our state.”

Helping hands

Members of Fairfax County, Va.'s [Virginia Task Force 1 Swiftwater team](#) suited up Sunday to head to Houston. Fourteen members drove through the night, expecting to arrive Monday afternoon, according to Assistant Fire Chief Chuck Ryan with Fairfax County Fire & Rescue. Armed with several inflatable and flat-bottom boats, they'll work out of Katy, Texas.

Montgomery County, Md. also sent a group of urban search and rescue workers, who were preparing to leave Sunday night for Texas.

Orange County, Calif. also sent a search and rescue team, including search and rescue dogs Wally and Jester, to Texas. The group of 45 includes personnel from the [Orange County Fire Authority](#). The Task Force, being coordinated by FEMA, drove in a 16-vehicle convoy for 20 hours down Interstate 10 and arrived late Friday afternoon at the AT&T Center in San Antonio for pre-staging. The group was split up between various areas in Texas had rescued 200 people as of Monday, according to Capt. Larry Kurtz, Orange County Fire Authority spokesman. "The best part is we are almost completely autonomous, we don't need any logistical support. We try to anticipate what we're going to need."

The team is one of eight state/federal Urban Search and Rescue Task Forces in California that is a highly specialized unit that can perform in heavy reinforced masonry structures, handle heavy rigging, specialized search functions and operate in swiftwater/flood environments.

For anyone wanting to make individual donations for victims of the flooding in and around Harris County, Sanchez suggested contacting [United Way of Greater Houston](#). A message posted to the group's Facebook page Sunday states: "Our community is facing incredible devastation – and it is not over yet. We are working with our partners to address immediate needs, like food and shelter. Please help: unitedwayhouston.org/flood or text UWFLOOD to 41444."

As of Sunday night, FEMA had more than 900 Urban Search and Rescue personnel working to save lives in south Texas. Commodities are being strategically located at Incident Support Bases (ISB) near the impacted areas. As of Sunday, more than 1 million liters of water, 1 million meals, 20,520 tarps and 70 generators are at the ISBs and staging areas in Texas and Louisiana. FEMA is providing around-the-clock staffing at its distribution center in Fort Worth, Texas, and is shipping additional commodities to ISBs and staging areas.

The White House announced that President Trump plans to visit Texas on Tuesday.