

## In the Wake of Katrina



THE WATER WILL BE GONE from the streets, the toxic sludge treated, and the rebuilding process well under way before the discussion on what went wrong in the wake of Hurricane Katrina subsides. Nearly everyone has his or her own idea of how things should have been handled. And the arguments over that will no doubt go on for decades.

As the disaster (or calamity, as it came to be called a few weeks later by synonym-hungry television reporters) relates to our field of interest, it may be years before we learn the many ways response training worked, or didn't, as the case may be. Could anyone have been trained well enough to anticipate the "perfect storm" aspects—the coming together of a number of one-in-a-million kind of events—that were this hurricane? Could better training have anticipated the scenarios that developed in Katrina's wake? I attended a management seminar recently on the concept of scenario planning, which may have made me more aware of how our system broke down. Many in leadership roles repeated the mantra that an event like this could have never been anticipated, but it is the planning and training phases that allow us to consider various scenarios—even the absurdly impossible ones.

It's also apparent that in many cases, people who must have been trained to take care of others just didn't do what they were expected to do. We all know the reasons: a threat to their own well-being or the need to protect their families from harm. While we always expect people to do the right thing, no amount of training will ever trump the will of a person who chooses to protect his own family.

The debate over the failings of governmental agencies to respond quickly to Katrina's destruction will do nothing but grow and amplify as we approach the 2008 U.S. presidential election. But for all of the complaining and posturing, there will be some success stories worth repeating. But no one should walk away from this event and feel as if the United States responded as well as we should have expected. Now is the time to begin developing better response programs and improving the training for the men and women who will be first on the scene, as well as those who support the massive effort to rebuild a decimated infrastructure.

In the November issue of T+D, we will look at the training of first responders for events like Katrina and we will examine what worked and what didn't. Beyond that we will all surely think more deeply about the limits and the possibilities of training for an event we hope never happens.

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