

NYRWA: Emergency Management and Our Role

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Since the fall of 2005 and the massive storms that rocked the Gulf Coast of our nation, the New York Rural Water Association has begun to re-evaluate what path our role as a responder might follow. When several of our Staff traveled to the devastated area of southwest Louisiana in the fall of 2005, we saw firsthand what a State Rural

Water Association could do, even within the limitations of their relatively small resources. Since that time members of the New York Rural Water staff have asked themselves how we might best serve our membership under similar circumstances. We realize that the Empire State's geographic location may never lend itself to the same type of devastating natural disaster that we witnessed on the Gulf Coast. We are certainly aware that there are weather-related events that can effect our region (Ice Storms, Flooding, Tornadoes) as well as man-made events that would constitute an emergency (Spills, Fires, Vandalism) to name a few. Since the first of the year (2006), several members of the New York Rural Water Association staff have begun to meet each month in an effort to collect data and formulate some guidelines on just exactly how the NYRWA can assist our membership in the event of an emergency. Initially we have concurred that we probably will not take on the role of first-responders, although certain members of our staff (Circuit Riders and Wastewater personnel) would be able to travel to the affected system on request. We are now examining how we might best serve the recovery effort. One of the ideas we are researching would put us in Control Center role where systems could call our toll-free number (888-697-8725) for assistance in locating available equipment and manpower. We could act as liaison between equipment vendors and the systems, giving system personnel the freedom to stay in the field, while we make the necessary phone calls, at their request. By utilizing this ONE-Call system, operators and decision makers would have access to telephone numbers and contact information that may not be available at their fingertips. While this is just one of the ideas we are considering, we are open to suggestions from the membership and would value any input that a system, operator, or decision maker would have to offer. You can contact any of the NYRWA staff with your suggestions by leaving voice-mails at the office (888-697-8725), e-mailing us through our website www.nyruralwater.org, or just write us a note and address it to:

NYRWA Emergency Management Working Group
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We are also looking forward to assimilating information from State Rural Water Associations that have had hands-on experience along the Gulf Coast during Katrina and Rita to find out what worked well and what did not work so well during their crisis. Hopefully, when New York Rural Water Association staff travels to Milwaukee, Wisconsin for In-Service and Dallas, Texas for the National Rural Water Association Conference we will be able to hear first hand from those involved. Remember to contact us if you have information or suggestions you would like to share with our Emergency Management Working Group. We will meet informally following our regular staff meeting each month in 2006 collecting information and discussing ideas that may help to serve you better during an emergency. ♠