

# Mutual Aid Agreement

## For Water and Sewer Utilities

2005-2006

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## Problem Background

-  Concerns that requests for assistance would come with unpredictable billing for services and materials.
-  No consistent operating procedures for water and sewer utilities during emergencies.
-  Past legal battles between the county and smaller water sewer systems over service areas.
-  Old thought processes that everyone was on their own and did not need “outside” help or interference.

## **Problem Background (Continued)**

-  Unwillingness to work as a unified body and little interest in discussing solutions to mutually encountered problems
-  Geographical separation by Eglin Air Force Base between the north and south ends of Okaloosa County.
-  (Note-Utilities marked in blue on next slide-Eglin AFB extends from south of Crestview to Valparaiso, and from Walton to Santa Rosa County Line).



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## Interventions

-  Separate meetings with utilities from the north end and separate meeting with south end utilities.
-  Joint meeting in the center of the county with utilities from the north and south end.
-  Encourage utilities to develop a plan acceptable to all, with Health Department assistance.
-  Help utilities to meet State regulatory requirement of having emergency response plan in place.

## Interventions (Continued)

-  Provide training to coalition members to be able to take the test for ham radio operator, thus providing each with a redundant means of emergency communication during a disaster.
-  Help utilities see how they can pool their material orders to buy in bulk, thus saving money and allowing for service expansion or system upgrades.
-  Assist coalition members in the preparation of their emergency response plans for the Federal Government.

## Interventions (Continued)

-  Work out agreement with county emergency management to allow coalition member utility vehicles to use county fuel during a disaster.
-  Ask utilities willing to sign agreement to talk individually with those reluctant to sign.
-  Provide training to utilities on how to prepare for possible pandemic influenza and its effect on their workers.
-  Help coordinate quarterly meetings with utilities to discuss common issues and develop unified ordinances to address items such as private lift stations and grease from restaurants.

## Project Benefits

-  Ability to purchase materials on a bulk basis, thus freeing money for service expansion/ system upgrades.
-  Developing a coalition that fosters an environment of partnership and serves as a model for other counties to replicate.
-  Having a unified set of ordinances to address common issues.
-  Having the Emergency Operations Center (ESF8) be the only party releasing water and sewer status information.
-  Damaged utilities are assured of paying an assisting utility the FEMA reimbursable rate.
-  County fuel will be available to utility vehicles following a disaster.

## **Project Benefits (Continued)**

-  Several utilities have agreed to interconnects for water to allow for continued service if a well goes down.
-  Relationships developed through the coalition have provided for interlocal agreements whereby one utility with sewer capability provides service in another utility service area where sewer is not available.
-  The Mutual Aid Agreement has led to a partnership with law enforcement, preparedness, local hospitals, water systems, emergency management and other regulatory state agencies to develop a unified plan of emergency response to a bioterrorism incident involving food/water.



## Goal Alignment

-  CDC Goal of preparing for emerging health threats by:
  - Assuring all media information regarding water and sewer safety after a disaster is through the emergency operations center
  - Providing for service expansion and system upgrades through funds saved by bulk purchases
  - Creation of a unified emergency response plan for food/water bioterrorism
  
-  Support educational models of best practices to gain community support to address public health service issues and concerns by:
  - Sharing the Mutual Aid Agreement for utilities with the other 66 counties in Florida, with several other states and with NACCHO as a best practice.

## Goal Alignment (Continued)

-  Coordinate and promote activities that identify critical stakeholders and foster interaction and communication between agencies. This has been accomplished by:
  - Numerous meetings with water and sewer utilities to foster trust and provide for 100% sign-on for the coalition.
  - Meetings with Department of Environmental Protection, Business Regulation, Agriculture, FBI, Domestic Security Task Force, County Emergency Management, Local Hospitals, Law Enforcement, Eglin Air Force Base, Hulbert Field Air Force Base, regional epidemiology and State Laboratories for Health, Environmental Protection and Agriculture to develop the Unified Emergency Response Plan for Food/Water Bioterrorism-a direct result of the Mutual Aid Agreement

## **Contact Information**

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