

STORIES FROM THE STORM

Tales and lessons from club and hotel professionals who have weathered natural disasters



Verna Rae Caudle, CAM, CHAE, CHTP
Former Controller
Lexington Community & Country Club
Fort Myers, Florida

The day after Hurricane Charley hit Southwest Florida in August 2004, after it was predicted to hit much further north, our staff, including management, office, golf course maintenance and landscape personnel teamed up with 60 of our residents to start cleaning up and assessing the damage. We were very fortunate that we had 145 dedicated employees on staff and the cash flow to purchase the equipment we needed to start putting things back together.



We lost tennis court fencing, awnings, benches, trees, roof tiles, lake banks, signs, computers and POS monitors.

Being the new controller for the club, I did not know the details of the property insurance coverage and did not have a copy of the policy. Our agent showed up about five days after the hurricane and told us to get pictures and keep invoices on any damages we had. We were on the property cleaning up and repairing damage immediately after Charley hit so by day five it was a little late to take pictures! We asked if we had tree and cleanup coverage and we were told “no.” Fortunately, or maybe unfortunately, our agent was incorrect.

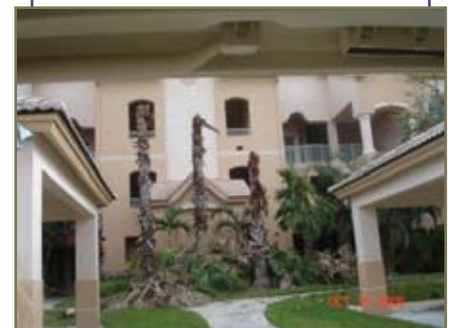
That following October, at the 2004 HFTP Annual Convention & Tradeshow in California, I voiced my concern to a representative from our insurance agency who was there at the event. I told her that we should have had coverage, and that our local agent insisted we didn't have it. Also, two-and-a-half months after Charley, we still had not heard from the insurance claims adjuster. The insurance representative, told me she would have answers for me before I left the trade show regarding our club's policy. How lucky for our club that a representative from our insurance company was there. Later that day the insurance representative informed me that we did have insurance coverage for the tree replacement and cleanup; in fact, fences, benches and awnings were also covered. She had also contacted the insurance claims adjuster assigned to our club, who had been told our damages were below our deductible. The insurance representative at the trade show made sure our insurance claims adjuster was at our property the very next week.

Sounds like a happy ending to our troubles, right? Well, I soon discovered it was the beginning of a paperwork nightmare.

When you have sufficient staff to do most of your cleanup and repairs in-house, a lot of intense record keeping for labor hours is required. In case you find yourself in this situation, here are five suggestions you should implement (and that we will not forget next time):



Damage incurred by Hurricane Wilma in October 2005 to the Lexington Community & Country Club in Fort Myers, Fla.



1. If you doubt your insurance coverage do not hesitate to ask lots of questions and go straight to the insurance company if necessary.
2. If you use in-house staff, be sure to have them clock in and out when they move from one task to another (normal activity versus disaster cleanup). If your power is down and the electronic timekeepers do not work, get a journal and keep a complete detailed hand-

written log on each and every one of your employees. I cannot emphasize enough how important this is for getting employee wages reimbursed.

3. Make sure all of your purchasing agents understand that they need to isolate all the purchases for repairs and cleanup from normal purchasing activity. If possible ask for separate invoices for these items for easier documentation on your insurance claim.
4. Appoint someone to be in charge of taking detailed pictures and to keep a log of all buildings inside and out before any disaster occurs. Every building, piece of equipment, as well as trees and shrubs in your community and on the golf course should be recorded. This document needs to be updated on a monthly basis and kept in a safe place — just like you would keep a tape backup of your network. Using a digital camera or camcorder will make this detailed document easier to provide and update.
5. After the hurricane, be sure to take a lot of pictures of the damage so you have before and after shots. If possible, assign the same photographer to this task as the one who took the before pictures.

The important message to take away from this article is:

- Don't take "no" for an answer from your insurance agent, and
- Prepare, prepare, prepare!

One small article like this cannot possibly shed full light on all that you can do for your property to prepare for a disaster and recovery effort. Look to your county for pamphlets on preparedness, talk to your agent in detail about your coverage and exclusions, and then talk to those of us who lived it first hand. I was given the opportunity at the 2005 Annual Convention & Tradeshow in Myrtle Beach, S.C. to participate in a panel discussion as a representative from the club industry concerning this very topic. With these wonderful opportunities HFTP has given us to share our experiences, perhaps everyone can learn and be better prepared for what they too can one day encounter. ■

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"With an impending event, when you have advance warning, get more petty cash on hand. You can always re-deposit later."

Peter D. Cavitt

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Chief Financial Officer
Harbour Ridge Yacht & Country Club
Palm City, Florida

We thought we were prepared. Buildings and equipment were secured and emergency generators (where we had deemed it important to have them) were tested and fueled. On September 5, 2004, Hurricane Frances gave us a direct hit.



Power was out across our entire county and the neighboring counties. The clubhouse sustained severe roof damage and resulting water damage. No electricity, no air conditioning! The employees were assigned to clean up the golf course and the grounds employees cleaned up around the community's 695 homes. The daily temperature was hovering at about 90 degrees with high humidity, and ice was difficult to get. Actually, many things were difficult to get. The club and its individual members were without power for nine days, and some parts of the county were without power for even longer.

One of the things we learned from this emergency situation is that the club should make it a priority to pay hard-working employees — showing how much their efforts are appreciated. With that said, for post-disaster situations, you should have a backup plan for off-site payroll processing.

When Frances hit, we were unprepared to be without power for so long, and thus made payroll difficult. Our pay week runs Monday to Sunday, and we pay on Wednesday; just three days later. We tried processing payroll on-site using the power from our generators to run the

computers. Unfortunately, we found out the hard way that you should never hook up a portable generator to any computer, because the power is uneven and will damage your computer's power supply.

Luckily, the employee who processes our payroll lives in the next county and had power in her home, even though most of her county was still without power (apparently her community is located right next to the county emergency response center). With that resource available, we moved our server to her house and were able to process payroll and pay staff.

Another lesson learned is that it's a great help to have plenty of petty cash on hand. I am sure many of you are laughing at this suggestion; but in fact, petty cash becomes very important. Ice, batteries, etc. were purchased from xyz convenience store and were paid in cash, as were many necessary items that we would never have purchased with petty cash before. I did not have enough on hand and local branches of the club's bank were not open because power was out. With an impending event, when you have advance warning, get more petty cash on hand. You can always re-deposit later.

On September 15, 2004 our power was restored. On September 26, 2004, just 11 days after having power restored, Hurricane Jeanne gave us a direct hit. We were without power for another seven days.

On October 24, 2005 Hurricane Wilma gave us a direct hit and again power was out. Unfortunately, this time we did not have all the generators we ordered because such supplies were re-routed to the Gulf region (due to Hurricane Katrina). We all need to do more work to prepare for post-disaster situations, but remember no matter how much you prepare, also be ready for the unexpected. ■

Robert Oprea, CHAE, CHTP
Controller
Le Pavillon Hotel
New Orleans, Louisiana

My knowledge of disasters and IT data security was tested with the Hurricane Katrina catastrophe. The Le Pavillon Hotel is in downtown New Orleans. It is a



226-room, boutique hotel and has been around for a hundred years — a good sturdy building with lots of concrete, bricks and steel. The hotel is located on a high section of the city. The consensus was this is as good a building to ride out a storm as any in town.

We also felt that we had an adequate IT data security program. We are set up to automatically back up everything in the system to an on-site hard drive each night and in addition, it will backup to a tape each morning. Our servers are on an uninterrupted power supply (UPS) and are also on our hotel's backup generator. The generator is secured on the roof and the computer room and the tapes are located on our second floor, high from the reach of floodwaters and away from windows. We also have maintenance contracts with all our system purveyors.

Prior to the storm's arrival, we had guests who were stranded at the hotel when the airport closed and all flights were cancelled. As usual with an impending hurricane threat, key personnel were required to stay at the hotel. We anticipated that we would lose our electricity early. Therefore, I processed payroll and the daily credit cards early Sunday morning, the day before Katrina came ashore. Sunday night while we still had power, we completed the night audit early, processed Sunday's credit cards and updated another backup to the hard drive, as well as to tape. As another precaution, we printed all folios and necessary reports then shut down our systems.

Katrina struck us on Monday morning and we lost power to the city. We decided to leave our systems shut down, to save the generator capacity for the necessities. The following morning the floodwaters slowly rose and started seeping into the basement, ultimately never reaching our first floor level. Tuesday night we decided to evacuate the entire hotel and leave the

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city by the only road available. My wife and I left town and took with us four guests, luggage and a copy of the most recent backup tape. The hotel sustained very little wind damage and had flooding of about three feet in the basement. Days later, we had a contracted security firm protect the hotel and remain on the property.

Two-and-a-half weeks after the storm, power was restored to our part of the city and we returned to the hotel. An apparent power surge had damaged some of our computer hardware and we lost much of our data. We replaced the damage computer parts and used the backup tape I had taken with me to restore the data to our systems. With some assistance, we were up and running in a few days.

In regard to our IT data security, I could in hindsight see some additional precautions that I initially didn't take into account. I would have preferred a more adequate UPS and strong surge protection. I would have also contracted to have our system back up each night to an off-site facility. It would have been ideal for us to have the security firm in the hotel before the storm as a precaution. With the system shut down, I would have unplugged the hardware to prevent power surge damage. Another flaw we discovered is that our electric panels and main circuits are located in the basement. Had the basement flooded a foot higher and submerged the panel, it would have rendered our generator power useless since the power would still have to travel through the panel.

Having experienced Hurricane Katrina has made me realize the vulnerability of our systems. Planning ahead and covering all the little possibilities can be most rewarding in the rare times of disasters. As they say, common sense and attention to detail can save you in the long run. ■

Fred Sawyers
Hotel Manager
Hilton New Orleans Riverside
New Orleans, Louisiana

Editor's note, the following is written by Lisa Dare for the Hilton year-end, internal newsletter, provided to The Bottomline by Mr. Sawyers.

“I guess it started the Friday before Katrina.”

Fred Sawyers was too engrossed in budget concerns to have time to check hurricane prediction sites on the Friday before Katrina. He meant to do so, but just didn't get to it; the category 2 hurricane was predicted to hit Florida anyway. David Blitch, food and beverage director, walked into Fred's office around 5 p.m. and said, “We have a problem.” The path of the hurricane not only had shifted westward toward New Orleans, it had begun to grow stronger.

In the absence of Paul Buckley, then-general manager, Fred was in charge. He called a 5 p.m. operations meeting to discuss plans and to notify management that they were going into “hurricane mode,” enacting a plan they had developed after previous hurricanes. Just as they had done the year before during Hurricane Ivan, the hotel management decided to open the Hilton at a reduced rate to New Orleanians for so-called “vertical evacuation.” The term refers to the practice of many locals who check into hotels during storms with the assumption that they will be safer than in their homes. By the next morning, the Hilton had taken about 800 new reservations, to bring total reservations up to 1,200 rooms, and Katrina was still gaining strength. Not wanting to tax the hotel's resources in what was then predicted to be a dangerous category



4 hurricane, Fred called Felicia Wano, director of revenue management, and told her, “close us down, that’s enough locals.”

Fred returned Saturday night to prepare his house for a hurricane, not realizing he would not return for nearly a month, when the six feet of water that ruined his Lakeview home had subsided. He and his wife packed their bags and three cats and prepared to ride out the storm at the Hilton. Just before leaving, Fred had a bad feeling about the storm and asked his wife Jayme to head north instead of accompanying him to the hotel. Jayme argued, but finally agreed to drive to Little Rock. “In retrospect it was the best decision I made — I didn’t have to worry about the well-being of my family,” says Fred. That decision would allow him to remain calm later when cracks in the hotel cascaded water into the building, the city of New Orleans fell to massive flooding and anarchy, and the hotel had to evacuate guests under dangerous and uncertain circumstances.

After 5 a.m. “things got bad really quickly,” says Fred. The long, intense hurricane lasted until noon, with a brief respite around 10 a.m. when the eye passed over New Orleans. Windows in two of the guestrooms blew out, most likely from debris flying from the top floor of the World Trade Center, but all the guests remained safe, and were even served a hot buffet breakfast.

Around 6:30 a.m. the power went out for good. There were backup generators, but they could only run emergency lighting. Without any air-conditioning in that humid, hot August, the hotel would become stiflingly, dangerously to some, hot. Later, Fred had to make the decision to limit the water pressure in the hotel to save generator power for lights and one elevator used to transport handicapped guests. The hotel became not only miserably hot, but smelly.

The breezeway that connected the main building and Riverside building had windows blown out and guests had to be directed through service hallways with no lights to get to the main building for meals — a dangerous and tricky problem that the staff handled well, guiding guests through a maze of back halls. Beth Tusa,

catering manager, says “we know things about the hotel we never knew before... and I’ve been here 20 years.”

The hurricane dislodged the entire main building’s third-floor pool cabana and threw it against the glass, breaking it and throwing glass and water down to the second floor, where Fred and some firefighters were crossing — forcing them to run for cover.

The worst of the damage happened in the health club. The roof of the health



Damage incurred by Hurricane Katrina in August 2005 to the Hilton New Orleans Riverside.



club started to peel back, allowing water to pour into the area where 450 staff members and families were staying on inflatable beds. The evacuation from the health club to the first floor ballrooms was wet, dark and dangerous, but everyone made it out safely.

Fred knew the hotel buildings could structurally stand up to the storm winds because he had been assured of that by Larry Imhoff, chief engineer, a veteran of the Hilton New Orleans Riverside since it opened in 1977. However, the water that was invading the hotel from various bits of damage was causing serious problems. It flooded the phone lines, so eventually the PBX had to be shut down and all the phone lines failed; it flooded the health

club and made its way to lower meeting room floors, ruined the sales office and front desk, forcing the removal of massive amounts of computer equipment and, worst of all, caused elevators to fail.

Without elevators in the 29-floor building, many older and infirm guests could not come down for meals. Hilton staff members walked the many flight of stairs to bring them food. Eventually, when these guests started leaving the hotel, staff members had to carry them down the stairs — some of them in wheelchairs.

The water also flooded the public address system, forcing staff to find creative ways of communicating with guests. Staff members had passed out information with hurricane advice before the storm. Now without a functioning copy machine, they spent hours sending voicemails to rooms in batches, and eventually switched to using signs on an easel outside of the makeshift cafeteria. The communication helped keep guests calm and informed.

When it later became clear that the city of New Orleans needed to be evacuated, staff members visited with guests one-on-one to explain the situation. Guests were told that it would be smarter to leave the city if they could, but that they were welcome to stay at the hotel. Staff members also reassured them that there was plenty of food and water, and that the Hilton would not abandon them.

Cut Off From the World

After the hurricane, communication within the hotel was not the only problem; without televisions the information that made its way into the hotel from the outside was spotty and often inaccurate. On Tuesday a rumor circulated that a nine-foot wave would soon overtake the Hilton; luckily, Larry Imhoff “had a good head on his shoulders; he just didn’t see it happening,” according to Fred. Fred also sent someone to talk to manager Pat Shimon at the Doubletree. He got on the roof and could see water — but it was not moving. Fred and Larry were reassured, but knew that even three feet of water could cause serious problems, particularly with the generators.

“The thing that frightened me the most happened on Tuesday night.”

Fred felt secure in the situation until Tuesday night. Corporate Hilton was sending supplies and having enough food and water was never an issue. So far the hotel had been spared the flooding that had overtaken 80 percent of the city. “But on Tuesday night looting started to break out and the lack of control in the city became obvious,” said Fred. “The thing that frightened me the most was when the National Guard, who were staying with us, came to me at midnight...they were relocating across the river to Algiers. If they got flooded in here, they wouldn’t be able to help us.”

It became clear to Fred that the city was out of control and that government officials were not in a position to help them. He would have to rely on the people at the Hilton Corporation.

“It’s not about the hotel anymore.”

At around 2 a.m. on Wednesday morning, Fred placed a call to Andy Slater, area vice president, on the only functioning phone line in the hotel. “Andy, it’s not about the hotel anymore. It’s about getting people out,” Fred told him. Andy began to arrange the evacuation, securing about 25 buses to evacuate anyone left in the hotel on Wednesday afternoon. The hotel staff began the process of organizing the evacuation and securing the hotel. After lunch the staff gathered the remaining 800 people in the hotel into the hotel’s exhibition center and explained the situation: the buses were going to evacuate everyone to Baton Rouge where a Hilton team was arranging for rooms and transportation out of the city.

“And then we waited.”

Once everyone was gathered into the exhibition center, staff members assigned them to buses and arranged them in groups so they would be ready for a speedy and orderly evacuation. The stifling heat and pitch black darkness of the room made for an uncomfortably long wait, but everyone bore it well, knowing that the buses were going to rescue them by 9 p.m.

Without cell phone contact, Fred had no way of knowing exactly when the buses would arrive or where they were. Nine p.m. came and went, then 10 p.m., and still no buses. “We finally got word around 11 p.m. that the buses were at the Hilton New

Fred, who had been communicating with guests on his bullhorn, remained positive, calming them by assuring them that the buses would indeed come. Secretly, he was not sure they would make it there before daybreak.

Orleans Airport, but they were refusing to come to the city,” says Fred. Reports of rampant violence and chaos in New Orleans had made the drivers afraid to enter the city. Fred, who had been communicating with guests on his bullhorn, remained positive, calming them by assuring them that the buses would indeed come. Secretly, he was not sure they would make it there before daybreak. Paul Frederick, regional director of loss prevention and Craig Mouney, Hilton New Orleans Airport executive manager, set to work persuading the bus drivers that they could not leave the Hilton evacuees stranded.

“I knew some people were beginning to lose hope”

Fred knew they could not wait until daylight for the buses. Some of the guests were panicking or losing hope, and he had to get them out. Joe Lopinto, security director and a retired New Orleans Police Department captain, convinced some of his officer friends to meet the buses on the Crescent City Connection and escort them behind the convention center to the hotel. The bus drivers again faltered; only when Hilton Airport’s Michael Marquis, assistant food and beverage director and Gerald Osborne, assistant director of engineering volunteered to accompany the drivers to New Orleans did they agree to come. Joe Lopinto and the officers drove out to meet the buses at the toll plaza on the other end of the Crescent City Connection, only to be told by the National Guard that the buses were not allowed into the city and needed to wait for orders from the government. After a heated 45-minute discussion, Joe convinced the Guardsmen to let the buses cross the bridge.

Fred finally got word around 2:30 a.m. that the buses were on their way. “I’ll never forget how happy I was seeing the headlights indicating that the buses were here.” The situation was far from over, however. Looters were spotted around the hotel and there was fear that they

might overtake the buses. Managers and the two police officers left in the building guarded the driveway with guns and waited for the buses.

When the buses finally began to arrive, another problem presented itself. Some of the buses got separated from the convoy, which had driven without lights the back way, behind flood walls to the hotel. Fred worried that the buses that arrived would not be enough, but kept this information to himself. “It wouldn’t do any good to tell people,” he thought. The rest of the buses finally did arrive, but they drove to the Hilton by way of Convention Center Boulevard with their lights on, alerting the masses of New Orleanians who had gathered to wait for rescue. Some of them followed the buses to see what was going on, but were turned away by police officers recruited by Joe Lopinto. Fred knew that there were barely enough buses to evacuate the hotel; if the buses were overtaken by people desperate to get out of the city, there would be a confrontation. The orderly staging of the evacuees took on a frantic new pace.

“We loaded about 800 people in 45 minutes.”

Staff members threw the passengers’ luggage onto the buses and herded them and their pets out in 45 minutes. But they still had to go to the Doubletree for their evacuees. Unfortunately, they had given up hope that the buses would arrive and had fallen asleep. They were roused and loaded, and the buses finally left, followed by the staff members in cars. The convoy made its way, again without lights, behind the flood walls and out of the city.

The evacuees arrived in Baton Rouge at the Embassy Suites around daybreak, where food and rooms and doctors were waiting, as well as buses to Dallas, San Antonio and Houston or the Baton Rouge airport. “The Hilton Corporation did an amazing job of pulling all of this together,” said Fred. ■