



**State Emergency
Response Team**



Long Term Recovery Office
Orlando, Florida

FEMA

Backgrounder

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2004 HURRICANE SEASON SPAWNS INNOVATION

ORLANDO, Fla.—As the saying goes, necessity is the mother of invention. Hurricane Charley started a period of unprecedented necessity and the Department of Homeland Security's Federal Emergency Management Agency and its partner, the Florida State Emergency Response Team (SERT), answered with innovations to existing response services to meet that need. Those improvements remain in place in Florida today and for the future.

As four hurricanes were transforming the landscape of Florida, FEMA and SERT together matched the damage with an even stronger response bringing relief to victims more expeditiously than ever:

- **Online registration**—Debuting in October 2004 on FEMA's Web site www.fema.gov, it provided disaster victims the option of registering online for assistance. Following the 2004 hurricanes, more than 26,000 Floridians used the new service. As of July 2005, individuals can check the status of their claims 24 hours a day on this interactive site.
- **Florida Public Assistance Web site**—With billions of dollars in disaster assistance at stake, the Florida State Emergency Response Team created, with FEMA's funding, an online solution—www.floridapa.org—that allows local, county and state officials to track their applications.
- **Housing Strike Teams/Task Forces**—Highly skilled teams of planners, analysts and engineers, led by FEMA and Florida officials, provided immediate disaster response in the hardest-hit counties. Deployed across the state, teams assessed housing situations, resolved housing issues and worked with county officials to address housing needs. Teams included personnel from the Department of Housing and Urban Development and the Department of Agriculture's Forest Service to assist in locating housing resources, placing applicants in temporary units and managing field activity.

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- **Operation Blue Roof**—This emergency roofing program was used in the continental United States in 2004 for the first time since Hurricane Andrew. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers installed blue sheeting to temporarily cover storm-damaged roofs on more than 136,000 homes throughout the state, a record for the number of such roofs the Corps of Engineers has ever installed in one year. Volunteer organizations helped install an additional 21,000 blue roofs.
- **Emergency Group Sites**—FEMA and SERT constructed 15 sites to hold travel trailers as extended shelter for short-term housing assistance. Setup of these facilities included installing above-ground utilities. The majority of these 15 sites have been successfully closed and eligible applicants still needing FEMA housing assistance have been placed in mobile home group sites that are more spacious and comfortable for longer-term occupancy.
- **Mobile Disaster Recovery Centers**—These units were used to speed up the relief process in 10 Florida counties. Although FEMA had used mobile centers in the past, these new units were self-sustaining, transported weekly to cover different areas and carried satellite technology to aid the online registration process.
- **WIP Database**—FEMA also engineered the Work in Process (WIP) database, a real-time accountability tool for manufactured housing operations. The WIP gave FEMA supervisory staff the first real-time, web-based tracking system to assess progress on the temporary housing program. Other technological improvements included streamlining the existing housing database with advanced software to make information flow efficiently and effectively.
- **Disaster Housing Resources Online**—When hurricanes rendered tens of thousands of housing units unusable, FEMA and Florida officials sought a common electronic forum to bring together those with available rental resources and those in need of rental housing. Designed in partnership with Florida State University, the result was www.dhronline.org.
- **Disaster Contractor Network Online**—Created beginning in 2002 in cooperation with Florida State University, www.dcnonline.org faced its first true test in 2004. The Web site provides an easy link to Florida licensed contractors to help disaster victims avoid scam artists and unscrupulous, unlicensed construction workers.

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For information on SERT go to www.floridadisaster.org; For FEMA, go to www.fema.gov.