



FEMA

Safe & Secure Building Allows Hospital Staff to Do Their Job

Lacombe, LA - As Category Five Hurricane Katrina approached the southeast Louisiana coastline, the Louisiana Heart Hospital (LHH) prepared for the worst. During Katrina's approach, the hospital accepted transfer patients from area hospitals located on low-lying ground. Devoted hospital staff cared for more than double its normal patient load. The hospital never lost power or water supply and sustained only minor roof damage. It also provided housing, meals, meeting rooms, and medical care to law enforcement and response teams in the days following Katrina.

Prudent decision making during the design and construction of the facility contributed to the ability of the hospital to withstand Hurricane Katrina. Opened in February 2003, the hospital is a 58-bed, specialty care facility. The non-flood zone property was selected for its convenient location between Covington and Slidell, above the storm surge projection.

A wetland survey revealed the need for extensive site preparation which included the placement of more than \$1 million worth of sand to compress the swamp-like soil. Safety measures included installing impact-resistant windows that meet the missile impact test created for hurricane prone areas by Miami Dade County, Florida. These reinforced windows are designed to sustain the force of winds of 130 to 140 mph. According to Wynn Searle of Medcath, Inc., "measures were taken to attach the roof membrane to meet a certain 'wind uplift requirement' (determined by their insurance company and testing lab) to preclude uplift from significant wind storms." Clearly the minimal damage sustained by the hospital demonstrates their cost effectiveness.

The hospital's two large generators engaged when electrical power failed. Additional diesel fuel was ordered as the storm approached, enabling the hospital to run the air-conditioning units and continue dialysis treatments, cardiac catheterization lab procedures, and surgeries. The protocol for back-up diesel fuel now has been addressed and cylinders have been purchased to hold an additional 1,800 gallons of fuel on site.

Problems with the hospital information technology system prevented outside communication during the hurricane. According to Michelle Hays, CFO and Acting CEO of the hospital, "there were no land lines, no cell phones, no email, no form of communication with the outside world." To prevent future interruptions, LHH has purchased additional equipment for better communication.

Clearly, the mitigation measures LHH took to reinforce their building benefited patients, staff, and the surrounding communities. According to Ms. Hays, "No one expected this hospital to play the role that it did during this disaster event."

Photo Caption 1: Four cylinders used for extra diesel fuel located behind the hospital.
Photo Caption 2: Louisiana Heart Hospital, Lacombe, LA. Photos courtesy of Michael Schuler.



Saint Tammany Parish,
Louisiana



Quick Facts

- Sector:
Private
- Cost:
Amount Not Available
- Primary Activity/Project:
Retrofitting, Structural
- Primary Funding:
Private funds