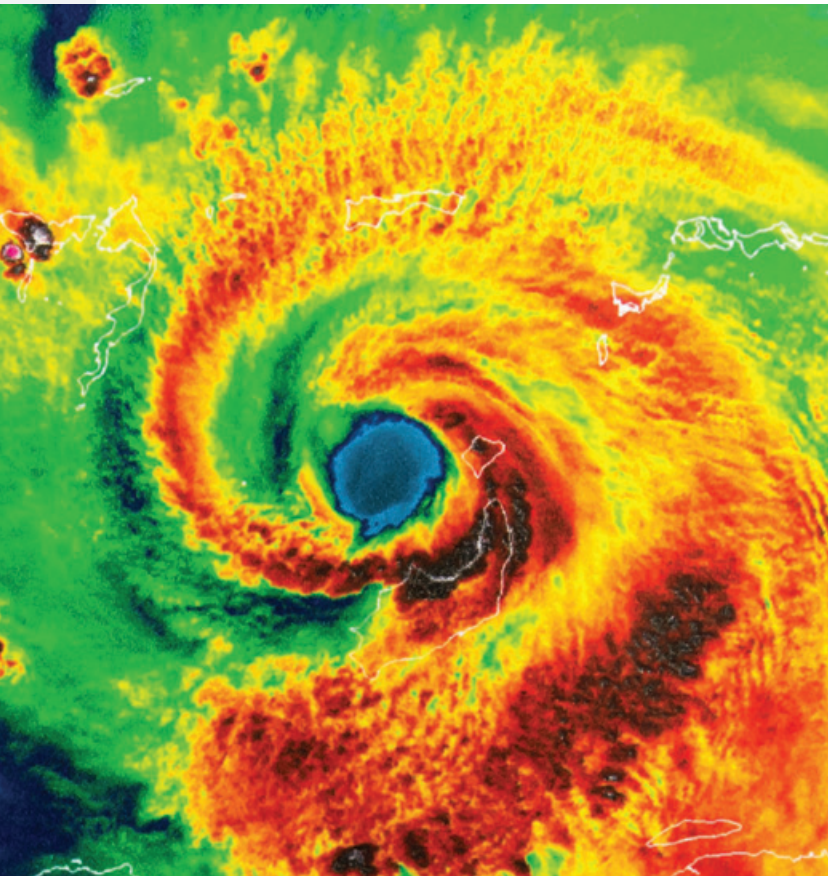


Are you prepared for a **NATURAL DISASTER?**

How a comprehensive disaster plan helped NOVO Health Services maintain linen quality, availability and service during Hurricane Irma



With the recent string of severe hurricanes in the Southeast United States, many hospitals — and the laundries that supply their textiles — are taking a closer look at their strategies for disaster response.

These facilities can find inspiration from businesses like NOVO Health Services, a provider of hospital patient linens, surgical reusable sterilization and related services. *Threads* recently spoke with NOVO Senior Vice President Greg Cox about how NOVO Health Services leveraged proper planning and preparedness to support hospitals in the face of two major hurricanes: Harvey and Irma.

The power of planning

One of NOVO's healthcare customers is a large hospital system in the state of Florida. NOVO won the RFP to supply the hospitals' linen services, in part, by providing a comprehensive disaster plan.

Upon the award, NOVO immediately began preparing for potential hurricanes. The preparations came at the right time. NOVO had to implement its disaster plan just a few months later.

As Harvey raged against the Southern U.S., NOVO organized logistics and other efforts to ship more than \$200,000 worth of clean, usable inventory from its South Florida facility to hospitals that needed immediate emergency relief in Louisiana and Texas. Then, within one week, South Florida became a target for its own hurricane system — Irma.

With Irma on its way, the local NOVO team began implementing its disaster plan and communicating regularly with its suppliers and the area hospitals. Because it is often difficult to gain access to affected areas after a natural disaster, NOVO deployed two senior staff members — Cox and Chief Operating Officer Karl Phillip II — to Miami for pre- and post-hurricane support.

"Starting about six days out, we held daily conference calls with all the affected hospitals," Cox says. "We talked about their daily preparations and walked through what they were expecting and experiencing. We also provided daily email communications with status updates."

As part of its disaster plan, NOVO committed to providing one to two par above normal inventory thresholds, depending on the item, for each hospital in the event of a hurricane. With Irma expected to arrive on a Saturday, NOVO delivered half of the pre-processed linens on Thursday and the other half on Friday. It delivered a final one-half par early Saturday morning



to provide the hospitals with extra linen (and extricate soil) for after the storm.

Some hospitals became safe harbors for local residents and staff. Others were under evacuation orders. NOVO had to meet those excess linen needs, as well.

“One hospital had to evacuate its entire facility,” Cox says. “We had to get additional linens from hospital A to hospital B for the extra influx of patients.”

During hurricane preparations, NOVO’s normal daily linen services never stopped. Although NOVO needed a large inventory, its linen supplier had the linens available and provided the necessary quantity. In fact, the day before Irma made landfall, when all trucking companies had stopped crossing into Florida, the supplier’s transportation team found a carrier and coordinated an additional delivery of linen from Atlanta to Miami.

Lessons learned

After successfully preparing for Irma, NOVO conducted analytics to offer some helpful disaster planning tips for itself, other healthcare laundries and hospitals.

Have backup supplies. Make sure you have gas, diesel and electric, and backup support already in place. “After a hurricane, gas and natural gas are hard to come by,” Cox says. Even if you have fuel, if the electricity is out, you can’t pump the gas. It’s helpful to have a generator on hand.

Think ahead. Maintain sufficient inventory to support customers through the aftermath of the storm. NOVO stocked four days of inventory in its depot in addition to the 2-3 par pushed out to the hospitals before the storm. “We thought ahead and ordered and processed an additional par for the back half of the storm in case something happened to our laundry,

“Starting about six days out, we held daily conference calls with all the affected hospitals,”

– Greg Cox, senior vice president, NOVO Health Services

such as loss of power,” Cox says.

Know when NOT to use linens. The Association for Linen Management (ALM) Disaster Recovery report¹ suggests reprocessing clean linens that are wet or damp. If your facility doesn’t lose electricity or ventilation for more than 48 hours – even if it sustains water damage – you can probably use the clean, dry linens unless they are visibly soiled. If your facility does sustain flooding, and you lose electricity and ventilation for more than 48 hours, consider reprocessing the linens (unless they are packaged and stored in a moisture-resistant

container or location).

Be conscientious of your employees’ needs. In the days before the hurricane struck, NOVO made sure its employees had time to prepare their own homes and families for the storm. Protect and respect your employees, Cox says. Employees will appreciate your thoughtfulness. If needed, reserve rooms for after the storm in case employees (or customers) are displaced.

Work diligently and directly with customers. Disaster causes excess stress and undue confusion. Creating an avenue for open, clear and concise communication is an important step in assuring transparent customer service. NOVO not only understood the linen needs of its customer, but in some cases, it helped the hospital system develop appropriate par levels.

Share appreciation. Compliment and thank everyone after the storm: vendors, employees, customers and anyone participating in the disaster response. Showing kindness and gratitude will only support your efforts the next time a disaster occurs, Cox says. ■

REFERENCES

1. Disaster Recovery: Guidance for Healthcare Facilities and Commercial Laundries. Association for Linen Management. September 2017.



Karl Fillip II is chief operating officer of NOVO Health Services, and was previously a vice president at Brookstone Partners, a middle-market private equity firm based in New York. He has served as a board member of Anomatic Corp., Diamond Products LLC and Denison Pharmaceuticals LLC.



Gregory Cox is senior vice president at NOVO Health Services. He has over 20 years of experience in the healthcare laundry industry. He previously held senior leadership positions with Centerstone, Dramatic Healthcare and National Linen Service.