Rain of Terror
Tropical Storm Allison—June 8, 2001
Harris County Texas
• County Court Complex consisting of 7 buildings

• 59 District Courts / 19 County Courts-At-Law / 4 Probate Courts / 2 IV-D Masters / 13 Associate Judges / Justice Courts / County and District clerk (1,200 employees)

• County Government Administrative Offices

• County Jail housing over 7,000 inmates
Downtown Houston is bounded on the west and north by Buffalo Bayou.

Many buildings are interconnected by underground tunnel system.

The new Criminal Justice Center, with a subterranean tunnel and basement, is located two blocks from the bank of the bayou.
Allison Disaster Chronology

- June 4, 2001—Tropical Storm Allison comes inland, then turns back over the Gulf of Mexico.
- June 8—Allison comes ashore again. Within 24 hours, 36+ inches of rain falls on Houston
- June 9—County government closed (except for public safety operations)
- June 10—Rain subsides / Initial damage assessment
Allison Disaster Chronology (con’t.)

- June 11—Courts set up emergency operations
- June 12—Criminal Detention hearings are conducted in the Harris County Jail
- August 8, 2001—Criminal Courts re-open
- May 1, 2002—Criminal Justice Center reopens.
At least 22 people died
More than 40,000 homes flooded
Total damage over $5 billion
Harris County Criminal Justice Center closed for 10 months
Data networks relocated for 2500 County employees
Criminal Justice Center
First Floor Devastation
Criminal Justice Center Basement
Files Under Water
Allison Disaster Chronology
Further Complications—The County Jail

• Jail was shut down because its kitchen was under water.
• 7,000 inmates were relocated to a smaller facility.
• We were often unsure of how to find inmates. When we found them, it was problematic getting them to court.
Where can I go to get out of the rain?

- The oldest buildings in the county complex were the only facilities that stayed on line and operational throughout the flood.
- “Move toward the light….”
- Establishing a base of operations:
  - A folding table
  - A cell phone
Allison Disaster Chronology
Civil and Family Courts - Roommates

• Moved the 9 family courts and the 5 civil courts from Congress Plaza into the civil courts buildings.

• Multiple courts and staff shared courtroom space for approximately two months.
Juvenile Courts - relocated to outlying juvenile holding facility to conduct hearings.

Criminal Courts – Starting from scratch. Urgency because of court mandated 24-hour hearing process.
Temporary home for 47 courts.
A little crowded...but it’s DRY!
A data network—quick and dirty...
...and techies get the courts back on line.
Courts open for business!
Cases are filed in one corner ...
...and set for court across the room.
Support staff work from boxes
How do you respond if you have no facilities?

Do YOU have a plan?

- We had a disaster plan for recovery of data

- No plan for disaster recovery to physical plants or plan for alternate staff facilities

- No alternate facilities or procedures for holding court
Anatomy of a Disaster

Stages of Disaster Recovery

• Disaster Planning
• The Emergency
• Initial Damage Assessment
• Meeting of the Managers
• Short-term Recovery (24—48 hours)
• Interim Recovery (48 hrs.—1 mo.)
• Long-term Recovery (1 mo.—1 yr.)
Anatomy of a Disaster Planning

It’s hard to imagine the extent of a potential disaster until it actually happens.

- Information Systems Recovery Plan
  - Offsite data backup
  - “Hot Site”
- Business Recovery Plan
  - Reviewed Annually
  - Tested Twice a Year
Anatomy of a Disaster Planning (con’t.)

• Communications Plan
  – Media Alert-broadcast communication channels
  – Chains of Command—Avoiding the Alexander Haig effect
  – Currency of information—Personnel contacts and systems recovery
Anatomy of a Disaster Planning (con’t.)

• Facilities Contingency Plan

• Operations Plan
  – Critical Operations
  – Manual procedures for automated processes
Anatomy of a Disaster
The Emergency

- Events handled primarily by professionals (Trans-Star/Red Cross/Police/Fire Dept.)

- Safety is the overarching concern.

- Determining when the emergency is over.
  - When can people come back to work?
Anatomy of a Disaster
Initial Damage Assessment

“Standing in the water.”

• Stop the Bleeding
  – Identify continuing life/safety issues
  – Identify Public Safety Risks
  – Address critical needs (water, toilets, food) for key recovery personnel and others (ex. jail prisoners).

• Inventory Resources
  – What facilities are still functional?
  – What personnel are available?
Anatomy of a Disaster
Meeting of the Managers

The REAL Disaster Plan

• Involve managers familiar with operations needs
• All business areas should be represented
• Identify leadership personnel—a field general for each area
• Begin to communicate plans and information through broadcast channels
• Schedule status meetings
Anatomy of a Disaster
Short-term Recovery (24—48 hours)

- Identify facilities for command center and critical operations
- Identify immediate information needs
- Identify key personnel
- Establish procedures for critical operations and duty rosters for key personnel
  - Overcoming shock and paralysis
  - Avoiding the “Headless Chickens” Syndrome
- Rumor control—“The building is leaning!”
Anatomy of a Disaster
Interim Recovery (48 hrs.—1 mo.)

• Identifying minimal information needs.

• Reestablishing communications—phones, mail delivery

• Identifying facilities for continuing operations—look “outside the box”

• Identifying purchasing needs

• When the party wears on—Dealing with…
  – Loose Cannons
  – Whiners
  – Prima Donnas
Anatomy of a Disaster
Long-term Recovery (1 mo.–1 yr.)

- Responsibility of facilities professionals
- Advocate to address needs
- Manage executive stress
Lessons Learned

• Identify essential personnel / emergency strike team
  – *Who ya’ gonna call?*

• Identify alternate physical facilities (schools, federal facilities, stadiums)
  – "*Not in my building, you don’t.*" (The prisoner problem)

• Obtain legal authorizations
Lessons Learned (con’t.)

• Communication with the public and other agencies

• Establish baseline operations
  – What absolutely has to be done?

• Consider media reactions
  – When courts went to the jails, the media was upset that the proceedings weren’t “public.”

• Anticipate a protracted recovery
  – 10 weeks to get our old building back in operation
  – 10 months to get our new building back
Rain of Terror—Conclusion

Canoeing down Interstate 59 near Compaq Center