

DDC team helps distribute hurricane relief supplies

By Scott Woosley and Jessica Walter

The Defense Distribution Center rushed to the aid of those affected by the hurricanes that wrecked the Gulf Coast region earlier this year by shipping comfort kits and meals to feed evacuees and relief workers. DDC's Deployable Distribution Center was also called on to provide support in Texas. Employees of Defense Distribution Depot Albany, Ga., began shipping Meals Ready to Eat, or MREs, to Federal Emergency Management Agency staging areas Aug. 28 as Gustav moved toward the Louisiana coast. When the hurricane made landfall

Sept. 1, the 1.3 million MREs that DDAG had shipped were in place and ready to be distributed.

Mitch Potts is DDAG's transportation supervisor, and directs the team that coordinates trucks picking up and dropping off shipments. He says he gets energized by the opportunity to help.

"One of the most rewarding parts of our jobs is the fact that we are able to help people in their time of need," Potts said. "Whether its flood victims, hurricane relief, or supporting our troops, we strive to help in any way we can."

According to Potts, his team just buckles down and gets the job done. They loaded 39 trucks full of MREs to be shipped to a FEMA staging site in Florida, and they did it in 8 hours.

In addition to support provided by DDAG, nearly 100 comfort kits were shipped out of Defense Distribution Depot Susquehanna, Pa. Defense Distribution Depot Norfolk, Va., also shipped more than 100 truckloads of MREs and provided supplies to load Navy vessels deploying on assistance missions to the disaster areas.

DDC's Deployable Distribution Center responded when Hurricane Ike hit Texas near Galveston less than two weeks after the first truck of MREs left DDAG to support people affected by Hurricane Gustav.

DDAG again shipped MREs to FEMA staging areas, this time in Texas, and the deployable center, or DDXX, deployed to the region Sept. 11 to be in place to provide distribution support after Ike hit the coast.

The DDXX team initially helped FEMA set up a national logistics staging area at Fort Sam Houston near San Antonio, Texas. That site was later moved to the small town of Seguin, near San Antonio.

As the situation became clearer, the team helped set up other sites to distribute food, water, ice and other supplies to people in the region.

"We adjusted to the situation based on where FEMA wanted us and where the most people who needed help were," said Marc Parsons, director of the deployable center. "Our team worked long hours while we were here to make sure the necessities got where they needed to go."

The team ultimately ended up with personnel supporting two sites: the national logistics staging area at a U.S. Air Force auxiliary airfield near Seguin and one at Ford Park Arena near Beaumont, Texas.

The Beaumont site began operations Sept. 14. The DDXX team supported both sites with two teams of employees working rotating 12 hour shifts.



Andre Mallari gives directions to a driver with a truckload of water. Mallari, a distribution process worker, deployed to Southeast Texas with the Deployable Distribution Center to provide relief to survivors of Hurricane Ike which hit the region Sept. 13.

The DDXX team members who deployed to Texas were very aware of how important their jobs were to those impacted by the hurricane.

“I feel really proud to be here and doing this,” said Jerel Ballesteros, a distribution process worker from Defense Distribution Depot San Joaquin, Calif., who is assigned to the DDXX team. “It’s a good feeling to give back to the people impacted by the hurricane.”

Ballesteros got a personal glimpse into the tragedy shortly after he arrived at the staging area in Beaumont.

“There was a couple that walked all the way here the first day we got here and seeing them get water and food, really made me feel like we were doing something really good here,” Ballesteros said.

This was the first time in the Deployable Distribution Center’s two-year history, that it had the opportunity to deploy in response to a natural disaster. The center’s previous deployments were planned evaluations of its capabilities.

To make this operation a success, the members of the DDXX team drew from their experiences over the last couple of years as they were evaluated. Their success during the recovery efforts was the result of those experiences and lessons, but Parsons acknowledges that doing it for real is what counts.

“We certainly shined during our previous evaluations, but the

real thing is always a little different,” Parsons said. “This was our chance to show that we could do what we said we could.”

The DDXX team helped process almost 4,000 trucks full of meals, water, ice and plastic sheeting survivors needed while they waited to return to their homes.

The heaviest days were Sept. 17 and 18 when between 700 and 800 trucks arrived at the Beaumont site.

The Deployable Distribution Center was established in June 2006 in response to a need identified by the Department of Defense after Hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans and the surrounding area in August 2005. It was funded through the Defense Logistics Agency’s research and development program and was part of a larger program funded by the Undersecretary of Defense for Advanced Systems and Concepts.



Donald Segerlund of Defense Distribution Depot Norfolk, Va., loads Meals Ready to Eat onto a truck destined for areas affected by the recent hurricanes.

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