

USCG Hurricane Disaster Training

USCGAux Trains For Hurricane Elizabeth

WESTHAMPTON, NY, February 9, 2009 (Vincent Pica, Division Commander, Division-18 1SR, USCGA)



As noted many times, we often speak about the “next 9/11” as being inevitable. We have to be perfect everyday. “They” have to be lucky just once. With a constant eye for that, it is still more likely that it will be a natural disaster that will affect more of us and potentially in a deadly fashion. Back on November 7, 2007, we wrote here that even more likely than “another ’38 hurricane”, is one like Noel in ’07... and Beryl in ’06... Cindy in ’05... Ivan in ’04... So, this past weekend (Apr 26-28), under the

direction of District (1SR) USCGAux Commodore Thomas Venezia and USCG Commander E. D. Young, Director of the Auxiliary (1SR), USCG Forces conducted an exercise – a Cat-4 Hurricane called Elizabeth. This is about that day.

The Wind-Up...

The day started the night before when our automated emergency notification system started calling Auxiliarists, as well as emailing them, with the following simulated emergency message:

THIS IS A DRILL - THIS IS A DRILL - THIS IS A DRILL

On Saturday April 26 all flotillas and divisions are asked to participate in a drill. An Incident Action Plan has been distributed via the Chain of Leadership.

The scenario is as follows:

Hurricane Elizabeth is expected to make landfall on 26 April along the south shore of Long Island and metropolitan New York including NY harbor. The system is projected to follow a NNE track, impacting Long Island Sound. It is also forecast to be an extremely large storm system with strong winds and extended periods of heavy rain. Flooding is predicted throughout the First Southern area of operations.

Rear Commodores are expected to work closely with Auxiliary Sector Coordinators and Division Captains to implement plans for their respective areas.

And The Pitch...

So, starting the next morning, the “butchers, bakers and candle stick makers” that comprise the civilian component of the USCG, i.e., the USCG Auxiliary, a.k.a. the “Minutemen of the 21st Century per USCG Captain Boynton, were requested to get to work. This form of exercise, called a “Table-Top” drill, means that no one moves a vessel or themselves. The exercise is an exercise to test our ability to communicate with each other, to care for our community if, as and when asked, and to care for each other. Here is what we were asked to develop via our phone-chains:

USCGAux crews and vessels available, if selected and directed, to assist some search-and-

rescue/distress situation.

Auxiliarists who can, if selected and directed, travel to marinas and other marine-related facilities to advise dock masters and private boaters to take proper actions re impending high winds, surge tides and coastal flooding.

Auxiliarists who can monitor AUXNET radios and emergency VHF channel 16.

Keep track of the # of our thousands of USCGAux members who have been reached as a data point, from the stand-point of taking care of our own, with respect to potential evacuation orders from civil authorities.

As follow-on, we were tasked with a post-storm simulation re our plans are for going forward with steps to check on status of our fellow members and being able to report on HAZMAT (hazardous materials or conditions created by the storm) and vessel distress...

This simulation lasted much of the day and was a great success. This summer, I expect that we do this again and that exercise will be a full-scale drill involving the deployment of vessels to simulated distress situations, utilization of emergency radio procedures and the like.

Practice makes perfect. And we have to be perfect everyday while the other guys, even in the form of a hurricane, need to be lucky "just once."

Summary

Was it fun? Absolutely. Was it sobering to think about what we were training for. Absolutely. Is it necessary? 1,000% absolutely. As Admiral Allen has tasked USCG Forces, "All Threats, All Hazards, Always Ready."

BTW, if you are interested in being part of USCG Forces, email me at JoinUSCGAux2008@aol.com or go direct to MaryJo Cruickshank, who is in charge of new members matters, at F50-PS@emcg.us and we will help you "get in this thing..."