

Hurricane Sally takes a swing at Florida

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Hurricane Sally made landfall as a Category 2 storm near the western Florida-Alabama border in the early morning of September 16, 2020. While a category 2 storm seems small, Sally presented a unique trial in emergency response with her slow moving rain bands that have poured a record amount of rain onto both states. Sally continues her slow steady march to the Atlantic Coast and is expected to continue pouring rain on Alabama, Georgia, and Florida for the next several days. Flood warnings, watches, and advisories are in effect for several areas. Flooding creates a hazard for responders as flood waters can hide dangerous debris or downed power lines. Flood waters can submerge equipment and controls causing damage and outage.

As with any storm event, safety is a top priority during the response effort. This includes when responders are on site assisting as well as when they travel. FRWA coordinates with the Florida Department of Transportation (DOT), local sheriff offices, and other authorities to ensure that roads are clear and passable for travel. This has been exceedingly important given the damage the 3 Mile Bridge in Pensacola. Other bridges may have been affected and closed for inspection prior to heavy equipment being driven over them. FRWA continues to monitor the progress of these closures to ensure that equipment travels quickly and safely to the ones who need it. While some traffic delays may slow our response FRWA will find a way to get the equipment to those in need using our semi or fleet vehicles.

As we in the water industry know, flooding can be a detriment to collection systems causing inflow through manholes and flooding of lift stations. This flooding has caused a number of systems to experience an increased need for bypass and trash pumps to bail out their lift stations. FRWA has responded with as many resources as we had on hand. Our response to Hurricane Laura which affected Louisiana earlier this year saw most of our equipment already deployed out of state. As equipment is released from its use in Louisiana, FRWA will continue to move it to staging areas in the affected area to continue serving our members. Georgia Rural Water (GRWA) has pledged 3 by pass pumps to aid in removing flood water and to pump out submerged and damaged lift stations while we wait on FRWA's resources to become available. It's great to know that rural water sticks together regardless of state lines.

Generators of all sizes have made their way into the affected area. From our tiniest 2 kilowatt generators up to our large 200 kilowatt generators, FRWA has responded with several generators being brought to the affected area. Florida's Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) has acquired an additional 16 large state-owned generators for use in this emergency response. These generators will be loaded onto the FRWA semi and sent to the area later this week. Utilities as members of the Florida Water/Wastewater Agency Response Network (FlaWARN) have also pledged generators and additional resources to help affected systems stay afloat in these times. Generators are necessary in keeping lift stations, wells, and small plants operating until line power can be restored. Smaller generators can be put on a rotation schedule to service multiple lift stations. While this practice can be time and personnel intensive, it can often allow a system to operate with fewer resources. For more information about this practice, consider reading some of FRWA's Emergency Response guidelines and best management practices, which can be found [here](#).

One of those additional resources, made possible through FlaWARN, is personnel. Often times during a storm event, the affected systems' staff is unavailable as they are also dealing with the effects of the storm. This can often lead to shorthanded utilities in need of trained and experienced personnel. While FRWA circuit riders are actively responding to help, we often find our staff stretched thin. Thanks to FlaWARN members, additional personnel are made available to assist the shorthanded utilities. These additional crews and personnel respond to the disaster often providing relief to the local utility staff. This assistance is appreciated by all the customers, operators, and staff of water and wastewater systems.

Coordination efforts for response are handled by the new WATER Tracker from DEP. This system is the primary location for reporting a system's operational status following a storm event as well as any available resources for use in the response efforts. DEP, FlaWARN, and FRWA use it to coordinate response efforts, matching available resources with reported needs. Each water and wastewater system in the state is responsible for updating their status after a storm event. If a system has not updated their status within 24 hours, FRWA or DEP may call your system to ascertain the operational status. It's important to log in and update any emergency contact information for your system regularly to aid us in this effort. Visit FLwatertracker.com <please make this a link> to log into the tracker; training videos are available on the site to help you familiarize yourself with the new system. If you experience trouble logging in to the system, you can contact DEP by emailing WATERTracker@floridadep.gov or calling 1-800-872-8207 or you can contact Joni at Joni@FRWA.net or by calling our offices at 850-668-2746.