

Dave Coffey, the Training Manager for The New England Consortium (TNEC) and Bob Zalewski a TNEC trainer with New Hampshire Coalition for Occupational Safety and Health (NH COSH) recently returned from working in Puerto Rico assisting with hurricane search and rescue efforts. Dave and Bob are members of the Massachusetts Task Force 1 (MA-TF 1) Urban Search and Rescue Team (US&R) located in Beverly, Massachusetts. Urban Search and Rescue teams are comprised of 150 Police, Fire, EMS and Civilians (a 27-person team was deployed to Puerto Rico) and respond to major disasters under a contract with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). Bob, a retired Chelsea Fire Department Battalion Chief is a Hazardous Materials / WMD Specialist with MA-TF-1 and Dave is a Planning Manager / Technical Information Specialist with the team.

Most news out of Puerto Rico told a story of devastation and a lack of communication capabilities. "We found a family trapped in a hotel in need of water and food. The woman had only one day left of her life sustaining medication. We were able to pick it up for her along with food and water," said Bob Zalewski. The MA-TD 1 team was working out of Jaco, Puerto Rico

Established in 1987, TNEC is the region's worker health and safety training organization providing Hazardous Waste Operations and Emergency Response (HAZWOPER) training. TNEC is a partnership between the University of Massachusetts Lowell and the Coalitions/Committees for Occupational Safety and Health (COSH) in Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Hampshire and Rhode Island.

TNEC is funded through a grant from National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences Worker Training Program (NIEHS) (WTP) a National Response Framework (NRF) which guides the nation on how to respond to all types of disasters and emergencies. If the NRF is activated, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration may ask the NIEHS Worker Training Program (WTP) to provide using lessons learned, the WTP and its awardees developed ways to get needed safety and health resources into the field, including; on-line e-learning tools, personal protective equipment and other training supplies, printed training materials and tailored training to reach underserved minority works.

Rick Rabin, a volunteer with MassCOSH, a TNEC partner, for over 30 years, was one of five people sent to Houston to 'train the trainer' for storm recovery workers on health and safety protocol. Other participating trainers came from Northeast New York COSH; National COSH' the International Chemical Workers Union and Fe y Justicia Worker Center. Texas is home to nearly a quarter of U.S. oil refineries and half of the nation's chemical manufacturing. In the aftermath of Hurricane Harvey, dozens of these refineries and factories were sidelined. In a rush to reopen, the companies need to insure workers are protected, Rick one of the lead trainers delivered Spanish language training to about twenty trainers over three days.

Hurricane Maria whipped Puerto Rico with high winds, drenching the island with rain creating unimaginable flooding, crippled communications, decimated buildings and damaged a dam that put down stream residents at risk of catastrophe. According to FEMA airplanes and ships loaded with meals, water and generators have been arriving or are headed to Puerto Rico and other affected Caribbean Islands. More than 10,000 federal employees are in Puerto Rico and the US Virgin Islands helping with search and rescue efforts and moving goods, FEMA tweeted.