



State of Louisiana

BOBBY JINDAL
GOVERNOR

GOVERNOR'S OFFICE OF HOMELAND SECURITY
AND
EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

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PRESS RELEASE

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IN CASE YOU MISSED IT

Baton Rouge Business Report: "The Business of Disaster"

"The Business of Disaster"
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The response to any major disaster, be it a hurricane, a tornado, a flood or an oil spill, often must be a public-private partnership: government might coordinate the efforts, but the private sector has most of the assets.

Louisiana has had more than its share of experience responding to disasters over the past decade, ranging from hurricanes Katrina, Rita, Gustav and Ike to the Deepwater Horizon oil spill. Presumably, the state's businesses and governments should be getting better at this sort of thing.

Economic development officials often fret about the perception left by an emergency that makes national headlines. They don't want business leaders to think the state is underwater or covered in oil.

But is there an upside to this unfortunate—and often tragic—experience? Is Louisiana getting any better at the business of disaster? And can the state's emergency preparedness and response expertise be marketed to the rest of the world?

The Louisiana Business Emergency Operations Center looks a lot like a college computer lab, which is fitting given its location on LSU's South Campus. State government, LSU's Stephenson Disaster Management Institute and the University of Louisiana at Lafayette collaborated to open the center last year.

"Usually what other states will do, they'll have a seat set aside for a Wal-Mart or a Home Depot," says Mark Cooper, who directs the Governor's Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness.

What makes the LA BEOC unique, he says, is the state identified the industries that are important during an emergency and gave their trade associations a seat at the table.

"This is where the handshake happens between the business community and state government," SDMI Executive Director Col. Joseph Booth says.

The center also provides a nexus of communication among businesses, he says, so they can coordinate resources in a way that didn't happen in the chaos after Hurricane Katrina. FEMA calls the BEOC a best-practice model for public-private partnerships.

"We now have a tool that's going to help business and industry before, during and after a disaster, where previously that did not exist, and does not exist in all the other states," which gives Louisiana a business-recruitment advantage, Cooper says.

"Not only are we better prepared than we were before," Booth adds, "but we're better prepared than our counterparts in other states."

Cooper says the conversation at national conferences has shifted from what went wrong after Katrina to what Louisiana is doing right: Officials from places as diverse as Alabama, Iowa, Haiti and Japan have visited or contacted the state to learn what they can apply in responding to their own disasters. SDMI is co-hosting a series of conferences in Washington, D.C., with the Center for Strategic & International Studies.

When oil from the Deepwater Horizon spill threatened Louisiana last year, the administration of Gov. Bobby Jindal didn't have sufficient boom and skimmers ready, nor did they have a boom plan to protect the coastline. Officials said they expected the Coast Guard and rig operator BP to protect the state; instead, the administration created a plan with leaders from coastal parishes several days after the crisis began.

State and parish leaders say they should have been given more leeway by the federal government to manage the spill response. Booth says LSU researchers from multiple departments are studying the spill, adding that SDMI plans to incorporate that work into a single document.

Some of the economic benefits of the state's recent disasters are obvious and well documented.

The federal government's post-Katrina GO Zone program helped fund a construction boom throughout south Louisiana. Capital Region industrial and commercial contractors participated in rebuilding work, helping cushion the blow of the national recession to the Baton Rouge economy. Much of that work now is winding down.

Some area businesses directly involved in emergency preparedness and response have gained national prominence. Hammond-based Worley Catastrophe Response, a "diversified risk management company" that contracts with insurers and other corporations, has worked in "every major headline incident" nationwide in the past 15 or 20 years, owner Mike Worley says.

The company's revenue increased 102.6% from 2007 to 2008, from \$68.1 million to \$138 million, and it climbed from No. 48 to No. 26 on *Business Report's* Top 100 Private Companies list. Revenue dropped 23.9% from 2008 to 2009, to \$105 million and the company slipped to No. 30 on last year's ranking.

Once you start talking about this issue, it's difficult to overcome those [negative] perceptions with facts," Price says. "Is there a payback? Can we market ourselves as a prepared state, and somehow translate that into more effective economic development marketing?"

"You definitely have to walk a fine line," GOHSEP's Cooper says.

Disasters happen everywhere, from flooding in the Midwest to earthquakes in California, so it's not as though south Louisiana is the only place that's vulnerable. Cooper understands why Moret might be hesitant to promote emergency preparedness and response, but argues the state's growing expertise and capabilities could ease the concerns of an executive nervous about a possible hurricane or oil spill.

Booth says Louisiana has to think about the competition.

"If we don't mention it, they're going to," he says. "I'd just as soon say, 'Let's tell our story.' There are some wonderful things going on in Louisiana in the emergency management community. That story needs to be told, and we're getting the word out."

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