What Hell Has Been Brought?

August and September 2017 provided a horrendous tale of destruction, death, and misery for tens of millions of people in Texas, Mexico, Florida, and the Caribbean that has not been seen in my lifetime. One after the other they came. . .

Hurricane Harvey hit Texas on August 25 as a Category 4 and Louisiana on August 30 as a tropical storm.

Hurricane Irma completely covered the state of Florida as it hit the Florida Keys as a Category 4 and entered mainland Florida at Marco Island as a Category 3 on September 10, then traveled up the state on September 11.

On September 19, a 7.1-magnitude earthquake leveled Mexico City and the surrounding area, killing over 360 people and creating devastation throughout this region of over 20 million people.

Hurricane Maria, not content to spare Dominica and Puerto Rico after they “dodged” Hurricane Irma, made a direct hit on these islands as a Category 5 in Dominica on September 18 (the first Category 5 landfall on the island ever recorded by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration) and as a Category 4 in Puerto Rico on September 20.

Not to be outdone, the Virgin Islands got hit twice within two weeks: Hurricane Irma on September 6 as a Category 5 and Hurricane Maria on September 20 as a Category 4.

These insults to humanity provided the most long-term and extensive destruction and suffering to this part of the planet in decades: no power, no water, no fuel, no medical supplies, limited food, and no relief in the foreseeable future for millions of people, particularly those on the many Caribbean islands devastated by Hurricanes Irma and/or Maria.

My office neighbor is Monique Durand, who is also our new FSAWWA Diversity Committee chair. Her family, including her mother and siblings, lives in Dominica, which was devastated by Hurricane Maria, and I have included here two of the many pictures her sister took of her neighborhood the day after. Dominica was hit head-on by a Category 5 hurricane and I believe we should look at these sobering pictures; if not for the grace of God, we too here in Florida could have suffered such a hit.

Time Will Tell if Humanity Overcomes Natural Disasters

This tale includes hard work, sacrifice, and love, as first responders did all that they could to relieve the pain and suffering of people in the impacted areas, while those like me sought the best ways to help by donating money and supplies toward the relief and rebuilding effort. This story of redemption has yet to be written, but from what I have seen in the media, humanity is winning out over environmental catastrophe.

From the Florida Emergency Operations Center in Tallahassee, Ron Trygar and Carol Hinton of the University of Florida Training, Research, and Education for Environmental Occupations (UF-TREEO) Center implemented FlaWARN by facilitating over 130 requests for water utility assistance over a 12-day period after Hurricane Irma struck Florida. Since about 90 percent of the water utilities in Florida were impacted by the hurricane, the available utility resources needed to help other utilities were limited; however, the Florida Rural Water Association (FRWA) and many northwest Florida utilities were very responsive.

FlaWARN extends a special thanks to FRWA and the following northwest Florida utilities that came to the rescue after Hurricane Irma:

- Auburn Water System
- Pace Water System
- Destin Water Users
- South Walton Utility Co.
- Regional Utilities (South Walton County)
- Emerald Coast Utilities Authority

Many other utilities also provided assistance after their power was restored. The FSAWWA is proud of these utilities and the hard work and sacrifice of their water professionals.

In addition, under the Emergency Management Assistance Compact (EMAC), which is the nation’s state-to-state mutual aid system, six crews from Tennessee, three from South Carolina, and one from North Carolina came to the aid of our Florida water utilities. This is the first time that outside help to provide assistance to Florida water and wastewater utilities has been provided through EMAC. Our section extends a warm and heartfelt “thank you” to the following utilities:

- Onslow Water and Sewer Authority in North Carolina
- Renewable Water Resources, Greenville Water, and Mt. Pleasant Waterworks in South Carolina
- Metro Services Nashville in Tennessee
As of this writing, FlaWARN is waiting for Puerto Rican assistance requests through EMAC. Several Florida water and wastewater utilities are interested in assisting this ravaged United States territory.

What Can We, as Floridians, Do to Protect Ourselves?

Hurricanes are a fact of life here in the tropics. These recent disasters are an excellent opportunity to learn from our successes and mistakes and to learn from others, while recognizing that hurricanes as strong as a Category 4 and 5 may be too much for any community to handle. Also, the procedures needed for protection from a Cat 4 or a Cat 5 direct hit can be different from those needed for protection during a weaker hurricane, which makes it harder to plan effectively.

To Floridians, Hurricane Irma was a grand experiment to see which regions and utilities were best prepared for a hurricane of up to Category 3 (or Cat 4 in the case of the Florida Keys). Some utilities fared well because they had implemented sound best management practices that quickly restored power to pump stations and quickly isolated and repaired broken water mains. The utilities that planned ahead were those that fared the best and had the happiest customers. Even when some plans went awry, there were many utilities that had a “Plan B” already in place to enable them to tackle the adversity.

I want to take this opportunity to send my sincere thanks and gratitude to all of the water, wastewater, and electric utility professionals who moved heaven and earth to protect our lifesustaining access to drinking water, sanitation, and power during and immediately after Hurricane Irma. While I have never had to work under those conditions, my father worked for Florida Power & Light for 40 years and was one of the first responders after every Florida hurricane. He got up early, worked all day and through the night, came home exhausted, got four hours of sleep, and went back to work for another day and night. I have seen the sacrifice first hand. This is what our first responders did through Hurricane Irma—and afterward.

Shortly after Hurricane Irma, FSAWWA and FWEA decided to go ahead with their Joint Utility Council meeting in Orlando on September 20, and the Associated Industries of Florida decided not to postpone the 2017 Water Forum on September 21–22. At both venues, water and wastewater utilities shared their experiences with Hurricane Irma, including what worked and what didn’t work. These discussions were very enlightening and informative and should be the focus at future FSAWWA events.

One positive measure of the success of Florida utilities in coping with Hurricane Irma is that only about 20 percent of the water utilities in the state serving more than 10,000 people issued boil-water notices (BWNs), either as a precaution or in response to a system failure. Many of these BWNs only applied to a small area of the utility. Considering that about 90 percent of the water utilities in Florida were impacted by the hurricane, this is a very good sign of the strength and resilience of our utilities, at least during a hurricane of Category 3 or lower. Since most of Florida did not experience a hurricane of Category 3 or higher, we all need to be diligent in storm disaster planning.

FSAWWA Saddened by the Passing of Past Chair Jack Smith

Our section lost a family member on September 15 when Jack Smith, 1985-1986 FSAWWA chair, passed away in Gainesville.

Jack attended the University of Florida, majoring first in pharmacy and then in chemistry, and ultimately became a water and wastewater environmental consultant. He is survived by his wife and the love of his life, Sondra; their son, James H. Smith of Gainesville; and grandson Sean T. Smith, now an engineering student at the University of Florida. He is also survived by two brothers, an aunt, and a cousin. We extend our heartfelt sympathies to his family during this very difficult time.

Jack never did anything halfway, and threw himself into his hobbies as seriously as his working life. In his career, he went from project manager to department manager to senior vice president of CH2M, and regional manager of the Florida offices. In his spare time, he enjoyed scuba diving, kayaking, long-distance biking, golf, and Gator football, and was a private pilot. Jack is remembered fondly by his fellow past chairs and is described as a fine role model: thoughtful, cheerful, and a good friend. He often attended our past chairs summit and will be sorely missed.

West Central Florida (Region IV) Raises More Than $10,000 at Water For People Event

The place to be on July 25 was Hidden Springs Ale Works in Tampa listening to live music from Sisemore, eating barbeque, and enjoying craft beers during Region IV’s Water For People fundraiser. Over 139 people attended this event, which became the region’s largest Water For People fundraiser. The evening included a silent auction and raffle. We thank the following organizations for their sponsorship:

- Garney Construction
- Jones Edmund
- George F. Young
- Applied Drilling
- Carter VerPlanck

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Central Florida (Region III) Raises $49,000 at “Wine for Water” for Water For People

The Orlando Science Center was hopping on July 27 as over 290 people celebrated easy access to water and sanitation at the Region III annual “Wine for Water” event for Water For People. Attendees enjoyed wine and beer tasting, a silent auction, several raffles, good food, live music, dancing, and fun company.

Ticket sales were over 30 percent higher than last year, and 26 sponsors contributed financially so that thousands of people in developing countries will gain access to safe water and improved sanitation—giving them hope for a better future.

We thank Debbie Bradshaw, Yvonne Picard, Andrea Netcher, Amy Hunter, and Barika Poole for this successful event that continues to raise impactful funds each year to support Water For People and its life-changing projects around the globe.

FSAWWA Announces Member Engagement and Development Council

This year’s “Wine for Water” event was a huge success. Congratulations to Region III for another successful event that helps underprivileged communities improve their health and sanitation by developing sustainable water supplies and eliminating waterborne illnesses.

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- King Engineering
- McKim & Creed
- Wade Trim
- Hazen and Sawyer
- Meskel Engineering
- Moss Kelly

The FSAWWA Region IV Water For People Committee (left to right): Kris Samples, Sean Menard, Nestor Murray, Sharmeela Khemlani, Ryan Curll, Lizeth Mora, Hillary Weber, Johna Jahn, Tommy Kiger, and Amber Kiger. Not pictured: Lisa Rhea and Jason Parrillo.

Also, the Water For People Committee, chaired by Juan Aceituno, is now a board committee reporting to the Executive Committee, and the Certification and Training Committee, chaired by Ray Diaz, is now under the Technical and Education Council.

This year’s “Wine for Water” event was a huge success. Congratulations to Region III for another successful event that helps underprivileged communities improve their health and sanitation by developing sustainable water supplies and eliminating waterborne illnesses.