

Facilitator — February/March 2016



Storm of the Century

Charlie Hartmann

How a Wendy's Facilities Manager prepared for Hurricane Katrina

Welcome to FM Project Profile, an interview-style series in which a restaurateur spotlights a major facilities project. By discussing one of their most memorable facilities jobs, our members hope to share insight and inspiration. This month's profile comes from Charlie Hartman, New Orleans Division Facilities Manager at The Wendy's Company.

Briefly, what was the overall scope, facility wise, to prepare for Hurricane Katrina? We needed to brief the maintenance team on the plan for preparation, return expectations, key contact info and a designated meeting place and time in case there were no means of contact. We also had to secure all restaurants of any loose panels or objects on the roof and set up local contractors and schedule meetings for emergency repairs as soon as possible.

Was there a disaster management plan in place? Yes, there was a plan in place.

What internal departments were involved with the plan's activities? Safety and Security, Engineering, Facilities and Operations.

How many different geographical areas were involved? The entire New Orleans Division company restaurants were affected. It was from as far west as Lafayette, La., to the Florida panhandle and as far north as our Shreveport market.

How many restaurants were you responsible for during Katrina planning? Approximately 85 company sites.

Did any of your units stay open throughout the storm? No units operated through the storm. Most closed early to let the staff seek safe shelter and prepare accordingly.

Were all your units damaged? Every company site had some sort of damage, whether it was signage, minor trim and fascia or, as in the New Orleans and Mississippi areas, mass destruction and flooding.

Was Facilities responsible for damage assessment?

Yes; it was a team effort between Facilities, Engineering, and Safety and Security.

How long did it take to visit all the locations to survey damage?

It was approximately three weeks to cover most assessments, and then the follow-up visits started to assess the hidden issues.

How long was it before damaged assessment could be completed?

We accessed the outlying restaurants in the western part of the market within the first five days. Then we moved into Jefferson Parish and Mississippi. We were able to access restaurants in New Orleans as the areas of flooding cleared. We had multiple teams, so we planned our routing as we were granted access and by anticipated severity. We also took into consideration what areas had power restored and employees to operate those restaurants. Those sites would take priority. The technicians would be dispatched accordingly to check all equipment and make the necessary repairs.

How many restaurants were completely destroyed?

Eight company restaurants were considered total losses due to flooding and/or structural damage.

What internal department(s) determined when to reopen?

It was a joint decision between Operations and Facilities. In most cases, Facilities had the restaurant ready to reopen, but there was not enough crew to run the operation.

As of today, have all the locations been either reopened or rebuilt? All but one in Pascagoula, Miss.

Why was that restaurant not reopened? In most cases, the repair cost would dictate whether a site could be rebuilt or would need to be relocated due to the new flood elevations. Some of those older sites were just too small to accommodate the type of building elevation that was needed. Therefore we would need to seek a larger site in order to meet the new elevations and be able to get the drivethru lanes elevated as well.

How much additional internal facilities support was supplied during the crisis and after? The extra support came from the region facilities director, as well as the region engineering director. This allowed us to have two experienced assessment teams. Each team also traveled with a technician who had ladders to get us access to the roofs, and he would also make some temporary repairs while on site (e.g., roof sealing, access panels reattached to equipment and securing loose or damaged electrical lines).

Were contractors set up for immediate repairs after the storm?

We had several contractors and roofing companies working immediately once we had access into the damaged areas.

Were generators used while power was being restored? We did not use any generators to power complete restaurants. The contractors and disaster recovery companies supplied their own generators as needed.

Was your personal residence damaged? Did you lose power? If so, how long until power was restored? I had very minor roof damage and was without power, other than a generator, for about three weeks.

In hindsight, what would you (or the company) have done differently to either prepare or recover from a similar disaster? While we were well prepared, we did not have enough disaster recovery companies available to handle the widespread needs. This can be very costly trying to contract them while in need.

What were your main takeaways? There can never be enough planning. We will keep updating the plan as we learn from our experiences.

Charlie Hartman began his career as a Technician for Wendy's in 1981 after a background in commercial refrigeration. He then rose through the ranks to become a Facility Manager. Hartman has worked at Wendy's for 34 years, handling several different areas of the country as a Facility Manager.