

# Are You Reday?

Curtis Dukes

## Disaster Recovery

How a Pilot Flying J facility and fuel manager responds to a disaster

What is your title, and how long have you been at Pilot Travel Centers, LLC? My title is Manager of Facility and Fuel Support. That's a fancy way of saying I keep the toilets flushing and the hot dog grills turning. I have been with Pilot Flying J for 11 years.

When, and why, did Pilot Flying J begin developing a disaster management plan? We have always had an unofficial response plan, but after Hurricane Katrina, we began to formalize it.

What other departments are involved with the plan? Four key departments were instrumental in developing and executing our response plan: Operations, Facilities, Marketing and Technology.

What was your responsibility in the initial plan? Initially, I was with Technology, so my role and responsibilities were somewhat different than they are today. I was responsible for procurement and staging of back-of-office, point-of-sale and fueling equipment. I would also go into a store that had been impacted and attempt to bring all systems back online.

In your current position, have your responsibilities changed over time? They have changed pretty drastically now that I'm on the Facilities side. I monitor events closely and try to estimate potential impact to certain areas. I also coach the stores in preparing for unexpected events. Post-events, I work closely with other departments to ensure they can get product to stores that I'm able to get re-opened.

What are the basic elements in Pilot Flying J's Emergency Response Kit for individual locations? Why are they specified and supplied? We supply our locations in risk areas with a very basic facilities kit. This includes items such as flashlights, weather radios, water barriers, padlocks, gas shut-off tools, etc.

Do Pilot Flying J locations have their own generators? If not, explain how the affected locations are supplied with generators when power is lost. We have a handful of locations that have stationary generators due to their geography and stability of the power grid in the area. During an event such as a hurricane, we immediately start staging mobile generators in strategic locations. We use drivers to mobilize generators to an impacted area once it's safe. When utility power is restored to that location, we move the generator to another site.

Since one of your products is fuel, are you able to use onsite diesel to power the generators? This depends on the layout of the facility. If the generator is set too far from a diesel dispenser, we use transfer trucks to fuel the generator.

Before, during and after an event, how often are the responsible parties communicating? If it is an event we can plan for, we begin having daily calls about three to five days out. As we get closer to the event, we will increase the duration of the calls if needed. The calls continue with all departments and impacted locations once business resumes normal operation.

Do you rely on local or national contractors to help stores prepare for disasters? We use local and regional resources, as well as internal team members, to help prepare for a disaster.

What trades are set up for immediate response? We use electricians pretty regularly during an event to assist with the generators. We also make sure our fueling equipment technicians are set up to respond quickly to ensure we're 100-percent operational in fuel sales. We also have general contractors ready to assess the damage at sites and to make repairs as needed.

In local areas, where your employees may have lost their primary residence and are incapable of working, how does Pilot Flying J supply staff to reopen and operate a location? We evaluate disaster efforts and the impact on our team members on a case-by-case basis, with their safety as first priority. During Hurricane Matthew, Pilot Flying J provided impacted team members with an extra \$100 to use at their discretion, as well as full pay for their scheduled days they were unable to work. We will bring in staff from surrounding non-impacted areas to assist with staffing locations as the primary team members work to assess and react to the damage.

Does Pilot Flying J have other Facilities department personnel assist in the recovery effort? Yes. The Facilities department is a very close-knit team that works together to ensure a seamless response. We have dedicated facility managers and project managers who will own a specific area of the response.

Has Pilot Flying J ever lost an entire facility due to a disaster? We have lost locations to fires before. We've been fortunate the last few years to have only sustained minor wind and rain damage from hurricane activity. In May 2011, we had substantial impact to one of our Joplin, Mo., units due to a Category F5 tornado.

After an event, how soon are the decision makers discussing what went well and what adjustments need to be made in the overall plan? We begin to assess our response immediately following an event to identify any lessons learned.

How often is the plan practiced with all the appropriate parties? At least once a year, we will review our plan with high-risk locations and all involved departments. This introduces the plan to newer team members and allows discussion of best practices with some of our veteran operators.

In your opinion, what is the most important item or activity in disaster recovery? Keeping our guests and team members safe is by far the most important part of our plan. Aside from that, communications before, during and after are integral. I've stated before that it's counterproductive for me to put effort toward opening a location that we are unable to deliver fuel to, or vice versa. Constant communication within departments and our operators is what allows us to focus our time and energy on ensuring we are working toward a common goal.

Curtis Dukes is the Facility and Fuel Support Manager for Pilot Flying J. His support center team and field employees are responsible for the proactive and reactive repairs and capital upgrades at more than 600 locations.