

Making a Difference

2017 Wharton County Hurricane Harvey Response by Texas A&M AgriLife Extension

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Relevance

On the evening of August 25, 2017, Hurricane Harvey made landfall on the Texas Coastline at Rockport, Texas. Wharton County was among 39 counties expected to receive an unprecedented amount of rainfall over a course of several days. For the next seven days the Colorado and San Bernard River levels would meet or exceed forecasted levels. The San Bernard River at East Bernard crested at a new record of 31.96' on August 29th. The Colorado River at Wharton crested at 50.51' on August 30th, just shy of the record crest of 51.9'. The San Bernard River at Boling crested at a new record of 43.66' on September 1st.

Floodwater threatened homes, human lives, companion animals, livestock, crops, and water quality. Owners of companion animals and livestock found themselves in urgent need of emergency shelter and pet and livestock feed. Drinking water from private water wells can be contaminated by substances from upstream, such as manure, sewage from flooded septic systems or wastewater treatment plants. A septic system near a well also can cause contamination when the soil is flooded. To ensure that well water is safe after a flood, homeowners are advised to disinfect wells that were submerged during recent floods, and then have the water tested to make sure that the pathogens (disease-causing organisms) have been eliminated.

Response

Under action of the Wharton County Animal Issues Committee a combined: 58 dogs, 85 horses, 1 cat, 3 goats, 5 donkeys, and 367 head of beef cattle were sheltered at the Wharton County Fairgrounds in Crescent from August 25 through September 11th. Wharton Livestock Auction provided evacuation shelter to 31 horses and 250 head of cattle from August 24th to August 28th after having to evacuate all sheltered livestock after the Auction Barn began to flood from overflow waters from the Colorado River.

Wharton county residents found themselves isolated from the east and west sides of the county due to river flooding. The Wharton County Animal Issues Committee and Texas A&M AgriLife Extension established two Animal Supply Points (ASPs) at the Wharton County Fairgrounds, and at B&S Services in cooperation with Kevin and Kelly Bannert of B&S Services.

Wharton County Extension staff coordinated and facilitated well water testing for Total Coliform and E. Coli in cooperation with The City of Houston Water and Dairy Lab, the Brazoria County Health Department Water Lab, and the the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Texas Well Owner Network.

The members of Texas A&M AgriLife will provide equal opportunities in programs and activities, education, and employment to all persons regardless of race, color, sex, religion, national origin, age, disability, genetic information, veteran status, sexual orientation or gender identity and will strive to achieve full and equal employment opportunity throughout Texas A&M AgriLife.

The Texas A&M University System, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the County Commissioners Courts of Texas Cooperating

Results

At the conclusion of the 15 day ASP operation, 607 animal owners were assisted with donated feed and/or hay. Total hay and feed distributed for the Wharton Fairgrounds and the B&S Services ASP totaled:

Wharton County Animal Supply Point Feed Distribution Totals

1,050 Round Bales of Hay
10 Large Square Bales of Hay
1,638 Small Square Bales of Hay
116.77 Tons of Cattle Feed
28.795 Tons of Horse Feed
13.70 Tons of All-Stock Type Feed
7.06 Tons of Pet Food

Other supplies included:
0.175 Tons of Sheep/Goat Feed
0.5 Tons Molasses Tubs
0.4 Tons of Poultry Feed

The B&S Services ASP scaled down on Sunday, September 10th after operating 12 hours a day. Wharton County Commissioners Court and the Office of Emergency Management informed Texas A&M AgriLife Extension that approximately 500 private water wells could have been inundated by flood waters. While working to scale down the Wharton Fairgrounds ASP on September 15th, Wharton County Extension Staff began their efforts to educate well owners on testing and decontaminating flooded water wells, a daily task that would continue until December 12, 2017!

Over a course of 15 consecutive weeks, the Wharton County Extension staff provided water testing bottles and education on shock chlorination for owners of 616 water wells. Extension staff directed 150 well owners to the Houston Dairy and Water Lab for water testing prior to actually providing free water testing beginning on September 18th for what assisted 466 well owners. Well water testing provided by the Wharton County Extension Office resulted in decreasing a 20% presence of E. Coli in private water wells on September 18th down to 0% on November 14th and November 28th! We also realized a significant drop in the presence of Total Coliform, down from 40% on September 18th to 15% on November 28th.

Well Water Testing Results listed by date of Testing and % Positive Test Results

Lab Name	Date of Testing	# of Samples	% pos. Total Coliform	% pos. E. Coli
Virginia Tech	Sept. 18th	112	40%	20%
TAMU-TWON	Oct. 9th	87	40%	15%
Brazoria Health	Oct. 17th	39	41%	10%
Brazoria Health	Oct. 24th	32	40%	3%
Brazoria Health	Oct. 31st	41	21%	4%
Brazoria Health	Nov. 7	39	30%	7%
Brazoria Health	Nov. 14	39	15%	0%
TAMU-TWON	Nov. 28	59	15%	0%
Brazoria Health	Dec. 5	8	25%	12.5%
Brazoria Health	Dec. 12	10	10%	0%

- **607 Livestock Owners Assisted with Emergency Feed Supplies**
- **606 Well Owners Assisted with Well Water Tests and Consultation**
- **167.4 tons of Livestock Feed and 2,698 Bales of Hay Distributed**

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