

## Hurricane Irma...continued

An inside scoop from PSAI Members affected by the recent hurricane by Rachel Johnson, PSAI Director of Marketing

Hurricane Irma made her first "stop" on the islands of the Atlantic as she continued north toward Florida last week. Reaching out to multiple of our international Members in the area, the PSAI was able to make contact with a few. Those who were able to communicate with us were the lucky ones – their islands faced only minor damage. John Beagles of Cruzan Environmental Services, Inc explained how "Hurricane Irma was a minor incident in St. Croix," with the damage being to "mostly trees, electrical and landline telephone service." Thankfully, there was "no building damage to speak of." Although, this does not mean that companies located on the island won't play an important role in the aftermath of this storm. Those located nearby "are the staging point for recovery efforts to St. Thomas, St. John, and the British Virgin Islands," indicating that even though their location made it through unscathed, this does not mean that their portable units will remain unaffected.

We heard a similar report from one of our Members located in Barbados. According to Alison Elliot with Ellco Rentals, "most of the damage occurred" in the Northern Caribbean islands. In Barbados, there were "heavy seas and rain," but thankfully no damage. "We were lucky this time but we were warned it would be an active hurricane season and there are nearly two months to go," Alison explained. "We have our hurricane plans in place and we hope for the best." Similar to John Beagles' report, "Barbados is being used as a staging area for assistance to some of the islands, especially Barbuda." Barbuda is a small island that is roughly 400 miles from Barbados that "was totally destroyed and has been deemed uninhabitable." With most of the seaports and airports closed from the storms, immediate civilian aid cannot reach some of the affected islands. While they are carrying on with "business as usual," Alison did mention how an added problem looking forward will be the "delay in shipments coming out of Florida," as they were hit by Irma shortly after.

While it appears that some of our Caribbean PSAI Members faced little damage, the truth remains that many were probably hit much harder than St. Croix or Barbados – and unsurprisingly we were unable to make contact with them for this story. While we will continue to cover the hurricane effects as we communicate with those impacted, both of these examples highlight the importance of staging areas at nearby locations. Before immediate relief can be sent in, a staging area must be constructed, acting as a hub for supplies, volunteers, and those searching for aid. Staging areas oftentimes require restrooms. It stands to reason that if a PRO was not located in an impacted area, their units will often be needed during the relief efforts. Close proximity to a hurricane will still cause some sort of business effect.

As Irma moved upward toward Florida, we also reached out to our Florida-based Members to hear about their experience. PSAI PRO Jennifer Corrigan of JW Craft Portable Restrooms in Naples talked with us a bit while out delivering units immediately following the hurricane. "We live in hurricane country, so we're used to this kind of thing," she stated. Following their typical procedure, at the beginning of the season each year, they send out a letter to customers, letting them know to prepare their job sites. Because of JW Craft's large customer territory, "we can't go do that for them," Jennifer explained. "Once you [the customer] have the equipment on site, you are responsible for [doing that]." That is not to say JW Craft employees aren't out making preparations. "We try to run a regular route up until the storm hits. We try to pump the units dry so that they can secure them by putting them inside or between heavy equipment." They also encourage the option of strapping them to something solid. "While we don't [tell them to use] sand bags or concrete blocks, sometimes they do."

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Living in hurricane country, they've become accustomed to preparations. "Every page of our website [shows] an FAQ box," Jennifer mentioned. There are direct links to questions customers may have about preparing units specifically for hurricanes. The company makes sure that all of their trucks are empty, their water is full, their fuel tanks are full, and that their septic trucks are empty too. "We change our voice mail... to list the emergency contacts." Naples lost landline service and cell service shortly after, but "we had contacts in place for emergency services even before the hurricane came – the community was prepared. We're used to this kind of thing," Jennifer assured.

We touched base with another Florida operator, Ross Ambrose of AAA Porta Serve in High Springs, who shared with us his similar preparations for the hurricane. "We communicated with customers [the whole week before] – they understood to button down the hatch on the units." They instructed their customers to weigh the units down with bricks or 5 gallon buckets of water, making sure the doors get closed and cable-tied shut. Construction sites were told to move the units and AAA Porta Serve employees picked up many units that they knew were going to be an issue. One thing Ross also mentioned was their proactive assistance with highway rest areas. "When people started to evacuate, that increased the pressure on the rest areas – not a lot had bathrooms that could handle that load. We started dropping toilets at rest areas – servicing them on a daily and then twice daily basis before the storm came." Also, thinking forward to after the storm, Ross explained how they dropped off secured portable restrooms bundled together that were empty, clean, and ready to go. When the hurricane had passed and an attendant was back on duty and the rest stop, all they had to do was "cut the cable ties" and the units were ready for those returning to Florida. He stated that it worked out really well. Ross did mention, however, that by the time the storm had passed, some of these units that were meant for the aftermath had been unwrapped, unstrapped and were absolutely, completely full. "People got desperate," he explained.

So what exactly happened in Florida? "Naples took a direct hit," Jennifer said. The JW Craft office (that had just gone through a 12 week renovation) was flooded. She joked about the investment of the new waterproof flooring. They lost power and there was plenty of flooding, but according to Jennifer, things are good. They're operating under an all hands on deck mentality – her son was even out doing deliveries with her one day after the impact. While there was some building damage, with trees and power lines down, that seems to be the worst of it. "For the most part," Jennifer said, "it was a beat of a storm, but I think Florida kicked her ass." She elaborated by saying, "we were prepared for this. We weren't for Hurricane Charley [in 2004] but we were ready for Irma. We learned a lot from Charley."

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Jennifer's focus when touching base yesterday was the Key West naval base that was in need of 100 toilets. She assured that she was using all of her resources, "reaching out to companies on the east coast." She was also planning to reach out to some of her suppliers and ask if they had anything that could help. "The military helps civilians 99.9% of the time," she mentioned. "So I'm going to do everything I can to help them."

Ross explained what the situation looked like in the High Springs area, stating "Irma dropped a lot of water on the area." The Santa Fe River runs through their service area, and all of the floodwater has to work its way to the streams. "It's going to flood," he assured. "We've had to move units to higher ground [in anticipation of this]," he continued. If there is more flooding, he worries that they won't be able to get their trucks through to service their units. While there was no damage to the AAA Porta Serve office, and luckily their units stayed in place, "none of [their] employees – including Ross – have electricity in their homes." He doesn't expect they will have power for a day or two, minimum.

The focus for Ross moving forward was the same "all hands on deck" mentality. "We keep plugging forward – looking at different windows, figuring out what we need to do within the next hour to keep things moving immediately... then what about 3 days down the line. We keep redoing those pictures, staying ahead of the game." They're continuing to bring units to rest areas, now that people are making their way back down to Florida after the evacuation. They're also getting units to rural areas that don't have power, meaning they in turn don't have water. Yesterday morning they had dropped off toilets and hand wash stations for an organization supporting linemen going out for the day, repairing power lines.

Both Ross and Jennifer mentioned that, while Irma was destructive, there is something to be said about how it is bringing people together. "In situations like this," Jennifer said, "it's cool that all competitors put that aside and come together and work together as a team, [putting] the community first." Ross felt the same, saying how after he posted photos of their hurricane preparations to one of the portable toilet Facebook groups, "a lot of people took the time to message [him], saying 'hey, we've got these resources up in Georgia,' or 'on the other side of the state' if you need anything." He said it was nice "just to know that the community was willing to be that supportive."

While we reached out to some of our Texas operators, many are still handling the aftermath of Hurricane Harvey. We hope to get in contact with them soon to hear how they've handled their own hurricane and continue this story in future editions of *Association Insight*. If your company has been directly affected by the hurricane or if you are involved in relief efforts, reach out to Rachel at [rachelj@psai.org](mailto:rachelj@psai.org) to share your experience. We strive to bring our Members the latest industry news each week and the impact of these natural disasters on our Members could not be ignored. Our thoughts are with all of those affected by these storms and we would like to remind you that the PSAI is here as a resource. Let us know how we can help you.

