

# THE ROLE OF ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE DURING HURRICANE HARVEY RECOVERY EFFORTS



R6 Environmental Justice Forum  
June 13, 2018

# STARTED WORK BEFORE DISASTER STRUCK

Harms Way

Wellness Checks

What kind of Information Receiving/ From Whom

Notified of A Need to Evacuate

Ensured EPA Contact Information was Current

# Established a communication strategy within 2 days of the disaster

## EJ Harvey Calls

- Held weekly conference calls with EJ contacts
- Discussed/listened to community concerns in impacted areas
- Provided updates regarding current response efforts



# Established a communication strategy within 2 days of the disaster (cont.)

## EJ Harvey Calls

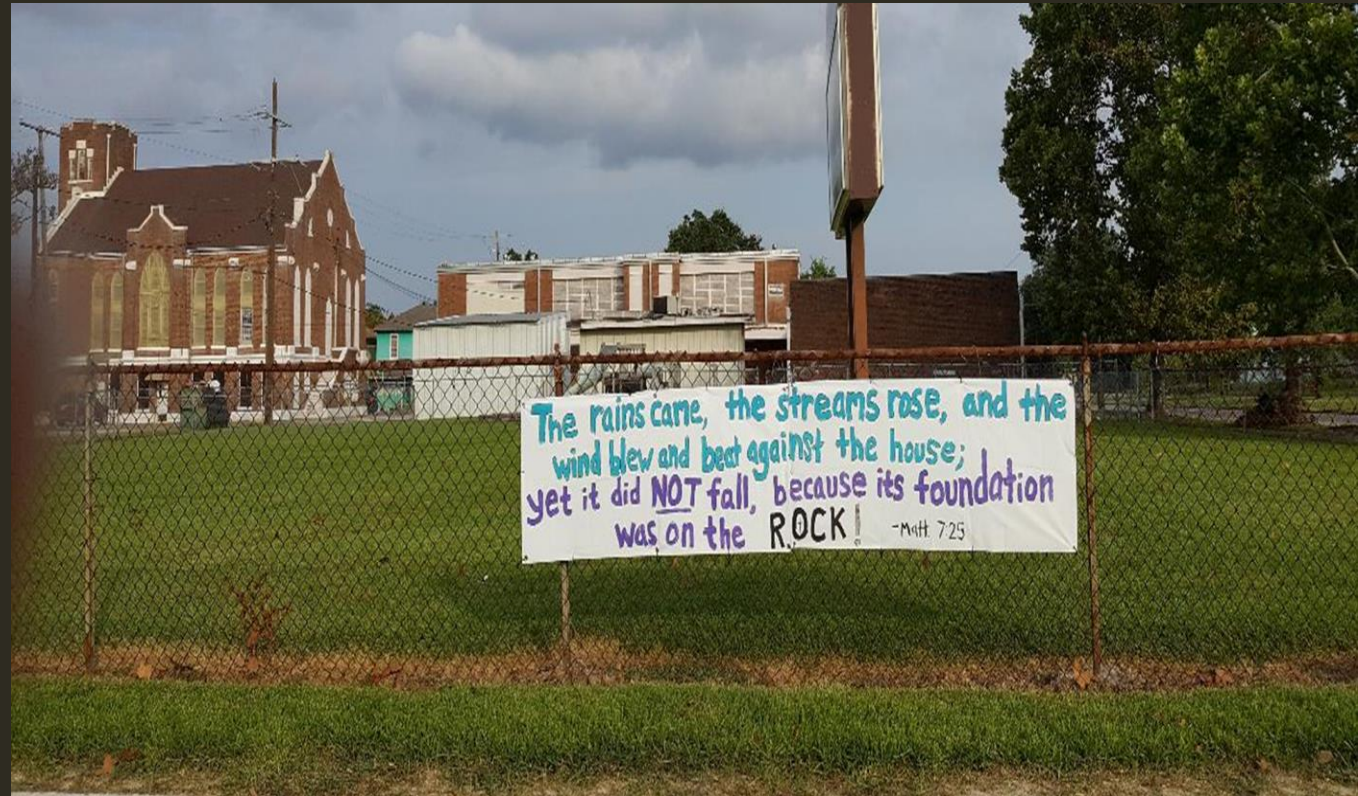
- Passed along information from EJ contacts regarding Harvey to appropriate REOC staff
- Community members (TX, LA) city of Houston Health Dept., TCEQ participated on call
- Platform for communication with state and federal partners



# Established a communication strategy within 2 days of the disaster (cont.)

## EJ Harvey Email

- Set up a dedicated EJ email address so that EJ concerns could be sent directly to the EJ office
- EJ conveyed those concerns to REOC
- Community liaison made direct contact with EJ advocate



# Use of EJSCREEN

- Better scope of impacted communities
- Identification of landfills





# BOOTS ON THE GROUND

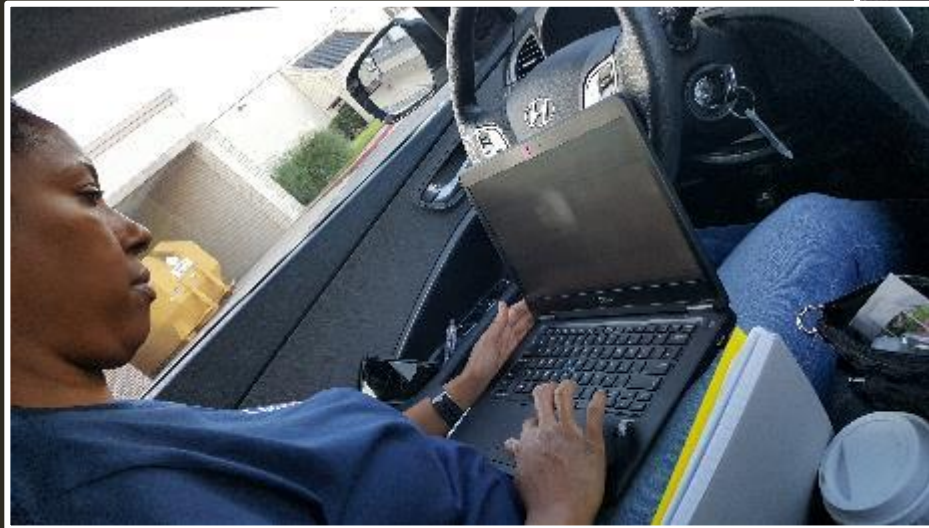
more than information  
downloads

# BOOTS ON THE GROUND

- EJ Staff deployed during first weeks as Community Liaisons
  - Worked with CLs and EOC in more than 30 counties
- Embedded in emergency response centers
  - Beaumont-Port Arthur, Houston
- Provided information on reentry, disposal of household hazardous waste, recycling white goods, indoor mold remediation, debris removal, and water well disinfection
- Provided guidance to CL on how to interact with EJ communities



# When you land with just environmental information to share



...you become extremely resourceful

# Establishing communication networks

- General Population
- EJ Communities



# Having EJ experience helped open many doors

- Cultural sensitivity
- Communication barriers
- Timing and place – knowing when and where the hard-to-reach communities gathered.



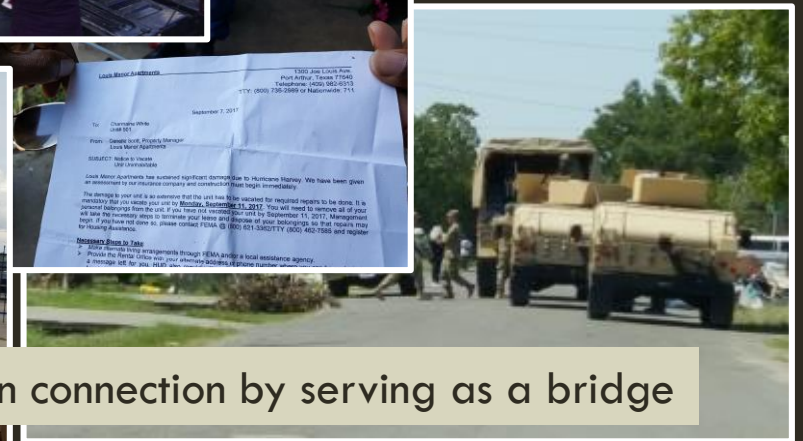
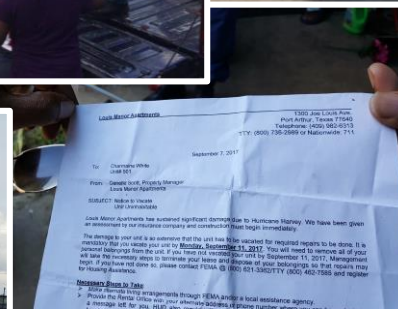
# Understanding the immediate needs of the EJ community

Beyond the environmental challenges



# Earned credibility by bridging gaps between communities in need and service providers

- Home evictions – brought in TX Lone Star Legal Aid
- Rerouting of supplies to more remote areas
- Transportation challenges for Vietnamese community
- Basic services in the Spanish-speaking communities



Made a human connection by serving as a bridge



# LESSONS LEARNED

Recommendations for  
future efforts

# Lessons learned

- Establish EJ Staffing and support function within the incident command structure
- Add EJ training for the Response Support Corps, ICS, etc. (*Working with EJ Communities*)
- Communicate the need to address EJ concerns to the EOCs
- Provide printed copies of clean-up material to impacted communities rather than links.



**THANK YOU**

Gloria Vaughn