



U.S. COAST GUARD



Homeland Security

Flag Voice 267

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HURRICANE KATRINA PEOPLE SUPPORT

Many units and people across the Coast Guard have or are actively engaged in supporting the unprecedented efforts that are ongoing in the Eighth District as part of our response to Hurricane Katrina. The operational Coast Guard has performed superbly in every mission area, and as you know, many of our brave men and women involved in these operations are victims themselves along with their families. To give you a sense of the impact on the Coast Guard Family, there are approximately 2600 active duty, 480 selected reserve, 260 Coast Guard civilians, 3100 Auxiliarists and 1250 retirees in areas affected by Hurricane Katrina. Active duty members in the affected areas alone have more than 4000 dependents. As I'm sure most of you have witnessed on TV, the devastation wrought by Hurricane Katrina is almost unimaginable, and it will likely go down as the largest natural disaster in the history of our nation when all is said and done. Despite this, our men and women in the Eighth District have and continue to perform their duties in an exemplary manner in some of the most demanding conditions imaginable. It will take a long time for the affected areas to recover. The same can be said for the personal and family aspects of many of our people. Their lives have been turned upside down and have been filled with much anxiety and uncertainty. We still don't know the full impact, but I assure you, we've got dedicated people in the Eighth District, MLC LANT, and Headquarters as well as throughout the Coast Guard Family working to ease the impact wherever humanly possible.

In the interest of keeping everyone informed, I've developed a catalog of things we're doing to support our people in the affected areas. Our efforts have been focused first on crisis intervention where needed and then on providing our people with the means and flexibility to take care of their personal and families situations as they deem most appropriate. We don't have answers for all the issues we're working, but we're making good progress on a lot of major fronts. There's a lot of work ahead, but I am confident that everyone involved is up to the task. One of my big concerns is that our folks make informed decisions that best meets their needs in the long-run because they do have options. We are establishing a joint tiger team made up of experts from Headquarters, MLC LANT and Eighth District who will deploy to the affected areas in the very near future to help in this regard. This team will build on the already impressive work of the legal, housing and entitlement assistance and other support teams that have tirelessly provided advice and information to our folks during the initial stages of this disaster. This Flag Voice is meant to complement all these efforts.

- **Housing/Relocation Support:** This is likely the most critical issue our people and their families face. We are working diligently to provide both short-term and long-term alternatives that will give our people the maximum flexibility to re-establish a family residence.

- Prior to the storm, families were evacuated to *Designated Safe Haven* locations. Several days ago, we authorized these families to relocate to *Alternate Safe Haven* locations of their choosing, in CONUS and when appropriate OCONUS. They will receive full evacuation allowances (travel and per diem) for the first 30 days with 60% of these allowances payable for up to 150 additional days. We are also working on authority to extend these entitlements beyond a 180-day period if necessary.

- Evacuated members are eligible for two months advance pay.

- Dependents may choose to establish a new permanent residence and will receive housing allowances at that location or for their permanent duty station (PDS), whichever is higher. Families will also be eligible for "PCS-like" entitlements (such as DLA, HHG shipments) if they establish a new permanent residence.

- If dependents move to a new permanent residence, they are still entitled to a "PCS like" move back to the area of their old PDS at any time as long as the member is not under orders to a new duty station. Those dependents returning from a *Safe Haven* location but who did not establish a new permanent residence are eligible to receive travel entitlements back to their original residence.

- We have designated the affected military housing areas as *Critical Housing Areas* as well. This will give new members ordered into the region three options: they can move their dependents into the affected areas, they can keep their dependents at their old PDS, or they can move their dependents to a location of their choosing. The member will receive BAH for their new duty station or may request BAH at the location of their dependents whichever is higher.

- We are still working on getting authority to receive travel entitlements for dependents who want to briefly travel back to their original homes from their *Safe Haven* location in order to assess the damage and collect valuables and other important personal effects. This is currently not a reimbursable travel expense authorized in the travel regulations.

- **Leave Carryover:** We are working to get authority to carryover leave balances in excess of 60 days at the end of this fiscal year for those service members who were unable to take leave as a result of Hurricane Katrina operations. This requires a change in current law, and we have several legislative vehicles in motion to do this. On 30 September 05, we will bring all military leave accounts to 60 days where applicable. We will store everyone's leave in excess of 60 days in a separate file at PSC. We can easily restore the excess leave to authorized accounts once legislation is passed. This protocol and programming is the same we've used to carryover excess leave in past years associated with Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom.
- **Uniforms at No Cost:** The Secretary of Homeland Security has

authorized us to issue replacement uniforms at no cost to those members in the affected areas whose uniforms were lost or damaged by Hurricane Katrina. Our uniform distribution center has worked overtime to issue over 14,000 uniform items to date, and will continue to provide next day service as additional Eighth District orders are received.

- **TRICARE:** All medical care must remain within the TRICARE/Coast Guard/DoD system. However, TRICARE has granted a waiver allowing medical care to be obtained beyond an individual's primary care manager for people in the affected areas or displaced to other locations by Katrina. We will release a detailed ALCOAST within the next few days describing all of the TRICARE benefits available to affected people.

- **Travel Charge Card Limits and Claims:** Travel Charge Card Coordinators have increased the limits for all members within the region, and PSC has established procedures to handle travel claims by fax.

- **PCS Assignments:**
 - CGPC is working closely with the affected units to ensure only vital personnel are ordered into the area in the immediate future so as to not tax already stressed units.

 - For both officers and enlisted members in the affected areas due for reassignment in AY06 and any other officers and enlisted members in the affected areas who now have other critical assignment issues resulting from Hurricane Katrina, CGPC has formed a special team to review individual needs and make as many early assignment decisions as possible. This will help reduce some of the uncertainty surrounding the selection of a new permanent residence by providing the opportunity to make more informed long-term decisions, thus, eliminating the possibility of moving families twice within a year. Although early assignment decisions will be made in most cases, the service member will stay in place at their current unit until the normal spring or summer timeframe. The special team of CGPC-epm/opm representatives will visit affected units and meet firsthand with members and command cadre within the next few weeks.

 - CGPC is working with PSC to provide alternate means for members to submit e-Resumes and meet upcoming enlisted SWE deadlines.

- **Civilian Employee Assistance:** Detailed information in the form of a Q&A which addresses evacuation, pay, travel, financial, and related issues will be sent to civilian employees and posted on CG Central and the Civilian Personnel Office's and PSC's websites. We continue to operate a pair of dedicated call in numbers to provide employees with direct assistance for pay related matters: (757) 628-4766 or 67. The Coast Guard Human Resources Servicing Office, Norfolk, VA is staffing the call in lines and is coordinating matters with the Office of Civilian Personnel (CG-121) staff for fastest resolution of any problems.

- **Other Support Efforts:**

- PSC Topeka has established an Eighth District contingency SPO to fulfill the duties of those ravished by Katrina.

- Four 4-person teams are already on scene at each of the *Designated Safe Haven* locations and at our Command posts assisting our members and their families. Additionally, several Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) teams with 9 Chaplains have been deployed throughout the region assisting operational and support personnel in the performance of their extremely arduous duties. Legal Claims and Housing and Entitlement assist personnel have been deployed to advise and counsel members on claims and entitlement issues.

- **Coast Guard Mutual Assistance and Coast Guard Foundation Support:**

- Coast Guard Mutual Assistance has established a special account to directly support members affected by Hurricane Katrina. To date, the account has raised over \$471,000 and provided financial assistance worth over \$612,000 to over 300 members. There are still many unfulfilled needs. Your continued generous support of CGMA through contributions to the Katrina Account are heartily encouraged and welcomed.

- The Coast Guard Foundation has initiated a fund raising campaign to assist Coast Guard members and their families in recovering from the devastating effects of Hurricane Katrina. To date, over \$650,000 has been raised.

- CGMA and the Coast Guard Foundation are coordinating their relief efforts to ensure those Coast Guard members and their families who need financial assistance get it. Although the final protocol and criteria have not yet been completely worked out, CGMA will likely process all requests for assistance and forward appropriate requests to the Foundation for grants.

- I know there are many well-meaning people who are initiating their own creative ways to help our people. However, these efforts, though well-intended, are often not the best and most effective ways to help our people. Instead, I encourage everyone to funnel their generosity in the form of financial contributions to either CGMA or the Coast Guard Foundation to best aid Coast Guard people and their families. The money will be used for its intended purpose.

I'm sure there are still issues we haven't thought about that will arise as we gain a better understanding of the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. We welcome your input and perspective. There are many more efforts in progress than described in this Flag Voice. I'll continued to provide periodic updates as things play out. Rest assured, we will continue to do everything possible to support our people and their families as they continue to carry out their

important duties to the nation.

I strongly urge those people affected to visit the Personnel Support Command's website <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/psc/katrinafaqs.htm> for additional information and frequently asked questions. This website is constantly being updated. Also members should contact the health benefits hotline at 1 800 942-2422 for specific concerns about TRICARE benefits.

Regards,

RADM Kenneth J. Venuto
Ken Venuto

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