

Water Agencies Respond to Tornadoes

By, Gary Williams, Florida Rural Water Association

Some of the most devastating tornadoes to ever strike Florida left a 70 mile swath of destruction from Lady Lake to New Smyrna Beach just after 3:00 AM on February 2, 2007, killing 20 people, destroying hundreds of homes and businesses, and devastating infrastructure.

By daybreak, Florida Rural Water Association (FRWA) had already activated its Emergency Operating Plan and began coordinating with Florida's Water/Wastewater Agency Response Network (FlaWARN) to provide rapid damage assessments to the State's Emergency Operations Center.

FRWA personnel were already performing damage assessments when the shocking news started to filter out to the world via the mainstream media such as CNN and Fox News.



**Aftermath of Tornado at
Sunshine MHP
near Lady Lake, Florida**

Mobile homes in direct path of Tornado were completely destroyed.

Note mobile home frame wrapped completely around large Oak tree in left center of picture.

FRWA personnel were busy both on the ground and on the phone visiting and contacting water and wastewater utilities in the tornado-stricken areas to assess needed emergency response. Personnel on the ground were quickly dispatched to these locations to further determine the extent of utility aid needed.

Fortunately larger utilities escaped major damage from these tornados, but FlaWARN members across the State remained mobilized on alert to support FRWA's efforts if needed.

In the early morning hours of February 3, while emergency first aid crews were still working, FRWA was on-site to restore critical water and wastewater facilities. The most notable example of an FRWA challenge was at the Sunshine Mobile Home Park (MHP) Wastewater Treatment Plant where nothing of the plant structure was remaining.



Sunshine MHP Wastewater Treatment Plant

The concrete block walls are shown blown into the settling and aeration basins as Florida Rural Water Association arrives on-site at 8:30 AM, February 3.

An FRWA crew immediately began the task of removing by hand, broken concrete block walls, pieces of lumber, blocks, mangled piping, electrical boxes and conduit from the wastewater plant process tanks, while setting up a portable generator to provide emergency power to the plant.



FRWA Prepares to Set Generator at Sunshine MHP Wastewater Treatment Plant

Kenny Williams, Fred Handy and Bob McVay of FRWA work with plant operator Gawaine Murray of General Utilities clearing the way for to set up an emergency generator.

Using slings and hooks fabricated from materials at the site, debris was lifted by hand and pulled with a tractor from the basins. Plant equipment was temporarily repaired and the wastewater plant was placed back in operation by noon, after being completely demolished by the storm.



Florida Rural Water Association personnel and plant operator, observe equipment operation at Sunshine Mobile Home Wastewater Treatment Plant just before noon on Saturday, February 3. The small generator in background was also installed by FRWA.

Florida Rural Water Association also assisted Lady Lake Utilities during the early morning hours repairing water lines damaged by the storm.

Acknowledgements and Appreciation

The FRWA and FlaWARN wish to express great appreciation to the following persons and entities that assisted in the emergency recovery after the storm:

Gawaine Murray - General Utilities, contract operator.

Assisted with the removal of debris, provided tools and equipment, repaired damaged equipment on-site, provided emergency disinfection of effluent and stayed with Sunshine WTP to ensure that everything was running properly before leaving the site on Saturday.

The Town of Lady Lake for helping Sunshine MHP and Lady Lake MHP TLL provided supplies and assisted in repairs at the two systems.

Ken Keough Public Works Director and Staff

The City of Deland for helping Hawthorne Hill MHP and others with providing supplies and assisting with repairs.

The Following helped with transporting supplies (ice, water etc.) and police support etc.

City of Minneola

Lake County

Marion County

City of Leesburg

City of Mount Dora