

FlaWARN Recognized for 2005 Efforts as new Hurricane Season Approaches

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The FlaWARN organization recently was honored with the Samuel R. Willis Award for its role in providing assistance to water and wastewater utilities during the 2005 storm season. The award is given annually by the Florida Water Environment Association (FWEA) during the Florida Water Resources Conference. It is named for Samuel R. Willis, who in November 1976, risked his life to save another human being and in the process sustained personal injury. This year the Florida Department of Environmental Protection also presented the Good Neighbor Award to FlaWARN utilities that responded to the 2005 hurricanes.

This recognition comes as FlaWARN celebrates its first anniversary and offers an opportunity to reflect upon a very successful inaugural year as we prepare for the upcoming hurricane season.

In 2005, FlaWARN responded to Hurricanes Dennis, Katrina, Rita, and Wilma. The Hurricane Katrina response is the first known coordinated interstate response for water and wastewater utilities. Over 50 different utility crews provided assistance, with many other crews covering the shifts of those that were deployed.

In less than 12 months, FlaWARN has gone from a good idea to a national leader in mutual aid for water and wastewater utilities. At the Florida Section AWWA meeting in November, FlaWARN hosted a WARN meeting to share information with other states interested in setting up similar organizations. Approximately 30 people attended including: USEPA, AWWA, RWA, DOJ, and several other state representatives.

Since that meeting, over 23 states have contacted the FlaWARN leadership seeking their expertise in setting up mutual aid organizations. On a national level, eight of the national professional water and wastewater organizations have signed a Joint Policy on Mutual Aid and Assistance Networks. Several members of the steering committee have traveled to other states to talk about FlaWARN.

In responding to many natural-disaster emergencies in 2005, FlaWARN demonstrated that a network of "utilities helping utilities" is the best method for responding to the immediate water and wastewater damage caused by natural disasters. The abilities to restore safe drinking water and dispose of wastewater are



Eleven members of the FlaWARN Steering Committee were presented with the Samuel R. Willis Award for their efforts in creating the flagship mutual aid organization for Florida utilities. Standing from left are Brad Macek from the city of Port St. Lucie, Ed Cordova from the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, Richard Griswold of Destin Water Users, Ray Hanson from Orange County Utilities, Dr. William Engel from the University of Florida TREEO Center, and Brian Matthews from the city of Palm Coast. Seated from left are Brian Wheeler of the TOHO Water Authority, Gary Williams of the Florida Rural Water Association, Scott Kelly of JEA, and Doug Prentiss of Safety Services Company. Not pictured: Rob Hungate of the Orlando Utilities Commission.

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taken for granted until those services are taken away. In successfully responding to these emergencies, FlaWARN has been able to educate local and state officials on the need for a collaborative effort in restoring services to communities in a timely manner.

Future enhancements to the FlaWARN organization include expanding the FlaWARN Web site using the lessons learned during the 2005 hurricane season. Enhancements will include some new functions and general site improvements that will completely revise the request tracking functionality of the site.

Whenever there is advance knowledge of an event such as a hurricane, the steering committee starts pre-planning three to four days out. As the hurricane is tracked, utilities out of the path of the storm gear up to help the affected areas.

Member utilities are able to request assistance through the FlaWARN Web site. Since electricity is often out during an emergency, FlaWARN administrators and steering committee members attempt to use emergency contact information to reach members in the area of the storm and determine their needs. Administrators then post any needs to the Web page. This is an innovative process because it allows member utilities to match

their available resources to requests for assistance. FlaWARN is designed to get the needed resources to the appropriate location within the first days after an event.

FlaWARN is also publishing an Emergency Response & Preparedness Best Management Practices For Florida's Water & Wastewater Systems manual. This will be posted on the Web site and will be a living document, continually changing as new lessons are learned.

As the 2006 hurricane season arrives, the FlaWARN team is ready to gear up without notice, using the Web page and personal contact to respond to any emergencies, man-made or natural. For more information on FlaWARN, visit the www.FlaWARN.org Web site or email info@flawarn.org.

Carol Horton is responsible for all administrative, financial, promotional and programming areas at the University of Florida's TREEO Center. Among her professional affiliations, she is a member of the board of the Florida Section of the American Water Recourse Association, communications chair for the Society of Government Meeting Planners, a member of the UF/Zero Waste Committee, and a founding member of the North Central Florida US Green Building Coalition. ◊