

Situational Awareness: The Day of Landfall

8:30 AM ET:



"about a twenty-foot tidal surge... The tidal surge came up and breached the levee system in the canal, so we're faced with major flooding both in the east, East New Orleans, and then out on the lakefront."
(statements made by Col. Terry Ebbert, New Orleans Director of Homeland Security, during a conference call with the American Red Cross, Louisiana Emergency Operations Center, FEMA Region VI, and the National Weather Service (NWS))

9:08 AM ET:



TSA

"The National Weather Service has reported that a levee broke on the Industrial Canal near the St. Bernard-Orleans parish line, and 3 to 8 feet of flooding was possible . . . In the uptown area of New Orleans on the south shore of Lake Ponchartrain, floodwaters by have [sic] already intruded on the first stories of some houses and some roads are impassable . . . There is heavy street flooding throughout Orleans, St. Bernard, and Jefferson parishes."
(9:00 AM Transportation Security Administration "Katrina Brief" distributed; later received by Homeland Security Operations Center (HSOC) Senior Watch Officer at 11:41 AM ET)

9:14 AM ET:



"A levee breach occurred along the industrial canal at Tennessee St. 3-8 feet of water is expected due to the breach."
(NWS Flash Flood Warning)

9:25 AM ET:



"At a 7:30 a.m. [CT] news conference, New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin said that water was coming over the levee system in the Lower 9th Ward, especially in the Florida Avenue area. Nagin said that the Florida Avenue pumping station was not working, and there were unconfirmed reports of people standing on their roofs."
(HSOC Spot Report #5, sourced to the Louisiana Office of Emergency Management and a news conference conducted by Mayor Nagin)

9:36 AM ET:



"Report that levee in Arabi has failed. next to the industrial canal."
(E-mail from FEMA Hurricane Liaison Team Coordinator Matthew Green, who was stationed in the National Hurricane Center, to FEMA's Deputy Director of Response Michael Lowder)

10:00 AM ET:



"Levees overtopped in Orleans and St. Bernard Parishes . . . Extensive and life threatening storm surge flooding occurring along the Louisiana and Mississippi coast at this time . . . Significant and life threatening storm surge 18 to 22 feet above normal is occurring."
(NWS Hurricane Katrina Local Statement)

**Committee on Homeland Security and
Governmental Affairs**

EXHIBIT Q

Individual items listed herein may or may not have been provided directly to the HSOC

10:00 AM ET:



“It is getting bad. Major flooding in some parts of the city. People are calling in for rescue saying they are trapped in attics, etc. That means water is 10 feet high there already. Trees are blowing down. Flooding is worsening every minute . . . The bad part has not hit here yet.”

(E-mail from DHS Protective Security Advisor Louis Dabdoub, stationed in New Orleans, to HSOC and DHS officials)

10:12 AM ET:



FEMA

“Severe flooding in the St. Bernard/Orleans parish line. Police report water level up to second floor of two story houses. People are trapped in attics. Pumps starting to fail. The city has now confirmed four pumps are off line”

(E-mail from Michael Heath to, among others, FEMA Chief of Staff Patrick Rhode and FEMA Acting Director of Operations Ken Burris summarizing a report from FEMA's Marty Bahamonde, who was located in the New Orleans Emergency Operations Center)

10:36 AM ET:



“The lower parishes of La, Plaq and St Bernard parish's [sic] are under water.”

(E-mail from DHS Protective Security Advisor Louis Dabdoub, stationed in New Orleans, to HSOC and DHS officials)

11:13 AM ET:



“Flooding is significant throughout the region and a levee in New Orleans has reportedly been breached sending 6-8 feet of water throughout the 9th Ward area of the city. Per the Governor, water is rising at 1 foot per hour and the New Orleans Mayor reports problems with a pumping station, causing flooding. HSOC repots [sic] that due to rising water in the 9th Ward, residents are in their attics and on their roofs.”

(White House Homeland Security Council Katrina Spot Report)

11:32 AM ET:



“After a morning conference call with state and parish officials, Maj. Gen. Bennett Landreneau said emergency personnel stationed at Jackson Barracks have confirmed that the waters are rising, although he could not say whether the cause was a levee breach or overtopping. Extensive flooding has been reported along St. Claude and Claiborne avenues . . . The 911 call centers in St. Bernard and Orleans parishes have been shut down and evacuated, Landreneau said.”

(HSOC Senior Watch Officer e-mail to senior DHS officials)

11:51 AM ET:



FEMA

“New Orleans FD is reporting a 20 foot wide breach on the lake ponchartrain side levee. The area is lakeshore Blvd and 17th street.”

(E-mail from FEMA's Michael Heath to FEMA's Deputy Director of Response Michael Lowder summarizing a report from FEMA's Marty Bahamonde, who was located in the New Orleans Emergency Operations Center)

11:52 AM ET:



"Katrina batters New Orleans . . . Some levees topped . . . Extensive damage is occurring . . . A significant and life threatening storm surge estimated around 20 feet has occurred with Katrina . . . Causing levees to be overtopped in Orleans and St Bernard parishes."

(NWS Hurricane Katrina Local Statement)

12:00 PM ET:



"Captain Mark Willow, NOPD Homeland Security has reported a 20 foot Levee Break at 17th Street Canal. Fire Department is reporting authority. Levee Board notified."

(Louisiana State Police Emergency Operations Center, Hurricane Katrina Situation Report)

12:40 PM ET:



"Widespread flooding will continue across the parishes along the south shore of Lake Ponchartrain in the greater New Orleans area . . . This continues to be an extremely life threatening situation . . . Those seeking refuge in attics and roof-tops are strongly urged to take the necessary tools for survival. For example. . . those going into attics should try to take an axe or hatchet with them so they can cut their way onto the roof to avoid drowning should rising flood waters continue to rise into the attic."

(NWS Flash Flood Warning)

2:54 PM ET:



"A small breach reported at 17 Street Canal by local firemen. Report that Duncan Pumping Station and Bonnebelle Pumping Station suffered roof damage, inundation of pumps, and are not operating at this time. Reported overtoppings of levee near Arabi and Inner Harbor Navigation Canal. Some level of widespread flooding has occurred. Report there has been a breach of the levee in the east of Harvey Canal, west bank area."

(USACE e-mail to, among others, Commanding Officer of the Mississippi Valley Division, later forwarded at 4:14 PM ET to USACE headquarters)

5:00 PM ET:



"St. Bernard & 9th Ward Levee breach (reported by Sewage & Water Board) . . . Haynes Blvd Pump Station Levee Breach (reported by Jackson Barracks) . . . 17th Street Canal levee breach, flooding Lakeview area."

(Louisiana Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness Situation Report)

8/29 6:00 pm ET - DHS HSOC Situation Report #7:

"Preliminary reports indicate the levees in New Orleans have not been breached; however, an assessment is still pending."

6:08 PM ET:

American
Red Cross

“Reports of flooding vary based on region with some levees in new Orleans reportedly breached [sic]. Extensive flooding in the Lower 9th Board [sic] and St. Bernard Parish may be a result of water going over the tops of the levees.”
(American Red Cross Situation Report, e-mailed to HSOC, IIMG, DHS officials, and White House Officials)

Early Evening:

“[Y]ou could also hear chatter on the radios that there was thousands of people on the rooftops that needed to be saved.”

* * *



“I called up our Incident Command Post in Alexandria, relayed information that there was intense flooding in the area and that we needed to marshal as many resources, both aircraft and small boats, as many as possible because this would be an extended, protracted search and rescue effort.”
(Testimony of Coast Guard Captain Frank Paskewich before this Committee regarding late afternoon overflight of New Orleans)

7:35 PM ET:

DHS HSOC issues Spot Report containing reports of breaches from USACE 2:54 e-mail.

(HSOC Spot Report 7, sourced to USACE New Orleans District Emergency Ops)



8:34 PM ET:



“There is reported flooding in Kenner with water 4-5 ft. on Williams Blvd. There is flooding in St. Bernard Parish with reports of water up to the roofs of homes. It has been reported that Causeway Blvd. has about 4 ft. of standing water. It has been reported that Arabi, in St. Bernard Parish, is under 10 ft. of water . . . All Jefferson and Orleans Parish Pumping Stations are inoperable as of 29 Aug.”
(USACE Hurricane Katrina Situation Report)

9:00 PM ET:



FEMA

“This is a catastrophic disaster. I’ve just started getting reconnaissance reports in from my folks in the field and I’m anticipating now that I’m going to have to prepare for housing at least tens of thousands of victims that are going to be without homes for literally months on end . . . We’ve got some storm surges that have come across the levees. We have some, I’m not going to call them breaches but we have some areas where the lake and the rivers are continuing to spill over. The flood waters are still spilling into those neighborhoods, so it’s frankly unfortunately going to get worse before it gets better . . . FEMA folks who have been with the agency for, you know, 15 or 20 years to call in and talk about how this is the worst flooding they’ve ever seen in their entire lives and talking about just neighborhoods after neighborhoods gone.”

(Statement of Michael Brown on CNN's Larry King Live)

9:29 PM ET:



"[T]he first (unconfirmed) reports they are getting from aerial surveys in New Orleans are far more serious than media reports are currently reflecting. Finding extensive flooding and more stranded people than they had originally thought – also a number of fires. FYI, in case tomorrow's sit reps seem more 'severe.'"
(E-mail to John Wood, Chief of Staff to the Secretary of DHS)

10:05 PM ET:



"Significant flooding reporting [sic] in St. Bernard Parish. Levee on West bank of Industrial Canal was possibly overtopped or breached. Over 10' of water reported standing. Levee at East Jefferson was not overtopped, however localized flooding reported. Due to this flooding, 4 East Jefferson pumping stations are not working."
(USACE Hurricane Katrina Situation Report)

10:30 PM ET:



"There is a quarter-mile breach in the levee near the 17th Street Canal about 200 yards from Lake Ponchartrain allowing water to flow into the City . . . Only one of the main pumps is reported to still be working but cannot keep up with the demand and its longevity is doubtful . . . an estimated 2/3 to 75% of the city is under water . . . Hundreds of people were observed on the balconies and roofs of a major apartment complex in the city . . . A few bodies were seen floating in the water and Coast Guard pilots also reported seeing bodies but there are no details on locations or numbers."
(HSOC Spot Report #13, sourced to a FEMA teleconference with Marty Bahamonde)

11:05 PM ET:



Summary of Bahamonde's overflight sent to DHS Deputy Secretary Michael Jackson.
(E-mail from Patrick Rhode)

11:47 PM ET:



"According to Remote Sensing Imagery and available Census data, approximately 136,000 housing units in New Orleans have been impacted by flooding."
(HSOC Spot Report #12, sourced to the FEMA Mapping and Analysis Center)

3:15 AM ET:



"Extensive flooding throughout various parts of metro New Orleans area. Several levee breaches reported and flooding continues from Lake Ponchartrain into parts of New Orleans and Metairie . . . This storm has impacted a wide area and caused catastrophic damage to New Orleans and the surrounding region, including areas north of Lake Ponchartrain and western Mississippi.
(U.S. Coast Guard Situation Report 6 – Hurricane Katrina)

6:00 AM ET:



"Industrial Canal at Tennessee St.: levee has breached, with water to depth of 5 feet at Jackson Barracks; 17th St. at Canal Blvd.: levee has been breached – breach extends several 100 meters in length; Much of downtown and east New Orleans is underwater, depth unknown at this time . . . Widespread and significant flooding has occurred throughout the city of New Orleans, extending eastward across the Mississippi gulf coast into Alabama."
(DHS HSOC Situation Report #8)