



TEXAS COMMISSION  
ON ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY

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TCEQ's Hurricane Harvey Response

## TCEQ's Hurricane Harvey Response

The Texas Commission on Environmental Quality is fully committed to responding to Hurricane Harvey and the resulting widespread, unprecedented flooding from the storm.

Even while the impacts of this storm continue to unfold, the TCEQ is working to help communities assess damage, manage debris, and bring critical services back online, including water and wastewater. In advance of the storm, TCEQ staff members coordinated with industry as they worked to safely shut down facilities. In the areas along the coast, regional staff prepared by moving agency vehicles and equipment to safer areas, arranging for continuous communications, and working with local emergency management officials. The TCEQ expects over 500 agency staff to be directly involved in the Hurricane Harvey response efforts.



The TCEQ is also following the governor's directive by making restoration of water and wastewater services a priority. Staffers began calling the approximately 300 public water systems and 100 wastewater systems in the impacted areas from Hurricane Harvey over the weekend to check on status and to provide assistance. The United States Environmental Protection Agency has deployed personnel to assist the TCEQ Drinking Water and Wastewater Phone Bank.

TCEQ and EPA experts from around the state are en route to areas hardest hit by the storm. As part of the TCEQ's deployment, the agency is sending its main Mobile Command Post, along with the TCEQ DFW Disaster Response Strike Team, to Corpus Christi. All coastal environmental emergency response activities will be coordinated from this Main Unified Command location. The Mobile Command Post operates as a fully functional regional office with communications, laboratory, and office space. In addition, the TCEQ will also deploy its second Mobile Command Post, along with another Disaster Response Strike Team, to the Houston region later

this week to establish a Unified Command Branch that will allow the TCEQ and its federal and state counterparts to respond promptly in the Houston area.

The EPA has an organized emergency response program and is positioned to support the Federal Emergency Management Administration, state, local and tribal partners. EPA's Emergency Operations Center has been activated and is deploying assets to support emergency response and aftermath flooding. The National Incident Management Assistance Team, consisting of highly skilled response personnel from across the EPA, have arrived in Dallas and one Incident Management Team deployed to Corpus Christi.

Both the Main Unified Command Center and Branch will respond to drinking water, wastewater, HazMat, debris management issues, and air quality monitoring. The EPA is developing surface water sampling plans to address public health concerns regarding possible contaminants found in storm water. The EPA will begin field sampling of flood waters as soon as conditions allow. The EPA, EPA contractors, U.S. Coast Guard, and National Guard will also be deployed to both locations to support response operations.

The TCEQ has also initiated a request to the Federal Emergency Management Agency for additional federal resources, known as a Mission Assignment. If approved, this will provide the state with an additional 184 personnel from the EPA, including its contractors, and the U.S. Coast Guard to assist with the short-term and anticipated long-term recovery efforts stemming from Hurricane Harvey.

The TCEQ's Superfund Program took steps to secure state sites in the projected path of Hurricane Harvey (example: removing drums with waste, shutting down systems, etc.). The EPA has been coordinating with potentially responsible parties as well with the TCEQ on these sites. The TCEQ and the EPA will be inspecting sites in the affected areas once re-entry is possible.

The TCEQ is aware that releases of wastewater from sanitary sewers occur during major flood events. The agency actively works to monitor facilities that have reported spills, as well as conducting outreach and providing technical guidance to all other wastewater facilities in flood-impacted areas.

In an ongoing emergency response, the TCEQ and other state agencies give priority to protecting and preventing imminent threats to public health. Once flood waters have receded, and it is safe to enter flooded areas, debris removal activities will commence. The TCEQ is aware that spills occur during flooding events, and the appropriate primary agency will monitor and work with the responsible party, if known, to take appropriate actions as conditions allow. Throughout the flooding event, the TCEQ remains in constant contact with state partners in spill response.

Floodwaters may contain many hazards, including infectious organisms, intestinal bacteria, and other disease agents. Precautions should be taken by anyone involved in cleanup activities or any others who may be exposed to flood waters. These precautions include heeding all warnings from local and state authorities regarding boil water notices, swimming advisories, or other safety advisories. In addition to the drowning hazards of wading, swimming, or driving in swift floodwaters, these waters can carry large objects that are not always readily visible that can cause injuries to those in the water. Other potential hazards include electrical shock from downed power lines and possible injuries inflicted by animals (example: snakes) displaced by the floodwaters.

Here are some helpful web links that contain flood related health and safety information:

**[U.S. CDC: Flood Waters or Standing Waters: Health Risks](#)**<sup>[5]</sup> 

[U.S. EPA: Natural Disasters: Flooding](#)[6] 

[DSHS: Precautions to be taken in flooding situations](#)[7] 

[TCEQ, Floods: Drinking Water Concerns and Dealing with Debris](#)[8]

The EPA has granted the TCEQ's [request for fuel waivers](#)[9] to allow for additional needed fuel to be transported to affected counties.

Once Hurricane Harvey has moved out of the state, we will continue to ensure that affected areas have their critical services restored. The TCEQ will provide updates during the recovery period on our [Hurricane Response webpage](#)[10].

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[1] <https://www.tceq.texas.gov>

[2] <https://www.tceq.texas.gov/news>

[3] <https://www.tceq.texas.gov/news/tceqnews>

[4] <https://www.tceq.texas.gov/news/tceqnews/the-latest>

[5] <http://www.cdc.gov/healthywater/emergency/extreme-weather/floods-standingwater.html>

[6] <http://www.epa.gov/natural-disasters/flooding>

[7] <http://www.texasprepares.org/English/information-flooding.shtml>

[8] <http://www.tceq.texas.gov/response/floods>

[9] <https://www.tceq.texas.gov/response/hurricanes>

[10] <https://www.tceq.texas.gov/response/hurricanes>

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