

# Hurricane Ike

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Houston mega-shelter.

As we were in registration, we would be the first people that the clients would meet upon entering the shelter. I felt as if this position would be a great way in which to meet those affected by the disaster.

The mega-shelter was housed in a vast, abandoned Auchan’s supermarket. When I arrived at the mega-shelter that afternoon, I was shocked to see how the empty space had turned into a suitable living area. There were five different cot sections, one for single men, one for single women and three for families.

There were numerous port-o-potties and showers outside. There was a large canteen set up inside that would eventually serve three warm meals a day, and there were male and female medical stations where clients and staff could be seen.

I spent the next eleven days at the registration desk in the mega-shelter. I slowly got into a morning routine: wake up around 6:00am, drive past broken windows and broken stoplights, look at the fallen trees gracing resident’s front lawns, and arrive at the mega-shelter sometime between 7:00am and 7:30am.

My night routine was always a bit different. Sometimes I left at 7:00pm, other times I left at 11:00pm. My ending time always depended on whether we were expecting more buses or not. Additional buses were usually full with disaster victims and were generally coming from a smaller shelter that had just closed.

Most of my days were spent registering new clients, speaking with a few who wanted to talk and handing

out comfort kits- American Red Cross bags that included such items as a toothbrush, toothpaste, deodorant, a washcloth and a razor.

There were certainly down times in the day when I would wander over to the canteen to grab a meal or would take a quick walk outside in the sunshine. These breaks were crucial to both my mental health and to my overall usefulness to the registration team.

Although I never made it to Galveston or to the other areas where there was complete and utter destruction, I met the families or individuals whose lives had been affected by the hurricane.

Most of the mega-shelter residents were from Houston and either had water damage in their apartments or homes or had no electricity. In some extreme cases, the local’s apartment building had been condemned or had been destroyed.

The residents from Galveston just wanted to go back to Galveston to see what had happened to their homes. They did not seem to care if there was no electricity or clean water on the island; they just wanted to see their home in order to gain closure.

Some of the residents already knew that they had lost everything; you could clearly see the pain in their eyes.

Despite the pain and frustration that most clients felt, I was glad that there was the mega-shelter to help with their immediate needs. I left the shelter and Texas on October 3<sup>rd</sup>, but I am pleased to know that the mega-shelter will stay open until everyone’s needs are met.

The American Red Cross does its best to support individuals before, during and after a disaster, and I can only commend them for the work they do. I myself had an invaluable learning experience, and I look forward to my next Disaster Response.



A beachfront home stands among the debris in Gilchrist, Texas on the coast of the Gulf of Mexico on Sunday, Sept. 14, 2008 after Hurricane Ike hit the area. Ike was the first major storm to directly hit a major U.S. metro area since Hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans in 2005. (Pool Photo/AP)

## West Hills Landslide

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prevented if the water had been dealt with properly.”

The events brought consideration from the Oregon state legislature. However, Thayer charges, pressure from the real estate industry kept some key elements from being included in the legislation that was eventually passed.

A key missing ingredient was a provision that property sellers disclose to buyers past geological problems on the property. Another was a chance for “peer review.”

On sloping sites builders are required to obtain a geotechnical report in order to build but, Thayer said, geotechnical engineers like other consultants will tend to slant their findings to the advantage of whoever is paying them; there should be a chance for such findings to be checked.

“There are some instances where development is actually the best course of action,” he said. A famous castle-like building on Southwest Canterbury

Lane in the Arlington Heights neighborhood, built with reinforced walls, actually adds stability to the steep slope it is built on.

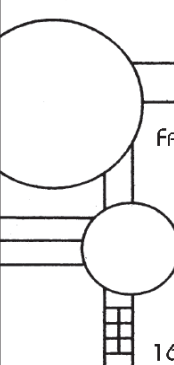
Doug Morgan of the Bureau of Development Services, another speaker at the SWHRL forum, says he and his colleagues fulfill that function. Problems due to bad development decisions are much more likely on older properties, he said, whereas newer development must pass extensive tests.

In terms of avoiding trouble, Morgan agreed with Burns that the culprit is the water. He repeated Burns’ checklist and added a few items: look for cracks in foundations or walls, or porches and patios moving away from the house, which indicate the ground is moving. He agreed with Thayer that seller disclosure regulations would be helpful, but also agreed that it isn’t likely to happen.

Currently, Morgan and Thayer said, the state is in the process of mapping the geology of the West Hills by beams projected from airplanes that show the nature of the ground underneath.

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