D5.1: Protection of a Bio-behavioral Lab: Lessons learned from Hurricane Ike 2008

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Abstract:
Introduction: Purpose: Provide information about hurricane preparedness for bio-behavioral research labs so researchers can be better prepared for future hurricanes or other disasters.
**Method(s):** Methods: Review of the Hurricane Preparedness Plan, UTMB website, research services’ hurricane Ike homepage, Town Hall meeting reports, and media reports were reviewed for the purpose of this report.

**Results:** Findings: The UTMB hurricane preparedness plan was written before the hurricane and was put into practice immediately afterwards. Research personnel were evacuated from campus two days before the hurricane. A “Look and Leave” policy for Essential 1 personnel (principal investigators using the lab) was implemented to briefly investigate lab conditions and to supply dry ice and nitrogen to maintain the samples. Actions for saving samples started on day 6 after the hurricane, including inventory of -80 degree freezers, supplying dry ice and nitrogen to freezers that were not supported by emergency power. Access to the campus was blocked by the campus police until the safety was assured. Clear guidelines for researchers were published online on Day 17 including list of dos and don’ts for assessing lab conditions and disposing of waste and lab waste disposal by the UTMB department of Environmental Health and Safety (EHS). Research was restarted in approved buildings where damage was repaired on Day 32. Along with the Galveston and vicinity declared as a National disaster area, NIH assistance was made available including accepting late grant application submissions, deadline extensions for reporting, assistance with laboratory animal welfare issues, and extension of salaries and benefit for grantees.

**Discussion & Conclusions:** Discussion: Although the overall UTMB hurricane preparedness was well planned and practiced, the damage from the Hurricane overwhelmed researchers at UTMB. Some actions should be implemented earlier to save samples and minimize the damage to research projects. Having consumable materials in safe place can avoid this delay after a disaster. Conclusion: The experience of Hurricane Ike provided us with critical information for the future emergency preparedness of the Bio-behavioral lab. Based on findings and analysis of the aftermath of Hurricane Ike, we updated emergency protocols, equipped the lab with an emergency generator, and stored emergency supplies, so that we can protect researchers, save data and minimize the delay in projects.

**Abstract History:**
This abstract has not been presented or accepted for presentation in whole or in part at the SNRS or other scientific meeting.

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