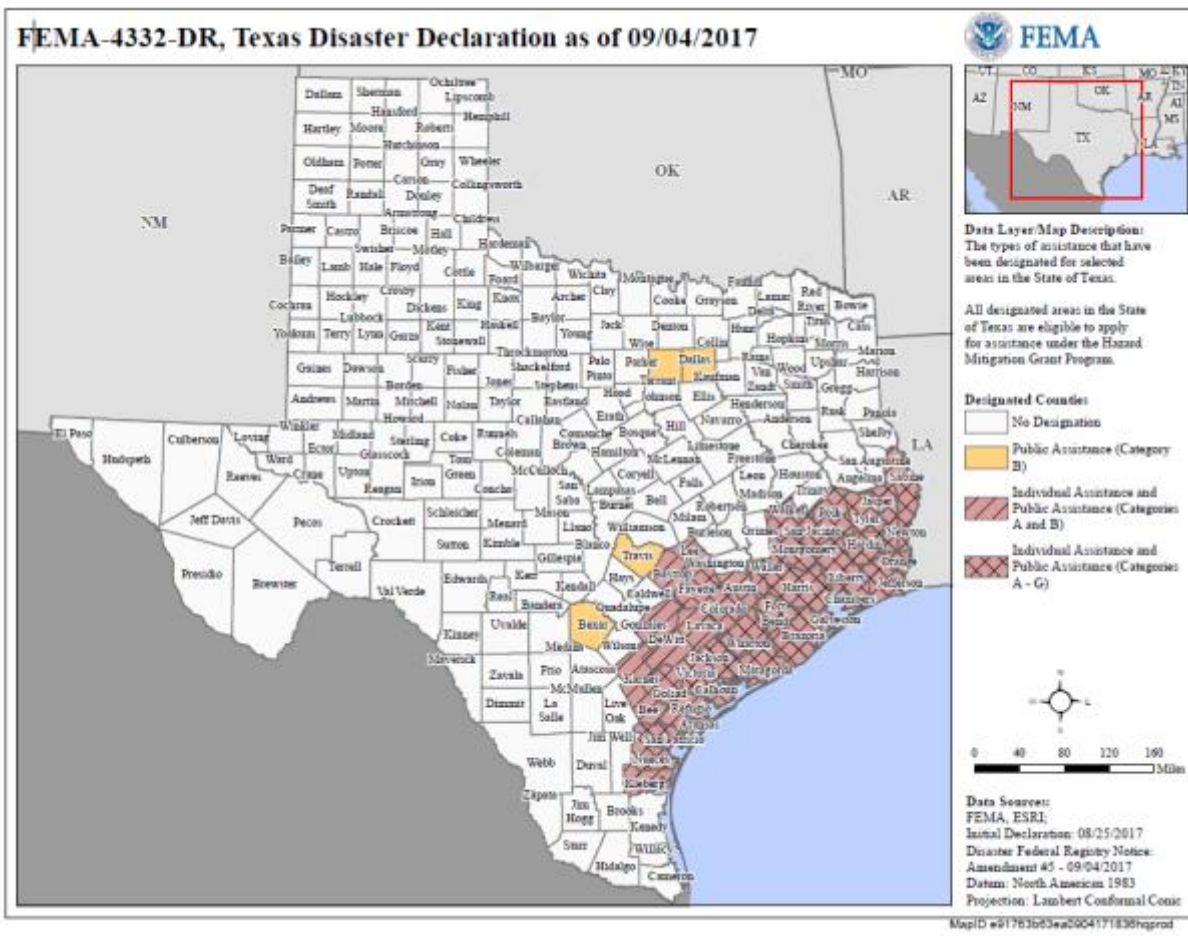


# Rebuilding Texas after Hurricane Harvey Operational Plan

## Purpose

On September 7, Texas Governor Greg Abbott asked Texas A&M University System Commissioner John Sharp to serve as Commissioner of the Governor’s Commission to Rebuild Texas to oversee the rebuilding of Texas communities along the Gulf coast in the wake of the devastation created by Hurricane Harvey. (See Figure below.) The focus of this effort includes activities related to rebuilding the public infrastructure in the affected counties as opposed to repair and replacement of private structures (homes, etc.) that will be handled by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). Essentially, the Governor’s charge was summed up in one direction to the Commissioner: “I want you to advocate for our communities, and make sure things get done without delay.”

Commissioner Sharp agreed to undertake this important assignment and provides this plan as an initial strategy for moving forward with getting Texas rebuilt.



## **Mission Statement**

If we are going to rebuild swiftly, we must communicate effectively with all stakeholders. The mission of this project is to provide a single point of contact and authority representing Governor Abbott for overseeing the rebuilding of the public infrastructure—roads, bridges, schools, and other facilities—damaged or destroyed by Hurricane Harvey. While there may be some overlap, our understanding is that the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) will have responsibility for assisting individuals with homes damaged or lost in the storm.

*The Commissioner's responsibility is to assist local areas with their unique needs, to coordinate the state recovery response and to recommend policies that serve the best interests of the people of Texas while maintaining Texas' economic preeminence, specifically along the Gulf Coast.*

This effort does not override or replace the excellent disaster management efforts currently underway under the auspices of FEMA and the Texas Division of Emergency Management (TDEM). Many federal and state agencies are now—and will continue to be—involved in dealing with the effects of the disaster. Instead, it is specifically intended to create a one-stop-service center to which local officials and others can turn for information, help and advocacy as they undertake the difficult process of recovering and rebuilding from the hurricane.

The Governor has set an ambitious goal of completing the rebuilding along the coast, certain to be a difficult and challenging effort, in as short a time as possible and restoring the Gulf coast to its traditional role as a central component of the Texas economy.

The Governor has also directed that the various local applications for assistance from the federal government be coordinated in such a way that it reflects a truly regional approach to recovery and avoids a hodge-podge of proposals that does not make the most effective possible use of the funds provided by Congress for assistance. Our goal is the efficient, fair and honest use of all public dollars involved in the Hurricane Harvey recovery effort.

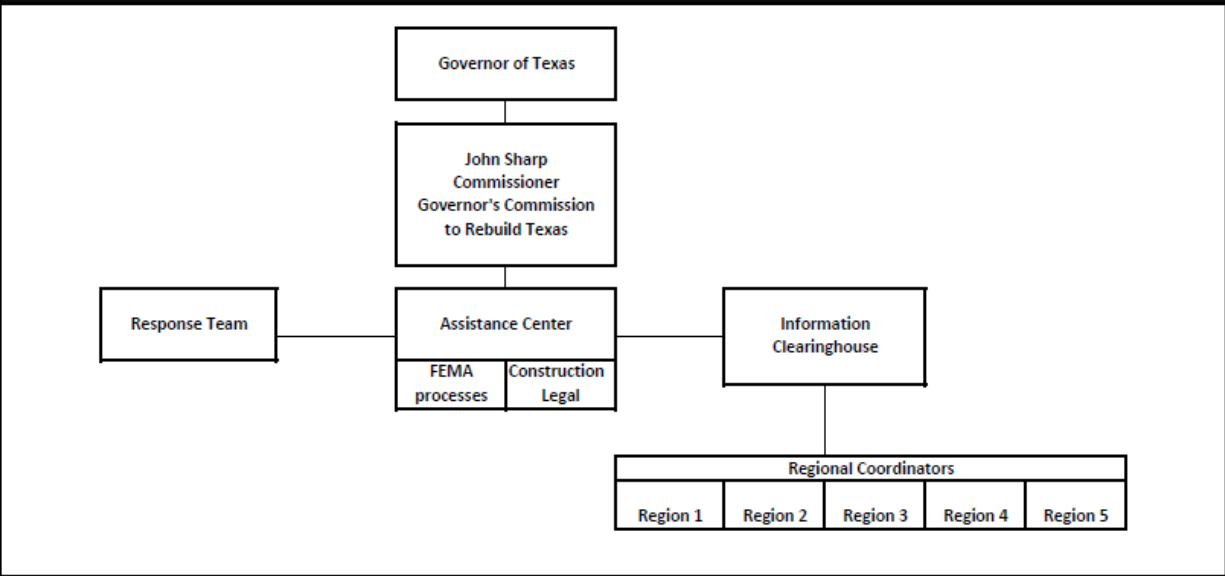
## **Authority**

The Governor makes this delegation of authority granted under Texas Government Code, Chapter 418, Emergency Management, Sec. 418.011, Sec. 418.016, Sec. 418.017, Sec. 418.018, Sec. 418.022, and Sec. 418.122.

## **Initial Structure**

Commissioner Sharp is committed to providing a flexible and highly responsive resource for communities, schools and other public institutions as they rebuild. As an initial structure, Figure 2 on the following page shows how resources will be organized to provide this response.

**Figure 2**  
**Response Structure**



Essentially, Commissioner Sharp plans to use a three-pronged approach to ensure that the state is able to meet the diverse needs in various communities.

First, he plans to deploy an “assistance center” team of on-site subject experts who are knowledgeable in federal and state law, federal disaster rules, state rules, government procurement, and large-scale construction issues that local officials must have access to as they begin to work on recovery.

This team of experts will be available to consult with local officials and help them with the complex details involved in a recovery effort of this scale. Also important to this effort will be coordination with other efforts. For example, the Texas Department of Emergency Management has a Public Works Response Team that focuses on the recovery of infrastructure.

This group would also serve as a link to experts in state and federal government who can help resolve the issues. This team will be comprised of representatives of agencies and university systems that have extensive experience dealing with disaster situations.

Second, the Commissioner will create an “information clearinghouse” group to provide regular contact with local officials on Hurricane Harvey related issues. The counties covered by the federal disaster declaration would be divided into 5 regions. Each county within each region would have its own team member (or members) who will focus on the area’s specific needs and, transfer them to appropriate assistance center experts or other parts of the state government for a solution.

The Commissioner will develop this county-level project staff primarily from System’s Extension staff members and representatives of other state agencies who are already located in counties affected by the hurricane and who have a strong knowledge of local government in their respective counties.

Third, the Commissioner will create a “response team” that will maintain a direct line of communication with Texas’ Chief Operations Officer housed inside the Governor’s office to ensure that state agencies receive information in real-time and can respond quickly and decisively to address issues that arise at the local level.

The Governor also wants to ensure that the rebuilding efforts are consistent across regions and create the potential for strong economic growth in the future. In addition, the U.S. Department of Commerce Economic Development Administration will likely be getting significant funds for recovery, and that agency prefers to distribute funds regionally. The response team will focus on this activity. It will compile and review information as it becomes available and make sure it is accurate and consistent.

The response team will also establish a group of industry professionals and research experts to review all infrastructure assessments and other available data gathered from the impacted areas to identify and recommend novel infrastructure construction and renewal practices and approaches that will maximize the resiliency and sustainability of any reconstructed infrastructure from future catastrophic weather events.

The bottom line is that we cannot just rebuild what was damaged; we must “future-proof” what is built new to mitigate future problems to the greatest extent possible.

In addition to these direct assistance activities, the Governor also directed the Commissioner to serve as an advocate for Texas communities, schools and other public institutions before Congress and the Legislature to ensure they receive the assistance they need in a timely way, making it possible for the Texans affected by Hurricane Harvey to return to their normal lives as quickly as possible with as few lasting effects as possible. In short, the Commissioner and his team will have four primary tasks:

- Respond to local needs,
- Assess each community to identify its true needs.
- Advocate for the interests of the affected areas,
- Rebuild the affected communities better than they were before as quickly, and efficiently, as possible.

## **Communication**

Initially, the Commission leadership team will make regular daily situation reports to the Governor’s office and the Commissioner, updating them on all activities for the day, problems encountered, and other information critical to the Commissioner’s management of the overall

process. Other reporting regimes will be established based on the situation as it exists as the process evolves.

### **Initial Timeline**

Based on current planning, these are the next immediate steps to put this plan of operations into effect:

September 2-11: A central office for the effort has been established at the System offices in College Station. This office has been created and phone lines are being installed and the office staffed and readied for operation.

September 2: AgriLife Extension has been notified to make contact with county officials in their respective service areas and begin making regular reports to Extension management. These reports are being compiled and forwarded daily to the Commissioner and the Governor's office on a daily basis.

September 7: Announcement by Governor Abbott.

September 7-9: The Governor and Commissioner will travel to meet with county and city officials in affected counties.

September 7-13: Contact made with relevant state and federal authorities.

September 7-13: Notify other agencies involved in disaster response of need for regular updates to Governor and Commissioner, including FEMA, TDEM, TxDOT, Department of State Health Services, Health and Human Services Commission, Department of Public Safety, Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs, Public Utility Commission, Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Task Force 1, Task Force 2, Texas A&M Forest Service, and others.

September 11-forward: Assess and adjustment basic plan to meet operational needs.

### **Rules of the Road**

Make the situation better, not worse.

Let the experts do their jobs.

Empower local governments to achieve their goals.

Be available, all day every day.

Make effective coordination a priority.

Focus on the needs that will have the greatest impact locally and regionally.

Respond immediately; fix the problem; cut red tape.

Prioritize a consistent regional approach.

Create a future Texas that is better than the status quo.

Follow the law.

No surprises.