

# teaching note

## *Readiness and Response: The case of hotel emergency management during hurricanes*

### Summary of the Case

Hutchinson Island, located on the east coast of Florida, is made up of two barrier islands separated by the Fort Pierce Inlet: North Hutchinson Island and South Hutchinson Island. Hotel Adria is a 3-star, 204-room, mid-scale property located off U.S. Highway 1 in Port St. Lucie, Florida. It's now Friday, October 13th and Hurricane Rene has been upgraded to a Category 4 Hurricane with winds recorded up to 137 mph. The hurricane's outer bands are tracking toward Hutchinson Island, 9 miles northeast of Hotel Adria. The evacuation zone for Hotel Adria has not been identified as a mandatory evacuation zone and is not expected to be in the direct path of the hurricane, thus it remains open. Manager in Training (MIT) Mary Banna graduated last fall and is completing her training at Hotel Adria. Her General Manager (GM) has designated Mary the Manager on Duty (MOD) for four days while he is meeting with franchise owners in Chicago. He is unable to return to Florida due to the hurricane and Mary must work with the hotel team to manage the hotel during Hurricane Rene's movement toward Hutchinson Island. Currently on property with Mary Banna are the following managers: Liam Clean, Executive Housekeeper; Mitch Star, sous-chef; Amanda Quick, Front Desk Supervisor; Jack Done, Assistant Facilities Engineer; and Patricia Night, Catering Manager. Additionally, the following hourly staff are on property: 4 housekeepers, 4 part-time banquet servers, 3 restaurant servers, one front desk clerk, and one bartender. Mary and the hotel team are faced with five broad challenges that are common throughout the southern United States and Caribbean Islands during hurricane season.

Mary sees that there is extremely high demand for rooms and chooses to raise the current room rate to the rack rate to capture extra revenue, in case the hotel suffers loss of business after the hurricane. She is able to fill the hotel at this much higher room rate as residents and other visitors are evacuating areas of Florida to escape the hurricane. Some guests have arrived with pets and Hotel Adria has a no-pet policy. Mary allows a family to check-in to the hotel, but forces them to leave their dog in their car overnight. Even though the hotel is completely full, residents, visitors and evacuees are still arriving looking for shelter. Mary decides to call a meeting of the managers and discusses potential options for helping evacuees now that the hotel is completely booked. She seeks recommendations from each of the managers. They decide to continue to take in evacuees even though there are no more guest rooms.

Mary must now determine how the hotel will feed over 500 guests who are now required to stay inside the hotel due to an emergency curfew. Mary convenes another meeting with the management

team to discuss how to manage the hotel's services, and meet guests' needs and concerns during the curfew and storm. The clock is ticking and it's only two hours before the 80-seat restaurant, Hemingway's, is scheduled to open for dinner. The eye of the hurricane is now passing close to the hotel and guests are concerned and worried. Mary is informed that an elderly woman with Alzheimer's is lost in the hotel, and that a young couple who've had too much to drink are outside trying to take a selfie to capture their first hurricane experience. Mary walks off to find the couple to bring them back inside the hotel.

It's now two weeks later and the GM is meeting with Mary to discuss the outcomes of the situations she and the hotel team encountered during Hurricane Rene. He reports that the Florida Attorney General's Office is considering charges against Hotel Adria after receiving complaints for price gouging. The GM also shares with Mary that the head of franchise relations from the corporate office has sent him an online video that has received over 200,000 views on YouTube showing a scared Black Lab in a car parked outside the hotel during the hurricane. On a positive note, the GM informs Mary that many of the guests that she sheltered in the hotel's public spaces when they were fully booked have posted positive reviews on TripAdvisor. He also informs Mary that the hotel received a nice letter from the family of the elderly woman with Alzheimer's that the hotel took care of during the storm. The GM also commends Mary for her innovative ideas and use of resources to feed so many guests who were required to stay indoors at the hotel during the curfew.

### Target Audience and Courses

This case study is appropriate for a diverse set of students and courses. It is intended for upper level (3rd and 4th year) students in hospitality and tourism management programs who have had either a lodging internship or basic introduction to hotel operations courses. While some pre-existing understanding of the workings of a hotel would be useful, several themes make the case study flexible for use within general business management courses. This case highlights the importance of operational planning, the need for innovative use of human and physical resources, and the crucial role private businesses play during crises and disasters. The case presents crisis scenarios that are suitable for any undergraduate or graduate management student enrolled in courses concentrating on communications, ethics, risk management and leadership. Ideally, as part of a senior seminar course, this case provides an opportunity for students to demonstrate their capstone knowledge through an application to real world scenarios that they may face as new graduates entering the workforce.

## Teaching Objectives

Through the review of secondary sources and forty-one interviews with General Managers regarding their experiences with hurricanes in Florida, common disaster scenarios have been presented in this real world case study. Formulated and unformulated actions have been presented in this case study in order to achieve the key learning objectives.

### The primary objectives of this case study are for students to:

1. Recognize the importance of each phase of emergency management planning
2. Develop responses to natural disaster scenarios utilizing hotel resources
3. Evaluate firm centric and community stakeholder responses during a natural disaster

## Lesson Plan and Instruction Overview

This case should be organized around three student activities to achieve the core learning outcomes. It is recommended these activities take place over three class sessions. During class session one, the case and required readings are assigned. In class session two, student groups of 4 or 5 are formed and presented with three discussion themes to be addressed in their groups. Class session three entails the instructor reviewing best practices. Sessions 2 and 3 are based on a 75-minute class period. However, for a shorter class session (50 minutes), each student group could be assigned 1 of 3 discussion themes rather than all three.

### Class Sessions

#### Class Session 1: Readings

The first requirement is that students read the case study and required readings as an introduction to emergency management issues and hospitality businesses. Upon completion of the readings, students will be required to:

1. Describe the stakeholder focus of a firm centric and community centric response to a natural disaster
2. Define the 4 R's framework for emergency management planning
3. Explain the key actions within the hurricane response cycle
4. List key recommendations for cross-training of employees during disasters
5. Summarize the importance of understanding customer management during a disaster

#### Assignment and Assessment

These readings should be assigned prior to group activities in class session 2, and assessed through either a written assignment consisting of responses to the five reading objectives

above or as part of an exam later in the course.

#### Instructor Assigned Reading

To provide the instructor with an operational overview of hotel emergency planning and hurricanes, the following reading is suggested:

St. Petersburg Clearwater Area Convention & Visitor Bureau & Pinellas County Department of Emergency Management.  
(n.d.). *Accommodations Industry Hurricane Planning Guide*.

#### Class Session 2: Group Exercise

Students will form groups of four to five and discuss the following three themes within their groups, and then present their response to a summary discussion question.

#### Instruction

1. Form groups: 2-3 Minutes
2. All groups separately discuss Theme 1 and corresponding questions: 10 minutes
3. A notetaker should be chosen for each group and notes taken for a post class assignment. (Note: If less than a 75-minute class, assign each group 1 of the 3 separate themes.)
4. Groups share the summary question with the class - how could Hotel Adria have been prepared to be more community centric during hurricane Rene? 10 minutes
5. All groups separately discuss Theme 2 and corresponding questions: 10 minutes
6. Groups share the summary question with the class - what hotel resources would be most helpful to shelter and feed guests during Hurricane Rene? 10 minutes
7. All groups separately discuss Theme 3 and corresponding questions: 10 minutes
8. Groups share the summary question with the class - how could Hotel Adria have utilized its supervisors and managers to manage and support guests during Hurricane Rene? 10 minutes

### Group Discussion Themes

#### Theme 1: supporting vulnerable stakeholders

1. Was it illegal when Mary, as the manager on duty, decided to raise the rates and not allow guests' pets to shelter in the hotel?
2. What indicators should have encouraged Hotel Adria to move from a firm centric approach to a community centric approach in handling disaster scenarios?
3. What were the negative impacts of the decisions concerning room rates and enforcing the hotel's pet policy?
4. What actions could Mary have taken to address concerns of hotel management surrounding pets in order to allow for pets to stay in Hotel Adria during the hurricane?
5. What policies should hotels adjust during times of crises and disasters?

### **Theme 2: Utilizing Hotel Resources**

1. Why are hotels often sought out as a place for shelter during a natural disaster?
2. What are the minimum efforts Hotel Adria should have taken, once 100% occupied, to help community members seeking rooms?
3. How could Hotel Adria use its resources to help house those seeking accommodations once all of its rooms were fully booked?
4. What efforts should Hotel Adria take to protect food and beverage inventory during a disaster that may result in sustained power outages?
5. What innovative strategies could the team at Hotel Adria implement to feed over 500 guests now in the hotel when *Hemingway's Restaurant* only seats 80?
6. What phase of emergency management planning is most crucial to the best use of hotel resources during a hurricane?

### **Theme 3: Guest Support and Management**

1. What forms of vulnerability might guests in Hotel Adria be experiencing during Hurricane Rene?
2. What strategies could Mary have implemented to ensure that guests received regular communications and ongoing updates?
3. What policies or practices could have been utilized to prevent the elderly guest with Alzheimers from getting lost and the couple from taking the selfie during the hurricane?
4. What additional roles could the managers and supervisors of Hotel Adria have been assigned to better serve and support guests' needs that arose during the hurricane?
5. How could Hotel Adria prepare and equip its guests for the likely impacts of the hurricane?

### **Assignment and Assessment**

For next class, student groups will be required to turn in a written document reporting their responses to the set of questions above. Groups will be required to participate in a class discussion based on an instructor review of hotel best practices during hurricanes. Groups should come prepared to verbally present the actions that could be undertaken in the recovery phase to address the negative outcomes that occurred due to decisions made during Hurricane Rene.

#### *Class Session 3: Class Discussion and Best Practices*

The instructor will share best practices and solutions to the real world scenarios presented in the case study. Each theme should be introduced and a question posed to all groups, followed by the instructor presenting best practices not previously identified by the groups.

## **Analysis of Case Objectives**

### **Theme 1: Moving From a Business Focus to Supporting Vulnerable Stakeholders**

Hotels may be surprised by certain natural disasters such as earthquakes, but hurricanes follow a regular season cycle and development. There are regular signs that hoteliers should monitor to be better prepared.

#### **Pose the following question to the class:**

Q1: What indicators should have encouraged Hotel Adria to plan for and implement policies that support those who will likely be made vulnerable by a major hurricane?

#### *Best Practices*

- Monitor Weather Warnings

Hoteliers should follow the status of storms through reporting from the National Hurricane Center, a division of the United States NOAA/National Weather Service

As a storm moves from a tropical storm to various stronger hurricane categories, hotels should enact corresponding plans and preparations.

- Support the Recommendations of Trade Associations  
State associations like the Florida Restaurant Lodging Association (FRLA) will suggest best practices as storms become a threat. These may include the suggestion to waive cancellation fees and other fees associated with reservations. This should also be a strong indicator not to raise rates or charge resort fees.
- Airport Closures

The closing of a local airport should be an obvious sign the storm is serious and that the ability for some guests to arrive or even check-out and leave will be hindered. This is an indicator that the hotel should plan for how to allow guests to remain on property and extend their reservations when they may not have rooms for them.

- Evacuation Orders

Whether a hotel is located near or far from an evacuation zone, hotels should prepare for evacuees as residents will begin to make a decision to travel away from the storm even before an evacuation order has been given.

If a hotel is located near an evacuation zone, plans for handling and supporting the immediate high demand for rooms should be implemented.

- State of Emergency Declarations

With the declaration of a state of emergency, hotels should review all decisions based on changes to their legality and what guests will interpret as fair. The government may make a request that hotels accept pets, causing guests to often interpret that this is required of hotels and should be free of charge.

*As mentioned above, these indicators should initiate certain planned responses to the disaster situation.*

Q2: What other practices and policies should hotels implement and adjust during major natural disasters?

#### *Room Rates*

- Not only should hotels not raise rates, but hotels will often offer “Special Distress Rates” to provide discounts to evacuees seeking shelter from other parts of the state.

#### *Managing Room Inventory:*

- It may be a mistake to completely fill the hotel to 100% occupancy knowing that guests will be seeking shelter from the hurricane. It is recommended that a percentage of rooms be reserved for hotel employees and their families, not only to support them, but if the hotel is hard to reach for an extended period of time, it's important to have enough employees staying onsite to run the basic operations.
- Evacuees will often make several reservations through online travel agencies (OTAs) as they are insuring against the unpredictable path of a hurricane. Unless the hotel's reservation system can handle real-time updates to the room reservation system, hotels may want to only accept reservations directly through its own hotel reservation system during hurricanes. It's not uncommon for evacuees to show up at hotels only to find out that they don't really have a reservation because the OTA they used was not synced with the hotel's reservation system.

#### *Pet Policies:*

- Hotels that are pet friendly usually charge a pet fee to cover the extra cost of cleaning and housing a pet. During a major hurricane it's common to waive or discount this fee.
- Hotels that do not normally allow pets should have a temporary plan defined in their emergency plan to allow pets. It is recommended that pets be given less water than normal to avoid the need to go outside. A section of artificial carpet should be purchased in advance as a designated option if pets are forced indoors for long periods of time. Designated times for pets to be allowed outdoors, if available, should be established, and a pet only entrance used

to avoid impacts on other guests.

## ***Theme 2: Utilizing Hotel Resources***

During a natural disaster, when hotels may be at 100% occupancy and operating without full staff and resources, they are sought out by diverse stakeholders for assistance. Pose the following question to the class:

Q1: Why, as private businesses, are hotels often sought out to help the public during natural disasters?

- Hotels are already located where disasters often occur.
- Hotel management are experts at delivering basic needs: food, water and shelter.
- Hotels are already connected to existing supply chains and thus have experience getting supplies to needed areas affected by disasters.
- Businesses like hotels are involved in community disaster planning and are often utilized as command centers for local officials and first responders.

Q2: How can hotels house evacuees and those needing shelter when they are fully booked?

- Consider the use of ballrooms, meeting rooms, and common spaces to house those seeking shelter.
- Consider bringing pool lounge furniture inside as make-shift beds and places to rest.
- Monitor these areas as they are often crowded and offer little privacy.
- Check-in and check-out these guests as you would a typical guest to keep track of who is on the hotel property.
- Continually check other nearby properties to help guests find appropriate rooms.

Q3: What are possible strategies for feeding guests under the potential challenges of high demand, lack of power, and limited human resources.

- Almost all hotels shift their restaurant service to buffet-style service during disasters to speed up service and reduce the need for staff.
- Dinner service can be scheduled by assigned seating time using room numbers or floor numbers, similar to a cruise ship, to manage for the extra demand on the hotel's food and beverage facilities.
- To-go containers can be used for guests to take food back to their rooms, reducing demand for seating.
- Food and beverage tables can be set-up throughout the hotel with packaged and non-cook snacks and beverages.
- Sternos and chafing dishes can be used to set-up buffets in the ballrooms and meeting spaces.

### ***Theme 3: Guest Support and Management***

Q1: What strategies should hotels implement to ensure that guests are well informed?

- Be visible; managers and supervisors should be constantly walking around and reassuring guests.
- Have pre-printed hurricane guidelines that can be distributed under the guest's door.
- Hotels will in some cases collect mobile numbers and text regular communications to inform guests.
- In-house hotel TV channels can be customized and used for regular updates.
- Use whiteboards or flip charts from convention services to keep guests informed, located in common spaces and lobby areas.
- In-house emergency sound systems can be used to make public announcements.
- Plans for high tech and low tech communication strategies are essential due to the possible loss of power or mobile service.

Q2: What additional roles should managers be assigned during a natural disaster?

- Cross training is important since hotels are often left short on staffing during major hurricanes.
- *Counselor* - guests may become scared, some may even panic, so an employee with a strong empathetic skill set needs to be identified and assigned to these situations.
- *Sheriff* - Assign hotel employees to specific areas of the hotel to make regular inspections and monitor for guest needs. Guests may be required to stay in the hotel and managers will be needed to monitor exits. Guests are known to turn to excessive drinking during stressful disaster situations, so managers will have to monitor bar and guest behavior carefully.
- *Communications* - If not the MOD or GM, someone needs to be assigned as the key contact during a disaster for local officials and first responders to keep the hotel and staff informed.

Q3: How can hotels support guests during the hurricane?

- Any guests checked in as a single individual without family and friends should be checked on to ensure their well-being.
- Consider requiring a guest from each room to inform the hotel of all names in their party and note any health concerns that may arise if there is a prolonged curfew in the hotel or if the hotel is forced to evacuate.
- As the storm approaches, implement a buddy system where guests are asked to accompany their children and elderly parents when moving outside their guest room.

- Provide guest emergency kits (water, snack bar, glow sticks, flashlight).
- Require guests to stay in their rooms when the worst of the storm is projected for the local area.
- Establishing a hurricane concierge. Often, during a major hurricane guests will face boredom, especially children, so it's helpful to have a place where they can get puzzles, games and cards to pass the time.

### ***Theme 4: Emergency Management Planning***

Q1: What phase is the most critical in disaster planning?

- The readiness / preparedness stage is likely the most crucial stage for a hotel. It's difficult for a hotel to mitigate or reduce the chances of a hurricane occurring, but they can prepare and be ready for them.
- Hurricane readiness and preparedness are year round activities.
- Prior to the hurricane season, hotels attend industry workshops and training sessions to share best practices and train staff.
- Hotels constantly review emergency management preparedness plans and update them after each hurricane season.
- The recovery stage is also very crucial as hotels unfortunately may be directly hit by hurricanes and have to plan for repair and restoration activities.

### ***Theme 5: Recovery Phase***

- The recovery phase often starts with assessing physical damage to the hotel property and preparing to open facilities and services at full capacity. Hotel employees may have suffered damaged homes and loss of belongings, needing support from the hotel. Hotels should reach out to employees to support them with temporary housing and material support. Even the best laid plans may result in service failures during a natural disaster.
- Have student groups verbally report to the class the actions that could be taken during the recovery phase to address the negative outcomes that occurred due to decisions made during Hurricane Rene. It's important to note to the class that even if the choices to raise room rates and turn away the public or those with pets are deemed legal or inline with hotel policy, the resulting impacts on reputation and hotel brand can be costly. In an era of social media and viral sharing, having the hotel's name attached to a price gouging complaint regardless of legality will negatively impact the company's reputation. Additionally, the public at large has very little sympathy for companies that don't show empathy for evacuees seeking shelter, especially those with pets.

- Consider donating extra room rate revenue generated by excessively raising rates to those who have suffered damage in the community, and return that revenue to those guests who stayed at the hotel during the hurricane.
- Make a donation to the local animal shelter and incorporate into the hotel's emergency management plan a policy to take pets only during issued State declarations of emergency and evacuations.

## Final Note: "Liability"

*Shared by Instructor with Class:*

This case study activity presents real world scenarios that hotels encounter during hurricanes, and presents a set of guideline considerations for hotels to aid their stakeholders in the future. It is important that hotel properties be aware of the legal risks they may encounter when aiding the public during and after a disaster, and consult with their legal team in advance to identify the appropriateness of 'hold-harmless' clauses and the appropriateness of Good Samaritan efforts. Liability is always a concern and should be reviewed annually as part of the hotel's hurricane preparedness documents.

## Assigned Readings

Becken, S., & Hughey, K. F. (2013). Linking tourism into emergency management structures to enhance disaster risk reduction.

*Tourism Management*, 36, 77-85.

Ergun, Ö., Stamm, J. L. H., Keskinocak, P., & Swann, J. L. (2010). Waffle House Restaurants hurricane response: A case study. *International Journal of Production Economics*, 126(1), 111-120.

Kwortnik, R. J. (2004). *Safeguarding Service: Emergency Preparedness Essentials*. Cornell University, Center for Hospitality Research.

McKnight, B., & Linnenluecke, M. K. (2016). How Firm Responses to Natural Disasters Strengthen Community Resilience: A Stakeholder-Based Perspective. *Organization & Environment*, 29(3), 290-307.

## Instructor Resource

St. Petersburg Clearwater Area Convention & Visitor Bureau, & Pinellas County Department of Emergency Management. (n.d.). Accommodations Industry Hurricane Planning Guide.

Hurricane Dorian batters Bahamas with severe flash floods and ferocious wind <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T-jEj8Bh5Kc>.

Evacuations from Barrier Islands and low-lying areas <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oidbsyljuAw>.

Hurricane Michael's strong winds, heavy rain damage Florida Panhandle | ABC News <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fzcrsok9j90>.



## Suggested Grading Rubrics

### Group Discussion – Grading Rubric

In class *Group Discussion* grades are based on two factors: *Critical Thinking and Participation*  
Each are worth 5 points for a total of 10 points

#### I. Critical Thinking

5	4	3	2	1
<b>Outstanding</b>	<b>Exceeds Expectations</b>	<b>Meets Expectations</b>	<b>Below Expectations</b>	<b>Insufficient</b>
<i>Several innovative and unique examples used to support answers to discussion question supported with case and or course evidence</i>	<i>Several examples used to support answers to discussion question supported with case and or course evidence</i>	<i>Connection of case and course material used to articulate answers</i>	<i>Few examples referenced from case no connection made to course materials</i>	<i>No specific references to case and course materials</i>

**Feedback Notes:**

#### II. Participation

5	4	3	2	1
<b>Outstanding</b>	<b>Exceeds Expectations</b>	<b>Meets Expectations</b>	<b>Below Expectations</b>	<b>Insufficient</b>
<i>Feedback articulated loudly and clearly and directed towards specifics of the case. Asking questions that demonstrate relevance and understanding of the case</i>	<i>Group note taker taking notes, feedback articulated loudly and clearly and directed towards specifics of the case</i>	<i>Group actively engaged in discussions and respectful during group presentations</i>	<i>Participation by multiple members, but lack of engagement in whole class discussions</i>	<i>Participation primarily through only one group member and lack of engagement during discussions</i>

**Feedback Notes:**

**TOTAL SCORE** \_\_ / 10

## Group Written Document (Paper) – Grading Rubric

One written document per group will be turned in with the answers to the assigned thematic questions.

Formatting and length will be at the discretion of the instructor.

*Each element is weighted and will receive a percentage of that weight based on quality of work submitted.*

Element	Excellent (90-100%)	Good (75%-89%)	Poor (less than 75%)
Analysis (60%)	<p><i>Multiple examples used to support answers and synthesis with course material integrated.</i></p> <p><i>Additional research utilized to supports answers.</i></p> <p><i>Answers align with best practices revealed during final day discussions.</i></p>	<p><i>Multiple examples used to support answers and synthesis with course material integrated.</i></p>	<p><i>Primarily utilizing just one example to support answers.</i></p> <p><i>Minor integration of course materials or case literature.</i></p>
Content (30%)	<p><i>All questions answered, references to the case material made.</i></p> <p><i>Answer reflects course work and previous class discussion.</i></p>	<p><i>All questions answered, references to the case material made.</i></p>	<p><i>Lack of depth in many of the responses to the questions pertaining to the case theme. Some questions not complete.</i></p>
Spelling, grammar, sentence structure (10%)	<p><i>No errors, completely original writing professionally formatted using APA style guidelines or similar.</i></p>	<p><i>Minor errors, completely original writing professionally formatted using APA style guidelines or similar.</i></p>	<p><i>Several errors and failure to cite sources and case</i></p>
<b>Total Score</b> <b>/ 100%</b>			