

# DIGEST

*Special Flood Issue 2002*

The Flood  
Water Strike  
Teams of  
Texas Task  
Force One

## Texas-size Flood

A Model  
EOC:  
How it  
Worked in  
Comal County

Judge  
Wolff  
Weathers  
the Storm

The Floods of 2002

photo by Robert McMillan/FEMA

**DIVISION OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT**  
Texas Department of Public Safety

# ***Texans Helping Texans***

## ***Letter from the Governor***

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As floodwaters surged through dozens of counties this summer, forcing Texans from their homes and destroying businesses, hundreds of emergency workers across the state worked tirelessly to ensure the safety of their fellow Texans.

Texans reached out to Texans, putting their own lives on the line to conduct search and rescue operations and devoting long hours to provide shelter, food and financial assistance to flood survivors. Men and women from volunteer organizations, citizen soldiers in our Texas Army National Guard, dedicated state employees in more than 30 agencies and our top-notch emergency managers all worked together in response to this weather emergency.

Nine lives were lost, and we continue to grieve for the families who lost loved ones. I have no doubt that the professional – and often heroic – actions of our emergency workers saved many more lives. Once again, our state’s first responders proved they are among the best and most dedicated in the world.

Sincerely,



Governor Rick Perry

Texas Department of Public Safety

**DIVISION OF  
EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT**

**DIGEST**

Volume 49, Number 2  
*Special Flood Issue: 2002*

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***Storm Overview . . . . . 4***

***Texas' Flood Water Strike Teams . . . . . 6***

***How it Worked in Comal County . . . . . 8***

***Q&A with Mayor Adam Cork . . . . . 9***

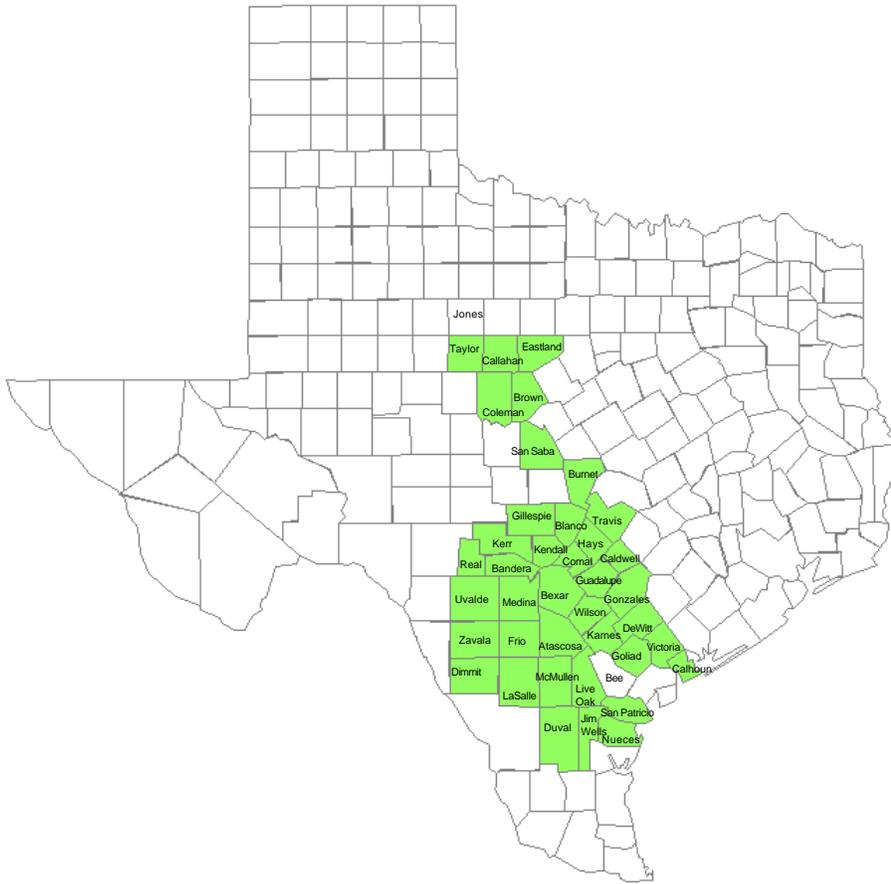
***The Wisdom of Judge Scheel . . . . . 10***

***Judge Wolff Weathers the Storm . . . . . 12***

***Sijansky on Being an RLO . . . . . 13***

***State Guard's Spirit of Volunteerism . . . 14***

***Above: the Guadalupe River spills over its banks near Seguin; on the cover: torrents of water rush down the spillway of the Lake Medina dam.***



## ■ Presidential Disaster Area

### Declared counties:

Atascosa, Bandera, Bee, Bexar, Blanco, Brown, Burnet, Caldwell, Calhoun, Callahan, Coleman, Comal, DeWitt, Dimmit, Duval, Eastland, Frio, Gillespie, Goliad, Gonzales, Guadalupe, Hays, Jim Wells, Jones, Karnes, Kendall, Kerr, LaSalle, Live Oak, McMullen, Medina, Nueces, Real, San Patricio, San Saba, Taylor, Travis, Uvalde, Victoria, Wilson and Zavala.

### Total area:

40,188 square miles

### Combined population:

3,670,987

# 'Land Hurricane' Waltzes across Texas

By William Ayres

As the month of June came to a close, a low-pressure system settled over south and central Texas. It stayed there for more than a week.

By the time it left, the "land hurricane" had dumped as much as 40 inches of rain over the rugged Texas Hill Country. The event caused severe flash flooding and put several of the region's dams to the test.

But the storm's fury was not over. It moved 150 miles to the northwest and poured out an additional 17 inches of rain on the Abilene area in a 12-hour period.

In many parts of drought-stricken Texas, there had been fears of an active fire season. The rain that came instead doused that fear, but the way it came was not welcome.

Every major river in Texas south of the Colorado River was at flood stage or higher during the first half of July. And as floodwaters in upriver regions receded, counties downstream waited

for flooding to begin.

"This was a very devastating event, a catastrophic event over a very large area of Texas," said Jack Colley, state coordinator of the Division of Emergency Management. The flood event was not actually a single event, but five separate floods, he said.

The massive storm effected a region covering more than 40,000 square miles, an area bigger than South Carolina. The combined population of the disaster area is 3.6 million. That is more than the population of Oklahoma.

In total, 41 counties have been declared a presidential disaster.

"It's going to be another few days or weeks before good dollar estimates can be made," said Colley. "The ultimate cost could be \$1 billion, maybe less or maybe more."

The state of Texas has lost a lot of public infrastructure. And in the Hill Country, the loss is especially critical

because there are not many roads and bridges in that region. If a road gets washed out, some of the more remote ranches may become isolated.

Texas Department of Transportation estimates up to \$15 million in damage to the state's roads and bridges.

And Texas Parks and Wildlife estimates as much as \$8 million in damage to Texas' parks.

The storm will also likely have an enduring economic impact because it came at a critical time of year.

Summertime is high tourism season in cities like New Braunfels and little towns up and down the aquamarine rivers of the Texas Hill Country.

The clean-up is underway, but Texans will be a long time in getting over the floods of 2002.

# Flood 2002 Facts

- From June 30 to July 9, there were five separate flood events associated with the same storm system. The event officially ended July 31.
- Kendall County recorded the most rainfall during this event: 42.5 inches. In Abilene, 17 inches of rain were recorded in a 12-hour period.
- It was the first time on record that all major rivers south of the Colorado River were at flood stage or higher.
- The Canyon Lake dam filled to capacity for the first time in its 44-year history and it was the first time that water flowed over the spillway.
- The storm claimed nine lives and injured two.
- Nearly 25,000 residents have registered with the Federal Emergency Management Agency for assistance.\*
- Disaster Housing aid totalling more than \$22 million has been approved for 14,531 households.\*
- More than \$36 million has been approved for Small Business Administration loans to 1,444 business and homeowners.\*
- A total of \$12.3 million in Individual and Family Grants has been approved.\*
- More than \$42,000 in Disaster Unemployment Assistance has been dispersed.\*

\*Figures as of August 27.



a.

photo by Robert McMillan/FEMA



b.

photo by Robert McMillan/FEMA



c.

photo by Robert McMillan/FEMA



d.

photo by SSG Ken Walker/TXARNG

**a. flooded house in McQueeney; b. high water in Bexar County; c. another flooded house in McQueeney; d. flooded highway in Nueces County.**

# Swift Water Rescues

## The Flood Water Strike Teams of Texas Task Force One

*“The concept of the flood water strike team is the quick strike. If you don’t get in there quickly, you are going to miss your opportunity to pull people out of the trees and off of their roofs.” – Tim Gallagher*

By Mary Lenz

The Texas floods of 1998 killed 31 people as storms swept through San Antonio and Del Rio. In 2002, the number of fatalities from the unprecedented rain event that flooded 41 Texas counties stood at nine.

A two-year-old response program called Texas Task Force One is among the reasons for the lower death toll. Texas Task Force One, located at Texas A&M’s Engineering Extension Service (TEEX), is led by Tim Gallagher.

Gallagher, a retired battalion chief from the Phoenix Fire Department, said one of the first things he decided to do after moving to Texas from Arizona was to change the training and organization of urban search and rescue teams. He and Division of Emergency Management State Coordinator Jack Colley worked together to spearhead the program.

Texas already was among the top



**Firemen of San Antonio Fire Station Number 11, one of Texas Task Force One’s special flood water strike teams, made more than 200 rescues in the San Antonio area during the floods of 2002.**

states nationwide in the number of highly skilled swift water rescue personnel. The challenge was to organize these resources into flood water strike teams that could be deployed rapidly anywhere in the state, augmenting local personnel who might otherwise be swamped by disaster response needs.

“The concept of the flood water strike team is the quick strike. If you don’t get in there quickly, you are going to miss your opportunity to pull people out of the trees and off of their roofs,” Gallagher said.

A working group of people from around the state who were already skilled in swift water rescues was convened in order to pool their knowledge and experience in developing a statewide response mechanism.

Gallagher said Texas swift water rescue experts – primarily Texas fire chiefs – made it clear that they wanted a proper incident command structure. They also wanted to ensure that no individual would participate unless that individual was properly trained to perform the specific functions of the job.

“The participating agency chiefs preferred that their people stay together in four or five person squads plus some leadership and support personnel,” Gallagher said. The 24-member strike teams were formed of four such squads plus a team leader with logistics and technical support specialists.

“We used two strike teams in this event and we used several strike teams in Tropical Storm Allison,” Gallagher said.

Gallagher said another important issue for the chiefs was “they did not want their equipment to leave their city” in case their own hometowns were threatened while the equipment was deployed elsewhere. For the same

reason, only one squad per department would be made available.

The state would provide a 24-foot trailer, tents, rescue gear, sleeping gear, life jackets, boats – enough equipment to keep the team in business for 72 hours. “This worked well,” Gallagher said.

Last year, in what looks almost like a case of psychic decision-making, Colley and Gallagher scheduled two day-long, full-scale exercises involving eight different agencies and the Texas Army National Guard on May 31 and June 1 – at the start of hurricane season. “We trained them on the use of helicopters for transportation platforms. There was a lot of work, a lot of relationship building,” Gallagher said.

One week later, Tropical Storm Allison struck Harris County and the teams went into action for real. The strike teams performed 1,125 rescues in a very short period of time.

This year, two strike teams were deployed, one to New Braunfels High School and a second to Texas Lutheran University in Seguin. Activity was coordinated at the Texas Army National Guard facility in San Antonio. A total of 58 Texas Task Force One personnel assisted in rescue efforts.

“We planned, we trained, we exercised, we executed,” Gallagher said. “I’ve been in the business for a lot of years and I’m very proud of what we have been able to accomplish in a very short period of time.”

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***“We planned, we trained, we exercised, we executed,” Gallagher said. “I’ve been in the business for a lot of years and I’m very proud of what we have been able to accomplish in a very short period of time.”***

## **A Day in the Life of San Antonio Fire Station Number 11**

Fireman Ben Zepeda’s tired eyes speak volumes. Stress, determination, courage, compassion. And too many long hours. But he hasn’t lost his sense of humor.

The 17-year veteran of the San Antonio Fire Department is a highly trained swift water rescuer. He and his team at Fire Station Number 11 operate as a local cell of Texas Task Force One.

During the July 2002 floods, the unit made more than 200 rescues, and one almost cost them their lives. They were called to a scene near Woodlawn Lake where several cars had become trapped by fast-rising waters. One car was lodged in the top branches of a tree. Another car was nearly submerged, the driver clinging to the only small segment of roof that could be seen above the water.

The crew of Number 11 deployed their nine-foot-long Zodiac rescue boat, reaching the victim and snatching him into the boat. But a moment later, the Zodiac’s motor

stalled. Then the crippled Zodiac hit a bridge and jammed.

Fireman Mario Nerio, a crew member with 13 years of rescue experience, said the boat was wider than the space under the bridge. “The nose raised up and formed a seal. It was like a coffin in there – dark and tight, but with water roaring in.”

Zepeda and another team member were thrown out, swept under the boat and tossed about in a rapid circular motion. “We ended up getting washed through, and we popped up a hundred yards or so downstream,” said Zepeda.

They wound up in Woodlawn Lake where the water was calmer. The men stuck in the Zodiac remained trapped in the narrow space underneath the bridge, until they managed to kick themselves and the original victim out of the boat. Everyone got out alive.

Later that day, the group watched in astonishment as a man walked directly into a raging

torrent. “He looked right at us,” said Zepeda.

“Then he walked right in. We couldn’t believe it.”

The team re-entered the water and pulled the man to safety. “Nothing was going right,” said Zepeda. “We’re thinking at this point, it’s definitely a strange day.

It got stranger. Before the day ended, a frightened skunk made homeless by the flood sprayed the Zodiac. “It took us two days to get the smell out of the boat,” Zepeda said.



photo by SSG Ken Walker/TXARNG

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***Ben Zepeda, a 17-year veteran of swift water rescues, poses in front of a Zodiac rescue boat at San Antonio Fire Station Number 11.***

# A Model EOC: How it Worked in Comal County and New Braunfels

By Bob Karstens



On most July the Fourth holidays in New Braunfels, it's scorching hot and the Guadalupe River that winds its way through town is cold. River rafters and kids in inner tubes float down the crystal-clear waters. But that was not the case this year. Piles of debris and even whole houses rushed down the normally peaceful Guadalupe as it transformed into a raging torrent.

Fortunately, the City of New Braunfels and Comal County had done something only months earlier that would make the flood of 2002 a lot more manageable. They consolidated their Emergency Operating Centers. Everything is now under one roof and one chain of command. Emergency management officials didn't expect their joint operation to be put to the test so soon, but its benefits were immediately recognized.

"We were more calm and cool this time around," said city manager Don Ferguson, comparing this event to the 1998 flood. Officials had learned some hard lesson nearly four years ago when a massive downpour caused a similar flash flood.

"In 1998 we were rather disjointed. The city didn't know what the county was doing and vice-versa. It really made it difficult," said Carol Edgett,

emergency management coordinator for Comal County. "The system worked, but not well enough."

In most Texas counties, the county judge is the chief emergency management official for unincorporated areas while mayors have that responsibility for municipalities. Often an EMC is appointed. All officials are supposed to work closely together. But sometimes in the heat of an emergency when rapid coordination and communication

***"Why don't we combine our operations and take a lot of pressure off the city? We'll work together." – Judge Danny Scheel***

are essential, the division of power can cause confusion and duplication of efforts.

Soon after being elected Comal County judge, Danny Scheel recognized some potential disadvantages of multiple EOCs. He had a vision for improvements so he met with Chuck Pinto, city manager of New Braunfels. "Here's the deal," he said to Pinto. "The buck starts and stops with me as county judge. Why don't we combine our operations and take a lot

***Above: Comal County EMC Carol Edgett confers with Assistant EMC Lin Manford.***

of pressure off the city? We'll work together."

To an experienced city manager like Pinto, that sounded like a good idea. "Even from a funding standpoint it doesn't make much sense to maintain separate operations," Pinto said. "It just makes sense to coordinate."

So the first thing they did was hire Edgett as the full-time county-city EMC. She was currently assistant EMC for New Braunfels.

Edgett replaced Lin Manford who was the part-time Comal County EMC. He was also fire marshal.

"The EMC is a full-time job," said Manford. "You can't do it correctly on a part-time basis."

He now serves as assistant EMC, splitting shifts with Edgett during emergencies.

Edgett has learned a lot from two disastrous floods in four years. "What's really helped us is exercising. We did a joint city-county exercise and it gave us a heads up to pre-identify some problems we might have."

She is already fine-tuning plans from the lessons that have been learned

from the Fourth of July flood. "The planning process always continues. You don't just create a plan and leave it on the shelf."

The city-county EOC operates out of the sheriff's office. It is equipped with multiple video screens, a broadband computer network and dozens of dedicated phone lines. The center allows everyone involved in a disaster to work from the same script when communication counts the most.

During this flood event, members of the joint EOC listened to river forecasts by the National Weather Service, held conference calls with the state EOC in Austin, briefed the media and warned the public – all together.

They spoke one message with one voice. As a result, evacuations were called for in an orderly fashion and several hours in advance of rising waters. That allowed homeowners time to safeguard many of their valuables and get out safely before a river of mud surged through their living rooms. Despite the mess that they came home to, residents were grateful that their officials had effectively warned them of what was to come.

Mayor Adam Cork was also grateful and praised the unified command. "We had combined resources, all the decision makers together in the same room. We all shared information and that made it easier to make the right decisions. Communication was the biggest part of it," he said.

Another benefit of the consolidation was smooth media coordination. Reporters didn't have to go to different locations to get information and they were briefed during unified press conferences. "They got the full story which made it a lot more factual and informative," said Pinto.

Joint EOCs are not necessarily ideal for every jurisdiction. And for all their benefits, there are challenges. It takes the good will and cooperation between city and county. And egos and turf battles have to be checked at the door. "We work together. There is no empire building," said Scheel. "We're all in this for one reason, to safeguard the health and welfare of our public. I don't think anyone should take absolute control."

Others in New Braunfels and Comal County would agree.

## Q & A with Mayor Adam Cork of New Braunfels

### **Q What was it like being the newly-elected mayor of New Braunfels during this disaster?**

**A** I was on board two months before the flood – welcome to the new job! I've been told it was 'baptism by fire' but I think of it more as 'baptism by submergence.'

### **Q How did the city and county governments work together?**

**A** When we had the flood in 1998, we were separate governmental entities. This time we had everyone together in one room and all the resources were available in one spot. We had somebody at the EOC from police, somebody from fire, and somebody from city administration 24 hours a day.

### **Q What kind of support did you get from the state?**

**A** I can tell you that the Department of Public Safety was instrumental. They were in the EOC which was a tremendous help.

### **Q What kind of assistance did DPS provide?**

**A** DPS was very instrumental in getting us additional manpower for checkpoints when we were still in the protection phase. Also they made sure we had access to helicopters which was very helpful. Part of the reason why it was so helpful was that we were in the middle of conducting a drainage study (when the rains started) and redoing our drainage maps. It was helpful to get up in the air and see where the water was and how it was affecting things. You can't get a grasp of that from the ground.

### **Q What were your day-to-day activities?**

**A** I was on the phone with folks a lot of the time and in the EOC. I was either at the EOC or at a meeting with police or other officials. Or driving around and talking with people.

### **Q How did you make decisions to evacuate?**

**A** We were fortunate to have very good flood models and mapping data. Also, flood gauges told us how much water was flowing into Canyon Lake. Additionally, we were in constant contact with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. They were giving us estimates of how much water to expect. We

knew that if we got 25,000 cubic feet per second in New Braunfels, water would rise in certain areas and that we would need to evacuate those areas.

### **Q How many residents were evacuated?**

**A** We estimate that there were about 1,500 evacuations in the city. There were no deaths and no injuries. We attribute that to a combination of warnings and really good cooperation.

### **Q What were some of your achievements?**

**A** The challenge in working any disaster is good communication. Our overall communications were tremendously improved compared to 1998. One thing that helped was keeping the county's Web site ([www.co.comal.tx.us](http://www.co.comal.tx.us)) up-to-date with information such as water flow and evacuated areas. The public could access all that information online which kept us from having to take a lot of non-emergency calls.

### **Q What were some of your major challenges this year?**

**A** There's always room to improve in communication. We had trouble with some cell phones.

*Adam Cork (above) was elected mayor of New Braunfels in May. He previously served on the planning and zoning commission for the City of New Braunfels. The San Antonio native has lived in New Braunfels for more than seven years.*



# Comal County Judge Danny Scheel: **‘ZERO deaths and ZERO injuries’**



*Comal County Judge Danny Scheel addresses flood victims.*

## **Comal County at a Glance**

**Population:** 78,021

**County seat:** New Braunfels

**Land area:** 575 square miles

**Land features:** hilly terrain located mostly above the Balcones Escarpment; prone to flash flooding

**Elevation:** 600 feet to 1,743 feet

**Annual rainfall:** 34.3 inches (up to 34 inches fell in parts of the county during the 2002 event)

**Rivers:** Guadalupe, Comal

**Lakes:** Canyon Lake

## **By David Pyndus**

**C**omal County Judge Danny Scheel is well aware of his responsibilities, which range from judicial to ceremonial. But when disaster strikes, all priorities change. At that time, a county judge's sole focus becomes emergency management, said Scheel.

Juggling multiple duties such as presiding over the commissioner's court and acting as chief budget officer for the county, has taught Scheel the importance of streamlining.

That's what he did with Comal County's Emergency Operating Center. It now operates as a combined EOC with the City of New Braunfels.

"That's where Carol Edgett comes in," said Scheel, introducing the woman known as the local emergency management

coordinator. "She runs the show, but I still call the shots," he said.

"In 1998 when the last major flooding occurred, we didn't have the luxury of having a joint EOC," said Edgett, who formerly served as assistant EMC for New Braunfels before her county position was created.

But since then other communities in the county, including Bulverde and Garden Ridge, have also "signed off" on the idea of the joint EOC. All residents of Comal county benefit from the streamlining effort, said Scheel whose ancestors helped settle the area in 1845.

During the summer floods, Comal County's EOC worked directly with state officials in Austin, including the Division of Emergency Management, which continuously monitored the hazardous storm system and conducted daily conference calls with local jurisdictions.

"We were very satisfied by the response offered from the state," said Scheel.

"Jack Colley, the state coordinator for DEM, helped us get anything we asked for," he said.

Scheel credits DEM with helping to ensure that Blackhawk helicopters from the Texas Army National Guard were available. Community officials used the helicopters to map out the flood situation.

The Texas Department of Public Safety also dispatched helicopters on several occasions to assist with high-water rescues in isolated areas of the county. Scheel said that county DPS assistance was invaluable and that DPS troopers from as far away as Corpus Christi helped with traffic control.

After the initial days of heavy rain, Comal County officials began planning precautionary strategies for evacuation when the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers called to report that Canyon Lake dam might exceed its

spillway.

"We were trying to decide what to do with the tourists visiting the area," he said, referring to the throngs of campers, rafters and tubers who vacation along the Comal and Guadalupe Rivers that wind through the hilly county.

"After that strategy meeting, it began to rain," said Scheel. "There was going to be another five or six inches of rain, and Canyon Lake was rising at a rate of about one foot per hour."

Officials originally thought they might have as much as two days to prepare for evacuation, but the local EOC activated without hesitation when the forecast indicated no break in the rainy weather.

"We evacuated people up and down River Road, both campers and residences," said Scheel.

Five housing subdivisions located below the Canyon Lake dam were evacuated, and as many as 6,000 people were evacuated countywide. Comal County has a population of nearly 80,000

permanent residents.

"Some people didn't leave and two days later called and wanted us to air drop food to them," said Scheel. He estimated that 95 percent of residents cooperated with early warnings to seek higher ground.

"A few didn't think the water would come up as high as it did," he said.

"The way our EOC operated was my proudest point, and the way all the other state agencies – the utilities, Texas Department of Health and DPS – came together," said Scheel.

"The greatest benefit was the luxury of time because we were able to monitor this flooding, and as a result of early warnings, Comal County sustained zero deaths and zero injuries."

*"The way our EOC operated was my proudest point, and the way all the other state agencies – the utilities, Texas Department of Health and DPS – came together." – Judge Danny Scheel*

## In the Air and on the Land

By Michael W. Roger

Heroics is just a small part of being a Texas Army National Guardsman. Training is the big part. At least that's what the Guardsmen who performed more than 1,000 rescue operations during the floods of 2002 say.

A special team of Blackhawk helicopter pilots airlifted 100 stranded Texans to safety during this event. These top-notch pilots belong to an emergency response task force that trains with Austin Emergency Management Services (EMS).

They can deploy at a moment's notice to any location in the state.

Capt. Joan McGregor, commander of the 2nd Battalion, 149th Aviation Brigade is one such pilot. She carried out 11 rescue missions during the worst week of flooding.

McGregor responded to one call from an Austin man whose elderly parents had fled their flooded home in Uvalde County.

All roads leading out of the remote area had become impassable so the couple sought shelter in a barn.

Within thirty minutes of receiving the call, McGregor and crew were flying over Uvalde County.

Navigating the area was a challenge. Heavy rains had diminished visibility and high water covered roads and other landmarks.

EMS crews on the ground helped McGregor navigate the Blackhawk through the storm. They were successful in finding the barn and the stranded couple inside.

The couple was surprised to have been found. At first they were even reluctant to leave. But they did get into the Blackhawk and were flown to safety.

Once they landed, EMS paramedics checked out the couple and released them to their son.

"We train all the time for these events, so it's rewarding when we put that training to use," said McGregor. She added that "the volunteerism in the Guard is amazing – soldiers are always ready to go!"



# Judge Wolff Weathers the Storm

By David Pyndus

**W**eathered by the storm of 2002, Bexar County Judge Nelson Wolff can smile now as he reflects on the pivotal role he played in managing the disaster.

As the primary emergency management official in the most populous county affected by the floods, Wolff knows his actions can speak louder than thunder.

Funds from the Federal Emergency Management Agency will soon be arriving to repair Bexar County's damaged public infrastructure such as roads, bridges and public utilities. Spending that money wisely will be the biggest challenge, said Wolff.

Wolff was impressed that even as record rainfalls were still falling, the state's Division of Emergency Management and FEMA officials were setting up a disaster field office.

He was also impressed with how fast Texas agencies responded to the disaster. Wolff notes that ten counties were declared a federal disaster area only one day after torrential rains had

stopped. (Since the initial declaration, 31 additional counties have been added).

"There was a very quick response," Wolff said. "We were very pleased with both the state and federal response."

The former San Antonio mayor praised Texas Department of Public Safety for its rescue-related work, and the Division of Emergency Management for coordinating information efforts from headquarters in Austin.

"The DPS had water rescue teams which were very helpful and sent in Blackhawk helicopters. Working with the DPS during the disaster was a good experience," he said.

"DEM did a good job, too," he added.

Mike Miller, emergency management coordinator for San Antonio, concurred by calling state and federal support invaluable.

"Jack Colley [DEM's newly-appointed state coordinator] set up a conference call everyday – originally twice a day – with the jurisdictions so

everyone heard the same weather updates and heard the same resource lists," he said. "We streamlined our information channels."

In another streamlining effort, city and county officials decided to share the same emergency operations center.

"We asked the county to come to our EOC so it would be easier to coordinate information," said Miller. Wolff was glad to join them.

As the disaster intensified, Wolff met with Gov. Rick Perry. Later they toured hard-hit areas of Bexar County in a helicopter and then visited flood-ravaged homes in the Woodlawn Lake neighborhood. More than 100 homes in the northwest San Antonio neighborhood flooded.

Wolff's desktop is surprisingly clean for a man who just managed a disaster. "As soon as someone comes in, the paperwork leaves," he said, making a sweeping motion with his right arm. But when visitors leave, the paperwork comes back.

Nothing important is left undone.

# Randy Sijansky on Being an RLO

By Mary Lenz

**R**andy Sijansky got into law enforcement because he was interested in helping people. When he became a Regional Liaison Officer with the Division of Emergency Management in 1999, he did so because he wanted to broaden his horizons and help out in a wider territory.

Sijansky's resources, training and skills at coordinating with local officials were put to the test in July, when Texas rivers went out of control, flooding almost every county in his 39-county region.

As an RLO, Sijansky is charged with helping match state resources with local emergency needs and acting as an advisor and supporter to local officials who have to make tough decisions as a disaster unfolds.

Sijansky's territory consists of the stubby triangle bounded by the Lower Rio Grande Valley, the southern portion of the Texas Gulf Coast and the bottom edge of the Texas Hill Country. The storm dumped an estimated 30 inches of rain in San Antonio and 17 inches as far west as Abilene. But Sijansky's region was the area that was hit the hardest by the flooding that just wouldn't quit.

"My duty was to support Captain Joe Hamilton of Texas Department of Public Safety District 3B, the Disaster District Chairman. I was his adviser in regard to emergency management matters and he assigned me to be chief of operations, primarily handling all state resources that would be disseminated under the DDC," Sijansky said.

"It got very intense," Sijansky said. "At one time we had seven different events that might have required water rescues or other types of emergency requests going on at one time. The 12 and 16 hour days were very tough."

RLOs have many other duties, but

during disaster response, they serve as the linchpins, uniting local, state and federal officials and resources during the event. The flooding was so extensive that four additional RLOs were sent to strategic locations in Sijansky's region to assist local governments.

"My colleagues were a big support and allowed me to concentrate on the rescues," Sijansky said.

"When you are in an enclosed room, you rely heavily on the eyes

and ears of the DPS sergeants, who play a very important role in supplying valuable information to the disaster district Emergency Operations Center in San Antonio. When a DPS sergeant is on the scene, making quick decisions and asking for certain types of resources during a disaster, you really have to trust their judgment. We look at all the resources we have available in the district – manpower and equipment – to support the operation as best we can," Sijansky said.

ence calls involving officials from all the affected areas, he said.

"Each agency, as well as each jurisdiction could give a status report of what happened during that day. It was really helpful in keeping everybody on busy schedules up to date, and it helped local jurisdictions prepare for flooding and plan for any events," Sijansky said.

Sijansky, who has helped with training and emergency planning in the San Antonio area over the past three years, said: "When the disaster hit, local officials knew exactly what to do. They called for evacuations on their own. They handled things in a professional manner. I am proud of our state agencies for pulling together, accomplishing the overall goal of providing public safety and response to those people in need."

Sijansky grew up in Corpus Christi and graduated with a criminal justice degree from Texas A&M University in Corpus Christi. After serving as a lieutenant with the Nueces County sheriff's department, he joined DEM in 1999, in time

to participate in emergency operations involving Hurricane Brett. Sijansky is past president of the Coastal Bend Emergency Management Association, a board member of the Texas Gulf Coast Emergency Management Association and past president of the Texas Criminal Justice Information Users Group.

"The local jurisdictions, the first responders as well as state responders deserve a large accolade for what they did. It takes a combined effort to accomplish the overall mission. They did a very good job," Sijansky said.

**"It got very intense," Sijansky said. "At one time we had seven different events that might have required water rescues or other types of emergency requests going on at one time."**

# The State Guard's Spirit of Volunteerism

**T**he Texas State Guard, one of the many organizations mobilized during the flood of 2002, is unique. The all-volunteer force serves as the second branch of the Military Forces of the State of Texas. Their expertise and training are similar to the Texas Army National Guard and they are soldiers in every respect. But they don't use weapons and they don't get paid.

During July's floods, 22 State Guardsmen from the 1st brigade and 12 of their counterparts in the National Guard distributed more than 20,000 flyers throughout Comal, Bexar and Guadalupe counties in less than a week.

The flyers publicized critical disaster recovery information to flood victims. The primary message was to call the Federal Emergency Management Agency hotline to begin the recovery process. And reaching victims quickly was essential.

This task fits well with the Texas State Guard mandate of community service. When disaster strikes, they can be deployed anywhere in the state to help victims.

They serve in similar capacities as military police – directing traffic, patrolling, performing community outreach, conducting search and rescue operations and assisting with sheriff's and police departments.

"We have a tremendous wealth of knowledge in our ranks," said Colonel Chris Powers, commander of the 1st brigade. "We have Korean War veterans, Vietnam veterans. We also have some 18 and 19-year old college students who want to serve their country but aren't ready to make a commitment to the Armed Services," said Powell who volunteered for the State Guard two years ago after retiring from a 31-year-long career with the U.S. Army.

Horace Riebe, the state's Community Relations coordinator, said: "They were absolutely superb during the flood. They put 100 percent into every task with a minimum of supervision."

Buddy Davis, FEMA's Community Relations coordinator, concurred: "They cut our field time by 50 percent. They are invaluable.

This is our second time using them and it has been a tremendous help."

More than 40 State Guardsmen from the 6<sup>th</sup> battalion in Laredo were deployed to Central Texas. And an additional 15 State Guardsmen from the 39<sup>th</sup> brigade volunteered in Brownwood, another area severely affected by the torrential rains.



The State Guard volunteers come from a variety of backgrounds – retired police officers, emergency workers and military personnel. But military or law enforcement experience is not required. What is required is a sense of volunteerism.

Captain Juan Riojas, commanding officer of the 6<sup>th</sup> battalion, said that serving with the State Guard "is giving something back to the community. I think if you live somewhere, you should support it."

State Guardsmen attend annual training and then train a minimum of one weekend per month. The State Guard has six military police brigades, an air support wing and numerous support detachments throughout Texas. They operate alongside the Texas Army National Guard and the Texas Air National Guard.

# How Texans Helped Texans during the Floods

**American Red Cross:** Operated shelters and deployed multiple emergency response vehicles.

**Division of Emergency Management:** Operated the state emergency operating center. Conducted conference calls with affected jurisdictions, the Disaster District Centers and the National Weather Service. Conducted post damage assessments. Jointly staffed the disaster field office with the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

**Office of the Attorney General of Texas:** Warned disaster victims about phony contractors, scams, price gouging and other fraud.

**Office of Rural Community Affairs:** Met with rural community leaders and assisted with damage assessments. Will administer the Disaster Relief/Urgent Need Fund for rural jurisdictions when all other federal resources are exhausted.

**Public Utility Commission of Texas:** Worked with telephone service providers to establish tele-registration phone banks. Monitored power outages and initiated restoration of services.

**The Salvation Army:** Coordinated mass care needs requests and staffed disaster relief centers for the state.

**The State Bar of Texas:** Provided free legal advice to flood victims.

**Texas Animal Health Commission:** Provided assistance in handling lost and dead animals.

**Texas Army National Guard:** Conducted search and rescue operations with high-profile vehicles and Blackhawk helicopters. Assisted with evacuations, provided community outreach and performed public information duties.

**Texas Baptist Men:** Operated mobile kitchens to assist with mass feeding and helped with

clean-up throughout the affected region.

**Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts:** Postponed state tax payment deadlines for residents in affected areas and exempted sales taxes on labor costs for repairing storm-damaged property.

**Texas Department of Criminal Justice:** Deployed prison crews to remove debris, support mass feeding operations and assist with donations management.

**Texas Department of Economic Development:** Worked with local businesses, Chambers of Commerce, and convention and visitors bureaus to minimize economic impacts from the disaster.

**Texas Department of Health:** Provided guidance on public health issues including purifying contaminated water, mosquito control, mold problems and the need for immunization against diseases such as tetanus.

**Texas Department of Human Services:** Provided grants to hundreds of disaster victims through the Individual and Family Grant Program. Distributed drinking water.

**Texas Department of Information Resources:** Monitored telecommunications infrastructure.

**Texas Department of Insurance:** Operated a helpline (800-252-3439) to assist consumers with insurance claims and problems. More than 60 TDI staff volunteered.

**Texas Department of Public Safety:** DPS troopers and helicopter pilots rescued stranded victims and Highway Patrol units assisted local governments with traffic patrol.

**Texas Department of Transportation:** Assisted with road closures, assessed damage to roads, bridges and other structures.

**Texas Engineering Extension Service:** Provided swift water strike teams affiliated with Texas Task Force One.

**Texas Forest Service:** Provided field observers, land-moving equipment and assisted the Disaster District Center in San Antonio with reporting.

**Texas Mental Health and Mental Retardation:** Provided crisis counseling and stress management services.

**Texas Natural Resource Conservation Commission:** Assisted communities with hazards involving waste water disposal, dead animals and other environmental hazards. Also inspected dams in coordination with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

**Texas Natural Resources Information System:** Provided mapping services

**Texas Parks and Wildlife:** Assisted jurisdictions with water rescues.

**Texas Railroad Commission:** Monitored railroads and gas pipelines affected by the floods.

**Texas State Guard:** Provided volunteer Guardsmen to conduct community outreach.

**Texas State Library:** Assisted jurisdictions with the restoration of damaged documents and records.

**Texas Workforce Commission:** Provided Disaster Unemployment Assistance to workers affected by the flooding.

**The University of Texas, Center for Space Research:** Provided satellite and radar imagery of affected regions.

Additionally, numerous federal agencies, church groups and citizen volunteers provided assistance to flood victims.

# DIGEST

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**Ilene Stanush of Seguin came home to six inches of mud. Flood waters had risen within two feet of her ceiling. She pours flood water out of an heirloom pitcher and sorts through waterlogged keepsakes such as the newspaper as she saved when President Kennedy was assassinated.**



photo by SSG Ken Walker, TXARRNG



photo by SSG Ken Walker, TXARRNG



photo by SSG Ken Walker, TXARRNG