

Hurricane IAN Report

The Hurricane crossed the Atlantic and into the Caribbean. It turned north into the Gulf of Mexico after impacting Cuba, on a course that was forecast to take it north with an expected landfall in the Tampa, Florida, area.

On Monday morning, September 26th, Lee County Emergency Management tasked the ARES Team to provide ARES operators to nine School Shelters, Hertz Arena, Lehigh Acres Veterans Park and the Estero Recreation Center. All but two of the school shelters (smaller ones) and Veterans Park were staffed. Both the Lee County EOC and the Cape Coral EOC were staffed with ARES operators. And, although not requested by County EM, the Cape Coral Hospital was also staffed with two ARES operators.

On the morning of Tuesday, September 27th, all indications were that it would skirt the southwest Florida coast with the major track still being into the Tampa area.

Overnight on Tuesday and into the early morning hours of Wednesday, September 28th, it became evident that the track could move landfall to the Charlotte County area. Given the continuing shifting of the track to the east, Lee County Emergency Management decided to issue an evacuation order for citizens living in the “Red Zone.”

IAN made landfall at Cayo Costa Island (just west of Pine Island) at 1905 UTC on the 28th as a Category Four Hurricane with 150 mph winds. The storm brought with it a storm surge of 10 – 15 feet to the south of the eye. The surge and high winds combined to create severe damage to Collier, Lee and Charlotte counties. The barrier islands, including Pine Island, Sanibel were heavily damaged and Estero Island (Fort Myers Beach) was -- quite literally -- destroyed.

The bridge to Sanibel Island was cut in several places and the causeway to Pine Island (Matlacha Pass) was also cut. Transportation to / from those Islands was handled by boat, barge and heavy-lift helicopters until the bridges were opened in mid-October.

Some statistics from late October: 5,500 homes / businesses destroyed. 14,250 homes / businesses with major damage and another 16,300 with minor damage. Most areas in west Lee County without power / cell / internet service. Areas east of the I-75 corridor did somewhat better.

The County Public Service Comm Systems continued to function during and after the Storm. Fortunately, most of the Shelters had phone or Internet Service intact or restored on Thursday. Which allowed the ARES Operators to be relieved of their duties. Most were able to return home Thursday afternoon to assess the damage at their residences.

Power and Cell Service were restored, for the most part, within a week to ten days. Internet Service took longer to restore, but most areas had service two to three weeks after the storm hit.

ARES Things That Went Well

When the “call to serve” came two days before IAN’s landfall, ARES Team Members were prepared and willing to deploy to assist with communications during and after the storm.

Our “Area Net” program worked well. Each of the Area Nets was manned from about 7am to 10pm, starting on Monday and continuing through Thursday.

Operators not assigned to specific duties (shelters / fire stations / EOCs) did regularly check in to the Area Nets. And those operators provided SITreps when requested by the Area Net Control Stations.

Bulletins based on the 6am Lee County EM Briefing were issued each morning from the Lee County EOC at 6:30am. Updates were issued throughout the day. The bulletins were repeated on each of the Area Nets, so as to reach as many area Amateur Radio Operators as possible. (This was necessary since many homes were without power – so no TV to keep up with what was happening.)

All of our ARES Area repeaters survived. The antenna on the Cape Hospital Repeater 147.225 MHz was damaged, but still functional. Although not one of the Area repeaters, we lost the antenna on the 145.170 MHz repeater atop the Riva Del Lago Condos and we believe the repeater was damaged by a lightning strike or power surge.

All ARES Operators reported that they were welcomed as they reported to their assigned Shelter. And were treated as full members of the Shelter Staff while working there.

Items Needing Work by Lee County ARES

Two of the Shelters did not have power available – either from the grid or a generator -- in the room where the outside antenna terminated. (Which came a surprise in both cases.) And there were no “battery boxes” available to support operations at those locations.

There was little participation in the Area Nets by Amateur Radio Operators who were not ARES members. We need to find a way to get more operators involved. Info from “boots on the ground” across the entire region impacted by a disaster is very helpful to Emergency Management as they plan the response.

Once the Evacuation Order was issued and messages from ARES members who were leaving the area began coming in, it became apparent that there would not be enough operators to provide “back up support” to the operators who had been assigned to Shelters. We need to identify and train more operators who are likely to stay in the area in

spite of an evacuation order. (We recognize that this is easier said than done.) Of course, there are always “outside volunteers” who might be willing to come in to help after about the second day following an event.

Closing Comments

Kudos to everyone, both ARES Team members and others who helped during IAN and the recovery efforts.

Lee County Emergency Management has said they were very pleased with our response and the way that our back-up communications plan worked.

Now we have to continue our training and planning for the “next big one.”

73...

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ARES EC in Lee County Florida