

## SUCCESS STORY

# ATSDR Helps Hurricane Survivors Get Much-Needed Disaster Relief

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Following the devastation of Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria, which included some of the strongest storms and worst flooding in U.S. history, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) worked with federal, state and local agencies as well as global health partners to tackle the long-term health threats facing hurricane survivors, especially those in U.S. territories.

In 2017, ATSDR was asked to help support the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and CDC's efforts in Hurricane affected areas. ATSDR staff worked with state and federal agencies to aid hurricane survivors and support recovery efforts in hurricane stricken areas including Florida, Puerto Rico, Texas, and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

### SOME OF THESE ACTIVITIES INCLUDED:

- **Post Hurricane Harvey Private Residential Well Sampling, TX:** The extensive, catastrophic Hurricane Harvey flooding potentially resulted in the contamination of thousands of private residential drinking water wells. Because private residential drinking water wells are not regulated by any governmental agency and are not normally monitored for contamination, there was not a systematic method for people to get their private residential drinking water wells checked for potential contamination. ATSDR staff provided on-ground support to the State of Texas Hurricane Harvey recovery efforts by arranging the testing of private drinking water wells for bacterial and chemical contamination by the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service, Virginia Tech, and the Rural Community Assistance Program.
- **Post Hurricane Irma and Maria Recovery Support, U.S. Virgin Islands:** ATSDR staff deployed to the U.S. Virgin Islands and provided direct technical support to the U.S. Virgin Island authorities. ATSDR inspected evacuation shelters, emergency food and water distribution centers, and restaurants to assure that people were not exposed to hurricane related environmental contamination (i.e., biological and chemical). ATSDR staff also provided technical support and guidance on how best to assure that private drinking water cisterns were cleaned and decontaminated after the hurricanes.

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- Post Hurricane Maria Recovery Support, Puerto Rico: ATSDR staff were key members of the CDC/ ATSDR hurricane recovery support provided to Puerto Rico. ATSDR staff conducted inspections of health care facilities, evacuation shelters, emergency food and water distribution centers, and restaurants to assure that people were not exposed to hurricane related environmental contamination (i.e., biological and chemical).
- ATSDR staff also provided support at the CDC Emergency Operations Center (EOC) during the recovery efforts
- Post Hurricane Support, Florida: ATSDR staff oversaw and implemented preventive medicine activities such as food service safety, nutrition, sanitation, infection control, waste management, and animal care

Providing leadership to recovery teams in the affected areas, ATSDR also helped to conduct assessments of facilities and organizations that provide health and social services to better understand their ability to provide services following Hurricane Harvey. The objective of these assessments was to gain a ground-level perspective of issues affecting communities in their long-term recovery process. These assessments helped to ensure emergency resources were received in some of the hardest hit communities.

“These assessments identified major needs that may not have been otherwise identified,”

**ARTHUR WENDEL, MD, CAPT U.S. PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE, ATSDR.**