NEWS RELEASE FROM
NAVAL FACILITIES ENGINEERING COMMAND, SOUTHEAST PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE

MEDIA ADVISORY: September 18, 2020 **No. 20-40**

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NAVFAC Southeast CERT deploys with new tech for Hurricane Sally

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. – Naval Facilities Engineering Command (NAVFAC) Southeast dispatched 11 civilian personnel and one military officer from Naval Air Station (NAS) Jacksonville, today, as part of a Contingency Engineering Response Team (CERT) to help survey damage caused by Hurricane Sally onboard NAS Pensacola.

The team will have two new technologies with them to help conduct damage assessments, a mobile Geographic Information System (GIS) and Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS).

"This is my first time leading a CERT and I am excited to have this new equipment that will allow the team to operate more efficiently and safely," said Lt. j.g. Joshua Tenorio, Officer in Charge (OIC). "We will be able to perform damage assessments quicker and with greater detail, allowing us to prioritize necessary repairs."

Once on scene, CERTs are broken down into separate Damage Assessment Teams (DATs) of two to four individuals that conduct initial damage assessments of facilities on an installation affected by the storm. Each one will be equipped with a mobile GIS.

First time CERT member, Jay Sharpe, GIS project manager, was involved in the initial design process and testing of the mobile GIS units, which was conducted prior to the start of the 2020 hurricane season.

"This mobile GIS system will utilize smartphones and tablets to replace the hand written assessments that were done in the past," said Sharpe. "Each device will have applications installed that will allow the CERT to utilize map integration, access facility information and initiate an electronic version of the damage assessment form."

On prior CERTs, DATs would bring completed hand written forms back to their base of operations, input the data manually on a computer and transmit the information back to the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) and cost estimating team located in Jacksonville, Florida.

The electronic version of the damage assessment form will allow DATs to quickly send a PDF that contains information of the damage and includes photos and location data of the facility, through a Wi-Fi hotspot directly to the EOC for processing.

Veteran CERT member Peter Clinton, mechanical engineer, has over seven deployments under his belt using the traditional handwritten forms. He was part of the initial testing of the mobile GIS and is eager to try the devices in the field.

“The great thing about the mobile GIS application is it gives a step by step guide on how to complete a damage assessment form, which will be really helpful for new people on the team,” said Clinton. “If you are missing information, it will tell you before submitting the form for processing.”

Clinton also liked the visibility of the tablet in bright sunlight and the ability to tell if the structure has already been surveyed by another DAT, making the teams more efficient by not duplicating the same work.

“We are hoping to eliminate time issues experienced with recording damage assessments with the traditional pen and paper forms in past CERTs,” said Sharpe. “The mobile GIS will package all the information about a damaged facility in easily transmittable file, allowing for a quicker turnaround for repair cost estimates.”

Another technological first for the CERT is the ability to call in air support with the UAS.

The UAS will allow DATs to inspect taller structures and roofs that may not be accessible due to damage or are not safe to enter. They will be able to quickly cover more square footage and receive high-resolution images and video of the areas surveyed.

“The whole purpose of adding a UAS component to the CERT is the different vantage points that it provides,” said newcomer James Richardson, GIS analyst and project manager. “The biggest advantage is keeping our team members safe and off dangerous structures.”

The UAS will also have the ability to create 3-D images of a building, thus giving DATs a high perspective of a structure that they are assessing.

This is the first time that the mobile GIS and UAS will be used in a real world event. After a successful test back in March, CERT members are thankful to have these two new tools available to conduct their mission.

“The CERT capability can play a vital role to an installation post storm, during the damage assessment phase,” said NAS Pensacola Public Works Officer Cmdr. Ancelmo McCarthy. “Their output will set the framework for follow on facility and infrastructure requirements in order to return NAS Pensacola back to a fully mission capable status.”

Heavy wind and rain pounded NAS Pensacola as Hurricane Sally passed over as a Category 2 storm on the morning of Sept.16. The slow moving hurricane brought sustained winds of over 100 mph and caused wind and water damage across the installation. There were no reports of serious injuries and damage assessments will likely continue for the next several weeks.

Comprised of volunteers, the CERT consists of structural, electrical, and mechanical engineers, architects, roofing specialists, geospacial information specialists and construction contract specialists that deploy to begin damage assessments. It is during this phase that debris is removed and basic functions are restored such as opening roadways, sanitation, water, electricity and communications.

Photos available on DVIDS (Defense Visual Information Distribution Service)

Hurricane Sally causes widespread damage to NAS Pensacola (gallery of seven images)

https://www.dvidshub.net/image/6355870/hurricane-sally-damage-nas-pensacola

NAVFAC Southeast CERT prepares for the 2020 Hurricane Season with new technology (gallery of four images):

https://www.dvidshub.net/image/6205092/navfac-southeast-cert-prepares-2020-hurricane-season-with-new-technology

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