

# The Sit Rep

Newsletter of the NYC Office of Emergency Management

## Boots On The Ground: NY-TF 1 in Haiti



*NY-TF 1 members rescue an eight-year-old boy from the collapsed remains of his house eight days after the earthquake.*

The moment Joe Gennusa and Donald LeSala stepped off the C17 military transport plane at the Port-au-Prince airport on January 16, they saw hundreds of people sweating in the sun around a cracked and vacant terminal building. The Haitians newfound fear of being indoors would add complications and confusion to their search and rescue operations for the next eight days.

Gennusa and LeSala were part of the 80-member Urban Search and Rescue team from New York Task Force 1 (NY-TF 1) sent to Haiti to assist with rescue operations in the aftermath of the 7.1 magnitude earthquake that struck just outside Port-au-Prince on January 12. During the team's eight-day deployment the responders made six rescues, including a 10-year-old girl, Sabrina, and her eight-year-old brother, Kiki, who had been buried in their collapsed home for eight days.

"The Kiki rescue was something special. We were on the way home after a day of leads that

didn't pan out when we came across a domestic dispute. A man was screaming at his neighbors for help while he worked on a pile of rubble with a hammer and a chisel," LeSala explained. "At first we thought it was another lost cause, but when the father called to his children, we all heard a faint response. We couldn't believe it. The guy had snaked a garden hose through the rubble to give the kids water and keep them alive. Using high-powered drills and a bucket brigade we freed the kids in five hours. The father had been working for eight days."

NY-TF 1 is made up of firefighters, police officers, and paramedics from across the city and managed by John Grimm and Susan Schnetzer at OEM. Team members are specially trained to use the tools, equipment, and techniques required for work in dangerous conditions. Even with their specialized equipment and training, the days were not always so rewarding. Accurate information,

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## Editor's Note

The warm days and melting snow signals that a new season is upon us and with it comes the spring issue of OEM's newsletter. This Sit Rep focuses on the Haiti earthquake and the ways OEM responded to the disaster both abroad and at home.

The feature story is an in-depth account of US&R's deployment to Haiti in the days following the earthquake.

Patricia Emrich contributed an article that explains Temporary Protective Status, the most common form of assistance requested at the NYC Haitian Earthquake Resource Center. Also, Terence Forsythe wrote an article examining the costs of lost records on a society.

Finally, the back page of this issue showcases the agency's best dancers from the holiday party. Who's got the smoothest moves? You decide.

If you have an idea for a feature, or if you'd like to write an article for the next issue, send me an e-mail or just stop by. The Sit Rep is open to all ideas and guest contributors.

## Boots On The Ground *(continued from page 1)*

difficult to come by during any disaster, was scarce and muddled due to the lack of a formal reporting infrastructure and language barriers.

"There were dozens of rescue teams from all over the world there, but there were no defined zones to focus our resources. It was more of a shotgun approach," said Gennusa. "Our first rescue came from information we got from a woman walking around the airport looking for help."

Information was not the only missing piece. The entire infrastructure of the city had been destroyed. With no water or electricity to give people a reason to gather in a central location, the Haitians camped anywhere they could find space.

"Everywhere we went, people were sleeping in the streets because they were afraid of the buildings. They'd dragged debris into the roads to keep themselves from being run over when they slept," said LeSala. "It was like driving through a maze every time we left the base."

The team faced the same formidable conditions as the Haitians. This was the first deployment to test its ability to be truly self-sufficient. Team members

camped in their own tents, ate their own rations, used their own chemical toilets, and ran their vehicles and generators on the fuel they brought with them.

"I thought we were heavy when we going down there. I couldn't believe how much stuff we were taking," said Gennusa. "But after the first couple days I had a new respect for the procurement guys. Everything we purchased, we used. And the little things made a big difference. Those 59-cent sandals were heaven after working in boots for 22 hours."

After eight days of near continuous work, the team returned to New York City and was honored by a reception at City Hall. Mayor Bloomberg presented each member with a certificate for their contributions and lauded the capabilities of the program.

"This is an expensive program. We've spent years putting together equipment and attending trainings up and down the east coast," said Gennusa. "I'm grateful we got a chance to save some lives and show New York City and the world what we can do."



*Commissioners Kelly, Cassano, and Bruno stand with members of NY-TF 1 at City Hall as the team is honored for their work in Haiti.*

### OEM NEWS

#### OEM Gets Green Award

Homeland Security Today selected NYC OEM as its Green Organization Award Winner in the Green Awards section of its March issue for being, "the national leader in recognizing, and acting upon, the connections between sustainability and emergency management."

Deputy Commissioner Rachel Stein Dickinson is quoted several times in the article explaining the highlights of OEM's Silver LEED certified headquarters, the agency's holistic operating philosophy, and new planning

strategies like the Hazard Mitigation plan that focus on sustainable solutions to long-term problems. Check out the full article on page 40 here: <http://ipaperus.ipaperus.com/HomelandSecurityToday/March2010/>.

#### Operation HOPE

On January 25, eight OEM staffers joined volunteers from across the city to count the city's homeless as part of the 2010 Homeless Outreach Population Survey. Emily Carroll, Megan Pribram, Angie Huh, Eric Steiner, Chris Varley, Herman Schaffer, Justin Land, and Martha Kenton surveyed the area around the Brooklyn Museum from 10 PM to 3 AM. The night was cold and the final tallies were low, but one OEM group did discover a decoy, a DHS

staffer planted in the area to act as a quality control measure for the survey.

#### CERT Virgin Islands

On February 21, Herman Schaffer joined FEMA's National Preparedness Division on a trip to St. Thomas in the Virgin Islands to help establish Citizens Corps Council and Community Emergency Response Team programs.

Herman spent four days with his Virgin Island counterparts explaining how NYC adapted the national curriculum to better suit the city's needs. He also reviewed NYC CERT protocols and operating procedures to help manage volunteer expectations and avoid pitfalls, like low levels of volunteer retention.



# Legal Logic: Temporary Protective Status by Patricia Emrich

*Almost a quarter of the visitors to the NYC Haitian Earthquake Resource Center are seeking help with Temporary Protective Status. Sit Rep legal correspondent Patricia Emrich explains what this means for Haitians living in New York.*

On January 12, a 7.1 magnitude earthquake caused catastrophic destruction in Haiti, which was already considered the poorest country in the western hemisphere. Foremost in the minds of emergency managers was how to get immediate aid to Haiti. Many U.S. attorneys, however, were thinking differently.

Given the current instability of the country, one of the best ways to help Haitians is granting Temporary Protected Status (TPS) to all Haitian nationals currently living in the United States. TPS is a temporary immigration status that allows nationals from a designated country who are in the U.S. to remain for an established time.

TPS applications are regulated by the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). In order for foreign nationals to qualify for TPS, the Secretary of Homeland Security must determine that conditions in the affected country prevent nationals from being able to return safely, or, that a country's government is unable to handle its nationals' returns adequately.



*Earthquake survivors fearful of building collapses gather under tarps in Port-au-Prince.*

TPS has been granted to citizens of countries suffering from political unrest, ongoing armed conflict, or environmental disasters.

TPS is awarded originally for six to 18 months, but can be renewed as long as the Secretary of Homeland Security maintains that conditions are unsafe for nationals to return. Honduran and Nicaraguan nationals have had their TPS renewed repeatedly since Hurricane Mitch in 1999. TPS extensions for individuals are not automatic. TPS-granted nationals must reapply each time.

TPS not only protects illegal immigrants from deportation, but also grants other immigration benefits, like employment authorization, which allows nationals to work and send money back home; and travel

authorization, which permits nationals to travel back to their home countries to visit loved ones. TPS does not, however, facilitate or grant permanent resident status, commonly known as the "green card."

Of the 876 visitors to the Haitian Earthquake Family Resource Center (HERC) in its first month, 317 sought TPS assistance. The USCIS has had a presence at the HERC since it opened, assisting Haitians with cases that vary from visa applications and pending naturalization to family petitions and repatriations.

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security estimates that as many as 200,000 Haitians will be eligible for TPS following the earthquake. That is about four times the number of people that can fit in Yankee Stadium.

## Baby Boom



Rowan Lantz Andrus  
1/18/2010, at 8:01 AM  
8 lbs., 7 ozs.

Born to Carlin and Sheila Andrus



# The Troubling Cost of Lost Records by Terence Forsythe



Earthquake survivors gather in front of the ruined Parliament building in Port-au-Prince. Photo by Jorge Cruz AP

*The recent adoption scandal in Haiti highlighted some of the problems that can result from lost or ruined archives. The Sit Rep's Records Correspondent Terence Forsythe examines the problem in detail.*

The human cost of the 7.1 magnitude earthquake in Haiti, the worst in more than 200 years, was well documented by the media, but this disaster also struck a blow to the country's history and memory by destroying irreplaceable records and historical documents.

In Haiti, nearly all government records were kept on paper. A crippling number of them were destroyed during the quake. Birth records, death records, tax records, passport records, academic records, land records, court records, health records, and—as can be seen in the drama surrounding the American missionaries—adoption records, all disappeared in the earthquake. These documents could be seen littering the streets of the capital.

Imagine walking down the street and realizing that the piece of paper at your feet happens to be the original copy of the Declaration of Independence. On January 26 a similar document was found on top of a pile of paper blowing loosely on the streets of Port-au-Prince, a 1934 document restoring sovereignty and control of the Bank of Haiti to the government from the American bank that held it during a military occupation.

Haiti's oldest library, the Bibliothèque Haitienne des Pères du Saint Esprit, was severely damaged by the earthquake. Officials estimate a third of the books in Haiti's National Archives were destroyed. The library housed an extensive collection of rare historical books and documents that related to the years before and after Haiti gained its independence in 1804.

There were also records documenting the role Haitians played during the American War of Independence, the Civil War, and the role Haiti played in combating slavery—purchasing slaves at \$30 a head and setting them free. Drawing on previous experiences in Afghanistan and Iraq, UNESCO, the United Nations' cultural agency, called for a temporary ban on the "trade or transfer of Haitian cultural property," to prevent looting from art galleries, museums, and historical sites.

Gang members who once ruled Haiti's slums with violence and intimidation are reported to have returned to the streets after stealing guns from prison guards at the collapsed National Penitentiary and destroying all records of their crimes. More than 5,000 prisoners fled the country's jails after the earthquake. With no records of their convictions, most will remain at large.

When a catastrophic disaster happens, like the earthquake in Haiti, it should serve as a reminder for us to look at our own disaster-preparedness

plans. Many of us keep our important documents, such as insurance papers, wills, licenses, deeds, mortgage, automobile titles, birth certificates, passports, marriage/divorce papers, citizenship papers, contracts, etc., in a drawer or even in multiple places without much other protection. Placing them inside Zip Lock bags will keep them from being damaged by water and other debris during a disaster. I would also recommend using Zip-lock bags for your documents inside safety deposit boxes (or in your Go Bag).

However, avoid laminating your important legal documents. Lamination might keep them from being damaged from spills and debris, but the lamination process itself causes damage and speeds up the break down process of the document.

After a disaster, photos are often the one thing people wish they had saved. Unfortunately, it often takes a loss for us to realize how important it is to make backups. Having a USB drive that contains current family pictures is a great safety measure.

During a disaster, it may be important to show recent photos to aid in search and rescue efforts, especially for children. Consider taking pictures of your family right from your phone, if possible. Remember though, the key is to have current pictures so update them, at least quarterly, for growing children. If you decide to back your photos up on a CD or DVD, make sure you make extra copies and store them in a safe place, away from heat.

Our computers and electronic devices are rapidly becoming the modern-day equivalent of the shoe-box for keeping our photos and other important documents. It is therefore important to make sure that those memories—whether a country's, an organization's, or an individual's—last for future generations to enjoy.



# Dancing With the OEM Stars

## And the 2009 Holiday Party's Best Dancer is...

