



National Hurricane Center hosts virtual meeting with U.S. Coast Guard District 8 (New Orleans) and District 7 (Miami)

Representatives of the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) District 8 and District 7 participated in a National Hurricane Center (NHC) All-Hands virtual meeting on January 29, 2021. NHC welcomed [Rear Admiral John Nadeau](#) - Commander of District 8 centered in New Orleans, and Captain Harper Phillips - the Chief of Incident Management for District 8. [Rear Admiral Eric Jones](#) - Commander of D7, and Captain Eric Smith - the Chief of Incident Management for District 7, also joined in. Ken Graham, Director of NHC, and Chris Landsea, PhD., branch chief of NHC's Tropical Analysis and Forecast Branch (TAFB), led the discussion. This writeup provides some of the highlights of the discussions.

Landsea: "We have the obligation through [a Memorandum of Agreement](#) that was signed back in March 2020 between [National Weather Service \(NWS\) Administrator Louis Uccellini, Ph.D.](#) and [USCG Rear Admiral Timme](#) to provide forecasts and decision support services from the National Weather Service to the U.S. Coast Guard. Some of you may not know, but the Coast Guard does not have a forecasting arm. So while the U.S. Navy does ship routing for the Coast Guard, the National Weather Service provides them forecasts and briefings, and we have an obligation to do so. In 2020 we did 88 briefings.



This map shows the USCG search-and-rescue regions in the Atlantic basin. U.S. Coast Guard District 7 centered here in Miami has search and rescue responsibility for the Caribbean, the easternmost Gulf of Mexico, and the southwest North Atlantic. Whereas District 8 stationed in New Orleans has most of the Gulf of Mexico. With the 88 briefings, it was shocking how busy it was and we were exhausted by the end of the season. For those keeping score, District 7 had 45 briefings and District 8 only had 43, so it was a close competition there for our decision support services.

With that preamble, I did want to introduce our guest speakers. We will start with [Rear Admiral John Nadeau](#) - the Commander of District 8 centered in New Orleans, as well as Captain Harper Phillips - the Chief of Incident Management for District 8 and our main liaison. District 8 is not just the Gulf of Mexico; there's 26 states that they provide services for all the way up to Minnesota and The Dakotas. It's incredible the geographic range that they have to deal with."



RADR Nadeau: "It is an honor and privilege to be with you all. Thank you for giving us the opportunity to speak to your team. You heard the numbers from Chris. It seems that we were on with you all twice a day for a good stretch. Here in D8 we saw five hurricanes and three tropical storms [in 2020]. It was one heck of a time for us. **When I hear you say "decision-support", that's exactly what I think about. There's a lot of USCG actions that go into every single one of those storms.**

Every one of our actions hinges on, really, your tipping and your queuing. You're telling us when, you're telling us how where, you're telling us how big, how much, and for how long. We start ramping well in advance, 96 plus hours. When those systems get into the Gulf of Mexico, we know sometimes the uncertainty is quite high. You've got just about every bit of my AOR [area of responsibility] with ten Coast Guard units, most of those along the coast from the panhandle of Florida across to the border with Mexico.

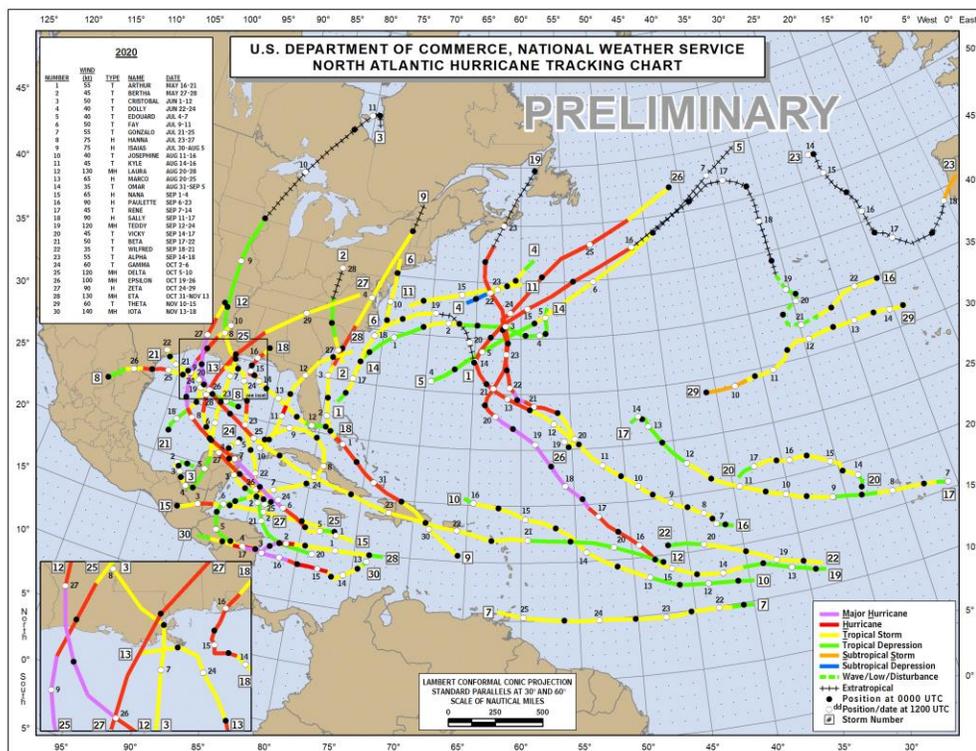
For example, we are relying on your predictions to help figure out when to tell our families it is time to go. I take that very, very seriously, because we want our active duty and civilian members that have to stay behind and work during these storms to not have to worry about their families. We had to evacuate 2500 Coast Guard family members at some point this summer. Your predictions, your timing is what drives me to make the decision to authorize for these families to pack up and start heading to a better, safer location.

Additionally, where do we need to have our forces, so as soon as conditions get safe, we are able to start affecting those search and rescue operations we need to get after and help those people. Where do we want to place those helicopters? Where do we need to put those small boats? All of the pre-staging, all of the timing for all of that all hinges on the good support from you all.

The same is the case with our Cutters. As the hurricanes move through, we know that we'll some clean up to do in the waterways. We want to make sure that we get commerce moving

as quickly as possible after the storms pass. Where can we stage those assets? Where can we pull from other parts of the Coast Guard? And where should we put it? So we can immediately put them to work after the storm passes. This all is based upon the input you provide us.

No part of the Gulf of Mexico was spared this summer. Thankfully, the Search and Rescue case load was relatively low. People from the most part heeded you and your colleagues' advice and made sure that they weren't in a bad spot when the storms hit. We saved 29 lives, which is relatively low compared to what it could have been. We flew 730 hours without incident from our aircraft. We did deploy 114 shallow water rescue craft across the summer in different storms. These boats and these aircraft were pulled from places as far away as Traverse City, Michigan and Cutters coming all the way down from Portsmouth, Virginia that came all the around and down to help clean up.



You are probably aware that the Coast Guard is the one that [decide when we have to close the ports](#), and when we have to cease commercial operations. When you are talking the Port of Houston or Port of New Orleans, the amount of economic activity that is going on is in the billions [of dollars]. There has to be a lot of thought of when are we going to close the port and how long can we keep commerce moving. Without your help, that would be a stab in the dark. We rely very, very heavily on your reporting and that's really the sole factor on when to pull the trigger on that. This year we had to have 58 instances of having to close a port here in the Gulf of Mexico. Because we closed them, in the long run it saves us - it saves everyone - time and money. By closing the port and getting vessels lashed up tight or getting them out of port minimizes damage to port itself.

A big part of what we did this year was [aids to navigation](#), where we have to survey all of the buoys out there marking the waterways. We had to assess 10,000 buoys after these storms and 2200 of them that had significant problems. Knowing where to expect that type of damage and where I can position the assets that I will need as soon as the storm moves through, your forecasts are what we rely on to make those determinations.

I mentioned cooping, that's when we pack up and go someplace else. We normally run operations out of our Command Center in our District Office [in New Orleans] as well as our Sector offices [throughout the District]. But in many instances, based on your forecasts, we decide that it's not going to be prudent for us to stay where we are. We better pack up and go someplace else. Where do we go? Do we go east, west, or north? It is all based on what you provide us. 43 times on the phone with NHC/TAFB [during the 2020 hurricane season], I think you said, Chris.

We lead every one of our briefings when we bring everyone together on the team with your [weather] brief because that sets the stage for every decision we need to make. I can't tell you enough how you all have a great steady presence in your briefs, I always look forward to them, and you set a good tempo for us as we consider actions that we need to take. **You are a crucial and critical partner to us. On behalf of all of District 8 with 4,000 men and women that serve here in uniform, we are very, very grateful for the support you have given us. We consider you one of our key partners to ensure that the American public is served well across all of District 8. We're very proud of the relationship that we enjoy with you all."**

CAPT Phillips: "Thanks for your [NHC/TAFB's] flexibility. Any time of the day, any day of the week, when we asked for a brief, you never hesitated. You're putting in a lot of late night and weekend hours to put those together. In addition to all of the briefs, **you did numerous Spot Forecasts for us, which were a huge help especially on specific SAR [Search and Rescue] cases that were offshore and helps drive our operational decisions.**



Thank you very much for everything. We look forward to working with you again next season, though hopefully it will be a little slower."

Landsea: "I'm honored that we could help serve you all. We have a really interesting job here. It can be stressful at times, but it's never life-threatening. However, the men and women that work for you are putting themselves in harm's way to keep the American public safe. Thank you for all the efforts that you all do every day. I'm really happy that this partnership is working out well between the National Hurricane Center and District 8 and all of the Coast Guard. Thank you so much."

Graham: “One thing that was always impressive to me when I went over to District 8 to give the preseason training, they went through your plan after I talked about the weather. You talked about the ports, you talked about ships and boats, you talked about coop, you talked about air ops and search and rescue. But there was always somebody that came up and went over the section about keeping the families of the Coast Guard members safe. I was always impressed by that for many years.”

Landsea: “We are also very fortunate to have two additional guests with us today. District 7 in the U.S. Coast Guard is centered here in Miami, in Brickell. They have the busiest in terms of marine responsibilities of any District in the United States for the amount of activities. Their Search and Rescue Region extends from the eastern Gulf of Mexico, the Caribbean Sea, and the tropical Northwest Atlantic. You can imagine between man overboard (that D7 was dealing with just yesterday), oil spills, law enforcement, possible aircraft down, disabled ships, missing ships. They lead the entire U.S. Coast Guard in all they have to deal with. From District 7 today we have [Rear Admiral Eric Jones, Commander of D7](#), and Captain Eric Smith, the Chief of Incident Management for District 7 and our main liaison.”

RADM Eric Jones: “It’s wonderful to see the whole team and I really appreciate you setting up this call. I’m actually on the road back from Tampa as we’re getting ready for the Super Bowl including taking some briefs to get ready for that and meeting with port partners.

I’m so glad you highlighted the Spot Forecast you just did for us recently in the Turks and Caicos. That was extremely helpful and I’m sad that we still have not found that eighth member of that crew. **The Spot Forecast is a huge tool year-round for us during search-and-rescue.**

Likewise, **I really want to thank all those responsible for creating the [Coast Guard weather webpage](#), which is extremely valuable to us. It has so many of the products that we use on a daily basis**, so I thank you and the entire team for that.

I think that Admiral Nadeau did a fantastic job of going right by the numbers on all the things that we use with the information that you so ably provide on demand at the beginning of each and every one of briefs during Hurricane Season when we have a system inbound. We just can’t say thanks enough also to opening the National Hurricane Center our new watchstanders to learn of what you have got going on there. I think it just raises their awareness of the things that you’re calculating.

Rather, if you have any thoughts on some of these crazy [hurricane] paths, these odd formation locations, and the rapid intensification you have seen these last couple years, please don’t be shy about sharing it. I think that it’s got us all flummoxed. District 7 was just lucky that we really only saw Isaias and Eta as our two [hurricanes], and even then, only Eta crossed as a full hurricane. We were very, very fortunate. Thanks to the products that you gave us we could plan the best way for us to get some of the additional resources that we can send to Admiral Nadeau and his team to help in both the response and the restoration of his coast.”

Landsea: “Thank you, sir, for joining us. When circumstances allow, we can do some more in-person meetings as well as bringing your new officers over here to visit NHC.”

CAPT Smith: “Thank you for everything that you all do. Please pass along our thanks for some of the new products provided to us. Your response to our data request and request for information was just timely and you always bent over backwards to meet whatever request we had. Specifically, the [tropical storm-force winds arrival time](#) really helped out to meet some of the needs

and movement of our critical resources. You incorporated [predicted rainfall total \[from the Weather Prediction Center\]](#) that was critical after Dorian left so many people homeless in the Bahamas and assisted with our surge planning effort. The projected [storm surge forecasts](#) were really crucial to our planning purposes. All I will say is to make sure to thank all of those team members that worked on those projects, as we really appreciate it.”

Landsea: “It’s worth reiterating to you though I’m sure you all know that what we’re doing is a big team effort. When we’re talking about rainfall in the briefings, we are providing the [Weather Prediction Center’s](#) and the local [Weather Forecast Offices’](#) forecasts. When we are showing the track prediction for the hurricane, it’s the [Hurricane Specialist Unit](#) here at the National Hurricane Center. We talk about the storm surge inundation graphic and watches and warnings - that’s from our [Storm Surge Unit](#). When we talk about winds and waves over the open ocean, those are from our [Tropical Analysis and Forecast Branch](#) here at NHC. So, it’s really a critical team effort to put all this together and package it for your use.

Thank you so much for your time today, gentlemen. We appreciate it and please give our regards to all the men and women at Districts 7 and 8. We’re looking forward to working with them again – though we’re not looking forward to starting soon. But you know we’re always available, whenever it is needed.”