

blanket into the dispatch center and crashed on the floor in the back. With the phones still ringing and the radio traffic in the room, I managed to doze for about four hours.

With only two showers in the building, I knew I'd have to be an early bird to grab one. But we all made it back to our consoles by the time our day shift would normally begin. It was safe enough for the other shift to go home. The call volume went down a bit, but the intensity did not. Many people had used generators that emit carbon dioxide, and some had fired them up inside their garage and even their homes. Unfortunately, now people were waking up to find family and neighbors dead. We also had injuries from chainsaws as people attempted to cut through fallen trees.


At the end of this second day it was time for our shift to go home. I dreaded the thought of going home to no power, and I was anxious about what damage I might find. As I drove down my street I was relieved to see how little damage there was, and yet the damage that was there surprised me too. There were some downed trees and roof damage in the neighborhood, but aside from some minor interior damage, my home was fine, and I was fortunate to have power.

I worked the next few day shifts, and although nothing compared to the call volume on the day of the hurricane, it was still somewhat heavy. Despite warnings put out by the media about generators and the danger of having them indoors, we still received calls for carbon monoxide poisoning. Injuries, deaths and damage were much greater in the county directly north of us where the eye of the storm actually hit. Twenty-nine deaths in our state were attributed to this hurricane. Over 12,000 homes were destroyed and almost 20,000 had major damage.

For about the next week, many of my co-workers were still without power. They came into work a bit earlier than usual so they could shower. I worked several more hurricanes with this agency, but none compared to this experience. Eventually our state and our county recovered. And so did the 9-1-1 operators and dispatchers who earned every cent of their pay that day. •

Sandra Gorsuch has been a 9-1-1 operator since 1998. She started her career dispatching Police, Fire and Ambulance for the City of Golden, Colorado. During that time she filled in part time at the Jefferson County Sheriff's

office after the Columbine shooting. After moving to Florida she dispatched for Lee Control, a secondary PSAP in Lee County, Florida. Sandy also dispatched police and fire for the city of Naples prior to her current position as Senior Dispatcher for the Sanibel Police Department in Sanibel, Florida.



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