

# TERT: Helping Out After Natural Disasters

**W**e know a telecommunicator's job requires adaptability. This is really put to the test in the middle of or just following a natural disaster—especially if you are working on equipment that's not what you were trained on, with people you've never met, in a comm center hundreds of miles from your own.

That's just what dozens of your colleagues did following Hurricanes Harvey and Irma in August and September of this year. Communities in southeast Texas still had Harvey's water in the streets and major electrical outages when the first team was deployed to Rockport, Texas, followed by teams deployed to four additional cities. Just two weeks later, teams from Georgia and Tennessee joined Florida teams to support the counties in Florida hardest hit by Irma.

In each state, the dedicated call takers and dispatchers assembled under Telecommunicator Emergency Response Taskforce (TERT) teams are what made this work smoothly for all involved. But it wasn't always like that.

Prior to Hurricane Katrina, there was no national system in place to provide operational support to communications centers and their personnel in the event of

a man-made or natural disaster. To address this problem and expand on some individual state initiatives in place, APCO International and NENA formed the National Joint TERT Initiative (NJTI), a partnership dedicated to the promotion of TERT programs that satisfy deployable status criteria for telecommunicator mutual aid response during disasters.

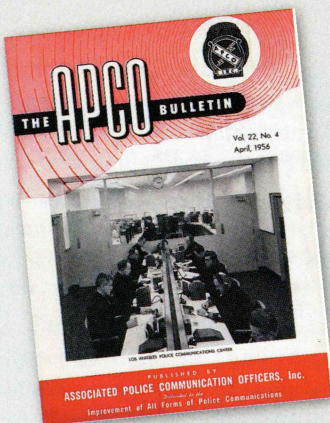
In the following 10+ years, NJTI has supported the development of active TERT programs in 22 states, with 15 more in development and a goal of having active TERT teams in every state.

So, in the immediate aftermath of Harvey and Irma, TERT coordinators in Texas and Florida and the affected agencies had established protocols and trained personnel to lean on. The deploying teams create a unique bond with their receiving agencies; they're enthusiastic about having the opportunity to help. According to one TERT coordinator, "We depart with a sense of accomplishment knowing we did our best to take care of our brothers and sisters [and help them] get back on their feet again."

Here's how you can get involved:

- Read more about NJTI and TERT on the [njeti-tert.org](http://njeti-tert.org) website, including news about recent deployments.

- Check to see if your state has an active team at [njeti-tert.org/about/status](http://njeti-tert.org/about/status).
- Look up your NJTI state coordinator at [njeti-tert.org/about/tert-contacts](http://njeti-tert.org/about/tert-contacts).
- If your state has a TERT team, follow the team on social media to see how they work and get to know the active members. Sit down and talk with your agency head about getting involved in the initiative.
- If your state does not have a TERT team or coordinator, read about developing one at [njeti-tert.org/state](http://njeti-tert.org/state). Take a close look at the Deployable Status Checklist, which provides nine points that are required for your state to be considered deployable. Then email the national co-chairs, at [ternjeti@apcointl.org](mailto:ternjeti@apcointl.org), who will contact you to help put the wheels in motion.
- Consult the American National Standard, APCO/NENA ANS 1.105.2-2015 Standard for Telecommunicator Emergency Response Taskforce (TERT) (available at [apcointl.org/standards/apco-standards-for-download](http://apcointl.org/standards/apco-standards-for-download)). This document will assist PSAPs and governing 9-1-1 authorities with the information required for developing, training, equipping and deploying a standardized TERT team. ●



## Pages From the Past

**I**n his president's letter for the April 1956 issue of the *APCO Bulletin*, Howard P. Black wrote, "The day is not too distant when the FCC will institute its plan of 'System Licensing' and 'Government Service Frequencies' will replace the present public-safety channels. Chaos will result if the various communication department heads haven't 'put their heads together' for some serious thinking; planning for the common good will be the only answer. Why shouldn't APCO

be the organization turned to for guidance in this planning?"

Six decades later, the public safety communications industry is faced with entirely different challenges, such as preparing for a nationwide broadband network and securing communications in an advanced digital landscape. Still, planning together for the common good is as timely and important as ever—and APCO gladly continues to be the organization to turn to for guidance in this planning.