Emergency Operations

TxDOT is prepared to respond to disasters that affect people and the state's transportation system. The department assists in response, recovery and resiliency efforts during emergencies and maintains safety of the state transportation system for the traveling public. Scroll down to learn more.
The safety and reliability of the state road network is of primary importance during emergencies. Safe transportation options make evacuation, search and rescue, mass care and other critical responses possible. TxDOT maintains readiness to respond to all hazards, particularly large-scale threats that regularly affect the state’s road network such as wildfires, ice and snow, and hurricanes.

Cover photo: flooding from Hurricane Harvey partially submerges a highway in east Texas.
Interagency coordination is key to successful emergency management. As a member of the State Emergency Management Council, TXDOT provides assistance to the State Operations Center during an emergency, as well as regional support to Disaster District Council emergency operations centers in cities and counties directly affected by the emergency.(1)

Photo: TXDOT Personnel assist in response efforts for Hurricane Ike at the State Operations Center located in the Department of Public Safety headquarters in Austin.

Local jurisdictions are required to use their own resources to respond to emergencies, but they may request additional assistance from the state when their resources have been depleted or a gap has been identified. In this event a State of Texas Assistance Request (STAR) is submitted to the State Operations Center where state agencies work to fulfill the request. (2)

Photo: TxDOT responders in Sugar Land receive a briefing during Hurricane Harvey.

TxDOT provides support to fire departments during wildfire events. TxDOT responders are generally not trained in firefighting, though responders are offered wildfire training through a course TxDOT developed with Texas Tech University.

TxDOT maintains two wildfire response trailers with personal protective equipment for responders, and a command post trailer that can serve as a communications center during wildfire response operations. (3)

Photo: TxDOT maintenance crews create fire breaks during a wildfire in Motley County.

(3) TxDOT (2019). Emergency Operations
TxDOT uses various methods to keep roads passable in winter weather conditions. Anti-icing materials are used to prevent ice formation and deicing materials are used to treat icy roads and bridges. Additionally, traction materials such as sand, crushed stone or crushed slag may be applied to help prevent vehicle sliding. Road treatment applications are carefully timed with weather forecasts to ensure maximum effectiveness. (4)

Video (non-mobile only): TxDOT "Don't Crowd the Plow." Photo (mobile only): A TxDOT snowplow.

During winter weather events TxDOT crews work 12-hour shifts to support round the clock operations, including weekends and holidays. TxDOT personnel make site observations, review camera images, check news reports and receive public feedback to monitor road conditions before, during and after inclement weather. (5)

Video (non-mobile only): A TxDOT deicing truck treats flyovers in Austin. Photo (mobile only): TxDOT snowplows clear a highway in Amarillo.

Emergency Operations

Snowplow Simulator

TXDOT uses a simulator to train snowplow operators to work in winter conditions. The department maintains plows and deicing materials in strategic locations to ensure timely response to winter weather events. A fleet of mobile fueling tanks is made ready for dispatch to support winter weather operations and refuel stranded motorists. During inclement weather TXDOT uses signage and issues safety messages through broadcast and social media to inform the public of hazardous road conditions. (6)

Photo: A plow driver trains on a simulator in the Denton Area Office

A local mayor or county judge may issue an order to evacuate in preparation for a hurricane event. TxDOT does not have the authority to order an evacuation, but the department may be requested to expedite traffic flows out of the threatened area following issue of an evacuation order. (7)

Photo. The junction of SH 105 and FM 159 is inundated with flooding from the Brazos and Navasota Rivers following Hurricane Harvey.

Minimizing road closures, removing obstacles such as abandoned vehicles, suspending construction and road maintenance activities, making traffic control arrangements and sweeping shoulders are some examples of how TxDOT prepares evacuation routes when hurricanes approach Texas. (8)

Video (non-mobile only): A Pharr District maintenance crew conducts a ramp closure exercise. Photo (mobile only): TxDOT crews mobilize for Hurricane Ike.

(8) TxDOT (2019). Emergency Operations
Hurricane evacuation routes are specifically designated roadways used to provide the safest and most timely evacuation of coastal areas and determine the best allocation of resources during a hurricane threat. (9)

Photo: A designated hurricane evacuation route near Corpus Christi.

TxDOT, in coordination with the Texas Department of Public Safety, can direct the use of select highway shoulders along evacuation routes as travel lanes. Shoulders opened to traffic are called evaculanes.

Photo: An evacuane on I-45 near Houston.
Contraflow operations entail reversing coast-bound traffic to the opposite direction during an evacuation. TxDOT and the Texas Department of Public Safety initiate contraflow operations following the local mayor or county judge’s decision to activate contraflow. Contraflow lane reversal roughly doubles the number of lanes available for evacuation traffic.
TxDOT’s hurricane response plans call for the positioning of fuel stations with backup generators at regular intervals along evacuation routes. The department works with oil companies to ensure fuel is available during emergencies. In hurricane season (June to November) TxDOT stages 30 fuel tanks in the Bryan, Yoakum and Corpus Christi districts to provide assistance to responders and stranded motorists.

TxDOT also works with local officials and other organizations to set up temporary comfort stations along evacuation routes. Comfort stations offer restroom facilities, water and ice. Some may offer oxygen exchange and snacks. (10)

TxDOT assesses and repairs damage to roads, bridges and other infrastructure during and following hurricane and flooding events. Maintenance crews inspect pavement, guardrails, signals, and bridge supports for damage. If a bridge or road is found to be unsafe, the facility is closed and the public is notified. (11)

Video (non-mobile only): Following Hurricane Harvey, Yoakum District maintenance crew divert traffic on a flooded road and Houston District maintenance crew deploy Aqua Dams to make roads passable. Photo (mobile only): TxDOT crews repair signals in the Corpus Christi District following Hurricane Harvey.

Following hurricanes and floods TxDOT's priority is to clear state highways of debris to facilitate emergency response operations. TxDOT strike teams work to clear roads and repair traffic signals and highway signs. The department works with the Texas Public Utility Commission and local power companies to address downed power lines in impacted areas. TxDOT has several debris removal and monitoring contractors ready to deploy following hurricanes in order to facilitate efficient reentry into affected areas. (12)

Video (non-mobile only): Debris removal efforts in the Corpus Christi District following Hurricane Harvey. Photo (mobile only): Debris removal operations following Hurricane Ike.

DriveTexas.org

TxDOT informs the traveling public of hazardous conditions and road closures using television, radio, newspapers, websites and social media.

Road condition information is available on the DriveTexas.org website. The website includes an interactive map that displays accident, closure, construction, damage and flood information. TxDOT employees regularly update the map with the latest conditions.

Click the Explore button in the lower right corner and then click the Default Location button to view the DriveTexas.org interactive map. Click the Stop Exploring button when finished and scroll down to continue.
Emergency Information

Motorists can also access road condition and travel information by phone at (800) 452-9292. Trained operators are available to provide information on this line during emergencies and hazardous conditions, and recorded road condition information is available 24 hours a day.
TxDOT has installed a network of permanent message signs along major roadways statewide. During emergencies TxDOT uses these signs to convey information about road conditions, weather conditions, fuel and shelter availability, and hazards. TxDOT also has portable message signs available to deploy as needed. (13)

Photo: A message sign in Pharr warns motorists of an approaching hurricane.

TxDOT Readiness

The safety of the traveling public is TxDOT’s highest priority when responding to emergencies and disasters. TxDOT is ready to respond and provide resources and personnel to prepare, respond and recover from emergency and disaster events. TxDOT’s statewide network of offices, equipment and personnel help make the department well suited for emergency and disaster response.

TxDOT will continue to adapt its disaster response and recovery strategies and work with its partners at all levels of state and local government to better serve Texans.