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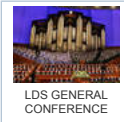
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From Deseret News archives:

Utah team ready to help after Rita

By **Pat Reavy**, Deseret News

Published: Saturday, Sept. 24, 2005 12:00 a.m. MDT

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DALLAS — With Hurricane Rita expected to make landfall early this morning on the Texas coast, members of Utah's Urban Search and Rescue Team made final preparations Friday night in case they were called into action.

Their assignment from the Federal Emergency Management Agency could come as early as this morning, depending on how fierce the hurricane proves to be.

The 34 members of Utah Task Force One arrived at the Adams Mark Hotel in downtown Dallas Thursday afternoon after driving 27 hours straight from Salt Lake City in nine vehicles. Friday, they made sure all their equipment was in place, supplies were filled, gasoline on hand for vehicles and each member knew his task.



See both photos | Click to enlarge

Photos By Jeffrey D. Alired, Deseret Morning News

Utah Urban Search and Rescue member Mary Lehman gets a friendly greeting from her dog, Phoenix, in her hotel room Friday evening in Dallas. The dogs are staying in hotel rooms until the team gets instructions on where they will be deployed. Royce Haakenson, one of 34 members of Utah Task Force One, relaxes in the Adams Mark Hotel in downtown Dallas. The team drove 27 hours straight from Salt Lake City.

From the archive

- [Utah Guard comes to aid of Louisiana](#) – Sept. 28, 2005
- [Utahns searching in New Orleans](#) – Sept. 27, 2005
- [Utah crew sent to New Orleans](#) – Sept. 26, 2005
- [Utah rescuers get call](#) – Sept. 25, 2005
- [Rescue team deploys to Texas](#) – Sept. 22, 2005

"I'd like to see a good rainstorm and go home," said task force member Merrill Bone.

But in the event they are needed, more than 700 Urban Search and Rescue team members from 10 task forces across the country were expected to be at the Adams Mark Hotel by today. Another seven were stationed in nearby San Antonio.

Friday night, groups of rescuers wearing shirts from California, Virginia and Indiana were all in the lobby of the hotel. Some were exercising their rescue dogs in preparation for deployment.

Utah Task Force One member Larry Littleford, a deputy chief with the Salt Lake City Fire Department, said there was a great feeling of camaraderie among all task force members. Furthermore, he said, the reactions from other guests at the hotel, some of whom were just evacuated from Houston, were very positive and supportive.

"They come up to you and say 'We're happy you're here' and 'Thank you for your work,' " he said.

Although task force members have their TVs tuned to the 24-hour news channels to keep updated on Rita, they don't sit around and watch continuously or dwell on when they might receive their assignment.

"They are all prepared to be on the curb and ready to go in 15 minutes whenever we receive an assignment," said Utah Task Force One Battalion Chief Royce Haakenson.

"This group knows where to go and which vehicles to go in," Haakenson said.

Each task force is required to be completely self-sufficient for up to seven days. That means they need their own food, water, medical supplies, gasoline and whatever else in the event they are required to live completely on their own.

Utah Task Force Once was formed 14 years ago. Although it isn't often deployed, it has been called to some of the nation's biggest disasters such as the World Trade Center attacks and Hurricane Katrina just a few weeks ago.

Three members of the task force had just returned from hurricane-struck Mississippi when they were shipped out again to face Rita.

Although they know it's because of unfortunate circumstances that their services are needed again, they were anxious to put their skills to work to help others.

"We'll figure out how to get (Rita's damage) taken care of," Haakenson said.

The task force said it didn't want to see anyone get hurt. In a best-case scenario, the team could just be told it's not needed.

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Haakenson compared it to being a player at a major sporting event.


"I'm the substitute with a huge game going on, and when they call my number, I'll be ready," he said.

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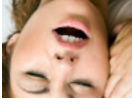
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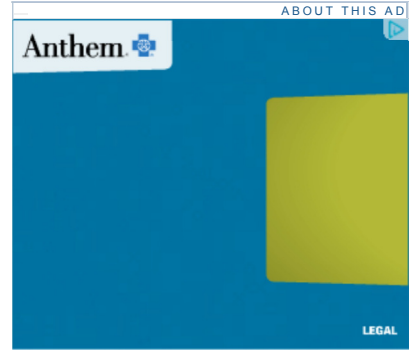


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