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Press Release

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Lifeline Tapped for Hurricane Katrina / Rita Response

Lifeline Ambulance was contacted by the US for any assistance they could offer after reports of thousands of dead in Louisiana. CEO Jim Jones and Operations Manager Scott Weaver just returned from New Orleans last week after attending the annual Emergency Medical Services Expo at the Superdome with 3000 other EMTs, 36 hours before Katrina's Category 3 landfall.

They cruised around in the trolley until midnight, taking in the city as matters unfolded. Only 20% of the activities were storm preparation. Boarding up windows and sandbags were the extent of those taking precautions; the rest were partying.

When they turned into the Hyatt around 1 AM and turned on the TV to see reports, Mayor Nagin was moderately warning people about Katrina. He reported he was waiting on Washington DC to address funding before he could help. "It was Saturday night in Washington DC; you have to be kidding," thought Jones. "Really? Who's around working at those hours?"

By 7 AM Sunday morning, there was total chaos in the streets with people looking for a way out and others looking to capitalize on the situation. All shapes and sizes of vehicles and people were looking to make long-distance one-way trips and share expenses. It was right out of an end-of-the-world movie. Jones and Weaver had airline tickets in hand for their return. They were also with ambulance manufacturer Demers from Canada, where they were a dealer and end-user. All of them were holding airline tickets, and several vehicles were on display. With airline travel up in the air due to weather, they made their way to the airport to find ticketing lines out to the highway. A crazy sight. Able to get checked in and on board, they finally were able to breathe easy. After the okay finally to take off, the pilot told them to look out of the window for they would never see this again, the outer wall of Katrina.

By the end of the week, grave concerns were brewing nationally and with Jones, who was a Louisiana Tech graduate and Air Force vet from the early eighties by Shreveport. He still had many friends there.

Lifeline was already part of the National Response Framework, still under development post-9/11 under HSPD-51. President Bush ordered a Continuity of Government plan to ensure National Essential Functions were met in the event of another major event. Lifeline was already providing services to the DOJ/ATF under the Attorney General as part of that plan. The ATF was the lead law enforcement agency under Emergency Support Function 13 (ESF). Lifeline provided medical support and medics on a 12-hour notice since 9/11.

Lifeline was under contract with DeWitt Army Hospital, the National Capital Region Command Facility for healthcare too. "Aid on the ATF/DOJ and DeWitt Hospital shortlist assigned to Fort AP Hill, Lifeline had no problem helping—it's just 1,000 miles away in the opposite direction, and not part of the current war plan. That's a record response distance, but no problem for Jones, who was stationed in the area from '81-'84 as part of a Cold War nuclear bomber alert force trained for aftermath in the event of a strike. This time, that Cold War relocation area is being used for a Katrina Response base camp.

A Strike Team with 5 ambulances, a squad truck, and a command vehicle is heading out with 14 people, including Jones, who's made the trip a few times before. Contact details have been spotty over the last few days; this is a first. President Bush is on the route to US Northern Command to head up the operation.

Jones is a Louisiana Tech graduate and currently enrolled in the University of Richmond Emergency Management Degree program, where he just finished FEMA's Incident Command System curriculum as part of his degree. Baton Rouge, New Orleans, or Alexandria, Louisiana, are the current rally points to be decided upon in transit. Alexandria was the alternate Cold War relocation base area in the '80s."