Against the Wind

First Responder Perspective by Raymond E. Swienton, MD
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As our response team approached the Rio Grande Valley region of the south Texas coast, the impact of Hurricane Dolly (July 2008) was apparent. The cover photograph, taken near Harlingen, was a common scene throughout the region in the early aftermath of Dolly's arrival.

To assist these affected coastal areas, rapid response teams from the Texas Disaster Medical and Public Health Assessment and Assistance Task Force (TxMAT) were mobilized. TxMAT, an innovative concept of operations, is a modular designed task force for statewide disaster and public health emergency response. During the response to Hurricane Dolly, 3 modules of the TxMAT were deployed, including the rapid assessment, the medical special operations, and the public health and medical assessment teams. These strike teams jointly served to accomplish 3 mission tasks in the affected region: to assist in the rapid health assessment of disaster victims; to coordinate, verify, and optimize local health care infrastructure; and to deliver disaster medical and public health services during the early response phase.

During the 72-hour rapid response mission to Hurricane Dolly, the 16 members of these strike teams logged more than 2000 mi and were involved in response operations at more than 1 dozen sites.

TxMAT is the result of an ongoing collaboration between the Texas Department of State Health Services, led by David Lakey, MD, MPH, Texas Commissioner of Health; key concept development leaders in medical and public health preparedness: Michael W. Proctor, MD, and Scott R. Lillibridge, MD, MPH, both of Texas A&M University Health Science Center, Houston, and myself; and key stakeholders from government, public, and private sectors statewide. This state-based standardized version of the federal disaster medical assistance teams is tailored for rapid regional response and mutual aid at the state and federal levels.