

# DRÄGER MEDICAL PROVIDES EMERGENCY SUPPORT TO GULF STATES DURING HURRICANE GUSTAV

by Bob Miglino RRT, BSRT, MPS

On Tuesday August 26th, the National Hurricane Center projected Hurricane Gustav to make landfall on the Louisiana Gulf Coast. They projected this storm would hit sometime early on Labor Day as a Category 4 or even perhaps a category 5. In fact, it was widely believed Gustav would hit with winds of 150+ mph (241 kilometers/hr).

Hurricane Gustav was projected to be just that strong of a storm and it was on a truly worse case projected path for New Orleans. This is why the Gulf Coast participated in the greatest mass evacuation in history. Over 2 million residents evacuated in less than three days. Lessons learned from Katrina would improve the response to future storms such as Gustav.

Having just launched its new Carina ventilator, Dräger through its local ventilation sales executive and marketing manager went immediately to work offering assistance to make these ventilators available in the event the Gulf region was to suffer a catastrophic landfall that would strike potentially affected hospitals.

Years ago, when Katrina hit the region, the shipment of merchandise was at a total standstill in the New Orleans metro area. It took weeks for hospitals to receive deliveries of all types of supplies and medical products. Knowing this could be the same situation with Gustav approaching, the need to be proactive, was apparent.

Dräger dispatched 17 new Carina ventilators to the region for next day delivery, albeit expensive and perhaps maybe ultimately unnecessary – Americans learned that it is best to be prepared for the worst. When asked why Dräger would make such an effort for what remained an unknown at the time, Ed Coombs RRT, marketing manager for Dräger Ventilation stated “It is the right thing to do. We want to support our respiratory colleagues from the Gulf region to the greatest extent possible”.

Once confirmed that the ventilators would arrive as planned in advance of the storm, the local ventilator representative, Frank



St. Tammany Parish Hospital RT's bringing Carina ventilators into the hospital

Caminita, RRT contacted the Dept. of Emergency Preparedness for each of the Gulf States that could potentially be affected.

At that same time Ed Coombs notified the AARC as to the actions Dräger was taking to proactively prepare for the storm. The AARC then contacted all five of the presidents of the local state respiratory care societies within the Gulf States region to advise them of the resources Dräger was putting in place locally if needed.

To ensure that this assistance plan could be implemented flawlessly, Dräger rented a U-Haul trailer to deliver these ventilators to the affected areas. As the local ventilator sales executive, Frank proactively started calling hospitals with the highest probability of a direct hit to advise them that Dräger had devised this assistance plan if needed.

Dräger's Southeast regional manager, Dean Calderone organized Dräger's other local respiratory and anesthesia sales executives to be ready to go to affected areas should the need be necessary. Guy Ray, RRT, Robert Dutruch, RRT, and Nancy Hemmert, RRT were ready for the call if necessary for product training and support

Additional easy reference guides were quickly printed and attached to the ventilators, Being aware that if these vents were going to be needed for patients, it would be an impossible task to in-service every Respiratory Care Practitioner with such a short notice. Dräger would make the best possible effort to in-service beforehand.

Dräger's ventilation marketing manager, Ed Coombs contacted Intensive Care Online Network (ICON) to explain the response that Dräger was urgently undertaking to support the Gulf region during the crisis. He requested their support to provide telephone support and clinical guidance should the need arise for customers who would have their personnel and resources stretched once again. ICON immediately supported



Dräger's Southeast regional manager, Dean Calderone, RRT

this effort without hesitation. A “Carina hotline” was established to provide customers with 24/7 phone support in the event they had questions or needed other assistance.

The first call came on Friday August 29th. Jina Cook, Director of Respiratory Care at Lafayette General called and stated she has a need for the Carina ventilator. Lafayette General was one of the facilities that would be receiving evacuated patients from lower lying hospitals. She was concerned that the current resources and influx of patients the hospital’s ventilator supply would be exhausted. After a brief description of its features and functionality, Frank delivered a supply of Carina ventilators on Saturday – this was imperative due to the highways implementing “contra-flow” by 4am Sunday.

Since Lafayette Hospital was in for a direct hit, Frank and Jina decided that 10 vents would be appropriate. In the event other local facilities would need these machines the National Guard could deliver them.

St Tammany Parish Hospital also received Carina vents late Saturday evening prior to the storm. Lisa Hyde, Director of Respiratory Care agreed to house a cache of remaining ventilators for any area hospital. This staging of equipment allowed Dräger to provide ventilators in the path of a direct hit and additional ventilators on standby in close proximity.

As Frank’s own home was in the mandatory evacuation area, he had to head north towards Memphis with the remaining stockpile of Carina ventilators just in case additional calls came in requesting assistance. While traveling north, he heard on the radio an advertisement from NEMA (National Emergency Management Association). This agency was establishing an evacuation center in Jackson, MS for patients with special medical needs. Frank called NEMA to make them aware of the situation. NEMA has a website, [www.aidmatrixnetwork.org](http://www.aidmatrixnetwork.org) to organize efforts such as Dräger’s.

Fortunately for the Gulf region, the storm did not strengthen as projected. Gustav made landfall as a Category 3 instead of a Category 4. Louisiana suffered massive power outages across the state however. Baton Rouge was on the right side of the storm and they suffered significant power outages.

Fast forward to Friday September 5th - Adam North, Director of Respiratory Care at Our Lady of the Lake Hospital in Baton Rouge called Frank Caminita requesting ventilators if possible. Adam mentioned that three of the area hospitals were closed and that Our Lady of the Lake Hospital was receiving many additional patients. His hospital had a census of thirty-five ventilated patients with only a few remaining ventilators on standby. Adam managed to borrow some Neonatal vents from Woman’s Hospital in Baton Rouge but had a need for adult vents. Within three hours, the Dräger anesthesia sales executive Robert Dutruch, RRT was on site to deliver seven Carina ventilators. In-service education was provided to the staff along with the quick reference guides for the staff.

It is important to note that four days after the storm made land fall, that Baton Rouge still did not have power to the traffic lights and gasoline was not readily available.

One important lesson learned from Hurricane Katrina was that proactive planning and communication is paramount. Dräger executed this response plan on multiple levels and will continue to provide support to the respiratory care community whenever disaster strikes.

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