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Citi: Demonstrates Resilience in the Face of Multiple Natural Disasters

How co-operation can overcome the greatest of challenges

Citi, the World's Most Global Bank, and winner of International SOS Foundation's 2018 Duty of Care Award for Resilient Care, coordinated numerous departments and disciplines to respond to a series of natural disasters impacting their global workforce in 2017.

Within a six week period, Citi was impacted by four significant natural disasters including Hurricanes Harvey, Irma and Maria and the 7.1 magnitude earthquake in Mexico City. These had the potential to put staff, travellers, and operations at risk, directly impacting over 18,000 people and 130 sites. With diverse geographic locations, businesses, and people affected, responding to these multiple natural disasters effectively required resilience, professionalism and teamwork.

Citi's Crisis Management Team (CCMT) gathered at its New York headquarters to orchestrate recovery. This global response successfully safeguarded the health, safety and security of its people and protected its sites, technology and business operations.

As Kevin Furman, Citi VP, explains:

"A company is truly resilient when people work together to achieve a common goal. Working in harmony from various disciplines within Citi's organisation, our team was able orchestrate a tremendous recovery in the toughest of times. . . Through clear communications to staff, forward-looking planning, strong recovery processes and exceptional support for our colleagues, Citi was able to continue operating its businesses, while other companies were out for days and even weeks."

Before the first hurricane made landfall, Citi Global Security Services - Crisis Management activated the CCMT. With approximately 60 representatives from all corporate functions, businesses and regions, the CCMT ensures a centralised and coordinated response to global events. Over the next few weeks it had to deal with four natural disasters.

Hurricane Harvey

The first occurred on August 25, as Hurricane Harvey attained Category 4 intensity. Initially 50 Citi locations and 3,545 staff were within its projected path. When Harvey made landfall near Rockport, Texas, the CCMT coordinated staff accountability and wellness checks.

The CCMT then worked with Employee Relations, Human Resources, Global Travel and Citi Security to assist those affected. Citi's Global Travel provided travel logistics to 400 travellers impacted by the hurricane, arranging hotel bookings and car rentals. In addition, 24/7 support was provided to Citi employees needing emergency housing assistance.

Hurricane Irma

On September 6, Hurricane Irma reached peak intensity in the Caribbean as a Category 5, with 185 mph (295 km/h) winds. To ensure the safety of Citi's staff, Continuity of Business was invoked with remote access as the primary strategy. Certain countries closed branches and others closed early. A few critical processes were transferred to other locations.

Luckily, impact was spared in the Caribbean, but Hurricane Irma then headed towards Florida where a large number of Citi sites and over 14,500 colleagues are located. Again, the CCMT kept in constant touch with local management, using satellite phones.

Citi also helped the American Red Cross (ARC) with its communications, offering information and advice to those in need. 50 Citi phone agents received approximately 15% of ARC's call volume, nearly 1,800 calls, in 11 days.



Above: Citi Response Team arrives in Puerto Rico with emergency supplies, following the devastation of Hurricane Maria.

Mexico City Earthquake

On September 19, a 7.1 magnitude earthquake struck Mexico, killing 370 people and injuring more than 6,000. More than 40 buildings collapsed. Citi's Global Travel looked after 433 travellers and introduced a pre-approval system to monitor travel into and out of impacted areas. Once more, 24/7 support was given to those Citi employees requiring emergency housing assistance.

80 branches were impacted, with some closed due to structural damage. Staff were advised to work from home, relocated or given alternate work arrangements. Thorough checks were carried out on any buildings affected before employees were allowed to return.

Hurricane Maria

Maria made landfall in Puerto Rico as a Category 4 hurricane on September 20. It had a significant impact on the population. There was no drinking water and the electrical infrastructure would take over six months to repair.

A Citi Response Team was flown on Citi's corporate jet to coordinate humanitarian assistance and search for missing employees. Citi Global Travel helped secure hotel space and rental cars in the toughest of environments.

Citi was one of the first responders in Puerto Rico. It flew or shipped in 22 tons of emergency supplies, including food, water, first aid kits, generators, batteries, personal hygiene items and emergency medicines.

In each location Citi cared for its customers too: by re-opening branches and ensuring ATMs had cash, waiving fees and extending deadlines, and providing liquidity to corporate and public sector clients who needed funds.

In addition, the Citi Foundation and other Citi community programmes made significant financial contributions to help victims of these events.

Kevin Furman concludes:

“These six weeks reinforced the effectiveness of Citi’s commitment to resilient care. Despite the enormous challenges of four significant natural events, Citi never lost sight of the fact that our staff and clients were counting on us. With diverse geographic locations, businesses, and people impacted – getting out of multiple natural disasters unscathed was a testament to the Citi Crisis Management Team’s professionalism, fortitude and teamwork.”

KEY ELEMENTS

Dealing with natural disasters requires a high level of resilience. The following are key:

Different disciplines within the global organisation must work in harmony.

They should be prepared to address many different issues: Travel, safety, housing, communications, power failures, structural damage, financial support, emergency supplies.

Care should extend to all employees and their families, customers, the local community and other stakeholders.

For information on the 2018 Duty of Care Awards winners in all categories, go to www.dutyofcareawards.org.