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New ways we give and volunteer



by Christie Garton

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Sep 03, 2010

Angels with some muscle arrive in Hurricane Earl's aftermath to help

01:47 PM

Yahoo! Buzz

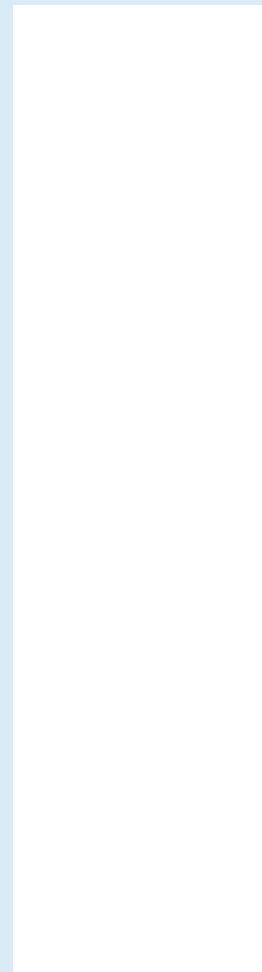
With sustained winds of 105 mph, Hurricane Earl blew into the Outer Banks of North Carolina before dawn this morning, [flooding some parts of barrier islands and knocking out electricity](#). Luckily, it stayed farther offshore than feared, and left no immediate reports of injuries.

For Tad Agolia's The First Response Team of America, which arrived as the storm was coming in last night, that's the good news. The bad news is that the team now must hustle its way up the East Coast to Cape Cod where Earl is predicted to strike next. But with three Peterbilt trucks, hauling two hovercraft, a generator that can power a building "the size of Wal-Mart", and of course, the crew of six, that's no easy feat.

Hurricanes. Floods. Tornados. Earthquakes. If a natural disaster has struck somewhere in the U.S., The First Response Team of America is usually on the scene. Indeed, the team is often one of the first crews to arrive in the chaotic aftermath of any of these major disasters. Call the team's members heroes or angels with muscle, they use heavy equipment and technology to remove obstacles that may prevent local emergency response teams from getting to those in need.

"In many major disasters, the local emergency response teams have lost all of their equipment and resources and the personnel is worried about their own families," says Agolia, founder and president. "They're not used to dealing with catastrophic situations, and usually don't know where to start."

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[Watch how [The First Response Team of America](#) typically responds to a disaster.]

I first met Agoglia at this year's [Jefferson Awards ceremony](#) where he was honored for his work in founding the First Response Team of America.

"We always work closely with the government, never independently. We find the leader of the community -- a mayor, judge, fire chief, sheriff -- and introduce ourselves," says Agoglia. "We're an absolute stranger that shows up to help with no strings attached. Roads get cleared. Things are lit up again instead of darkness. It encourages people, renews faith in mankind and gives them something to be thankful for despite such an incredible amount of loss."

But with the potential for a disaster to strike at any one time, how does the team decide where to head next?

"Our decision is always based on where life is threatened most," explains Agoglia. "If there is a tornado that brushed the edge of one town but struck the center of the next town, we head to that next town."

And in the case of predictable disasters like Hurricane Earl, Agoglia relies on meteorologist Dr. Greg Forbes at The Weather Channel, who helps identify where a major storm is expected to strike, giving the team time to mobilize quickly arrive on the scene in advance of the disaster.

"Dr. Forbes will say something like, 'Ok Tad, we think there will be a heavy tornado outbreak in Oklahoma in two days,'" says Agoglia. "We will then deploy to that area, so that we can be no more than 5-10 hours away. Our aim is to be as proactive as possible."

So with Earl now predicted to reach Cape Cod area by nightfall tonight, the team rolls northward.

"We can do the best with what we know," says Agoglia. "Though we have this great tech and equipment, it is wise for people to take caution. We have never heard, 'I should have stayed.' We always hear, 'I should have evacuated.'"

To learn more about The First Response Team of America and how you can help support its efforts, visit <http://www.firstresponseteam.org/>.

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About Christie Garton

Christie Garton launched her first non-profit at the age of 19. She is a writer and the founder of an online community focused on collegiate trends. From innovative takes on philanthropy to unsung community heroes, Christie delivers your daily dose of inspired giving. | [More about Christie](#)



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