

# CWT disaster readiness ensured ongoing client service during Hurricane Rita

## CRISIS MANAGEMENT NORTH AMERICA

### THE CHALLENGE

On September 21, 2005, Carlson Wagonlit Travel needed to close its Houston call center due to Hurricane Rita, a then-Category 5 hurricane forecasted to make landfall near Houston. To allow CWT employees time to evacuate the city per local government recommendations, the center was closed for two days—even as clients required itinerary changes for their travelers, ongoing status updates, and uninterrupted service.

### THE SOLUTION

With responsibility for hundreds of clients and employees through its 14 U.S. call centers, CWT has in place clearly-defined disaster contingency plans. Advance planning teams include Operations, IT, Human Resources, Client Communications, Employee Communications, Facilities, and executive leadership. Readiness plans include a range of potential scenarios and requirements for: power-down/power-up options, client, vendor and employee communications, SWAT team assessment of damage to IT and/or facilities, personal action plans, recovery steps, additional infrastructure resource needs, and more.

### FAST FACTS

**Disaster:** Hurricane Rita closes CWT call center

#### Results at a glance:

CWT in-place crisis plans ensured:

- Continuous client service with minimized impact
- CWT employee safety

### THE RESULT

Over the two days, CWT minimized the impact to clients by re-routing calls on 60-plus telephone numbers, covering for more than 100 impacted employees, and completing more than 4,500 back-logged GDS requests. This was possible because:

- Upon first notice of Rita's damage potential, IT notified vendors of plans to shut down, moved critical employee mailboxes to its Minneapolis site, and continually monitored system health.
- Operations redistributed the workload to eight additional locations/teams and utilized 45 employees from other functions.
- HR activated the employee hotline and offered 40 hours advance pay to Houston-based employees to assist employees with evacuation and return expenses. Temporary daycare was offered to employees who elected not to evacuate but did not have childcare. Working with sister company Carlson Hospitality and CWT Industry Relations, CWT secured a block of Houston-area hotel rooms in case employees' homes were damaged.
- Facilities, pre-armed with critical contact information, and having communicated the situation to Carlson Risk Management and Crisis Management teams, boarded windows and elevated equipment off the floor.

### CONTACT

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