



State of Louisiana
Cemetery Response Task Force
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Ryan M. Seidemann, J.D., Ph.D., R.P.A.
Chairman

Cemetery Response Task Force
Meeting Minutes
December 4, 2023

Members Present:

Ryan M. Seidemann – Louisiana Department of Justice (LDOJ) Member
Gustave Lehmann – Louisiana Department of Health (LDH) Member
Ginesse Listi – LSU FACES Laboratory (FACES) Member
Jerry W. Sullivan – Louisiana Cemetery Board (LCB) Member
Rubby Douglas – Governor’s Office of Homeland Security & Emergency Preparedness (GOHSEP), Member

Others Present:

Christine Halling – Louisiana Department of Justice (LDOJ) Designee
Arbie Goings – Goings Consulting Services, Inc., Mass Fatality Lead, Contractor to LDH
Justin Gremillion – GOHSEP
Carol Walker – LDH

Members Absent:

C. Shane Evans – Louisiana Coroners Association (LCA) Designee

1. Meeting Start time: 10:00 AM

Chair Seidemann (LDOJ) called the meeting to order at 10:01 AM. A quorum was present.

2. Past Minutes:

The May 2023 minutes were reviewed and, on motion of Ginesse Listi (FACES) and second of Gustave Lehmann (LDH), the minutes were unanimously approved.

3. General Public Comment Period

There was no discussion had in the general public comment period and no comments were received from the public.

4. Old business:

Chair Seidemann (DOJ) reported on Laura/Delta/Zeta response data. Chair Seidemann (DOJ) reported that Laura/Delta is, from the CRTF’s position, coming to a closeout of recovery and reinterment. All unidentified have been transferred to Cameron for reinterment after one last push at identification. Christine Halling (DOJ) reported that there are approximately 15 unidentified individuals that have been transferred and that 11 of those should be reburied in the Sweet Lake/Grand Lake Cemetery that is operated by the Parish. The remaining four will be buried in their respective cemeteries even though we do not know their identities.

Chair Seidemann (DOJ) reported that all of the Ida unidentifieds were removed to Baton Rouge for forensic analysis with the assistance of FACES. Some positive identifications were made immediately during the process and individuals will join the rest of the identified remains that are awaiting release for reinterment either because of contractor backlogs or families not yet having transmitted their FEMA funds to the contractors. Several identifications have since been made of individuals in the Ironton and Jefferson communities. Additional identification work for both areas will continue for the foreseeable future.

Chair Seidemann (DOJ) related the difficulties of reconstructing the Ironton Community Cemetery (i.e., the lack of mapping, lack of documents, lack of information on the caskets, and the haphazard burials at the site). Ms. Halling (DOJ) reported that there were approximately 100 graves and sets of remains impacted in this cemetery and that, to date, there are now 40 left unidentified. Chair Seidemann (DOJ) and Ms. Halling (DOJ) reported on how the unidentified would be commemorated and how data would be retained for possible future identification if families come forward with additional information.

Ms. Halling (DOJ) also reported on her recent use of GIS technology to back into some of the identifications. Chair Seidemann (DOJ) and Ms. Halling (DOJ) discussed the use of GIS technology in the future.

Ms. Halling (DOJ), Chair Seidemann (DOJ), and Arbie Goings discussed the difficulties of making the final identifications. They also recounted the recent identification of an unknown at Ironton from a pacemaker serial number with assistance from Medtronic.

Chair Seidemann (DOJ) reported on the difficulties of making the Jefferson identities. Ms. Halling (DOJ) reported that Jefferson is down to about 15 unidentifieds. She also reported on the success of GIS use to assist in the cemetery reconstruction process. Chair Seidemann (DOJ) reported that the Jefferson remains are further along in terms of identification due to better preservation of hospital arm bands and other identifying information.

Chair Seidemann (DOJ) reported on the side-scan sonar examination of Bayou Barataria. He also reported from conversations that he had with the contract geomorphologist, Dr. Frank Willis, that any vaults and caskets would not have made it to the Gulf if they had floating down the bayou due to transport slowdown as the bayou empties into Mud Lake. Chair Seidemann (DOJ) also reported that one last aerial overflight was planned to ensure completeness of the Ida recoveries. Ms. Halling (DOJ) and Rubby Douglas (GOHSEP) discussed the use for GIS technology and then they discussed the CRTF participating in some outreach work and trainings with GOHSEP.

Ms. Halling (DOJ), Rubby Douglas (GOHSEP), Chair Seidemann (DOJ), and Arbie Goings had a discussion of data sources for cemeteries and some of the complexities with the lack of cemetery information.

Chair Seidemann (DOJ) reported on the difficulties of remains recovery work in southwest Louisiana during Hurricanes Laura and Delta. One major complicating factor to this work were the locals who did not undertake a careful recovery of human remains before the CRTF was able

to coordinate recovery. Chair Seidemann (DOJ) and Ms. Halling (DOJ) also noted that increasing FEMA data granularity is going to mandate stronger controls of well-intentioned locals trying to assist with human remains recovery.

Chair Seidemann (DOJ) discussed the concerns about FEMA shifting from IA to PA for cemetery response and recovery. He noted that no new information on this issue has been forthcoming. Rubby Douglas (GOHSEP) also participated in this discussion.

5. New business:

Chair Seidemann reported that the 2023 hurricane season was nonexistent from a CRTF perspective.

Chair Seidemann also reported that the CRTF has been working with the State Archaeologist and FEMA to ensure compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. A new programmatic agreement (PA) is being drafted and the CRTF is working to ensure that it is included on the Section 106 PA for the coming several years. Chair Seidemann (DOJ) sought signatory authority, if necessary, for the CRTF to become covered by the PA. Rubby Douglas (GOHSEP) moved to authorize the Chair to have that signatory authority and Jerry Sullivan (LCB) seconded the motion. The motion unanimously passed.

Chair Seidemann (DOJ) raised the issue of the possibility that the other member agencies may have to bring additional resources to bear on the response work. Chair Seidemann (DOJ) reported that because GOHSEP provides logistics and equipment, he did not expect additional work from GOHSEP. He also noted that FACES supplies forensic work and mapping assistance. Chair Seidemann noted that, in future events, the CRTF may have to call on the LCB personnel for additional back office work in the event of large responses. Rubby Douglas (GOHSEP), Ginesse Listi (FACES), and Arbie Goings participated in this discussion.

Chair Seidemann (DOJ) reported that a CRTF Web site is in the works with basic information and forms are going to be available. He reported that the reason for the Web site was to provide some visibility for the CRTF when people are looking for information. Rubby Douglas (GOHSEP) suggested that the CRTF provide a link to GOHSEP for the Web site and that CRTF personnel perhaps consider doing a GOHSEP podcast.

Chair Seidemann (DOJ) reported on the IA process. He noted that the Good Samaritans have acted responsibly by turning over their funds for cemetery repairs. However, family members are less reliable. He reported that several lawsuits have had to be filed against family members for recovery of funds that are misused. This item was just informational. Chair Seidemann (DOJ) noted that the Good Samaritan process has never had any fraud problems as alleged by FEMA and that it has actually been the families that have been fraudulently using cemetery IA funds. Rubby Douglas (GOHSEP), Jerry Sullivan (LCB), and Arbie Goings participated in this discussion and reviewed the problems of IA funding not able to be allocated to contractors or the State directly.

Possible legislative corrections and changes were reviewed. Those changes included: ensuring public records protections for personally identifiable information and for the imagery of the

recovered remains; authority to promulgate regulations; exemptions from La. R.S. 8:308, 8:903, and 8:903.1; exemption from burial transit permit requirements; archiving of records; slight name change; possibility to do DNA analysis; exemptions from La. R.S. 8:655 and 8:659; activation of the CRTF; and ability for CRTF to activate to assist with cold cases and mass fatalities. Jerry Sullivan (LCB) and Arbie Goings participated in the discussions about burial transit permits and records archiving. Ginesse Listi (FACES), Christine Halling (DOJ), Jerry Sullivan (LCB), and Arbie Goings participated in the discussion regarding DNA analysis. Jerry Sullivan (LCB) and Arbie Goings participated in the discussion regarding La. R.S. 8:655 and 8:659.

Chair Seidemann (DOJ) discussed the ADA policy implementation required by law. He sought authority to use the LCB's policy until the next meeting when the CRTF could implement its own policy. On motion of Ginesse Listi (FACES) and second of Rubby Douglas (GOHSEP), this authority was granted by a unanimous vote.

6. Next meeting:

Unknown at this time. Members will gauge availability and set up the next meeting at a later date.

7. Adjourn

Rubby Douglas (GOHSEP) moved to adjourn the meeting and Ginesse Listi (FACES) seconded. The motion was unanimously passed and the meeting was adjourned at 11:57 AM.