

ALL DIGITAL: DMORT dentists use WinID software, Dexis radiography equipment and the Nomad portable x-ray unit to process Hurricane Katrina's victim identification effort.



HURRICANE KATRINA

Digital response

Thanks to digital technology, forensic dentists were able to quickly begin identifying the victims of Hurricane Katrina.

Forty-eight hours before Hurricane Katrina made landfall on the Gulf Coast, the Disaster Mortuary Operational Response Team (DMORT) placed Bryan Chrz, D.D.S., D.A.B.F.O. and his Region 6 team on "active" status. He packed his bags with whatever supplies he needed to sustain himself for at least 72 hours after hitting the ground.

BY MATT SCHLOSSBERG

"Activation" meant that it wouldn't be long before he was deployed to the area to help set up one of DMORT's two portable morgues.

Dr. Chrz has a CV primed for disaster response. A forensic dentist with 20 years of experience, he is chair of odontology for the American Association of Forensic Sciences, past president of the American Board of Forensic Odontology and a diplomate of American Board of Forensic Odontology.

He responded to the 1995 bombing of the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City and the 2001 World Trade Center attacks. But Katrina, he says, presented different challenges.

Oklahoma City and New York were confined to a single area. In this case,

the disaster area extended for thousands of square miles beyond the borders of New Orleans.

What also made Katrina a different kind of disaster could be found in the recovery. This disaster marked the first time dentists used all-digital equipment to process and identify the remains of victims. Thanks in part to a software program developed by a dentist and used to make antemortem and postmortem comparisons, the identification process is completely paperless.

According to Jim McGivney, D.M.D., D.A.B.F.O., the latest updates to the software allow the dental team to scan and digitize film x-rays and photos and paper records.

"It allows us to have complete digital x-rays," Dr. Chrz says. "It's the first time we've used this in a full operation. We're paperless, which means that in retrieval and comparisons later on we simply sit at a computer station to pull these things out rather than having to pull folders with x-rays that fall out. It makes it a smooth operation."

In the November issue of *Dental Practice Report*, we will explore the breadth of the recovery and identification effort in the wake of what's being called the worst natural disaster to strike the United States. We'll speak with the dentists about the recovery challenges and how technology has changed the face of disaster response. We'll also explore the impact of Katrina on area dentists and staff, what practices in other areas can learn, and how the evolution of digital technology in disaster response may affect the technology and record keeping in your office. ■

Matt Schlossberg is Managing Editor of *Dental Practice Report*. He can be reached at mschlossberg@advanstar.com.