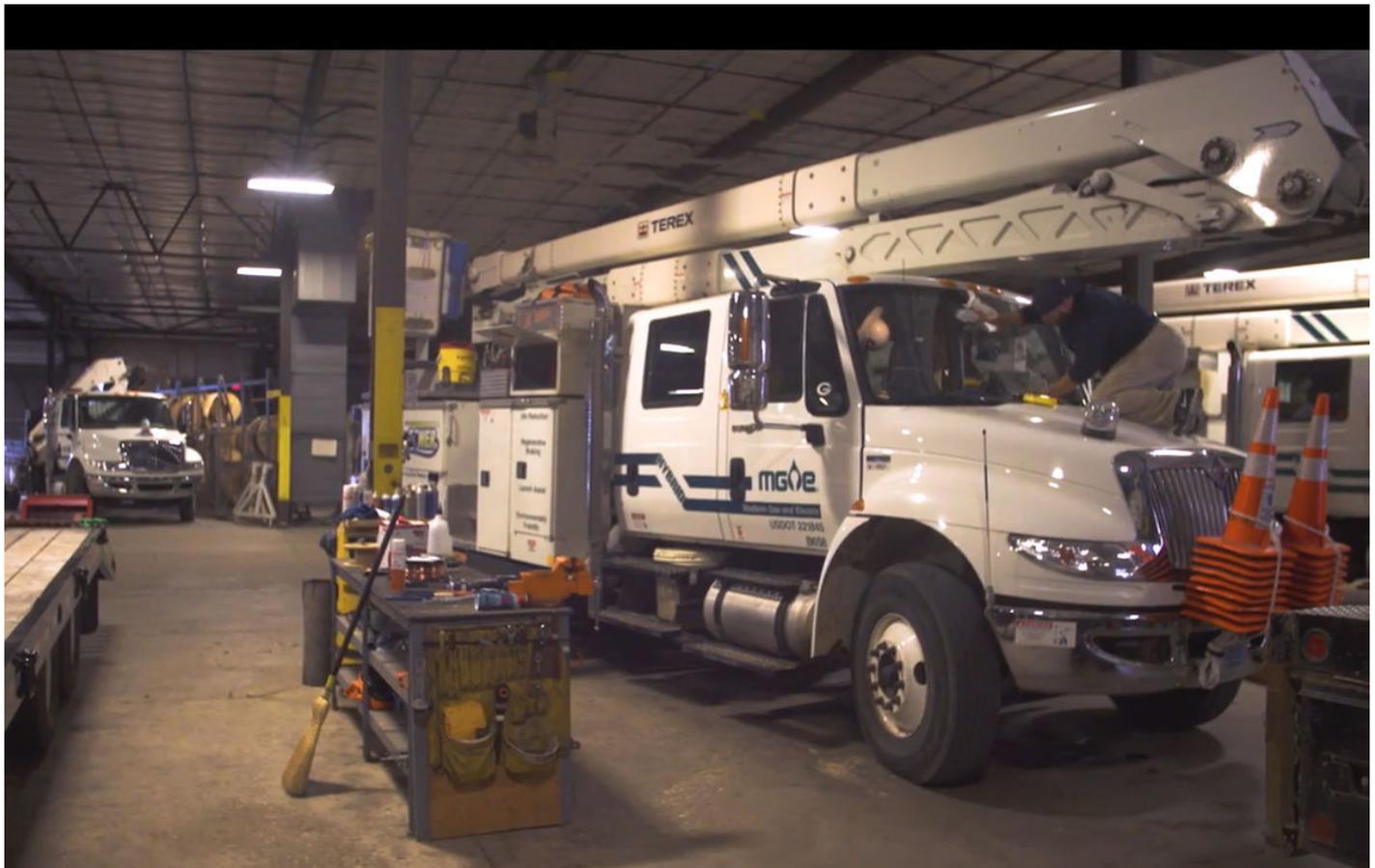


http://host.madison.com/wsj/news/local/wisconsin-to-the-rescue-utility-workers-search-crews-guard-troops/article_59ecd873-dbc1-57e6-a049-59360ac814fa.html

TOPICAL

Wisconsin to the rescue: Utility workers, search crews, Guard troops racing toward Florida

CHRIS AADLAND and LOGAN WROGE Wisconsin State Journal 8 hrs ago



Crews for Madison Gas & Electric ready one of six bucket trucks that have left for Florida to help restore power after Hurricane Irma swept across the state.

MADISON GAS & ELECTRIC

As wind and rain continue to batter Florida, Wisconsin utility workers, search and rescue crews and National Guard troops are on their way to the state to help it recover from Hurricane Irma.

And Madison-area churches also are responding to a call from Florida by collecting donations to help hurricane victims.

In addition to 11 Madison Gas & Electric employees in six trucks that left for hurricane-battered Florida on Sunday, Alliant Energy is sending about 200 of its employees from Wisconsin and Iowa to help restore power. About 50 Wisconsin-based Xcel Energy workers also will help restore power in the state.

More than 2,500 Wisconsin National Guard troops will be sent to Florida, and Wisconsin's 35-member Urban Search and Rescue Task Force is en route to Jacksonville, Florida, to help with search and rescue operations.

"The members of Wisconsin Task Force 1 are uniquely qualified to help the survivors of Hurricane Irma," said Maj. Gen. Don Dunbar, Wisconsin's adjutant general and Homeland Security adviser. "The team's water specialized training and other capabilities could help save lives."

On Monday evening, Florida emergency management officials reported that Irma, now a tropical storm, had knocked out power to nearly 13 million residents — two-thirds of the state's population.

About 18,000 utility crews from 30 states and Canada are expected to descend on Florida to help restore power to the state, said Alliant Energy spokesman Chris DuPre.

"When the call goes out like this, utility companies rally," he said.

Alliant employees will leave for Florida tomorrow, he said. Madison Gas & Electric crew members left Sunday and should arrive in the Tampa area Tuesday, said company spokesman Steve Schultz.

The three Wisconsin utility companies are part of a mutual assistance group. DuPre said Alliant crews will likely be stationed in northern Florida.

Madison Gas & Electric and Xcel crews will help Tampa Electric repair power lines and other utility infrastructure. The storm is expected to knock out power for up to 500,000 of its customers, Tampa Electric said Saturday.

While Schultz said he doesn't know the severity of the damage yet, he said it's probably similar to damage left behind by a severe storm or tornado.

"I would imagine power lines are down, transformers are damaged," he said. "We don't have hurricanes here, but when we get bad storm damage, we imagine that it would be pretty similar to that."

The utility companies said they expect their crews to remain in Florida for as little as 10 days or up to three weeks.

Alliant Energy and Madison Gas & Electric last assisted with hurricane recovery in 2012, when Superstorm Sandy hit the East Coast.

Spokesmen for both companies said utility repair assistance wasn't requested for Hurricane Harvey, which flooded parts of Texas and Louisiana in late August and earlier this month.

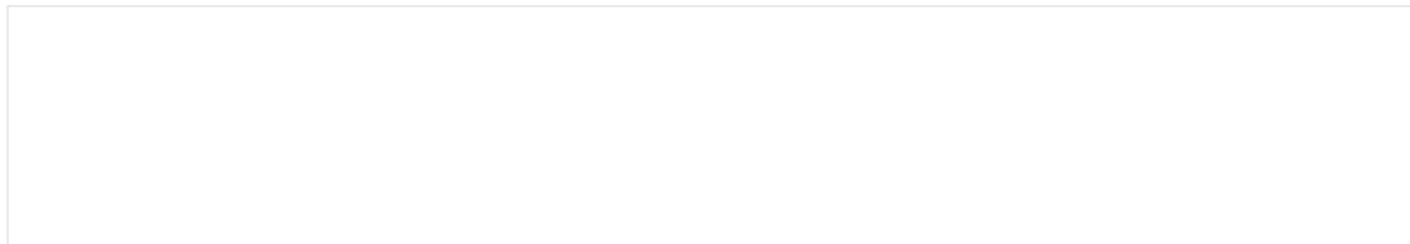
Meanwhile, Selfless Ambition, a Christian community development nonprofit, is organizing a relief effort to transport goods from Madison to Florida. Michael Johnson, CEO of the Boys and Girls Club of Dane County, said close to 20 churches will participate in the effort.

Donations of goods such as bottled water, flashlights, batteries and diapers can be dropped off at Lighthouse Christian School, 6400 Schroeder Road.

Johnson said the Boys and Girls Club is also accepting monetary donations to help those affected by the hurricane.

He said the goal is to get the donated goods to Georgia this weekend, and they will then be distributed to families based on the direction of local leaders in Florida.

MORE INFORMATION





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Chris Aadland | Wisconsin State Journal

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