

Case Study:

Hurricane Crisis Response & Federal Communications Leadership

Leading High-Stakes Federal Communications During Hurricanes Milton & Helene

Prepared by: Jennifer Sharpe | +1 704 616 2013 | Jennifer.sharpe.nc@gmail.com

Position: Lead Communications Manager | Duke Energy | Charlotte, NC (Oct 2016 – Nov 2024)

Executive Summary

During Hurricanes Milton and Helene, Duke Energy faced widespread infrastructure damage across Western North Carolina, requiring rapid, accurate, and continuous communication with federal stakeholders, including the White House.

I served as the communications liaison to the Federal Government Relations team, leading the development of all communications to federal officials. This included synthesizing real-time operational data, translating complex restoration efforts into clear executive-level messaging, and ensuring the company was fully represented at the national level.

The result: trusted, real-time visibility with federal leadership, strong alignment between operational response and federal messaging, and national recognition for crisis communications excellence.

The Opportunity

- Provide accurate, real-time information to federal stakeholders during a national emergency
 - Position Duke Energy as transparent, responsive, and operationally strong
 - Support alignment between federal, state, and corporate response efforts
 - Ensure leadership visibility at the highest levels of government
-

The Challenge

- Rapidly evolving crisis conditions with widespread destruction
 - High demand for real-time, verified data across multiple impacted regions
 - Complex operational details requiring simplification for federal audiences
 - Sustained 24/7 communications demands over multiple weeks
 - High-stakes visibility with the White House and federal agencies
-

My Role: Federal Crisis Communications Leadership

I served as the primary communications liaison between Duke Energy and its Federal Government Relations team.

Key responsibilities:

- Led development of all communications to the White House and federal stakeholders
- Aggregated and validated real-time data on infrastructure damage and restoration progress
- Translated operational updates into clear, executive-ready communications
- Ensured consistency and accuracy across all federal messaging
- Maintained continuous communications coverage, operating 24/7 as required

Strategic Approach

1. Real-Time Data Integration

- Built a rapid intake process for operational data across affected regions
- Synthesized complex field updates into concise, decision-ready summaries
- Ensured accuracy through continuous validation with operations teams

2. Executive-Level Messaging

- Developed clear, high-confidence communications tailored to federal leadership
- Focused messaging on impact, response, and restoration progress
- Maintained consistency across all federal touchpoints

3. Continuous Communications Cadence

- Operated in a sustained, high-frequency update cycle
- Delivered timely communications aligned with evolving crisis conditions
- Ensured no gaps in federal visibility during critical response periods

4. Cross-Functional Alignment

- Coordinated closely with operations, emergency response teams, and government relations
- Ensured alignment between field activity and external messaging
- Maintained a single source of truth across all stakeholders

Execution Highlights

- Delivered continuous, real-time communications to the White House during active hurricanes
- Maintained 24/7 communications coverage over multiple weeks
- Synthesized large-scale infrastructure damage data into actionable federal updates
- Ensured seamless alignment between operational response and federal messaging

Communications Impact

- Established Duke Energy as a transparent and reliable partner to federal leadership
- Enabled informed federal decision-making through timely, accurate updates
- Strengthened trust and credibility with government stakeholders
- Contributed to national-level visibility of Duke Energy's response efforts

Strategic Business Impact

- Reinforced Duke Energy's reputation as a crisis-ready, operationally strong utility
- Demonstrated the value of integrated communications during national emergencies
- Strengthened relationships with federal stakeholders and policymakers
- Elevated communications as a mission-critical function during crisis response

Key Takeaways

- Crisis leadership - delivered sustained communications under extreme conditions
- Federal engagement - supported White House-level visibility and alignment
- Execution discipline - maintained accuracy and consistency in real time
- Operational integration - connected field response to national-level messaging
- Endurance - operated continuously to meet the demands of a prolonged crisis

###