frame, during the fifth and sixth weeks of his tour in New Orleans, Battalion Chief Philip Gaetani, who relieved Chief Albanese, mentored NOFD Captain Lou Robinson and explained how the Safety Officer functions within the IMT. Together, they simplified the *mayday* procedures so that the different departments working together could all communicate with each other.

The Safety Officers established road hazard awareness so that dispatchers could relay this information to responding units. For example, the Safety Officers surveyed areas and noted problems, such as flooded roads, downed power lines or roads closed for other reasons. This information was provided to the dispatchers to pass along to the responders.

Once the city of New Orleans had pumped the flooded waters out of the city, new hazards arose to challenge the Safety Officers. Sediment samples of the flooded areas were checked for contaminants and found to have arsenic, lead and hydrocarbons, among others. Decon procedures were established and monitored at all five staging areas.

The day-by-day re-population of the city enhanced the danger of responding units driving around the city. Most of the traffic lights, stop signs and streetlights were destroyed, missing or inoperable. Members had to be reminded about safe response, especially when approaching and entering an intersection.

Daily *Safety Messages* were developed in the Incident Action Plan. These messages were read off to members at the 0600 and 1800 hours briefings with the ongoing platoon with additional copies distributed. Some of the *Safety Messages* addressed hazards and risks such as mosquito spraying, compressed gas, transition of Command, safety rules on the use of pressure washers, injuries and environmental hazards, plus pass-along news of any new hazards.

The third and final phase of this operation was the transition of safety functions passing from FDNY Officers to the NOFD. Throughout operations, New Orleans Safety Officers shadowed the FDNY Safety Battalions and participated in extensive question and answer sessions. They were thoroughly mentored in the actions of a Safety Battalion's operations; i.e., at a working fire, determining structural stability, ensuring Firefighter safety.

At Base Camp, the NO Safety Officers were schooled in decon methods and the importance of issuing the proper equipment. For example, those participating in *Operation Chainsaw* were issued goggles, overalls and gloves. And, after operations that necessitated use of SCBA, members were provided with wipes for their facepieces.

Part of FDNY's legacy following deployment in response to Hurricane Katrina is that the NOFD has established a Safety Command within its department. A Safety Officer now is assigned with an Incident Commander to respond to all alarms.

FDNY members responded to New Orleans in other ways, too--as members of other organizations. Some of these affiliations included the Urban Search & Rescue Program, FDNY Disaster Assistance Response Team and the Mission of Hope. Some of their contributions toward restoring New Orleans and getting its citizens back on their feet follow.

New York Task Force/USAR Response by Battalion Chief Fred LaFemina

There were two types of response to Hurricane Katrina this past summer. One consisted of a call for assistance from the New Orleans Fire Department to the New York City Fire Department. The other was the response of New York Task Force 1 (NY-TF1) of the Urban Search & Rescue Program. The municipalities affected by this devastating storm were unable to handle the amount of death and destruction that confronted them. New Orleans required assistance with fire suppression and other emergency responses. The FDNY provided a command structure using the IMT, staffed by FDNY members. This IMT coordinated all fire department functions by overseeing more than 300 personnel from the Department. The USAR Team responded, as part of the federal program, to conduct search and rescue operations. Both factions sent by New York City conducted operations to assist the local authorities during the disaster that overwhelmed them.

NY-TF1, on their return to New York, after a job well-done in Gulfport, Mississippi. *photo by FF Chris Landano*

What is a USAR Team?

USAR is an abbreviation for an urban search and rescue team. The National Urban Search and Rescue Response System was established in 1989, under the authority of FEMA, as a framework for structuring local emergency services personnel into integrated disaster response task forces. The task forces respond with the necessary tools and equipment and the required qualified personnel for the rescue of victims of structural collapse.

Although the main focus of these teams is structural collapse, they have been tasked recently with other duties. The teams now are capable of operating at natural disasters, as well as terrorist-related events in all facets of rescue disciplines, such as structural collapse rescue, confined space rescue, water rescue and hazardous materials incidents, including weapons of mass destruction. A task force is a partnership among the fire and law enforcement departments and local government agencies. Training requirements are intensive and members must be proficient in all rescue disciplines that the teams conduct. Members must complete hundreds of hours of training, as well as additional training that may be required for their individual positions on the team.

What type of resources can the teams provide to the Incident Commander?

Disciplines such as K-9 and technical search, logistics, rescue and rigging are required for most members assigned to the team. The equipment cache used to support a task force weighs more than 70,000 lbs. and is valued at more than $2 million. It is transported with the team by either air or land support to the disaster area. Due to the overseas conflict in which the United States is involved, air support is not available to the teams at this time. Most of the current deployments have been accomplished by land in the past couple of years.

The task forces can conduct physical search-and-rescue operations in collapsed buildings and other areas requiring search operations. They can provide medical care to trapped victims and conduct evaluation and stabilization of collapsed structures, as well as assess and control gas, electrical service and other hazardous materials. They can assist local commanders in conducting assessments of structures and provide search capability using physical, canine and technical search equipment.

The teams have the equipment to conduct breaching and breaking operations to remove trapped victims, as well as shore up dangerous areas and provide a reduced risk area of operations for the rescue personnel.

What is the make-up of the teams?

Task forces can deploy in different models. The first model is a Type I Team, capable of being self-sufficient and able to operate in the first 72 hours of the operations without the benefit of any outside support. Equipment such as logistics, medical, communications and rescue deploy with the team, as well as the members trained in these disciplines. This type of response includes 70 operating personnel, as well as 10 support personnel.

NY-TF1 consists of 210 members, including the Fire and Police Departments. The members are divided equally between both agencies, with the FDNY represented by two bureaus--Fire Operations and Emergency Medical Service. The Fire Operations members are all assigned to the Special Operations Command, including Rescue and Squad Companies, as well as Hazardous Materials Company 1. The EMS members are all Paramedics assigned to Haz-Tech units; they also are trained as technicians in disciplines such as confined space, collapse rescue operations and hazardous materials operations. The NYPD Emergency Service Units make up the remainder of the team.

December 27, 2005
Sir:

I wanted to personally thank you for your Department's assistance after Hurricane Katrina. I was tremendously impressed with the professionalism, commitment to duty and compassion exhibited by each and every member who volunteered to come here.

Their work on the fireground was fantastic. I am convinced that two FDNY Firefighters could extinguish a fire with an ax and a Halligan tool. If you give them a hose-line, the fire does not stand a chance. Their work off the fireground, helping clean engine houses and homes, was an unpleasant task that was done without complaint. They are true heroes.

It was a privilege and an honor to serve with them. It was an experience that I will never forget.

Captain David S. Castle, Engine 16, 2nd Platoon, NOFD

The second model design of response is the Type III or hurricane-type task force. This is a smaller deployment of members and a limited amount of the equipment cache, which allows them to rapidly deploy to the disaster area. A total of 28 members and six support members respond to this type of incident.

NY-TF1 responded to both Hurricanes Katrina and Rita as a Type III response. Usually, a hurricane response consists of at least two Type IIIs and a Type I team from different areas of the country. The Type I team responded with all their equipment to operate at the site, as well as provide additional support to the Type III teams.

How was NY-TF1 formed?

The task force concept was developed in 1989 after a series of major earthquakes hit the West Coast of the United States. The initial concept was developed with six teams participating in the program. Deputy Chief Raymond Downey, who was the task force leader of the New York Team since its inception, was the founding father of the USAR system. Chief Downey was personally responsible for the concept and development of the system and the elite status that the teams enjoy today. Funding of the team has escalated from $150,000 a year to a budget of more than $1 million annually. Chief Downey had operated at more than 15 USAR deployments in his career, most notably as the Operations Chief at the Oklahoma City terrorist bombing incident in 1995. Chief Downey lost his life during rescue operations at the WTC incident on September 11, 2001.

Katrina response

Besides national security standby events--such as the Democratic National Convention--NY-TF1 had not responded to a disaster since being rebuilt and put back in service in 2003. The task force had conducted a mobilization exercise in March 2005 at the Center for National Response in West Virginia. (See "West Virginia Tunnel Drill Prepares FDNY's Responders," by Battalion Chief Joseph R. Downey, on page 44 of this issue.) Although it was a realistic drill, it was not the same as responding to a catastrophic event. That changed on August 30th when the call came from Washington to have NY-TF1 respond to Gulfport, Mississippi, to assist local authorities by conducting search and rescue operations.