

THE DISTRIBUTION CHAIN

by Gary Bryant, Senior Vice President and National Sales Manager

The distribution chain is a phrase that describes the complex conduit that moves a manufacturer's products from the factory, through a network of distributors, to local customers. As you walk through any major retail store, you will see products manufactured by companies around the globe that have been shipped through a distribution chain. The distribution chain makes products readily available to local consumers like never before in our nation's history.

Our company made a decision to sell our products through local distributors many years ago. We manufacture products in small towns located in the center of the country, but thanks to our distributors, Ford products can be purchased locally in every major market across the nation.

Our distributors provide local service and maintain local inventories to supply the needs of contractors, municipalities, and water districts in a manner we could never accomplish without their assistance. But I never fully appreciated how effective this complex distribution chain worked until the Gulf Coast region was devastated by hurricanes. Like so many people around the world, we watched the events unfold on television and desperately wanted to help.

Within days we began to receive orders for emergency materials from our Ford distributors in the vicinity of those impacted areas. Orders came in by cellular phone, fax machines, and e-mail. The orders we could identify as destined for hurricane relief were expedited ahead of all others. In some small way this provided our employees a feeling of being able help those we knew were in need.

The good people of Hartford County, Maryland, extended a helping hand to their sister city, Bay St. Louis, Mississippi. They contacted their local Ford distributor, a national company who also had branches in close proximity to the disaster areas, and we dispatched the much needed supplies to a city water department who had truly lost everything in the storm. We learned that Ford products were even escorted into disaster areas by means of National Guard convoys. The speed at which we were able to respond to those areas most affected was made possible by our relationship with the local distributors.



The EPA estimated that over 1,200 water systems were damaged by these storms, and we knew our customers were in desperate need of the emergency repair products, but the means of long distance communications were also damaged by the storms.

I have always believed our distributors to be an integral part of our company's success, but I doubt many of the residents in the Gulf Coast area will ever learn the role their hometown distributors played in restoring their water service. I suspect this will remain one of the many untold stories of people helping their neighbors in the wake of the storm.