

Wednesday November 6, 2002

FIRE!



People came rushing into the yard at noon to tell us that there had been a small explosion and the HBS power plant was on fire. You could see the huge billowing dark clouds of smoke rising high above the oak and palm trees. The power plant is located adjacent to the hospital and housed five standby generators. Though we did not know it at the time, an electrical fire was ignited by a switch failure when a jolt of electricity was sent out by the local utility. By the time HBS maintenance men arrived at the plant it was too late to do anything. The door was closed but big red angry flames and black smoke were billowing out of the doors and windows.



Sandra, our Personnel Director, called the Cap Haitian Fire Department who sent out a truck and crew arriving within 30 minutes. These trained men used big hoses and foam to douse the flames. HBS personnel heroically rushed forward to cut off the outside fuel tank valves, so no more diesel fuel would pour into the house. It was a big hot angry fire fueled by the diesel fuel day tank housed in the complex. Thanks to the huge efforts of all, we suffered no personal injuries or any additional property loss.



In a very short time, everyone realized that the damage was unimaginable, with five generators, ATS switches, transformers, fuel tanks, spare parts and the building badly damaged. What a disaster!





Our first concern was to get back partially operational. Borrowing a small 15Kw, single phase standby generator and a of couple manual switches from neighboring projects, the maintenance men were able to hook into a single phase of the electrical system within 24 hours, alternating between the standby engine and the local utility. Being used to having electricity 24 hours a day, we have gotten very dependent upon this. All of the water for the hospital and the town of Limbe are pumped by the HBS electrical system. Providing a quarter of the power required for HBS normal operation, folks had to be cautioned not to use fans or too many lights. Each night the generator must be shut down from 9:30 PM and start up again at 6:30 in the morning. The wards use kerosene lanterns or rechargeable lanterns for back up at night. Even for sterilizing,

we are not able to use electric power, but instead must make do with the propane sterilizer in surgery. The daily routine of the hospital and outpatient clinic continue on this way awaiting a more concrete and positive solution. We are losing medical equipment as a indirect result of the fire as the power provided from the utility is not that stable. The biggest loss was our x-ray machine, which burned out within a week and will need replacing.

Once the electricity was partially reestablished, then came the phase of accessing the situation and making the painful decisions of where to go next. Over \$ 50,000.00 worth of equipment was destroyed with an equal amount of damage to the power plant building. It is needless to point out how discouraged everyone was. Many talks took place between HBS Florida and HBS Haiti and with a number of friends of HBS. Finally it was decided to order and purchase a pair of backup generators with electrical supplies and ship them to HBS Haiti to run at an alternate location. HBS



would borrow the monies required for this emergency project and hope and pray that donations would come in to pay the bills. A lot of work needs to be done in the meantime to order, ship and assemble all of the equipment to pack in a shipping container in Ft Lauderdale, Florida by 26 November as the next available shipping date is 29 November. The initial price tag is estimated at \$ 40,000.00 though we can already see that it will cost much more to rebuild and replace lost equipment.



We thank all of you for your concerns and words of encouragement. Please keep praying that this difficult situation will soon be resolved. Not only do the sick people depend upon the hospital, but the whole community really feels blessed to have water in their homes and the public fountains in town. Continue to pray that the work here can go forward.

"We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken, cast down, but not destroyed".

2 Corinthians 4:8-9

We will continue to update you as to the progress that is being made to alleviate this crisis.

Joanna Hodges

