



STAMFORD MAYOR
MICHAEL A. PAVIA

Our City's Response to Hurricane Sandy

Improving Emergency Preparedness and Homeland Security has always been a top priority for my Administration. Emergency Planning requires a discipline to think through the worst case scenarios in order to be fully prepared for the unexpected.

With the creation of such plans, you hope you will never have to implement them. There are times, however, when a circumstance presents itself as a considerable threat, and your plans must be rapidly deployed.

When that time comes, it is great to have complete confidence in the experience of our City's Emergency Operations and Response Teams. Stamford has been "battle tested" by significant weather events in the recent past; a major Nor'easter in March 2010, a record total of 85" of snow during the winter of 2010-2011, Hurricane Irene, and last October's surprise ice storm on Halloween.

PREPARING FOR SANDY

With alerts from multiple government agencies, I convened a meeting on Friday, October 26th at Government Center with sixty city and community officials to perform a threat assessment on Hurricane Sandy. Our Emergency Preparedness Plan was about to be tested by a 1,000-mile wide hybrid storm with reports of 80-90 mph wind gusts. Fortunately, the forecast provided sufficient warning to align resources and evacuate people from harm's way.

We immediately activated our Emergency Operations Center (EOC). We closely monitored forecast models, landfall predictions and the effects the storm surge would have on the Sound. Our primary concern was Stamford's shoreline which had the potential to see coastal flooding unlike anything we had experienced before.

On Sunday, October 28th at 12:30pm, I formally declared a State of Emergency for the City, and a Mandatory Evacuation of critical shoreline areas.

- **U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE):** The Stamford Hurricane Barrier, constructed after the great flood of 1955 to prevent flooding on 600+ acres of Stamford's South End, is managed and maintained by the Army Corps of Engineers. When storms of this magnitude occur, the Army Corps closes the barrier gate until the storm surge subsides, creating a 17 foot high wall to protect Stamford Harbor. On Saturday, October 27th, in anticipation of significant tidal surges, the Corps raised the barrier gate, deployed an onsite team to monitor flood levels and provide information to our EOC throughout the storm. According to the USACE, the highest storm surge recorded was 6 feet below the top of the Hurricane Barrier.

While the Hurricane Barrier was designed to protect the Harbor area and the South End of Stamford, we knew other coastal areas could be vulnerable as well; Dolphin Cove, Shippan, Wallack's Point, and Cove would also experience major flooding. Our calculations indicated the potential for unprecedented tidal surges; 4' to 8' above normal high tides. This determination prompted the Emergency Evacuation Order of SLOSH areas 1 & 2. SLOSH refers to our city's Sea, Lake, and Overland Surge from Hurricanes inundation map, created by the Army Corps of Engineers and FEMA.

- **Department of Health and Social Services:** With wide-spread power outages and an evacuation order issued, many residents would need a safe place to relocate while they waited for the storm to pass. Our Department of Health and Social Services coordinated with the American Red Cross and The Salvation Army to establish emergency shelters at Stamford High School, Rippowam Middle School and Scofield Middle Magnet Schools. The shelters accommodated over 665 people during the height of the storm.
- **First Responders:** From the start, our First Response teams, Police Officers, Firefighters, and EMS Personnel, had a continual presence in our Emergency Operations Center. They were deployed to enforce the State of Emergency order and facilitate the Emergency Evacuation. On Monday evening, conditions dramatically deteriorated. With winds exceeding 50 Miles per hour, unsafe conditions required us to temporarily suspend emergency response and rescue operations. Once conditions improved, our teams were redeployed.
- **Operations:** Our Operations Department supported all of the emergency plans with a 24/7 response maintaining access for emergency vehicles and clearing of roads of fallen trees, power lines, and other storm debris. Based on experience from previous storms, we again assigned Operations crews to work with Connecticut Light & Power crews to begin opening streets and restoring power. Representatives from CL&P were also embedded within our EOC, providing City management with real-time updates throughout the hurricane. Operations teams were out immediately after the storm restoring order to our neighborhoods, and CL&P crews worked to restore power to 35,000+ customers in our community.
- **Stamford Public Schools:** The Superintendent of Schools was involved in all EOC meetings and coordinated school closings and shelter plans with other agencies. At the height of the storm, 8 of 20 schools were without power and many bus routes were impassable.

- **Community Emergency Response Team (CERT):** The city relies on this volunteer civilian corps deployed to augment city resources. Each member is trained and certified to perform a variety of support functions during a State of Emergency, including manning shelters.
- **Stamford Amateur Radio Association (SARA):** HAM radio operators volunteered their time establishing and maintaining communications between Government Center and other agencies when mobile service was disrupted.

CONSTANT COMMUNICATION

Second only to our operational response was our focus on maintaining constant communication with the citizens of Stamford, to keep everyone safe and well informed throughout duration of the Hurricane.

A series of Public Alerts were issued, with situational updates received from the National Weather Service, The Connecticut Division of Emergency Management and Homeland Security, the Governor’s Office, and the Army Corps of Engineers. The alerts also advised residents on storm preparation, shelter locations, local emergency contacts, and other relevant information.

Citizens who registered for Stamford’s Code Red Emergency Notification System received alerts by phone, email and text message. The City of Stamford’s Information Technology Department and Citizen’s Service Center - both staffed 24/7 throughout the storm – worked to maintain communications and essential services. The City of Stamford website (www.cityofstamford.org), Twitter feeds, local television coverage, newspapers, online news outlets and blogs, and radio stations were key resources for getting important information to the public. Through these outlets, the City would deliver a total of 15 Public Alert Messages before, during, and after the storm.

Throughout the weekend, the City participated in frequent conference calls with Governor Malloy, national and state emergency officials and leaders of other coastal towns, to share situational reports and discuss available assets. President Obama also participated in one of the calls, offering Federal assistance wherever possible. After comparing notes with the other officials on the call, it was apparent that our Emergency personnel had taken every possible precaution and had acquired every asset available to us - including three high-water vehicles from the National Guard.

ADDRESSING THE AFTERMATH

Despite all of the preparation, the most difficult task of any emergency is witnessing the destruction left in its wake. Stamford



The Mayor declared a State of Emergency for the City of Stamford in anticipation of Hurricane Sandy. Photography: Clemon Williams

had encountered significant damage to Cove Island Park, Cummings Park, and the Shippan peninsula. It is difficult to see our beaches and roads destroyed, and to comprehend that the damage suffered from Sandy was far worse than what we experienced with Hurricane Irene. With disaster assistance from FEMA, we will rebuild and restore our coastal facilities to their prior beauty.

Most importantly, we are thankful that there was no loss of life during Hurricane Sandy.

I found additional comfort in the myriad of instances that our community came together to help others in need. Dozens of volunteer groups worked tirelessly to support those displaced or disrupted by the storm. One such example was Backyard Humanitarian, a growing group of community volunteers who, partnering with the Red Cross, provided exemplary support to our shelters by securing and coordinating resources among local businesses.

THE STRENGTH OF STAMFORD – THE CITY THAT CARES

Emergency Preparedness plans are as reliable as the people who prepare the plans and the response is only as strong as the people who implement them.

When it comes to the unprecedented weather events we have experienced over the last few years, our Emergency Preparedness plans succeed because the members of our community have consistently come together to demonstrate that there is no storm stronger than the people of Stamford.

Sincerely,

Michael A. Pavia
Mayor of Stamford

IN APPRECIATION

We greatly acknowledge and thank the many diverse organizations and community agencies who participated in the Emergency Preparedness and Response to Hurricane Sandy:

- 911 Communications Center
- American Red Cross
- Backyard Humanitarian
- Belltown Fire Company
- Board of Representatives
- Building Owners & Managers Association
- Business Council of Fairfield County
- Charter Oak Communities
- City of Stamford Employees
- Community Emergency Response Team (CERT)
- Connecticut Light & Power
- Glenbrook Fire Department
- Harbor Commission
- Harbor Master
- Long Ridge Fire Company
- Medical Reserve Corps
- National Guard
- Salvation Army
- Springdale Fire Company
- Stamford Amateur Radio Association
- Stamford Chamber of Commerce
- Stamford Emergency Medical Services
- Stamford Fire & Rescue Department
- Stamford Police Department
- State of Connecticut
- Turn of River Fire Department
- US Army Corps of Engineers
- Water Pollution Control Authority