

Testimony of First Selectman DaRos
Town of Branford
Post Irene report
September 19, 2011

Preparation for storm Irene commenced many days in advance of the storm's arrival – such as all equipment was inventoried, fueled and exercised. The town stock piled emergency materials such as rip-rap, processed stone, sand and sand bags; Staff was instructed to remove all town floating docks and remove or tie down any loose gear; efforts were made to secure debris disposal sites; and local contractors to stand by with equipment and roll off containers.

Four days prior, the town started regular briefings with all departments to set expectations and responsibilities. In particular, we focused on the possibility of having to function and provide services without high tech capabilities.

Three days prior to the storm, I started communication with the general public using Everbridge and continued those daily phone messages at the same hour every night with final calls being made ten days later with clean up and recovery instructions. Although during the storm it became apparent that it was difficult to reach residents due to communication failures.

Saturday at 11:30 a.m. a State of Emergency was declared in Branford. A mandatory evacuation was issued for all off shore islands and the emergency vessels were moved to safe harbors.

During the storm Public Works, Fire and Police made every effort to keep roads open until it was apparent that the situation became too dangerous for their own safety. At no time was any life threatening call delayed. By daybreak Sunday over 100 roads were impassable and closed by downed trees with wires.

On Monday morning only one CL&P line and tree crew was assigned to this area and a CL&P representative was sent to the Branford Emergency Operations Center. CL&P crews, though willing to get working, seemed to be hamstrung by CL&P policies and the first two days of their presence was totally inadequate by any standard. The first 48 hours CL&P seemed to have issues with their own internal communication between their Emergency Operations Center, their representatives and their work crews. In addition, they failed to provide the necessary resources in the stricken areas.

However, once they were organized and had available resources they did a marvelous job.

In my opinion, CL&P was more interested in the shareholders than their customers. Corporate policy seemed to be hell bent on spinning meters than responding to municipal priorities such as hospitals, medical centers, nursing homes and public safety buildings.

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In Branford, we had significant concerns with the amount of time it took to get our priorities back up and running such as our sewer treatment plant, our police department, which houses our 911 system, and other medical facilities. Failure at any one of these facilities would have been disastrous.

As far as restoration, in regards to the communication companies the efforts seemed even less. In Branford, the phone systems at all levels failed including cell towers. Our local cable company did not have a back up emergency generator. My communication with the public was reduced to printing thousands of flyers and having them distributed by volunteers and by the Boy Scouts.

In the future, I believe better communication between the utility companies and the towns is paramount. Also I urge the Siting Council to take a look at how much hardware is allowed to be hung on utility poles. In looking at some of the utility pole failures it appears that the poles are weighted down with a lot of equipment.

Also commodities availability and delivery needs further discussion. It was difficult to find available resources to pick up supplies at a time during the height of assessment and restoration. Additionally, the availability of American Red Cross resources seemed to be extremely limited and the only resource that was provided to our community took over 48 hours to organize.

Our community took a real beating during this storm and we are extremely fortunate that despite all of the damage we did not suffer any lose of life or severe injury.

I would like to thank the committee for allowing me to provide this information today and I would be happy to answer any questions.