



TOWN OF CANTERBURY
BOARD OF SELECTMEN

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Town of Canterbury
Tropical Storm Irene Summary

Communication

We had no direct communication with C,L&P, AT&T, or Charter Communications prior to the storm. We did have communication with the Red Cross and DEMHS at the Friday NECCOG meeting that Don organized.

We had limited communication with our regular C,L&P rep just after the storm and through Thursday, but with no useful feedback. We had contact from C,L&P Danielson office on Wednesday that resulted in our Public Works crew and myself waiting in our parking lot with 20 idle out-of-state utility crews for 18 hours.

Once we had a dedicated C,L&P liaison here late on Thursday that coincided with C,L&P actually allowing out-of-state utility crews to work with our local Public Works crew to start clearing and re-connecting wires, the communication and process went smoothly. This smooth process continued throughout the weekend.

The only communication we had with the Red Cross was using their web site prior to the storm to alert residents as to where shelters were being set up (Lisbon and Plainfield). Once the electricity, phone and cable lines went down, we heard nothing from the Red Cross. As it turns out, the location of shelters listed on their website was inaccurate, and resulted in substantial confusion. The shelter in Lisbon was either never opened, or opened and then quickly closed. The shelter in Plainfield turned away some Canterbury residents. When our CERT team visited the Plainfield shelter on Tuesday, the workers thought the CERT team was from the Red Cross with instructions. The workers at the shelter said they had had no contact from the Red Cross organization for 24 hours and were completely demoralized.

Preparation

Prior to the storm we met on Friday and Saturday in our EOC at the Town Hall to discuss how to handle the storm's actions and aftermath. We opened the EOC shortly after 6 a.m. on Sunday, and provided half-hour updates to DEMHS of conditions in Canterbury through the Web EOC system. We had Public Works personnel combing the Town throughout the storm to update us on conditions. By 9 a.m. we had an accurate picture of where the outages and blockages were in the Town, and we put together a priority list for restoration of power. This was all mapped out on a large map of Canterbury in the EOC.

Our assets to restore service were our Public Works crew, which basically could not proceed until C,L&P was here on site to partner with us.

Power throughout Town was out from Sunday morning until late Thursday evening. Our priority was to have the Route 14 commercial corridor restored first. This didn't happen until about 8 p.m. Thursday night.

Once the crews from New Hampshire arrived on Thursday afternoon, and worked with our crew to assess needs and map out a plan, work proceeded smoothly. C,L&P did try to pull the New Hampshire crew leader shortly after touring our Town, but he refused to leave. I applaud his resolve, as his focus and direction proved invaluable in keeping the work on track.

Reverse 911

We did publicize the reverse 911 program last year, and I believe a number of residents signed up. I was one of them. The system proved ineffective, however, as the phones were out from Sunday to Saturday.

Overview:

I think a "bottom-up" analysis is what would be most effective in this situation, as opposed to the "top-down" analysis that seems to be the way it's being approached. I think the Red Cross needs to re-assess their entire shelter program. I think that a comprehensive communications plan involving C,L&P, Red Cross, AT&T, Verizon, Sprint, Charter, etc. needs to be set up, and that our legislative offices should be part of this network. There's too many entities protecting and managing their bit of turf.

Brian Sear
Town of Canterbury