

Presentation to Chairpersons and Members of the Energy and Technology,
Labor, Public Safety and Planning and Development Committees
September 19, 2011

Storm Irene Preparation and Response Assessment

I would like to begin by thanking you for assembling this hearing today and for providing the leaders of several cities and towns the opportunity to share our experiences during Tropical Storm Irene. As First Selectman I was involved in nearly every aspect of our community's response during and after the storm which included manning the Emergency Operations Center with the Emergency Management Director, Fire Department staff, Public Works Foreman and local volunteers.

Following the horrific events on September 11th ten years ago, our State and Federal Government revamped the requirements for Emergency Management throughout our country. All members of our Emergency Planning Team, Public Works staff, Volunteer Fire Department, and other emergency responders attended numerous mandatory NIMS Training Courses. We took this charge very seriously and made sure that every individual involved in emergency response was properly trained. With felt organized and prepared to protect and assist our community should the need arise.

Tropical Storm Irene was no surprise. We had days of advance notice to watch the track of the storm, and as it moved closer we provided sandbags, checked on the elderly and disabled, conducted pre-hurricane meetings, arranged for adequate staff, EOC, shelter and were ready when the storm hit. I wish I could say the same about CL&P.

We lost power town-wide around 8AM on Sunday morning. When the storm had passed, around 2PM, teams of Public Works staff were dispatched and by 7PM, all trees were cleared from roads that were without wire involvement. They could go no further without CL&P declaring the wires dead.

A CL&P team did arrive the next day Monday at 11AM to meet up with Tennent Tree Service that had been waiting for them since 8AM. Together with our Public Works Staff, one road had been opened by evening with over 20 other roads impassable. Monday turned out to be only one of many days that outside contractors would be at our EOC early morning and wait hours for CL&P staff to arrive. The right hand didn't know what the left hand was doing.

The CL&P Liaison tried very hard to make a difference but was quite ineffective as his calls and questions were not answered. We learned that not only did the town not have the "grid map", neither did the Liaison. When he would speak with someone in Dispatch they would reference the "grid map", he had no idea what section of town or street they were referring to. CL&P also kept directing the Liaison to email reports and other data to their office when we had no email (internet) service. Such a ridiculous request that couldn't be accommodated. The Liaison appeared embarrassed by the poor organization and coordination and kept apologizing on behalf of his employer.

On Tuesday the Highway Mechanic was at our Transfer Station installing a generator and two volunteer firemen were responding to flooded basements when CL&P decided to "energize" a repaired section of Route 32 in Franklin but never disconnected the power to the switch to Route 207 in Lebanon. Rt. 207 still had many down wires and someone apparently "forgot" the disconnect. The power surged up the road, lines were arcing. The firemen and mechanic radioed the EOC and with the efforts of the Liaison the power was killed. It was a miracle that no one was injured or killed as people were outside on the roads, driving and walking.

On Friday it happened again. While attempting to energize Bush Hill Road without checking downed wires first, an elderly resident who had a tree/wires blocking her garage door since the day of the storm started smelling smoke. She dialed 911, responders came, and they called CL&P to shut off the power. The broken wires on the tree by her garage were burning. Power on that road never returned until Saturday night and the rest of the road was not restored until Sunday. Very careless and dangerous.

Sunday morning (one week later) while out driving town roads checking on crews, I noticed an out-of-state truck parked on a gravel town road with two men apparently "sleeping" in the cab. When I stopped to talk with them they said they were waiting to meet up with CL&P. This was early afternoon. When speaking with a neighbor on the street he said they had been there since morning and were still waiting.

Crews waiting to receive direction from dispatch, crews sent to opposite ends of a closed road with no way to communicate with contractor on other end, lines reactivated without proper checking, Liaisons being paid to communicate information to towns not given accurate or timely information. Total confusion—waste of money.

I think we all need to learn from this storm and that is why I am here. Suggestions for CL&P:

Suggestions for Future

- Grid maps should be in each town – laminated – held in EOC and in Selectman's Office
- Radios and/or cell phones to all crew in trucks and to sub-contractors
- Designated plan at CL&P headquarters so when Liaison calls with questions they can give him specifics – how many crews in town, where are they working today, etc. (He'd say only two crews today and then six would show or vice versa)
- Someone in CL&P upper management needs to make decision about staffing, hours, and provide clear direction to crew and to towns in which crew will be working.
- Tent Cities (Staging Areas) need to be "pre-planned" so when needed, they may be established quicker and without the lag time seen this year.
- During conference call with Governor, CL&P Chief indicated that they were having trouble getting crews from the Carolinas, Virginia (down south) as they were hit with hurricane also. We knew days in advance what was happening and when it was hitting Connecticut. Why in the world would you look for crew assistance from states that had already been hit by the same hurricane that was hitting us? Why not look to Ohio, Kentucky and other states not involved.
- Lag time to get out of state crews here. We had enough notice and knew of the impending damage/danger. Those crews should have been enroute prior to Saturday.
- Response time by CL&P is not good – even during non-storm events. Our town has trouble when poles are hit by MV at night and our emergency crews wait hours to have CL&P truck show up to disconnect lines so trees/pole/road may cleared and opened.
- Staff (on-call) needs to be increased – downsizing has made a major impact on their ability to be responsive in a timely manner.

Thank you very much for this opportunity to provide feedback to all of you and CL&P. It is my sincere desire to see communication and coordination improve.


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First Selectman