



TESTIMONY
of the
CONNECTICUT CONFERENCE OF MUNICIPALITIES

**ENERGY AND TECHNOLOGY,
LABOR AND PUBLIC EMPLOYEES,
PUBLIC SAFETY AND SECURITY, and
PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEES**

September 19, 2011

Good Afternoon, my name is Mary Glassman, First Selectman of the Town of Simsbury. I also serve as President of the Connecticut Conference of Municipalities. CCM is Connecticut's statewide association of towns and cities and the voice of local government – your partners in governing Connecticut.

I appreciate this opportunity to discuss preparation and response assessments related to Storm Irene.

We, as municipal officials, were given a very challenging test by Mother Nature on August 28th – a test we have been preparing for long before Hurricane Irene. I would be remiss, however, if I did not first acknowledge the tremendous efforts undertaken by our local first responders in the days, weeks, and months prior to this storm, the heroic efforts during storm and the tedious cleanup work that followed. As a municipal CEO responsible for activating my local Emergency Operations Center – it is an honor to witness firsthand the commitment and dedication of our local police, fire and emergency responders. We are grateful to all of our dedicated staff who protected our residents during this storm.

Storm Irene spared few communities and affected towns and cities in many different ways. Some residents were hardest hit and experienced days of power outages while others were less affected and quite satisfied with restoration efforts. As municipal leaders, we appreciate the opportunity to share our local experiences with you today in the spirit of working together as local and state partners to better prepare our communities when future natural disasters come our way again.

According to a post-storm assessment conducted by CCM, with approximately one-third of all municipalities responding, a majority of towns and cities stated their communication with the State of Connecticut ranged from “excellent” to “good” for *before, during, and after* the storm.

Local officials also evaluated their communication with local utility companies *before and during* the storm, with a majority of responses ranging from “very good” to “good”. Responses evaluating communication *after* the storm, however, were divided almost evenly between “excellent,” “very good,” “good,” and “needs improvement”.

More than 90% of towns and cities responded that they were assigned a “municipal utility liaison” and the majority of those respondents rated their liaison’s performance in a range from “excellent” to “very good”. The majority of respondents rated the effectiveness of their Emergency Notification Systems (commonly referred to as “Reverse 9-1-1”) – when functional – from “excellent” to “good”.

In terms of alternative forms of communication, many communities described using social media accounts like Facebook and Twitter (when able) to disseminate information, as well as using local radio stations and town/city hall websites.

Improvements for Consideration:

While overall feedback indicated that some expectations were reasonably met, respondents also commented on the need for improvement, particularly regarding the coordination and process of restoring services.

One suggestion for improvement is to **strengthen real-time communication, between individual municipal CEOs and their corresponding recovery crews (utility crew supervisors, tree removal crews, local Public Works and utility line crews)**. A common concern was the inability for these different disciplines of restoration to communicate among each other. This inability was cited as one of the main causes for delays in the restoration of local services.

Another recommendation based on feedback from local officials would be to **establish a “strike team” model of communication that (1) deploys restoration assets (the various field crews) and outlines a definitive chain-of-command within in the field, (2) equips designated leaders in the field with adequate communication capabilities (interoperable radios), and (3) conducts regularly scheduled reports directly to local EOCs**. Such a recommendation could build off the “utility liaisons” program which was identified by a majority of local officials as being beneficial to the recovery process. In addition, utility liaisons’ authorities and responsibilities should be more clearly defined in order to be more effective. Utility liaisons should also be included earlier in the local emergency management planning process – from preparation to response to recovery.

Another consideration is to provide more effective communication that is specific, timely and accurate. Officials see the need to **improve the collection and dissemination of local utility data, possibly via GIS mapping capabilities** (i.e., the location of major circuits/substations in relation to local priority restoration points – correlated with the specific causes and locations of power outages). Local officials’ real-time access to such information could provide their field crews with a concrete game plan for restoration. If such a blueprint were in place – combined with the ability to communicate among all field disciplines – then local recovery efforts could be

more efficient, and information to residents on the progress (or lack thereof) could be more effective.

Overall, true partnerships need to be strengthened now between local officials and their private utility counterparts so together, as a team; we are better prepared to protect the residents of Connecticut. The old adage rings true today more than ever before that the time to exchange business cards is not at the scene of an emergency.

As Connecticut's statewide association of towns and cities, CCM is willing to help facilitate a strengthening of these partnerships among all local, regional, state and private sector officials.

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If you have any questions, please contact Robert Labanara or Ron Thomas of CCM
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