

## Joint Informational Hearing on Tropical Storm Irene

### United Way of Connecticut—2-1-1 Report

Thank you for the opportunity to report on the work that United Way of Connecticut/2-1-1 did to support the state and Connecticut residents in the preparation, response and recovery phases of Tropical Storm Irene. We are also happy to share lessons learned during this emergency event.

Here is a brief summary of United Way of Connecticut/2-1-1's storm-related work from August 25<sup>th</sup> through September 5, 2011.

- In Connecticut and across the country, 2-1-1 centers (most often operated through United Way) support many emergency response efforts, through information dissemination, rumor control and helping people to access needed services.
- Overall, 2-1-1 handled nearly 4,400 hurricane related calls and responded to over 6,700 requests for services. Nearly three-quarters of the people who called us needed access to disaster services and municipal emergency services. But large numbers of people also called 2-1-1 asking for help with food pantries, utilities and shelter.
- There were over 6,500 storm-related inquiries/hits registered on [www.211ct.org](http://www.211ct.org) before, during and after the storm. Most people were down-loading 2-1-1 e-library papers on hurricane and emergency preparedness, flooding, power outages and emergency food. As might be expected, the topics getting the most inquiries changed as the various stages of the storm progressed.
- 2-1-1 Child Care sent out two letters to 2,400 licensed child care facilities in Connecticut on behalf of the state Department of Public Health. The first was sent just prior to the hurricane's arrival and provided guidance on preparing for emergencies, and what to do if directed to shelter in place or

to evacuate. The second letter was sent in the aftermath of the storm and provided information on food safety, drinking water and generator use.

- As in past emergencies, the state asked UW 2-1-1 to staff a work station at the states' Emergency Operations Center from August 25<sup>th</sup> through September 5<sup>th</sup>. During most of this time, UWC was staffing the 2-1-1 work station at the EOC around the clock.
- As the storm was approaching, leadership at the state's Emergency Operations Center asked UWC to collect and post on-line all the available storm services and changing conditions, including municipal emergency services, Red Cross shelters, food, road closures, etc. They asked that we update this rapidly changing information every two hours, which required a quick response by UWC's IT staff to enable regular updates and by UWC's 2-1-1 Information Services staff to collect and post the changing information.
- At the request of the Governor and leadership at the state EOC, 2-1-1 collected more than 1,400 storm damage surveys (approximately 450 by phone and 950 through the web) in the span of a few days. The early responses were used to help document the state's application for a federal FEMA disaster declaration for individuals.
- Before, during and after Hurricane Irene, United Way of Connecticut/2-1-1 provided status reports at multiple unified command EOC briefings for the Governor and state leadership. As we reported our activities, additional departments realized that 2-1-1 could help them too. This led to special projects including: helping the Department of Social Services to ensure that people who were living on the street could find shelter from the weather; helping the Department of Public Health as it tracked health risks (drinking water, hospital and nursing home damage, etc.); helping the Department of Insurance communicate to state residents where to go to file storm damage insurance claims; and helping Consumer Protection to communicate which gas stations and highway service plazas were operational.

- United Way of Connecticut's offices at 1344 Silas Deane Highway also lost power during the storm. We are happy to report that our business continuity/disaster recovery plan was generally implemented successfully and that our natural gas generator kicked into action to enable us to continue the work in 2-1-1. The generator provides enough power for one row in our 2-1-1 call center, and our 2-1-1 leadership and IT staff were able to operate about 15 work stations while the power was down. Many of our 2-1-1 call specialists braved the storm and/or stayed overnight in order to staff our 2-1-1 phones.

## Observations and Lessons Learned

1. The engaged leadership provided by the Governor and other state leaders through the unified command structure in the state's Emergency Operations Center was extremely helpful in communicating clearly how conditions were changing and what was needed from the many agencies (including 2-1-1) involved in the emergency response effort.
2. It was necessary to implement our business continuity/disaster recovery plan because of a power outage in our offices. Implementation of our plan generally went well, though we did identify areas that can be strengthened. The single most important reason we were able to continue our work was because our employees truly stepped up, responding to high call volumes and rapidly changing information and needs, while working under conditions that were not ideal.
3. The nature of the requests coming into 2-1-1 and the 2-1-1 website inquiries provided interesting and useful information on emerging needs of people across the state and on conditions "on the ground" as the storm went through its various phases.

