

TOWN OF SOMERS

600 Main Street
P.O. Box 308
Somers, Connecticut 06071
www.somersct.gov


FIRST SELECTMAN
Lisa Pellegrini

SELECTMAN
Kathleen Devlin
Bud Knorr

TEL. (860) 763-8200
FAX (860) 763-8228

September 23, 2011

To: Planning and Development, Public Safety and Security, Energy and Technology and
Labor and Public Employees Committees

From: Lisa Pellegrini, Town of Somers 

Re: Hurricane Irene Preparation and Response Assessments

Ladies and Gentlemen,

My name is Lisa Pellegrini and I serve as First Selectman of the Town of Somers. I appreciate this opportunity to submit testimony discussing the preparation and response assessments related to Storm Irene.

We are all familiar with the old adage "*Prepare for the worst, hope for the best.*" With such advanced weather warning systems we are able to adequately prepare for the worst. I am extremely proud of the preparation efforts by our local and state employees, police, fire and emergency responders, as well as the tremendous work from countless numbers of volunteers. The commitment and dedication of the individuals involved in preparing for the storm was certainly admirable and I am extremely grateful and appreciative of everyone's efforts.

Before Hurricane Irene arrived I had a very high degree of confidence in CL&P's ability to manage damage that would likely result after the storm. I did expect varying degrees of flooding, and certainly our share of downed trees and power lines. Let's face it, Mother Nature doesn't play by the rules and there were varying degrees of damage throughout the state after the storm had passed by.

Once the storm had passed and we conducted our initial damage assessments I still had a high degree of confidence in CL&P's ability to manage the cleanup and repair the lines. My customer liaisons Joe Haney and John Scanlon were exceptional to deal with. They were professional, organized and responsive no matter what time of the day I called. And believe me; I called them at all hours of the day and night.

However, it became apparent that something was wrong within the CL&P organization as the days without power went on and my roads continued to be closed. I still hoped for the best but it

became clear that there was a breakdown in communication between my liaisons and that great CL&P cloud in the sky. My liaisons knew my Town's priorities, yet I had a CL&P Manager contact me on the Friday after the Hurricane to tell me my Town was 100% up and running when in fact I still had downed trees on lines blocking major connector roads and a good portion of my Town was still without power.

I was told many times by my liaisons that additional crews were coming in, only returning the next morning to be told that the crews were redirected somewhere else. As you can imagine it was extremely frustrating. As the days went on my confidence in CL&P diminished.

However, as the weeks went by and we are able to review the lessons learned from this experience I am still hoping for the best so that we can continue to prepare for the worst. Now is the time to focus on working together with CL&P to improve the lack of communication experienced by many Towns as well as improving plans that detail coordination efforts in restoring power.

I support CCM's suggestion for improvements including the following:

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).

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.

Improve the collection and dissemination of local utility data, possibly via GIS mapping capabilities

Such suggestions for improvements would greatly improve communications and streamline coordination efforts and once again I hope to have a high level of confidence in CL&P.