



HOUSATONIC VALLEY  
COUNCIL OF ELECTED OFFICIALS  
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September 22, 2011

Connecticut General Assembly  
Legislative Office Building  
300 Capitol Avenue  
Hartford, CT 06106


RE: Joint Informational Hearing on Tropical Storm Irene

Dear Members of the Joint Informational Hearing:

Following Tropical Storm Irene, the chief elected officials and emergency management officials of the greater Danbury-New Milford area discussed how to improve local, State and utility company responses to a major weather related event, such as Irene. Attached are constructive suggestions that, if implemented, will improve public safety during such an event and help to speed recovery efforts.

We look forward to your consideration of these suggestions. Please contact me if you have any questions.

Respectfully,

  
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John Hodge, HVCEO Chairman  
and First Selectman of New Fairfield, CT

cc: CT DESPP Commissioner Bradford  
HVCEO Legislative Delegation  
Connecticut Conference of Municipalities  
Connecticut Council of Small Towns  
HVCEO Chief Elected Officials  
HVCEO Emergency Management Directors



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## POST IRENE SUGGESTIONS TO IMPROVE EMERGENCY RESPONSE AND RECOVERY ACTIONS

1. **DESPP Regional Coordinator:** During an incident that affects many cities and towns in Region 5 (includes 43 municipalities) of the Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection (DESPP), consider moving the DESPP Regional Coordinator to the State Emergency Operations Center in Hartford so that he will have direct access to State response planning, logistics, and operations. That move will help to expedite local requests for emergency response assistance.

When located at the State EOC, ensure that the Regional Coordinator is not "reassigned" to other duties, and remains focused on responding to DESPP Region 5 needs.

2. **Emergency Commodities Distribution:** During an emergency with widespread power outages, the State should facilitate the direct delivery of FEMA supplied commodities (water, ice, MREs, etc.) to municipal distribution points, utilizing the FEMA controlled trucks that bring these supplies into CT.

The off-loading of FEMA commodities at Rentschler Field in East Hartford, where they must be reloaded onto town owned or town rented trucks, delays the delivery of emergency commodities, and forces municipalities to divert public works assets away from emergency road clearing and clean-up activities that are needed to facilitate public safety access and utility restoration.

3. **Emergency Commodities Distribution:** A second option to facilitate the delivery of FEMA emergency commodities assets from the State commodities depot at Rentschler Field to municipal distribution points would be for the State to utilize CT DOT and/or private sector trucking resources (Stop & Shop, Walmart, etc.) to make commodities deliveries to municipalities.
4. **Emergency Commodities Distribution- Ice:** FEMA refrigerated trucks delivering emergency supplies of ice should remain within areas lacking power until the ice has been consumed, or power has been restored. Municipalities do not have refrigerated trucks to store ice. Readily available supplies of ice will reduce food spoilage and assist residents with medications that require refrigeration. (Note: There are about 50 types of medications, including insulin, that require refrigeration.)

5. **Emergency Commodities Distribution:** Following a disaster, such as that caused by Irene, assume it will take 48 hours for FEMA emergency commodity supplies to arrive in CT. Consider prepositioning a supply of FEMA emergency commodity assets within DESPP Region 5. These emergency commodities would be available to municipalities during the first 48 hours following a major emergency incident that results in widespread power outages.
6. **State Command & Control, and Messaging:** During a disaster resulting from a storm like Irene, there is a need for improved Unified Command & Control, and Messaging at the State level, in order to better coordinate the deployment of State controlled assets, as well as the messages to local officials and the public, from the many State controlled agencies and organizations involved in emergency response and recovery activities.
7. **Emergency Notification:** The State's "CT Alert" (Everbridge) emergency messaging system should be investigated for its ability to receive emergency municipal messages during an emergency, such as was caused by storm Irene. Some municipalities experienced up to a 10 hour delay in getting their messages out to local residents during the Irene event. That delay may have been caused, in part, by "clogged" phone lines.
8. **Emergency Notification:** The State should continue efforts to encourage residents to opt-in to the State's CT Alert emergency messaging system and remind residents to sign-up for text message alerts, as well as voice alerts. During and after Irene, text messaging services continued to work on cell phones, even when voice calling was unavailable due to high caller demand.
9. **Emergency Notification:** Cell towers should have backup generators, with a system for refueling and maintenance, to facilitate continued phone service (voice and text) during an emergency that results in widespread power outages and downed communication landlines.
10. **CT DOT Support:** During Irene, municipal road crews had to clear State roads before they could reach local roads. CT DOT road crews should be trained to become part of the immediate emergency response efforts to clear roads after a major storm causing downed trees. CT DOT's use of snow plows to clear roads after Irene often did additional damage to downed utilities.
11. **CT DOT Support:** CT DOT should consider the prepositioning of road crews trained in emergency response, into towns prior to a forecasted major weather event, similar to the prepositioning of plow crews prior to a major snow storm. These crews should be in contact with local emergency management personnel to coordinate response activities.
12. **Utility Response:** CL&P should make "circuits to roads" overlay maps available to every municipality prior to (for planning purposes) and during a major power outage to facilitate the town's prioritization of power restoration activities. Making

circuit geography clear will benefit power restoration decisions affecting public safety, nursing homes, commercial centers that provide essential commodities and areas with large numbers of residents.

13. **Utility Response:** During widespread power outages, CL&P should implement its program to train licensed electricians as certified line testers. Line testers would be deployed with State and local road crews that clear roads of downed trees and wires, and provide access for public safety vehicles.
14. **Utility Response:** Since the majority of CL&P restoration work is done during daylight hours for safety reasons, crews should start work at daybreak, instead of driving to the CL&P command center to report-in and then driving out to the assigned job. The current method causes restoration crews to lose 2-3 hours of daylight work-time, every day.
15. **Utility Response:** Allow the CL&P representative assigned to a town to run the restoration crews assigned to that town. Managing the actions of crews from a CL&P command center caused many delays, as crews often sat around waiting for work assignments. The on-scene local CL&P representative, working with municipal officials, knows the priorities for their assigned town better than someone sitting in a CL&P office.
16. **Utility Response:** CL&P, AT&T and Cable companies should better coordinate their utility restoration activities. Suggestions:
  - Crews restoring power should move AT&T and Cable wires to make roads passable for public safety access;
  - CL&P should use a sticker system to indicate that they have checked a pole;
  - Downed wires that have been checked by CL&P should be marked in some manner to indicate that they are not live, to facilitate public safety access.
  - CL&P has a video on what to do and what not to do when the power goes out. Find ways to make this information resource more available to the public in advance of a forecasted major weather event.
17. **WEB EOC:** The State should meet with local emergency management directors and discuss how WEB EOC will be used in the future, based upon a review of its use, or lack of use, during and following storm Irene.
18. **Emergency Radio Communications:** The CT Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection (DESPP) has deployed an emergency VHF radio system in every municipality in CT. DESPP should encourage municipal emergency management personnel to use this radio on a regular basis, so that it becomes second nature to utilize this communications resource during an emergency. Current State directives on the local use of this resource are considered overly restrictive.