

New Jersey experienced one of its worst natural disasters in 2012 affecting millions of residents and causing billions of dollars in damages. The aftermath of Superstorm Sandy is still evident, months after the storm arrived that devastated the northeast coast. Two facts are illuminated by the storm and they are incontrovertible: 1) New Jersey will face disaster emergencies in the future as the result of natural climate events and 2) public sector officials are never completely prepared to address these future catastrophes.

There have been numerous hearings and reports regarding the response to Sandy including state legislative hearings, federal assessments of New Jersey's topography, and the New Jersey Board of Public Utilities investigation of public utility companies' responses to the emergency statewide. The examination of the facts of the response provided numerous recommendations and suggestions regarding prevention and remediation for future events. The analyses are immensely valuable in identifying what needs to be done in the future. While the reports created by those investigative bodies reflect the insight and experience of professionals with training in specialized areas they may not necessarily discern the picture from the view of local officials.

Rutgers Center for Government Services (CGS) has a unique relationship with municipal managers in New Jersey through its partnership with the New Jersey Municipal Management Association (NJMMA). The members are professional managers responsible for the delivery of regular and emergency services. Their perspective is somewhat different from other professionals as it encompasses the complexity of all local services and systems. Rutgers believed that these professional managers have unique knowledge and experience about responding to emergency disasters that is worth hearing about, a perspective not often heard from nor solicited. It should also be noted that while local governments are the most responsible and accountable government body during an emergency, local officials were on their own for the first 24 – 48 hours of Sandy's arrival in New Jersey.

The perspective of municipal managers, despite critical to the implementation of services, is not often part of the public discussion regarding 'lessons learned.' To learn from this perspective, Rutgers convened a forum in December to hear from municipal managers about the storm, its impact, and the strategies they invoked to overcome the difficulties caused by the storm. The enclosed checklist is the result of that forum. It represents the ideas of managers who are 'in the trenches' and who are inevitably held responsible to make things better and 'clean things up.'

We are especially indebted to Ray Codey (Madison), Ralph Blakeslee (Netcong), Terry Reidy (Asbury Park), and Dave Breeden (Barnegat and Ocean) who served as panelists at the forum. We are also grateful for the numerous comments and suggestions we received from other municipal managers whose contributions are also part of this checklist.

By way of introduction, four critical areas were identified that drove the discussion:

- **Emergency Planning:** What plans existed and how useful were they? Who contributed to the development of the emergency plan and who else should have been a part of the planning process? How was the plan communicated and implemented?
- **Communication/Information:** Who had it? How was it shared? Was the information accurate and timely? How could it have been improved? How could it have been more widely shared?
- **Networking:** With utilities, other towns, the county's Emergency Planning Office, community-based agencies, schools, local universities and hospitals, and neighborhood groups. Were they useful or not useful?
- **Leadership:** Who exercised leadership in your town and what did they do?

The checklist that appears inside reflects the ideas of the professional managers. It is designed to assist local officials when confronted with circumstances similar to the one created by Superstorm Sandy.



**LESSONS LEARNED**

## Reflecting Upon Hurricane Sandy and the November Nor'Easter

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## Before: The Calm Before the Storm

### Planning

	Have shared service agreements in place with plans for emergencies
	Have a good management team in place before disaster arrives with roles that are defined
	Identify and prepare joint emergency shelters: club houses/community centers/schools, etc.
	Have shared police, fire and emergency equipment agreements between towns
	Identify County OEM resources and its plans to respond to and alleviate crisis
	Identify/designate "cut and run" teams to address downed trees and obtain access to roads
	Identify and create joint DPW/Utility teams working together under city supervision
	Develop a plan for systematic debris removal (not via individual calls from mayor)
	Develop criteria for systematic debris removal
	Develop a plan on how to collect and distribute needed goods and services during and after the crisis
	Enlist community-based organizations and other groups in the planning and provision of emergency services
	Planning process should include nonmunicipal entities (housing authority, schools, senior citizen sites, etc.)
	Plans should include the use of schools/community pool/civic centers as a hub for transportation services
	Consider special arrangements with local university(ies) for college students, if applicable
	Identify senior citizen population clusters, especially those with seniors living alone
	Develop plans for residents in nursing homes and senior citizen sites
	Create a 'special needs registry' to know where individuals with special needs are located
	Consider establishment of shelters/services for pets
	Establish a back-up plan for city computer servers and phone lines
	Have a sufficient supply of back-up generators with plans for maintenance and distribution
	Have a strategy and operational procedures to deal with utilities
	Have a contact list for Board of Public Utility Commissioners to be used when necessary
	Need for utilities to develop/implement/monitor tree trimming program on an ongoing basis
	Need to obtain grid network plans from utilities so towns know where power and telephone lines are located
	Develop a plan to recruit and train volunteers including specific tasks for volunteers with an oversight plan
	Establish 'house accounts' with large provider for instant credit for emergency purchases
	Develop a building inspections plan for after the damages have occurred

### Communication

	Have a formal communication plan to disseminate information to public on a regular basis
	Establish a dedicated emergency phone number to give information to the public manned by volunteers
	Obtain/Utilize Nixle system to contact and respond to resident inquiries
	Use organization of neighborhood/merchant block captains to share information and provide services

### Leadership

	Accept the reality "nobody is coming to help you" — leadership will have to come from your town
	Joint planning with your staff is necessary but allow them to do their jobs — trust them to execute their tasks
	Think outside the box — the pre-planning phase is the time to consider new/innovative strategies

## During: 9-1-1 What's Your Emergency?

### Planning

	Rotate generators from individuals/locations that have power to those that do not
	Plan should include the utilization of CBO's (e.g. YMCA as emergency shelter) to address needs
	Plan needs to include the collection, coordination and distribution for food, water, and other goods
	Limit the amount of time that staff can work each day - limit staff exhaustion by limiting time people can work
	Plan should include how to assign "cut and run" teams to handle emergencies, open major roadways
	Plan should include prioritization of debris removal sites to improve access to major roads
	Plan should include use of municipally-owned facilities as charging/warming/cooling stations for residents

### Communication

	Need for daily meetings and communication with critical players, including community representatives
	Recognition that elected officials were elected to lead — utilize them in emergency management planning decisions
	Utilization of Nixle, Code Red, and reverse 9-1-1 systems as critical for communication with public
	Mayor should tape a daily message to the public with updates to the community
	Use local radio station to communicate messages
	Use schools to provide information to parents
	Use message boards, municipal and school billboards, et. al. to communicate with public
	Use cable channels to distribute PSA's
	Acknowledge and utilize social media to share information
	Post notices on town hall doors and other public places to share information
	Provide regular and timely reports to council and the public about the event and the responses

### Leadership

	Utilize the crisis as an opportunity to be open and inclusive with the public
	Recognize that there is a need to be creative, innovative, and flexible in responding to crisis — "not in the playbook"
	Help others if you can (other towns)

## After: Picking Up The Pieces

### Planning

	Re-examine roles/responsibilities of county OEM's for emergencies; ensure adequate responses have been obtained
	Assess plan/services to ensure that town is providing meals/food to residents where needed
	Reevaluate safety/well-being of seniors who did not want to move
	Coordinate relocation of special needs individuals and pets
	Consider alternative energy supply, e.g. solar fields, as a way of paying for generators
	Consider locating utilities underground, where feasible
	Prioritize building inspectors' tasks (i.e. smaller emergencies will have to wait)
	Trim "problem trees" that may worsen the situation in future crises

### Communication

	Evaluate citizen responses to emergency; prepare to be criticized and look for valuable feedback
	Inform public on how crisis was handled; be transparent

### Leadership

	Re-affirm critical role of city government in responding to crisis — need for self-sufficiency
	Thank/acknowledge the people that helped during the crisis
	Need to conduct a debriefing after the crisis to figure out what went right/wrong
	Solicit input from staff and CBOs and community leaders to address crises/disasters in the future

*“You feel that nobody is coming to help you.”  
- Municipal Manager*