

December 2008 Ice Storm – Lessons Learned



The December 2008 Ice storm that hit New Hampshire and much of the Northeast taught many communities that there is a need for more citizen preparedness and preparedness education.

In the Southern New Hampshire Region this need is the focus of a new joint effort of the City of Manchester and the Southern New Hampshire Planning Commission. The Southern New Hampshire Region Community Preparedness Program aims to bring together all of the communities in the region to develop a plan and implement outreach in each the communities in order to increase citizen preparedness in times of emergency and disaster.

A recent meeting of community and emergency management representatives involved in the program focused on the lessons learned from the 2008 ice storm and the following themes emerged from those lessons in the Southern New Hampshire region.

- Public education
- Coordination among municipalities and regionally
- Better planning
- Communication
- Animal Services
- Emergency Shelters – Coordination and Supplies

Specific lessons learned cited during this meeting are:

1. There was an increase in the number of carbon monoxide poisonings as residents used generators inside their garages or switched to alternative heating sources. Public education is needed to prevent this in the future.
2. Several officials stated that there was no plan in place to address “shut ins”, and such individuals were often only discovered by neighbors once a fall or other injury occurred.
3. It was stated that points of distribution for water should be planned for and opened earlier than during this situation. Systems to handle water for people versus water for animals should also be addressed and included in community and regional planning efforts.

4. In regards to shelters, there was some concern that community shelters were not informed when regional shelters were being opened. As a result, there was a mixed message that was heading out to the public. It was noted that the regional shelter concept is a work in progress that was deployed early, and that this model will likely be the future of such disaster response.
5. At this point, concerns were raised that some members of the public, especially the elderly, may be unwilling to leave their communities to travel to a regional shelter. The public should be informed, ideally before the next disaster happens that they may need to make use of a regional facility instead of their local community shelter.
6. Of concern in the 2008 ice storm was where to house small pets and larger animals such as horses. Many of their owners would be unwilling to leave the home if they did not have a place that would take care of their pet. One suggestion involved creating a list of community resources that would have extra room in the event of a disaster. Such locations could be local farms and animal shelters.
7. A question was raised about the selection process for shelters, stating that some selected shelters appeared inadequate in that they were without municipal water or access to generators. It had been the policy of the state to limit the larger generators to only one per town, so towns would have to select where they thought they needed it most. In the future, more generators should become available for the multiple uses that are required in any given town.
8. Another population that requires special care during a disaster are those that require long term medical care or have other impairments. In Goffstown, where the shelter was a local school private classrooms were opened up so people with special needs could have a private space to sleep and receive care.