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PRACTICE NOTE

Emergency Public Information: The Metropolitan Government of Nashville and Davidson County, Tennessee, Use of an Emergency Community Hotline During a Disaster

PRACTICE

The Nashville, Tennessee, Mayor's Office of Emergency Management (OEM) worked with Metro Water Services to staff an Emergency Community Hotline during catastrophic floods in May 2010. The hotline received more than 22,000 calls in a 2-week period, providing critical information to the public, conducting rumor control, and alerting OEM to trends in calls received.

DESCRIPTION

On May 1 and 2, 2010, severe storms brought record-setting torrential rain to Nashville and Davidson County, Tennessee. Rainfall totals over a 38-hour period ranged from 13.57 inches at Nashville International Airport to 17.67 inches in the Bellevue area. The unprecedented rains resulted in flash floods and river flooding beginning mid-day on May 1, pushing water and debris into roads and properties. The Cumberland River and Mill Creek each exceeded their respective flood stages by more than 11 feet. From May 1 to 3, the Cumberland River at Nashville rose from 18 feet to a crest of 51.86 feet. The floods resulted in 10 deaths, damage to more than 10,900 structures, and billions of dollars worth of damages to public infrastructure, making it the costliest disaster in the history of Nashville and Davidson County.

Davidson County is located in central Tennessee and has a population of 626,681 (as of 2010). Nashville is its largest city and serves as both the county seat and the capital of Tennessee. Nashville and Davidson County has a consolidated city-county government structure.

Prior to the disaster, OEM and Metro Water Services agreed that the latter would staff an emergency community hotline that would serve as a "live-person connection" for citizens to provide and receive disaster information. On May 1, 2010, as flooding began to impact Nashville, OEM ordered a full activation of the Nashville and Davidson County Emergency Operations Center and the community hotline. The hotline was fully activated and staffed by 8:30 p.m. that evening. It provided Nashville and Davidson County



Flooding in Nashville (Source: FEMA)

residents with a range of emergency public information, including:

- How to request to be evacuated, how to access sheltering, or how to receive food or water;
- Accurate information about flooded roads or directions to circumvent flooded areas;
- How to donate money or goods;
- How to volunteer;
- Assistance on locating family members;
- Information about closures of government offices and businesses in flooded areas; and
- Reports of damages, flooding, debris, and power outages.

On May 4, 2010, President Barack Obama issued a major disaster declaration (DR-1909) for severe storms and flooding in Tennessee. This declaration included Nashville and Davidson County.

Community hotline staff members also provided rumor control and alerted OEM staff about trends in calls received. The hotline received 22,037 calls in the first 2 weeks after it was activated. Forty-six volunteers from Metro Water Services provided around-the-clock staffing of the hotline during this two-week period. Together, these volunteers logged 1,137 hours of work.

The Metropolitan Government of Nashville and Davidson County severe flooding after action report (AAR) concluded that the emergency community hotline was a major strength during flood response operations. The AAR identified additional measures that could further enhance the effectiveness of the hotline during future disaster responses, including:

- Updating the hotline system's technology;
- Formalizing the process of providing updates to the hotline supervisor, including standardized electronic updates;
- Having language interpreter services available;
- Expanding hotline staffing beyond the Metro Water Services; and
- Ensuring that all necessary resources and supplies for hotline staff are available for use immediately upon activation.



**Flood Debris in Bellevue
(Source: FEMA)**

CITATIONS

Metropolitan Government of Nashville and Davidson County, Tennessee. *Severe Flooding May 2010 After Action Report and Improvement Plan for the Metropolitan Government of Nashville and Davidson County*. 06 Jul 2011.

<https://www.lis.dhs.gov/docdetails/details.do?contentID=52542>

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. *Record Floods of Greater Nashville: Including Flooding in Middle Tennessee and Western Kentucky, May 1-4, 2010*. 11 Jan 2011.

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