

Stockton's Emergency Response: A Smooth Operator

Hurricanes, earthquakes, fires, explosions, influenza — all emergencies, hazards, and disasters have one key concept in common: an emergency operations plan (EOP). Nearly one week before Hurricane Sandy ravaged the New Jersey coast, communities prepared for the storm, but many were not nearly prepared for what actually took place. Through constant training and exercise, staff at The Richard Stockton College in Galloway, New Jersey reviewed their EOP and this formulated a successful response to Sandy.

Stockton's campus community is comprised of nearly 8,400 students, 1,000 faculty staff, and 2,400 residential students. With such a large number of people on campus daily, the immediate safety of all individuals is the main priority. President Herman J. Saatkamp has worked with several universities and medical facilities and he understands the importance of emergency plans.

"One of the tasks of education, not just for emergency planning but the whole education, is to not be victimized," Saatkamp said. "Think ahead, plan ahead, and prepare. When it comes to thinking of preparing for emergency situations whether it is a storm, shooter, or other emergencies and disasters that can occur on campus, the real trick is to not be victimized by the circumstances. Think ahead, prepare for it, and adapt to the changing circumstances as needed. That's what's called being educated."

EOPs define various important emergency criteria such as who is responsible for what tasks, who gathers needed supplies, and what areas are the designated safe locations. EOPs are an important part of the overall operation of a community or company. At Stockton College, the EOP is an all hazard plan and each core group involved knows their roles for all vulnerabilities.

Their EOP includes 19 annexes that are designed to be stand-alone documents that can be flexibly used depending upon the incident. The plan is a work in progress and it is exercised through tabletop and full scale scenarios that involve active participation of various groups, including federal agencies when possible.

Prior to Sandy, the EOP was activated and Stockton staff did several pre-storm activities including preparing for flooding and high winds and topping off vehicle fuel tanks and the campus fuel station tanks. Stockton staff also closed the campus and the appropriate staff and police were placed on stand-by to assist any students, faculty, staff, or evacuees that had no other place to go. By going door-to-door, the campus residential staff estimated nearly 80 students would need emergency housing. Officials then planned to house those students and the 20 staff members that would remain on campus for the duration of the storm.

"Sending the residential students home was a good idea," Police Chief and Emergency Management Coordinator, Glenn Miller, said. "Had we not sent the students home, it would have been difficult to feed 2,400 students as all roads in the area were closed for several days." Since not every refrigerator is on emergency generators, the college can only store a limited amount of food for long term.

Amongst the nearly 220,000 Atlantic City Electric customers without power after the storm, Stockton College officials worked steadily around the clock to ensure their campus community maintained

operations throughout the storm. To add to that burden, the Atlantic County Office of Emergency Management requested the college to activate their reception center for Atlantic City evacuees. Utilizing procedures and relying on experience from prior exercises made this an easy transformation from a preparedness mode to a response mode.

After Sandy, a large number of residents were left without homes to return to and others were greatly impacted by the widespread power outage. As specified in the Shelter, Reception, and Care Annex of Stockton's EOP, Stockton provided Seaview Hotel as a temporary housing facility for residents displaced by the storm. Seaview Country Club and Resort was purchased by Stockton in 2010 to be used as a source of revenue for the college as well as a means to provide additional student housing. At its peak, Seaview had nearly 60 rooms occupied due to Sandy.

Susan Maguire, a Little Egg Harbor Township resident, completely lost her lagoon-front home when four feet of water flooded it after Sandy impacted a nearby Ocean County community. With temporary housing funds, Maguire has been able to stay at Seaview which is close to her two jobs and home. "It was devastating to not be able to go back to my home," she said. "The entire situation is overwhelming but the comfort in it all is being able to stay at Seaview."

Maguire's neighborhood received notice of a mandatory evacuation prior to Sandy. She packed a backpack and her laptop—expecting to return home after the storm passed through. "I never thought this would happen," she said. "I thought I was going to just be gone for a few days. I've been displaced for six months now. The staff at Seaview understands and they make me feel at home here and that has made my transition easier. The material things are meaningless; it's the people that help you through your situation that makes everything easier."

In addition to the displaced residents, emergency workers also stayed at Seaview. Approximately 100 staff (at peak) and emergency workers (tree cutters, electricians, support staff, administrative staff, and three groups of power workers) were housed at Seaview for two and a half weeks. By housing emergency workers close to the disaster-impacted sites, Stockton College helped ensure operational continuity was restored as soon as possible.

"I feel very good about the way our plan works," Saatkamp said. "Our plan has been in place for a long time. The important part is the leadership. Had our campus not been safe and secure, we could not have done all these things."

Through actual events and exercises, Stockton has been able to identify areas in need of improvement. After every event and exercise, officials debrief and write after action reports. These reports identify accomplishments and deficiencies and are utilized to identify recognitions of individuals for their contributions and the correction of deficiencies. The plan affords individuals the ability to adapt and overcome unpredictable situations.

The debrief session and after action report for the EOP during Sandy has brought to light some deficiencies, such as the need for additional emergency generator power. If the power outage would have lasted longer than it did, maintaining campus systems would have become problematic for the staff.



“The plan has been in place for ten years and it is a ten year evolution,” Miller said. “Regular testing and exercising of our EOP is the most effective method of ensuring the college is as prepared as possible to respond to major incidents and emergencies.”

In addition, the exercises have addressed a need to organize, train, and certify several Community Emergency Response Teams. Today, students are becoming more involved with the college’s emergency response efforts and have presented the idea of creating a first aid squad.

“The key to success is support from senior leadership, faculty, staff, and students and an emergency operation plan that is specific in some areas, yet flexible enough to adapt and overcome unforeseen situations,” Miller said.