

3-15-13 What a storm! What a lesson!

Whoof! That was quite a storm; especially considering that we weren't supposed to get much of anything, here where we reside a couple towns inland. The already battered New England coast was once again going to see flooding and erosion but a little ways inland, we were expecting two to four inches of snow. That's not unusual for the first or second week in March in New England and then it quickly disappears. Well, usually. So, we weren't fully prepared for what we received.

We woke up to lots more snow than the whole storm was supposed to bring. Was it over? Could it really snow for most of the day, as the reports were then saying? How about all day long? People were joking that we must have missed out on two key words: Two to four inches of snow: yeah, "per hour"!

Some shoveling and four wheel drive allowed me to get to work but I was astounded at the white-out conditions. The early birds arrived to find the town hall parking lot not yet plowed. Fortunately, there were no accidents, as the cars attempted to enter the sloped drive. I decided to drive around to get a better idea of the conditions. Bad idea. I did get a better idea of what was happening and I was able to report some branches blocking a road but then I decided, to get off the road and get back to the Town Hall.

By late morning a little more than 300 homes were without power in Halifax and, without power, people get cold. While it was not known if a shelter would be needed, as it was during the blizzard, the call went out to CERT (Community Emergency Response Team) to staff a "warming center" at the Halifax Elementary School. There were more than enough volunteers for a warming center, which is a very different kind of commitment compared to setting up cots, preparing/offering food, assisting people with all kinds of needs and staying overnight.

The preparations for a shelter necessitate communications with other departments (many of which are already out straight during a storm) for assistance with building and equipment knowledge. Those interactions are numerous and the plans are detailed and complicated compared to offering a warming center. The goal is the same for both: offer safety and security to save lives and prevent injury when either is compromised or risked during emergencies.

That raises many questions, though. While offering well intentioned shelters and warming centers, the risks of that very offering, both for the givers and the receivers, have to be considered. It brings more people out on the road, when they are even plowed yet. The drivers offering to transport individuals were faced with unplowed driveways and snow filled walkways. That might be fine for young people but poses

real dangers for the elderly and the drivers weren't capable of also shoveling out each person.

With that in mind, one of the topics I think you will hear more about in the near future is the importance of "sheltering in place". Do you have enough water? (Have at least a gallon per

person per day.) How could you make water safe if it was questionable? (Have some plain bleach on hand.) What should you stock? Do you have three days of non-perishable food? Down blankets and iron oxide pocket warmers are great for keeping warm for many hours. What medications are essential and can you refill before a storm?

You'll consider these questions and more when you visit [ready.gov](http://www.ready.gov) and look at sheltering in place. <http://www.ready.gov/document/family-supply-list>

Their main categories are: Be Informed, Make a plan, Build a kit, Get involved, Protect your business and Fun and games for kids. The circumstances for sheltering in place are many and they vary from short term to long term, from meteorological (tornado) to disease (pandemic) from local to widespread. No matter what the circumstance, though, you begin to realize that even though CERT, Fire, Police, Highway, Building Maintenance and others accomplished so much in the midst of a storm, learning how to shelter in place is a very responsible thing to do.

I was in good company at the warming center last Friday. We talked, got to know one another better, and, at times entertained one another. Some even read and learned during the entertainment. I don't know how he did it but Mike studied for the next level of being a ham radio operator while I attempted my imitation of mule and donkey braying. It was all part of the master plan, after all: entertain yourself and others while barricaded, I mean volunteering at the warming center.

All were safe but we have more to work on. And "we" means you, too. Learn how to shelter in place. If you are capable of helping, join a list of volunteers, list your capabilities and limitations, agree to a CORI check and be on call. You can always say no when the calls comes.

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