

11-9-12 Stories of Sandy Will Survive

Hurricane Sandy created stories, images and memories, along with destruction. Some stories are light and amusing; many are narratives of devastation; some are accounts of death. They will be passed down through the generations, for it was that memorable. It should not and will not be forgotten.

Locally, Plympton and Halifax survived just fine, as far as I know, once the wires were repaired and trees removed from the streets. Our power wasn't out for long: minutes, hours, a few days. Even brief power outages teach lessons, for many have never experienced them. My niece, Emma was visiting when we lost the power. In Plympton, we all have wells and that means we lose the use of our water when we lose our electricity. It was still daylight, though, and that was a help, for organizing our bottled water and getting set up for such things as hand washing.

Emma had just left the TV room, mentioning something or other, when, a couple minutes later my daughter, Joanna, exclaimed, "Wait a minute! I think Emma said she was going to take a shower!" I flew out of the room, Joanna's dog in hot pursuit of whatever the apparent emergency was, and I ran upstairs, which was by now getting pretty dark. I began to knock on the walls and the doors and finally the bathroom door to get Emma's attention. "Emma, you're not supposed to use the water! Did you use soap yet?" (Poor Emma. She had no idea what Aunt Cathy was worried about.) I asked again, "Did you use soap?" If she said yes, she had begun to wash her hair or had just begun using soap, I had to decide if I could allow her to continue running the water to rinse off or if we were going to somehow manage that out of the shower. That would not have been easily achieved!

Emma responded in a frantic voice, "No, I didn't use any soap!" (Whew!) "Okay, good! Shut the water off right now! That water is the water left in the pipes but the well is not working and using the water can wreck the well pump!"

Oh, that story will be passed on and I am certain there will be versions of it, including Aunt Cathy's Shower Rules!

For thousands of others along the East Coast, however, the legends retold will be of landmarks and homes washed away. They will include images of the National Guard and the American Red Cross, living in shelters and dealing with numerous agencies such as their home owner's insurance company.

And then there are the many who probably thought the worst was over when they realized they had survived the winds and outages, only to discover the numerous public health environmental repercussions of a storm of this magnitude: flooded septic systems, broken gas pipes, carbon monoxide poisoning from improper use of generators, rotting food, wandering lost pets, dead wild animals, and contaminated well water, to name a few.

Locally, in 02367 and 02338, we survived. If you have been touched by this catastrophic weather event named Sandy in some way, through a friend or relative perhaps, you know what I'm talking about and you understand the very real need.

If you are looking for additional resources, thanks to the National Environmental Health Association, (NEHA) you can learn from the following:

NEHA – www.neha.org/preparedness/index.html

CDC – www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/hurricanes/workers.asp

FEMA – www.fema.gov/

NYC OEM – www.nyc.gov/html/oem/html/home/home.shtml

***** If you would like to help those who lost homes and did not have flood insurance (because it was not recommended or “needed”) or are looking for legitimate useful ways to donate to reputable organizations, here's NEHA's suggestion: check out this site helping you to find reputable organizations to which you can donate: www.charitynavigator.org

Interested in becoming more active in the Hurricane Sandy response? NEHA recommends visiting the Emergency Management Assistance Compact (EMAC) Web site – www.emacweb.org – for available opportunities. If you have some time and some talents, you are needed!

I understand if you don't have the time or finances to travel because you have all you can handle in your own private life. You are still needed and appreciated locally, where you can join such organizations such as Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) and/or Medical Reserve Corps (MRC).

Give it a thought while retelling those Sandy Stories. We sure could use your help!

Cathleen Drinan is the health agent for Halifax, MA. Please tell her your hurricane stories at 781 283 6768 or at cdrinan@town.halifax.ma.us