



United Way of King County

A REGION AT RISK: IMPROVING OUR READINESS TO RESPOND TO DISASTER

*An Examination of the December 14, 2006 Windstorm and its Effects on
Vulnerable Populations and Nonprofit Human Services Agencies in King
County*

**Report and Recommendations of the United Way of King County
Task Force on Emergency Preparedness**

March 20, 2007

Karen Reed Consulting, LLC





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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The December Windstorm was a severe storm event, causing unprecedented damage to the electrical grid in King County with resulting power outages that lasted for nearly a week or longer in many areas. Yet in some senses the Windstorm was a minor natural event, far smaller in scope than a large earthquake or other major disaster. The Windstorm provided a window on the strengths and weaknesses in our emergency response systems, and highlights opportunities for improvement. Major disasters by definition have impacts beyond the boundaries and capacities of any individual agency or jurisdiction's capacity to respond. Effective response requires that the many pieces of our response capacity can come together and work together easily and quickly, with some commonality of vision.

The Task Force concludes that the region is not prepared to deal with the impacts on vulnerable and special populations in a major disaster event. Although local governments and many nonprofit agencies have disaster response plans, in the Windstorm's aftermath many of these organizations could not maintain operations. The strength of our community response is dependent on the ability of nonprofits to continue to endure and serve in a disaster. Generally, nonprofit human services agencies are not adequately prepared to ensure continuity of services during a major disaster. Moreover, despite aggressive public education campaigns encouraging individual emergency preparedness, it was clear that most residents of King County were unprepared to be self-sufficient in the Windstorm and its aftermath.

In regards to vulnerable and special needs populations, the Task Force finds that Limited English Speaking, frail elderly, and medically dependent individuals were particularly hard hit by the Windstorm, and that many traditional means of communicating emergency information are not effective to reach these groups or other vulnerable groups (such as those with hearing or sight impairments). Additional work is needed to anticipate and address the disaster-related needs of vulnerable and special populations.

The Task Force report makes 17 findings and conclusions, and recommends seven areas and issues for action:

1. Strengthen emergency planning by, and emergency response capacities of, nonprofit human services agencies, through additional funding, coordination, technical assistance and other means.
2. Build capacity to serve vulnerable and special populations in an emergency by building relationships with these groups and the grass roots organizations that serve them.
3. Increase emphasis on building relationships between nonprofit agencies and local governments. All agencies should know their counterparts and partner agencies in the

region, and have up-to-date emergency contact information for them. The capacities of the various agencies to respond in an emergency should be understood.

4. Identify and implement new strategies for public emergency preparedness campaigns.
5. Clarify the role and strengthen capacity of the 2-1-1 Call System to serve in an emergency.
6. Improve coordination, capacity and deployment of sheltering resources.
7. Strengthen emergency response plans and capacity of assisted living and group care facilities.

The United Way Task Force on Emergency Preparedness was formed in January 2007 to examine the December 14, 2006, Windstorm and its impacts, with a particular focus on human services agencies and vulnerable and special populations in King County. The Task Force report is based on input received at a five-hour panel presentation session on February 14, at which the Task Force heard from 23 panelists representing nonprofit, local government, state and federal government agencies.



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INTRODUCTION

On December 14, 2006, the Puget Sound area was hit by a driving wind and rainstorm that produced the most weather related damage to the region in a decade. Wind gusts hit King County at up to 69 miles per hour. Unusually cold temperatures and record rainfall in the Seattle area combined with strong winds resulting in significant and widespread damage. The extent and duration of damage to the electrical grid was unprecedented: over 70 percent of Puget Sound Energy customers and nearly half of Seattle City Light customers lost power. The storm knocked out power to over a million residents. Hundreds of thousands of people were without power for days, and nearly a 100,000 had no power for a week or more.

Many of the people most adversely affected by the December Windstorm (“Windstorm”) were from identifiable populations including immigrants and refugees where English is often the second language, frail seniors or others in assisted living facilities or nursing homes that were inadequately equipped with back-up generators and supplies, as well as medically fragile adults in adult family homes that lacked back-up power. Some people sought to heat their homes or cook inside with equipment inappropriate for indoor use: eight people died from, and seventy people received hyperbaric treatment for, carbon monoxide poisoning.

The Windstorm provided a window on the strengths and weaknesses in our emergency response systems, and highlights opportunities for improvement. Major disasters by definition have impacts beyond the boundaries and capacities of any individual agency or jurisdiction’s capacity to respond. Effective response requires that the many pieces of our response capacity can come together and work together easily and quickly, with some commonality of vision. The United Way of King County formed the Task Force on Emergency Preparedness (“Task Force”) in January 2007 to examine the events of the Windstorm from the unique perspective of community leaders and lay persons working with human services agencies. This report sets forth the findings, conclusions and recommendations of the Task Force. The particular focus of the Task Force was the impact of, and response to, the Windstorm in terms of the human services needs of special and vulnerable populations in King County. Following the Windstorm, several agencies initiated “after-action” assessments in efforts to identify ways to improve disaster response. This report is intended to be both complementary to, and independent of, other Windstorm assessments.

TASK FORCE PURPOSE STATEMENT, TIMELINE AND PROCESS

The Task Force was designed to be a time-limited, quick-start, short duration effort involving members of the United Way Board of Trustees and other community leaders. A list of Task Force members is set forth at **Exhibit A**. The project's purpose was to:

- Review the impact of the Windstorm on the human services system in King County and the community's response to the human services needs of individuals and families in King County in the aftermath of the storm;
- Identify successes in the community's response to human services needs in the aftermath of the Windstorm and opportunities for improvement--taking care not to cast blame but to identify gaps in need of attention; and
- Develop concrete, actionable strategies that will significantly improve our community's ability to respond to disasters by strengthening community-wide response to human services needs likely to arise in a future disaster, with a primary focus on preventing loss of life and severe privation and suffering.

The Task Force met four times, beginning January 30, 2007, and ending March 9, 2007. The second meeting of the Task Force, on February 14, was dedicated to hearing five hours of presentation from 23 panelists from nonprofit, local government, state and federal government agencies. Meeting 3, on February 28, was focused on reaching consensus on a set of findings and recommendations. Meeting 4 was directed at approving this report.¹

The February 14 Panel Presentations included brief oral presentations accompanied by written statements from all Panelists. Summary written materials were requested to address:

- Agencies' experiences in the windstorm;
- Observed strengths and weaknesses in the response of the presenter's agency or other agencies and organizations;
- Observations about ways in which emergency response could have been improved; and
- Recommendations on specific actions that should be taken to improve response capabilities for the future, with a particular focus on meeting the needs of special or vulnerable populations.

¹ Copies of agendas and meeting minutes are available in electronic format by contacting the Community Services Team at United Way of King County (CommunityServices@uwkc.org; [206] 461- 4555).

Table 1 sets forth the agenda for the Panel Presentations and identifies the individuals and agencies participating. There were three distinct panels. The first focused on the experiences and observations of *agencies and organizations serving special and vulnerable populations in King County*.² The second focused on *coordinating emergency infrastructure* (such as the media and 2-1-1 call system) and *major non-government responders* (such as the American Red Cross). The third panel included *government responders* from the local, state and federal level. Several panelists stayed to observe the entire afternoon of presentations; several of them noted that the information presented was unique in its scope as compared to other after-action assessments of the Windstorm.

Table 1: February 14 Panel Presentations to United Way of King County Task Force on Emergency Preparedness on the Impacts and Lessons Learned from the December 2006 Windstorm: Schedule and Presenters

PANEL 1: Agencies/Organizations Serving Special Populations in King County

Focus: Given the experience of your agency and its clients in the December 2006 windstorm what ideas do you have that will make our community better prepared to respond in the next disaster?

Impoverished Populations

Jan Dickerman, Director, Housing and Child Development, Hopelink
(written information also submitted by Dini Duclos, Executive Director, **Multi-Service Center**)

Disabled (Physically Disabled, Deaf & Hard of Hearing)

Susie Burdick, CEO, and Donna Platt, Emergency Manager, Hearing, Speech and Deafness Center

Seniors / Frail Elderly

Dick Sugiyama, Program Manager, Seattle Division on Aging and Disability Services

Limited English or Non-English Proficient / Ethnic/ Religious Special Needs

Ngy Hul, Executive Director, Refugee Federation Service Center

Homeless & Shelter Dependent

Rick Friedhoff, Executive Director, Compass Center

² “Special and Vulnerable Populations” as used in this report means those groups identified as “Vulnerable Populations Segments” by the Seattle/King County Coordinated Assistance Network, including: physically disabled; mentally disabled; blind; deaf, deaf-blind, hard of hearing; medically dependent, medically compromised; chemically dependent; limited English or non-English proficient; children below age of majority separated from parents/guardians; homeless and shelter dependent, impoverished; undocumented persons; ethnic/religious special needs; emerging or transient special needs; and pets.

Table 1: Continued

PANEL 2: Coordinating Infrastructure, Major Non-Government Responders

Focus: Given the experience of your agency and its clients in the December 2006 windstorm, what ideas do you have that will make our community better prepared to respond in the next disaster particularly as related to meeting the needs of the clients of special or vulnerable populations?

Media Representative (Radio), Tom Tangney, Managing Editor, KIRO Radio

2-1-1, Kathleen Southwick, Executive Director, Crisis Clinic

Red Cross & Washington Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (WAVOAD) Susan Pelaez Response & Preparedness Manager, and Chair of Washington WAVOAD

**Seattle-King County Coordinated Assistance Network (CAN), Michelle McDaniel, Coordinator
Puget Sound Energy, Mary Robinson, Manager, Operations Continuity**

PANEL 3: Government Responders

Focus: Given the experience of your agency and its clients in the December 2006 windstorm, what ideas do you have that will make our community better prepared to respond in the next disaster particularly as related to meeting the needs of the clients of special or vulnerable populations? Is there a need for further clarification of roles and responsibilities between government responders and non-government responders? If so, what clarification would be helpful?

King County Office of Emergency Management, Timothy Doyle, Project/Program Manager

King County Department of Natural Resources and Parks, Bob Burns, Deputy Director

Public Health – Seattle & King County, Sandy Ciske, Regional Health Officer

**City of Seattle Barb Graff, Director Emergency Management and Alan Painter, Deputy Director,
Department of Human Services**

City of Auburn Sarah Miller, Emergency Preparedness Manager, Police Department

City of Renton Chief Dave Daniels, Fire Department

**City of Bellevue Vernon Owens, Emergency Management, Fire Department and Emily Leslie, Human
Services Manager**

City of Shoreline Gail Marsh, Emergency Management Coordinator

**State of Washington Emergency Management Division, Terry Egan, Ed. D., Planning,
Exercise, & Training Manager, Washington State Emergency Management Division**

**State of Washington National Guard, Colonel Ronald Kapral, J-3 Director of Military Support to
Civil Authorities, Washington National Guard**

FEMA, Dick Balnicky, Voluntary Agency Liaison, FEMA Region X

In asking Panelists to prepare their remarks, the goal of the Panel Presentations was described as follows: “The goal of Panel Presentations is to provide an opportunity for agencies involved in emergency response in King County to convey their ideas and recommendations as to what these agencies need to be able to enhance their response in an emergency, and for the Task Force to receive ideas from these agencies on system improvements – in communications, coordination, outreach, etc., – that could help all emergency responders be more effective.”

After each presentation, there was an opportunity for Task Force members to ask questions of panelists. The Task Force developed its findings, conclusions and recommendations presented in this report based on the input received at the Panel Presentations. The Task Force did not conduct additional independent research on the Windstorm or its impacts.

REVIEW OF INFORMATION FROM PANEL PRESENTATIONS

The Panel Presentations provided a wealth of information, observations and recommendations from professionals working with vulnerable and special populations and in emergency response.³ The Task Force is grateful for their time and assistance and impressed by Panelists’ candor and willingness to offer recommendations to improve both their own agency performance and regional emergency response efforts.

While it is important to acknowledge that the Panel Presentations were neither a comprehensive survey nor an in-depth analysis of all aspects of the Windstorm or all the agencies or populations impacted, it is nevertheless useful to review some of the key information received from Panelists in order to provide context for the Task Force’s findings, recommendations and conclusions.

- ***The Windstorm***

As noted in the Introduction to this report, the Windstorm was a severe weather event.⁴ The extent and duration of damage to the electrical grid in King County was unprecedented: over a million residents lost electric power for some period of time. The combination of wind and rain resulted in downed power lines, downed trees, and flood damage resulted in closure of over forty roads in unincorporated areas. Traffic signals were not working in many areas across the County. Torrential rain caused serious flooding in some parts of Seattle, leading to the death of one resident. As power outages continued, some people sought to heat their homes or cook inside with equipment inappropriate for indoor use: eight people died from, and seventy people were treated for, carbon monoxide poisoning.⁵ The combination of record rainfall and lack of power caused the West Point sewage treatment plant to go offline for several hours and two key pump stations to fail, resulting in millions of gallons of untreated sewage flowing into Puget Sound and Lake Washington.

³ Information as submitted by all Panelists will be available on the United Way of King County website, www.uwkc.org.

⁴ Statements regarding the Windstorm impacts are based primarily on information from King County Panelists (Dept. of Natural Resources and Parks, Office of Emergency Management) and Public Health--Seattle & King County). Information sources throughout this report are generally referred to by the Panelist’s agency; the individuals representing each agency on the Panels are identified in Table 1.

Hundreds of homes sustained serious damage as a result of the wind and rain, primarily from felled trees and power lines. As the outage continued, back-up generators ran out of fuel; people seeking fuel for their vehicles found many gas stations closed due to lack of power, or emptied of available fuel. Some areas with power and services experienced major gridlock, as residents from areas without power sought supplies and gasoline.

9-1-1 systems were overloaded with non-emergency calls of people seeking information about when power would be restored, where gas could be purchased, and other issues. The King County Emergency Coordination Center (KCECC) was activated for 10 days, the longest activation period in its history.

Yet the storm's impacts were geographically uneven, and were minor compared to the impact on this region that would result from a major earthquake. Some areas saw little rain or wind damage; some had no power outages or outages that were quickly repaired, while other areas of the County were without power for well over a week. In the aftermath of the storm, emergency proclamations were issued by King County, the Governor, and a number of cities in East and North King County (Bellevue, Kirkland, Mercer Island, Redmond, Snoqualmie and Woodinville) and the Snoqualmie Tribe.⁶

Most Panelists observed that citizens were largely unprepared to care for themselves in the Windstorm--for three days, let alone a much longer period of time--despite the significant effort that has been put into the "3-days, 3-ways" public education emergency preparedness campaign. As stated by Dr. Terry Egan, a panelist from the State Office of Emergency Management: "The public education effort is not doing the job, at all levels of government."⁷

- ***Vulnerable and Special Populations***

Members of certain vulnerable populations, particularly Limited English Speaking groups, frail elderly and medically dependent individuals, were particularly hard hit by the Windstorm. Panelists reported impacts to many vulnerable and special populations.

A major example of the impact on Limited English Speaking populations was carbon monoxide poisoning. Despite the notable efforts of the Public Health – Seattle & King County to issue media alerts, publish multi-lingual flyers with warnings, and reach out directly to Limited English Speaking populations through its Vulnerable Populations Action Team (VPAT), eight people died from carbon monoxide poisoning, related to heating or cooking indoors with equipment inappropriate for indoor use. There were 293 reported cases of carbon monoxide illness. Most of these cases were members of Limited English Speaking populations.⁸

Speaking to the carbon monoxide poisoning issues, the Director of the Refugee Federation Service Center, Ngy Hul, noted to the Task Force that Refugee or non-English speaking populations come from such different life experiences and different housing types that they simply may not have understood *why* using equipment inappropriate for indoor use for heating or cooking would create a health hazard, as cooking indoors in their native countries--where homes are typically more open to

⁶ Source: Public Health-Seattle & King County.

⁷ Source: Terry Egan, Planning Exercise & Training Unit Manager, State Emergency Management Division.

⁸ Source: Public Health-Seattle & King County.

the air--posed no health hazard.⁹ He further noted that refugees (a population in excess of 100,000 in King County) were generally unprepared for the emergency and lack the family networks from which many people receive assistance in an emergency. He observed the importance of having a network of grass roots organizations in place in advance to be able to assist these populations. Mr. Hul also noted that there are a lack of good connections between government emergency responders and grass roots organizations serving refugee and limited English speaking populations.

Many nursing homes and boarding homes lost power and did not have adequate, if any, back-up power generation capacity. Adult family homes emergency planning appeared to be weak in many instances.¹⁰ “We were very, very lucky not to have any fatalities,” noted Dick Sugiyama, with the Seattle Human Services Department Case Management Program, speaking of his agencies’ client population. Lack of electricity for extended periods impacted ability to operate oxygen machines or power-assisted wheelchairs. A representative from the City of Shoreline observed that while many group homes or adult family homes reported they were fine, subsequent on-site checks indicated serious problems with back-up generator capacity or other supplies.¹¹

Persons with hearing or sight disabilities are uniquely dependent on high-tech communications systems requiring electricity (TTY systems, email). The Hearing, Speech and Deafness Center sent email messages regarding storm impacts to their clients.¹² Given widespread and extended power outages, it is unclear how many of their clients in fact received such communications. The demand for interpreters to assist hearing or sight impaired persons or TTY systems in the aftermath of the Windstorm was not included in information received by the Task Force.

Homeless individuals seeking services in downtown Seattle reportedly observed little unusual impact from the storms as shelters in downtown did not lose electricity for any extended period of time. Some homeless individuals in outlying suburban areas were impacted by loss of electricity at shelters.¹³

Some of the individuals and clients served by nonprofit agencies did not appreciate the severity of the storm, or its impact on provider’s ability to deliver services on which they relied, and were thus frustrated by the response and services received.¹⁴

- ***Non profit human services agencies***

As noted by Panelist Alan Painter, representing the City of Seattle Human Services Department, the strength of our community response is dependent on the ability of nonprofits to continue to endure and serve in a disaster. Despite the heroic efforts of many individuals staffing foodbanks, shelters and other service agencies in the aftermath of the Windstorm, there were many challenges for nonprofit human services agencies resulting from the extended period in which electricity was not available.

⁹ Source: Ngy Hul, Executive Director, Refugee Federation Service Center.

¹⁰ Source: Crisis Clinic; City of Shoreline; City of Seattle Human Services Department.

¹¹ Source: Gail Marsh, City of Shoreline.

¹² Source: Hearing Speech and Deafness Center.

¹³ Source: The Compass Center, Hopelink.

¹⁴ Source: Hopelink.

There were at least two very different dimensions to the challenges. One challenge was being unable to provide service due to *logistical challenges* (lack of electricity, heat, fuel, transportation, staff). A second challenge was being unable to help due to a *lack of information* (where to refer people, what to tell people to do to help themselves, who to contact for assistance, gaps in emergency response protocols).

Many nonprofit agencies had to close their doors due to lack of electricity, inadequate back-up generation capacity and fuel, or the inability to operate telephone systems. As a result, they were unable to help serve their client base. “We were totally unable to respond until our power was restored, with the exception of the Food Bank,” wrote Dini Duclos, Executive Director of the Multi-Service Center. Organization staff and volunteers were in many instances limited in their ability to respond by their own personal situations—family members needing help; inability to find day care; lack of transportation or vehicle fuel. Over the course of the week, staff burnout became a factor for some agencies.¹⁵ Foodbank resources were particularly strained by school closures, as many children rely on school lunch and feeding programs.¹⁶ Nine of 10 clinics operated by Public Health—Seattle & King County lost power and had to close for one day.

Lack of back-up power led to serious issues with nursing homes across the county. The American Red Cross does not provide special needs sheltering.¹⁷ After assessing the situation, and at the direction of the King County Executive, Public Health Seattle-King County opened, operated and supported the first ever medical needs shelter in King County located at Bellevue Community College. Over 40 individuals with medical needs sought shelter in this facility over a five day period. One nursing home in East King County was forced to evacuate during the event and transported 36 patients to the medical needs shelter.¹⁸

In terms of information gaps, one notable example came from Hopelink staff, who reported the agency had no “triage protocol” in place to help determine how the few transportation trips available should be allocated to serve its clients; therefore, a protocol had to be improvised on the spot. Similarly, the Refugee Service Center Director noted his agency generally did not know what to tell people about how to get help in an emergency. It was also observed that both government agencies and nonprofit agencies in some cases lacked emergency contact information for critical nonprofit agency partners, such as homecare supervisors and directors.¹⁹

- ***Sheltering Issues***

The Task Force heard considerable information about problems with sheltering. The most significant sheltering challenges seem to have been around coordinating deployment of sheltering resources for the general population, rather than for the homeless. As a result of these issues, a regional sheltering summit has been convened to find better coordination and deployment mechanisms. The work of that summit has not yet been concluded and this report does not attempt to duplicate that effort. Some of the key information on sheltering delivered by Panelists is noted below.

¹⁵ Source: Hopelink, Multi-Service Center, Seattle Human Services Dept., American Red Cross.

¹⁶ Source: Multi-Service Center.

¹⁷ Source: American Red Cross.

¹⁸ Source: Public Health-Seattle & King County.

¹⁹ Source: Seattle Human Services Dept.

Panelists reported that the shelter needs of individuals were quite varied: many simply wanted a “warming center” where they could get coffee, information and warm up. Individuals preferred to sleep at home, even if that home was cold and dark.²⁰ However, simple “warming centers” were generally not available. Three American Red Cross overnight shelters were opened in King County; the City of Seattle Parks Department opened and operated four shelters. In addition, many community shelters were opened in other cities. Shelter locations were determined in part based on areas with electricity. However, the number of individuals seeking overnight shelter was relatively small, estimated to be well under 1,000. The peak number of individuals in Red Cross shelters in King County was reported at 250 individuals on Monday, December 18.²¹

The Task Force heard that there were far more shelters opened than were actually needed. The Task Force also was told that individuals will not travel far to go to a shelter. And, it was reported that people may stay away from a shelter even if they need one, out of cultural concerns (language, food) or concerns as to whether a shelter could address individual special needs (translators, TTY, medications). For example, the Task Force was told that persons with hearing or sight disabilities may be reluctant or unable to access emergency resources, particularly shelter, if staff at those facilities is not trained to work with hearing or sight impaired persons.²²

Communications about shelter availability was particularly problematic. There was a lack of information about shelters (i.e., location, their capacities) which made it difficult to help vulnerable persons. Some agencies did not have pre-existing arrangements or coordination protocols with local governments to know where shelters would be, how to best communicate with local authorities, or how agencies could help with various service needs.²³

Although King County Parks²⁴ remains tasked with regional sheltering for areas outside cities (i.e., rural and urban unincorporated areas) it has over recent years transferred most of its facilities that could be used for sheltering to cities and nonprofit organizations. Speaking to the Task Force, the Deputy Director of Department of Natural Resources and Parks reported that because of this diminished capacity, there may be a need to discuss how to best address sheltering needs throughout the County.

One notable sheltering “first” was the opening of an emergency pet shelter by the Humane Society for Seattle/King County.²⁵ American Red Cross does not provide sheltering for pets, but was notified of the need for this type of shelter through the King County Emergency Coordination Center. Pet owners may be reluctant to go to a shelter if a solution cannot also be found for their pets.

²⁰ Source: KIRO, City of Auburn, American Red Cross.

²¹ Source: American Red Cross Serving King & Kitsap Counties.

²² Source: Hearing Speech and Deafness Center.

²³ Source: Multi-Service Center, American Red Cross, City of Bellevue, Seattle Human Services Dept.

²⁴ King County Parks is a Division of the County’s Department of Natural Resources and Parks.

²⁵ Source: American Red Cross.

- *Communication Systems*

Nonprofits and government agencies alike found that traditional communications systems were ineffective in the Windstorm and its aftermath. Websites with contact information and shelter information could not be accessed because computers had no power. The same was true for television. Most home telephones require electricity to work, except simpler models that plug directly into the phone jack. Telephone systems at government agencies or nonprofits also require electricity for operation. On the positive side, the emergency 800 MHz radio system used by fire and police agencies, school districts and other government agencies worked very well, a marked contrast to the situation following the Nisqually Earthquake.²⁶

As a result of the lack of electricity, radio stations became a major source of public information. Radio is arguably the most relied upon medium of communication in a disaster. In the Windstorm, the newspapers were not printed for a time, and lack of power prevented many citizens from receiving television news. Given the importance of radio in emergency communications, the back-up broadcasting capacity of radio stations is an important consideration that may or may not be addressed by current governmental regulations and oversight. For example, KIRO has back-up broadcast towers on Cougar Mountain and Vashon Island. Yet KIRO would be off the air if those towers were damaged or could not be reached due to transportation challenges. There are reportedly no formal “mutual aid” agreements between major broadcast outlets, to ensure broadcasts can continue in a major emergency. Rather, the public would be dependent on the goodwill of these private firms or the governmentally operated emergency radio channels.²⁷ It should also be noted that Limited English Speaking populations may receive little benefit from the major media likely to remain on the air in an emergency, as these stations typically broadcast only in English.

Alternatives to traditional, electricity-reliant communications systems did evolve spontaneously in the Windstorm response. For example, agencies used community bulletin postings at community gathering places.²⁸ In some cities, staff made door to door visits to talk to residents, and flyers were placed in the U.S. mail or hand-distributed by letter carriers.

The Task Force was told that 9-1-1 systems were swamped with non-emergency calls.²⁹ In addition to calling 9-1-1, residents called radio stations for information. The media was in most instances unable to provide (or receive) useful information as to where power was restored. It was noted by several panelists that better information about power outages and restoration would have been helpful to both individuals and service agencies.³⁰ There were several other places that residents turned to for information. The Puget Sound Energy call center received 780,000 inquires in the week after the storm. Many of these calls were from residents seeking referrals to hotels, shelters and pet shelters.³¹ The American Red Cross also operated its own phone bank to refer individual and agency calls.

²⁶ Source: City of Seattle Office of Emergency Management.

²⁷ Source: Tom Tangney, KIRO.

²⁸ Source: Cities of Bellevue and Auburn.

²⁹ Source: Cities of Bellevue and Seattle.

³⁰ Source: KIRO, City of Shoreline, City of Seattle.

³¹ Source: Puget Sound Energy.

Another information system, the King County 2-1-1 call center, is designed to refer callers to agencies that can address a variety of human services needs. Crisis Clinic, provider of the 2-1-1 service in King County, was quickly overwhelmed by calls after the Windstorm. At the time, 2-1-1 was not staffed on a 24-7 basis. Over 600 calls were received during the week following the Windstorm, mostly between Friday afternoon and Tuesday, particularly due to referrals from the Mayor of Seattle and media. Even if callers got through to 2-1-1 operators, those operators found they did not have current or accurate information to give out, particularly as to shelter resources.³² Although 2-1-1 has an important role in the safety services network on a day-to-day basis, “there was widespread confusion about the role of Crisis Clinic 2-1-1 related to the disaster.”³³

- ***Service Provider Coordination Networks and Relationships***

Beyond the technological challenges, there were information and relationship gaps, specifically lack of relationships and strong networks of partner agencies to call upon when an agency found itself unable to respond. Many agencies and local governments found they did not have accurate or complete emergency contact information for either their own staff, or for partner nonprofit agencies or local governments. This exacerbated the difficulty of effectively coordinating or deploying the already limited resources. Agencies did not have pre-existing arrangements or coordination protocols with local governments to know where shelters would be, how to best communicate with local authorities or how agencies could help with various service needs.

As the Community Assistance Network (CAN) Draft Statement of Need asserts: “For a community to be ready and prepared to provide basic services such as shelter, food, mental health care, clothing and transportation to everyone in need in a disaster situation, it must have a strong collaborative structure that brings together government and nongovernmental providers to proactively create a comprehensive response and recovery operations plan.” Although the CAN pilot project is working to develop these networks and relationships, the Windstorm made clear that more work needs to be done: these relationships and collaborative structures are simply not strongly in place in King County.

- ***Local Government Responders***

Local government response to the storm was quite varied. In part this was due to the very different impacts of the Windstorm in different areas of the County. Not all cities activated their emergency operations centers. But the response capacity of cities also appears to have been quite varied.

The importance of the King County Emergency Coordination Center (KCECC) as a central point for coordination of resources was noted by several Panelists. The Regional Disaster Plan for King County includes a series of mutual aid agreements and means to coordinate the assessment and deployment of resources in an emergency. Cities that activated their local emergency operations centers did coordinate with the KCECC in assessing damage and deploying resources. The American Red Cross written comments noted: “Continued coordination through the centralized resource of KCECC is imperative to the coordinated efforts of responding to emergencies. Without this all organizations are stuck with only a tunnel view of the needs in the area. To respond to a

³² Source: Crisis Clinic.

³³ Source: Coordinated Assistance Network.

large/regional effort it will take a coordinated collaborative effort; no one organization can do this on its own.”

The lack of power that thwarted residents and nonprofits also shut down many government operations. As noted above, nine clinics operated by Public Health—Seattle & King County lost power and had to close for one day. Many city offices were shut down. Most Seattle fire stations had no back-up power generation.³⁴ Some smaller cities had virtually no operating facilities due to lack of back-up power.³⁵ Even those public facilities with back-up generators found their fuel supplies stretched or inadequate.³⁶

Lack of power to street signals, street closures due to downed power lines and trees, combined in some cases with minimal traffic control, led to challenging traffic conditions. In some areas, these traffic challenges exacerbated the difficulty of delivering services.³⁷

Several Panelists from cities noted that they were not adequately prepared to respond to needs of Limited English Speaking populations.³⁸ Further, the Task Force was told that some local government agencies knew little about the actual capacities of nonprofit agencies to help in response efforts.³⁹ It was noted that some government agencies lacked emergency contact information for critical nonprofit agency partners, such as homecare supervisors and directors,⁴⁰ and that there was confusion about which government agencies should be checking on the status of vulnerable adults in adult family homes or nursing homes.⁴¹ Emergency operations centers did not in all cases have good contacts with human services agencies needed to give and receive information about vulnerable and special populations.⁴² There was also reportedly a lack of clarity as to roles regarding food delivery in an emergency.⁴³

Some Panelists noted that government responses to requests for emergency information were quite varied.⁴⁴ Some cities reported that a strong incident command response was in place for the duration of the event.⁴⁵ Others viewed their damage assessment and response to be somewhat *ad hoc*. The Multi-Service Center identified a need for more local government emergency response locations in south King County.

On the positive side, the Seattle Human Services Department reported it was able to respond to its vulnerable clients because the agency had emergency contact information on file. The Seattle Parks Department opened and operated shelters for the first time—something trained for, but never actually implemented.⁴⁶ The Public Health Department implemented several responses trained and planned for as part of regional pandemic flu response planning, including the special needs shelter

³⁴ Source: City of Seattle.

³⁵ Source: City of Shoreline.

³⁶ Source: City of Bellevue.

³⁷ Source: Hopelink.

³⁸ Source: Cities of Renton, Auburn, Bellevue, and Public Health - Seattle & King County.

³⁹ Source: City of Seattle Human Services Department, King County Office of Emergency Management.

⁴⁰ Source: Seattle Human Services Department.

⁴¹ Source: Crisis Clinic, City of Shoreline.

⁴² Sources: Crisis Clinic, American Red Cross.

⁴³ King County Office of Emergency Management; Public Health - Seattle & King County.

⁴⁴ Source: KIRO, City of Shoreline.

⁴⁵ Source: City of Bellevue.

⁴⁶ Source: City of Seattle Human Services Department.

opened in Bellevue. As previously noted, Public Health’s Vulnerable Populations Action Team (VPAT) worked to reach out to community-based organizations that work with limited English speaking populations, contacting ethnic media, translating carbon monoxide messaging and distributing flyers in high-impact neighborhood. Public Health reported that the resources of the VPAT team were stretched thin by the Windstorm events.

- ***State and Federal Government Response***

The State’s role in the Windstorm was primarily through the Governor’s issuance of an emergency proclamation. The State is typically reactive to local Emergency Operations Centers (EOCs). The State’s emergency operations activate after local EOCs activate. The State monitors events, issues situation reports and responds to logistical requests from local EOCs. In the State’s experience, urban area expectations for services in disaster response are significantly higher than expectations from rural areas.⁴⁷ Dr. Egan reported that the State receives more requests for help from urban areas as opposed to rural areas whose residents seem to be more prepared to be self-sufficient.

The National Guard was not involved in the local Windstorm response. The Guard may only be called out by the Governor to respond to disasters following a request from local officials. The Guard has limited equipment and supplies (e.g., as a small supply of generators) with which to respond to natural disasters. The Guard is also capable of providing traffic diversion and control if asked. It reportedly takes the National Guard typically 24 – 36 hours to activate and respond once requested. It was noted also that many Guardsmen are currently deployed overseas.⁴⁸

FEMA resources were also not engaged in response to the Windstorm. There was no presidential disaster declaration for the Windstorm, which is a precedent to FEMA deployment. Moreover, FEMA “is primarily about coordination rather than direct service.”⁴⁹

Panelists from the State, National Guard and FEMA, all emphasized the need for residents to rely on their own personal preparedness first, and then look to local governments and nonprofits before looking to the State or national government for emergency response.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

Based on the information received from the Panel Presentations, the Task Force makes the following findings and conclusions. The findings and conclusions are not listed in order of priority.

1. The December Windstorm was a severe storm event, causing unprecedented damage to the electrical grid in King County with resulting power outages that lasted for nearly a week or longer in many areas. Yet in some senses the Windstorm was a minor natural event, far smaller in scope than a large earthquake or other major disaster. The Windstorm magnified the strengths and weaknesses of both disaster response systems and individual preparedness.

⁴⁷ Source: State Emergency Management Division.

⁴⁸ Source: Col. Ron Kapral, Director Military Support to Civil Authorities, Washington State National Guard.

⁴⁹ Source: Dick Balnick, Voluntary Agency Liaison, FEMA Region X.

2. The region is not prepared to deal adequately with special and vulnerable populations in a major disaster event. Although local governments and many nonprofit agencies have disaster response plans, many of these organizations could not maintain operations in the Windstorm's aftermath. The strength of our community response is dependent on ability of nonprofits to continue to endure and serve in a disaster. Generally, nonprofit human services agencies are not adequately prepared to ensure continuity of services during a major disaster.
3. Despite aggressive public education campaigns encouraging individual emergency preparedness, it was clear that most residents of King County were unprepared to be self-sufficient in the Windstorm and its aftermath. The key challenge appears to be finding a way to motivate individual citizen action. Responders assert that self-preparedness must be the first line of defense in these events, rather than reliance on government and nonprofit agency assistance. Rural residents are reportedly better prepared than urban residents.
4. Limited English Speaking, frail elderly, and medically dependent individuals were particularly hard hit by the Windstorm. Additional work is needed to anticipate and address the disaster-related needs of these groups.
5. Limited English Speaking groups, and the grassroots organizations representing and working with them, do not have capacity to meet their disaster response needs, nor do they have strong networks or relationships with government and major disaster response agencies. Effort must be made to build relationships with Limited English Speaking populations and the grassroots organizations serving them in order that emergency responders are better prepared to help--and their help is more readily accepted by--these groups. To be most effective, service agencies must be prepared to both communicate and provide service in a culturally competent manner.
6. Regulation and oversight of emergency preparedness and planning at nursing homes, adult family homes, group homes, child care has not been sufficient to ensure that these facilities can meet the basic needs of their clients in the aftermath of a natural disaster.
7. Coordination, deployment, and communication regarding sheltering resources must be strengthened. Consideration should be given to the type of shelter resources offered (i.e., "tiering" of shelter resources with a range of service options), and the capacity of shelters to meet the needs of special and vulnerable populations. Unincorporated area regional shelter responsibilities assigned to King County Parks Division should be re-examined given the significantly reduced number of sheltering facilities now owned by the County.
8. Emergency responders and service agencies are very reliant on "high-tech" means of communication (websites, television, TTY) that may be largely inoperative during a disaster. In the December Windstorm, some governments and nonprofits effectively deployed a variety of *ad hoc* "low-tech" communication solutions, such as community bulletin boards and postings, door- to door-visits and distribution of flyers.
9. Emergency communications methods typically employed for reaching the general public in an emergency are inadequate to effectively reach deaf/blind/speech impaired and Limited

English Speaking populations. Ethnic media appears to be a critical but under-utilized mechanism to address the latter group.

10. Radio broadcasters may be the primary source of public communication in a disaster. It is important that these organizations have emergency plans or mutual aid arrangements in place.
11. The role of the 2-1-1 system in an emergency is not well understood and the 2-1-1 system did not have adequate resources at the time of the Windstorm to play a major role in an emergency. The information that 2-1-1 would have needed to be more helpful to callers was in many instances not available to them from government, private utilities, or major nonprofit responders.
12. All local governments are on a “co-equal basis” during an emergency. With the exception of the public health department in certain instances, no local government is authorized to direct the emergency deployment of another local government’s assets. Rather, the region relies on dozens of mutual aid agreements and regional emergency plans stressing coordination in geographic zones, and each jurisdiction controls the deployment of its own resources.
13. The ability of nonprofits and government agencies to collaborate and communicate in a disaster is critical to effective emergency response and needs to be improved. Local government understanding of local nonprofit human services agency capacities, and means to communicate with those agencies in emergencies, can and should be improved. Relationships between government and non-government service agencies must be built in advance of an emergency so that this collaboration and communication can occur when needed. Successful examples of this relationship building include the work of the Coordinated Assistance Network (CAN), and pandemic flu preparation planning by Public Health - Seattle & King County.
14. All human services organizations should have strong, tested emergency preparedness and business continuity plans in place. These disaster plans should address both internal and external factors, including but not limited to back-up power, internal agency communications, capacities/needs of agency staff, and triage protocols.
15. The capacity of individual cities and local governments to respond in an emergency varies tremendously. Some cities lacked effective means to contact managers of regional emergency centers or utilities. Regional coordination and resource deployment in a disaster may be limited or inefficient to the extent that all cities do not have, or may not deploy, an active interface with the King County Emergency Coordination Center.
16. The Vulnerable Populations Action Team (VPAT) of Public Health - Seattle & King County played a critical role in outreach to Limited English Speaking populations, but the Team was stretched very thin and could benefit from additional depth.
17. Some emergency resources were potentially available from the National Guard to assist in Windstorm response, but were not requested by local jurisdictions. FEMA will not deploy absent a presidential disaster declaration.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Although the Task Force effort has been swift and our information limited, members were deeply impressed by what they learned about the efforts of the government and non-government agencies in responding to the Windstorm. The Task Force makes the following recommendations for action in hopes of strengthening emergency response and capacities, particularly as related to vulnerable and special populations and the agencies that serve them:

- 1. Strengthen Emergency Planning by, and Emergency Response Capacities of, Nonprofit Human Services Agencies.** Local funding organizations and local governments should increase financial and technical assistance to nonprofit human services agencies in order to strongly encourage these agencies to develop and maintain effective emergency preparedness and business continuity plans. Positive incentives and pilot projects should be used in this effort. Coordination between funding agencies and local governments in this regard may enhance the consistency of nonprofit agencies' emergency plans, as well as consistency in messaging to the communities they serve. We recommend that each nonprofit human services agency have a business continuity plan. All such plans should be effectively coordinated and integrated with the King County Emergency Response Plan and related local government plans in order to ensure coordination of nonprofit and government disaster response and recovery activities. Funding agencies should consider collaborating to create an emergency relief fund that could be accessed by nonprofit agencies in order to ensure their continuity of service in a disaster.
- 2. Build Capacity to Serve Vulnerable and Special Populations in an Emergency.** Local governments and nonprofit human services agencies should take steps to identify and build relationships with vulnerable and special populations and the grass roots organizations working with them in order to be able to more effectively serve these populations in an emergency. Emergency communications plans and capacities focused on vulnerable and special populations should be better developed. A variety of strategies should be considered, including but not limited to: having translation service capacity on-call; developing pre-prepared safety communication pieces in appropriate languages as well as pictorial communication pieces; engaging ethnic media; working in advance with general broadcast media to facilitate emergency communications in multiple languages; working with private businesses in these communities; and delivering free or very low cost emergency kits to individuals and families in these vulnerable and special population groups.
- 3. Increase Emphasis on Building Relationships Between Nonprofit Agencies and Local Governments.** All agencies must know their counterpart and partner agencies in the region, and have up-to-date, 24-7 emergency contact information for them. Strengthening inter-agency relationships is the simplest but most powerful route to strengthening our regional emergency response system. The capacities of the various agencies to respond in an emergency should be understood. A compendium of disaster resources should be prepared and kept up-to-date and housed with the 2-1-1 call system. The Coordinated Assistance Network (CAN) pilot project, which is aimed at creating and strengthening service networks and relationships between government and non-government human services providers and emergency responders, should be permanently funded.

- 4. Identify and Implement New Strategies for Public Emergency Preparedness Campaigns.** Government and nonprofit agencies efforts are not a substitute for individual preparedness. Efforts to motivate citizens to take action are probably most effective in the wake of a disaster. Individual preparedness public service announcements via broadcast or signage alone are not achieving the goal. New messages and new messengers should be employed. For example, messages should encourage people to plan at the neighborhood level, and to check on their neighbors after emergencies. Consider engaging new messengers (e.g., neighborhood associations, housing authorities, churches, grassroots organizations, apartment complex managers, and similar entities) to reach the public. Cities and other responders should work together to develop concise emergency preparedness information flyers to be mailed to each household this spring, while memories of the Windstorm are still fresh.
- 5. Clarify the Role and Strengthen the Capacity of the 2-1-1 System to Serve in an Emergency.** Emergency planners and responders must ensure better communication of critical emergency information from major utilities (public and private), local governments and nonprofit agencies alike to the 2-1-1 call system. Additionally, the 2-1-1 operation in King County needs an enhanced ability to ramp-up its emergency service capacity. This could include arrangements with existing local Emergency Operations Centers or mutual aid agreements with 2-1-1 centers in other areas of the state.
- 6. Improve Coordination, Capacity and Deployment of Sheltering Resources.** Agencies with sheltering responsibilities must work to improve emergency shelter deployment capacity, communication and coordination. Consideration should be given to the type of shelters to be made available, coordination of sheltering response, coordination of location, involvement of large privately-owned facilities (such as shopping malls), signage, and the availability of culturally competent staffing and services.
- 7. Strengthen Emergency Response Plans and Capacities of Assisted Living and Group Care Facilities.** These types of facilities must have effective emergency plans and equipment on-site, and their staff must be trained to respond in disaster events. Cities and emergency responders (including Public Health - Seattle & King County) should have information on all such facilities within their jurisdiction, including emergency contact information for facility managers, and should enhance coordination with the State of Washington Department of Social and Health Services to ensure the needs of residents in these facilities can be met in a disaster event. This is primarily an action item for the State of Washington. However, local agencies should also have accurate information on these facilities and have a plan for assisting them in emergencies.

- ***Additional Considerations***

Although not rising to level of a Task Force recommendation, the Task Forces offers below some observations that arose during our deliberations as worthy of further consideration.

- When considering the most severe of disasters this region may face, several Task Force members have some concern about the ultimate capacity and effectiveness of an emergency response system based, as is our region's, almost entirely on coordination. Our 39 cities, dozens of special purpose districts, school districts and the County have developed an elaborate coordinative structure for emergency response. Each of the dozens of jurisdictions in King County is responsible for deployment of its own assets in an emergency, although Public Health has in some situations the authority to direct actions across many jurisdictions. At some threshold level, which we are not qualified to define, it seems intuitive that a greater "control" structure is required. For example, in a region-wide major disaster, someone may need to be empowered to make triage decisions to deploy resources of many jurisdictions in order to save citizens at greatest risk in specific locations. The Task Force encourages regional disaster planning groups to consider whether in some situations there is a need for a broader control authority than is currently in place.
- Neither FEMA nor the National Guard was involved in the response to the December Windstorm. Their assistance may be critical in a bigger disaster. In light of the experience of the Gulf Coast states as a result of the Katrina Hurricane in 2005, the Task Force would first encourage that steps be taken to ensure that the processes to deploy the resources of these agencies are streamlined and clearly understood by local and state authorities. Second, the Task Force would urge local emergency planners to consider their role in responding to major disasters that occur in other parts of the country, but which may have spillover impacts locally. For example, who is the key responder to meet the needs of displaced persons coming to the region and how can we most effectively coordinate the delivery of services to these people?
- Task Force members were struck by the ways in which private businesses not traditionally associated with disaster response had in fact a significant impact or potential impact for helping or hindering recovery efforts. For example, fuel was a critical resource for individuals and governments alike, yet many gas stations were without electric power and could therefore not pump and sell fuel. Malls and other private facilities might become critical sheltering locations in a massive disaster. Private radio stations are critical communications means in a disaster and should have mutual aid arrangements and adequate back-up power generation. For these and perhaps other private businesses, is there a role in emergency response that should be acknowledged and even formalized?

The Task Force recommends that United Way of King County convene a roundtable discussion group to explore the above considerations. The group should include representatives from government emergency responders, nonprofit agencies, private sector companies who are signatories to the Regional Disaster Plan, and members of this Task Force.

CONCLUSION

The Windstorm resulted in many powerful examples of the success that can result from emergency preparedness planning. At the same time, the Windstorm also illustrated gaps in emergency preparedness of residents and nonprofit human services agencies, as well as local governments. The Task Force encourages United Way of King County to create a work plan in response to the recommendations in this report. Further, the Task Force would offer to reconvene later this year to assess progress made on implementing these recommendations.

In closing, the Task Force believes we are well served in King County by many excellent public service providers and nonprofit agencies. The Task Force commends the efforts of these local governments and agencies to continually enhance their individual and collective emergency response capacities. As citizens, our greatest means of thanking these organizations and their employees for their work to keep us safe in an emergency is for each of us to become better prepared ourselves.

EXHIBIT A

UNITED WAY OF KING COUNTY TASK FORCE ON EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

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