

June 2013

SUPPORTING COMMUNITY-BASED DISASTER RESPONSE

LESSONS LEARNED FROM HURRICANE SANDY



Office of
Bill de Blasio
PUBLIC ADVOCATE FOR THE CITY OF NEW YORK

LETTER FROM PUBLIC ADVOCATE BILL DE BLASIO

June 20, 2013

Dear Fellow New Yorkers,

Hurricane Sandy devastated communities across our city. More than seven months later, communities are still in the midst of a long and often frustrating recovery. The storm and its aftermath revealed gaps in our preparedness and emergency response—none of them more grave than our city's failure to protect and support low-income New Yorkers. From issuing warnings, to conducting evacuations, to delivering aid and sustaining at-risk families in their homes, our safety net failed the most vulnerable.

But into that gap stepped hundreds of civic and charitable organizations and tens of thousands of volunteers. And it is that critical piece of our disaster response—and the lessons learned from our experience after Sandy—that are the focus of this report.

Our office set out in the months after Sandy to interview experts from the field, evaluate the City's official systems in place to coordinate the charitable response to Sandy and recommend changes to better prepare New York City for the next emergency. We looked a ways to avoid duplication of services, coordinate outreach, harness volunteerism and ensure the highest quality of service delivered to vulnerable populations.

Now is the time to put these changes in place.

Mayor Bloomberg recently laid out a series of valuable recommendations to prepare our infrastructure for the next storm. That agenda is a critical piece of protecting New Yorkers going forward, but it is only a piece of the puzzle. We need to ensure that our emergency planning and disaster response make the needs of low-income New Yorkers a high priority—and more fully harnessing the power of our charitable and community-based organizations will help us do it.

I look forward to advancing these recommendations together, in the interest of all New Yorkers.



Bill de Blasio
Public Advocate for the City of New York



INTRODUCTION

Last fall, New York City experienced the devastating impact of Hurricane Sandy, the most destructive storm encountered by the Northeast region in nearly half a decade. New York City was unprepared for a storm of its magnitude. After Sandy struck, a wide variety of responders stepped into action - including City agencies, Federal aid workers, and local non-profits.

Local non-profits and faith-based organizations - referred to collectively in this report as Community Based Organizations (CBOs) - far exceeded their primary role as 'safety net' social service providers, offering meals, emergency supplies, vital information, medical care, referrals to alternate housing, and providing public safety. Following FEMA's principle that all disasters begin and end locally, CBOs addressed the immediate needs of 'at-risk' residents and communities at large in the critical 72 hour period following the storm and have extended support services through the city's ongoing recovery.



In many cases, CBOs had a long-standing relationship with residents in affected communities prior to the storm and were able to establish a presence and perform door-to-door outreach before Federal aid workers arrived. These organizations implicitly understood the needs of vulnerable populations they served - including the elderly, immigrant communities, disabled residents and those with special medical needs.

Despite their achievements, CBOs encountered a number of challenges providing services during and after the storm. The challenges faced during Hurricane Sandy mirrored those experienced by CBOs during Hurricane Katrina, where vast majority of CBOs indicated that they were unconnected with the City's emergency management system.¹ It is inevitable that New York City will encounter another major disaster in the future. According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), it is possible that New York City could experience a storm the size of Sandy as soon as this year.² The City must take immediate action to establish partnerships with CBOs and ensure they have the necessary support to assist communities in need in the event of next major disaster.

BACKGROUND

In the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy, the Office of the Public Advocate quickly mobilized to assist community residents, homeowners and small businesses impacted by the storm. The Office led community outreach efforts to go door-to-door to assist residents in more than a dozen communities including Far Rockaway, Brighton Beach, Coney Island, Howard Beach, Seagate, Sheepshead Bay, Canarsie, Broad Channel, and Staten Island's south shore.

The Public Advocate's Office led one of the City's largest volunteer efforts, recruiting more than 5,000 volunteers in the weeks following Sandy and helping to connect volunteers to the work of CBOs across the city. Volunteers helped with clean-up efforts, prepared meals, collected and delivered much needed supplies, and helped community residents navigate the process of applying for disaster assistance. The Public Advocate's Office also prepared a series of informational materials on how to apply for federal, state and local disaster relief which were distributed to thousands of New Yorkers

¹ <http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/08/posthurricanerelief/rb.shtml>

² <http://www.ny1.com/content/182638/noaa-predicts-7-to-11-hurricanes-for-upcoming-season>

through a partnership with local CBOs, the City's public libraries, and NYCHA community centers.

In addition to community outreach efforts, the Public Advocate's Constituent Services Department provided support to residents on a wide range of Sandy related issues, assisting in over 750 cases and serving as a vital liaison between communities and government agencies at a federal, state, and local level. As part of this process, the Office organized a series of discussions with CBOs to assess service delivery efforts during Hurricane Sandy.

Hurricane Sandy Social Services Working Group

On January 17th, 2013 New York City Public Advocate invited experts from a cross-section of social service agencies throughout the City to discuss broad-based inefficiencies in providing aid during Hurricane Sandy. The group discussed methods and best practices that could be incorporated into the City's emergency plan to improve human service delivery response time and effectiveness in times of disaster.

Round-table Discussion on Improving Outreach in Affected NYCHA Developments

The Public Advocate's Office convened a round-table discussion with non-profit leaders on February 11th, 2013. The CBO leaders present at the discussion coordinated and provided outreach in New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) developments prior to, during, and after the storm and provided first-hand accounts of their experiences. The goal of the round-table was to shine a light on the greatest impediments CBOs faced in providing outreach.

The findings below focus on barriers that CBOs encountered delivering aid to Sandy affected neighborhoods and weighs concerns not sufficiently addressed in the Administration's *After Action* report. This report presents the account of CBOs, outlines best practices in CBO directed emergency response and provides additional recommendations on ways the City can improve service delivery in the event of a next disaster.

Hurricane Sandy After Action Report

On May 3rd, 2013, Deputy Mayors' Gibbs and Holloway released a *Hurricane Sandy After Action Report* outlining wide-ranging actions taken by the City to respond to the storm and provided a number of recommendations for improving the City's emergency response. According to the report, the City made efforts to facilitate and provide social services with collaboration from a wide range of municipal agencies by maintaining evacuation sites, securing healthcare facilities, special medical needs shelters, evacuation shelters and restoration centers, emergency stockpiles and food distribution centers. However, the report also recognized that there were major deficiencies in providing services for those residents that sheltered in place.

While traditional communication lines were down, door-to-door outreach to residents homes represented the best and only method to reach residents in need and deliver vital information and services. The Public Advocate repeatedly called for widespread canvassing immediately after Sandy hit. Yet the City's efforts to perform door-to-door outreach were passive and initiated far too late - more than a week after the storm. The majority of Sandy affected households were not reached through City directed efforts and the canvassing effort was not sustained for the duration of time essential services were unavailable. Several findings presented in the Administration's After Action Report were raised in the Public Advocate Office's discussions with CBOs:

- The need to further leverage community-based support to target and expedite critical services to high needs populations.
- The need to expand and formalize information sharing between the City and relief workers.
- The need to improve the management and procedures of volunteer organizations.
- The need to more effectively execute the delivery of goods throughout the City.

Although the City should be commended for acknowledging the need for increased community-based outreach, for many vulnerable residents affected by Sandy this recognition has come too late.

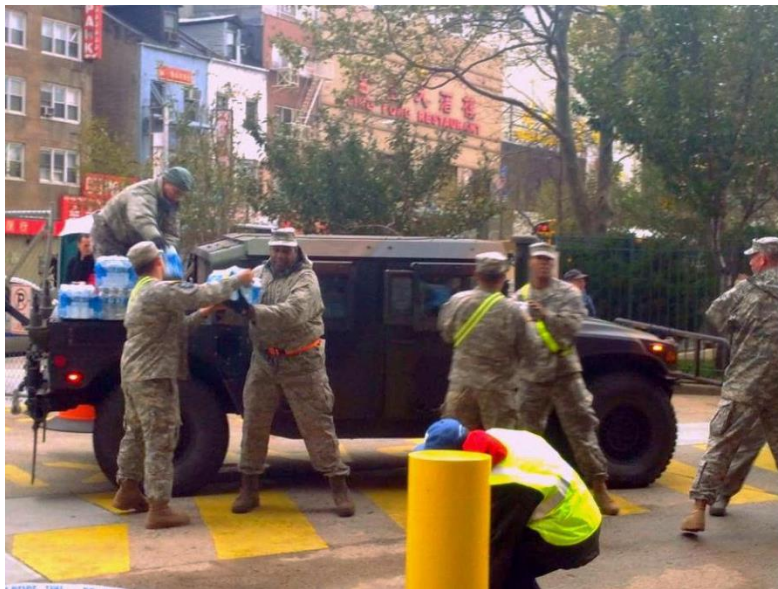
AREAS OF CONCERN

The following section highlights areas of concern that were brought to the attention of the Public Advocate's Office from discussions with CBOs.

1. COLLABORATION

a) CBOs were not sufficiently incorporated in the City's emergency management plan.

The City did not make adequate efforts to identify and build relationships with CBOs prior to Hurricane Sandy. Many CBOs that provided significant aid were not integrated in the emergency response coalition Voluntary Organization Active in Disaster (VOAD), NYC Service volunteer management system or the Citywide Incident Management System (CIMS). While unconnected to City efforts and without clearly defined roles, many CBOs were forced to improvise an operational strategy without clear guidelines or prior planning. Although the City and the Federal government made funding available through the Mayor's Fund, the Nonprofit Recovery Fund and FEMA grants, many CBOs, particularly smaller nonprofits and faith-based organizations, were unaware of these resources. This has made it difficult for many CBOs to budget for supplies and services as they were unclear if and how they would be reimbursed for costs they incurred.



Best Practices: Cities in the State of California have contended with earthquakes and wildfires for decades. The State of California Office of Emergency Service (OES) has urged emergency management planners to find CBOs, meet and discuss CBOs' capacities, address common concerns, and integrate CBOs in emergency planning.³ FEMA has also advocated this approach.⁴ Recognizing the importance of addressing the needs of vulnerable populations, the City of San Leandro has included CBOs as one of three primary components of the city's emergency management system called the Triad Alliance.⁵ In Santa Clara County, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), which defines the roles and responsibilities of CBOs, has been established for leading CBO members under their umbrella network Santa Clara County Collaborating Agencies' Disaster Relief Effort (CADRE).⁶ In San Francisco the city's Department of Health has extended contracts to over 100 CBOs that can assist in medical services in the event of a disaster so that they have assurances that their costs will be covered.⁷

b) CBOs did not have adequate emergency training to deal to the conditions they encountered.

The New York City Police Department (NYPD), New York City Fire Department (FDNY) and FDNY's Emergency Medical Services (EMS) were overwhelmed by multiple incidences happening simultaneously and were unable to assist with all urgent needs. CBOs were often the first on the scene yet were an under-utilized resource because most CBO volunteers did not have Community Emergency Response Team (CERT), CPR and First Aid training. This was a particular concern in

³ <http://www.calema.ca.gov/planningandpreparedness/documents/vulnerablepopulations.pdf>

⁴ <http://www.fema.gov/blog/2012-08-24/faith-based-community-organizations-whole-community-approach-emergency-management>

⁵ <http://www.sanleandro.org/services/emergency/triad/default.asp>

⁶ http://www.cadresv.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/CADRE_3_0_Strategic_Plan-092810-FINAL.pdf

⁷ <http://www.calema.ca.gov/planningandpreparedness/documents/vulnerablepopulations.pdf>

NYCHA developments where Tenant Association Leaders were expected to manage tenant needs in buildings while most did not have emergency training. Meanwhile, CBOs and residents in need had to wait idly for trained personnel to arrive. Situations like these pose a liability concern as some CBOs may feel they need to provide services that they do not have the capacity to provide.

Best Practices: The City has only about 1,000 voluntary CERT team members – between one and two teams per Community Board district - to support traditional first responders.⁸ Emergency training efforts in cities that have been historically prone to natural disasters far exceeds those in New York City. For instance, Los Angeles Fire Department (LAFD) CERT program has hosted about 70 training courses a year and trained 3,500 residents annually, training nearly 60,000 residents since its inception. In San Leandro, each CBO incorporated in the City's emergency management system is provided annual training consisting of an individualized agency emergency plan as well as CPR and First Aid courses at a nominal charge.⁹

2. COMMUNICATION

a) **There was a lack of information shared between emergency managers and CBOs during the storm.**

While traditional communications network of cell phones and land lines were down, CBOs were unable to remotely communicate with the Office of Emergency Management (OEM), Federal Aid responders or City agencies. During Sandy, VOAD members had local representatives at OEM's Emergency Operations Center, yet most of the CBOs providing aid were not represented. CBOs were unable to effectively relay information on conditions they were witnessing or receive regular updates and direction from OEM. Many CBOs were also not connected to the City's

existing communication systems like Notify NYC, Federal Communications Commission's (FCC) Disaster Reporting Information System, New York City Amateur Radio Emergency Communications Service (NYC-ARECS). This lack of information sharing resulted in an ineffective command and control structure where individual CBOs had to make isolated decisions, often without a clear understanding of regional conditions. Determining a plan of action was also particularly

Sandy in Context:

Outreach in NYCHA Developments

Sandy's impact on public housing developments in New York City was overwhelming. Approximately 65,000 tenants in over 300 New York City Housing Authority buildings were affected. Many residents went without essential services such as electricity, heat and water for nearly three weeks. The storm heavily impacted NYCHA developments in the neighborhoods of Lower East Side, Red Hook, Coney Island and the Rockaways, as well as many developments beyond Zone A.

NYCHA residents were prone to suffering the worst effects of a natural disaster. Vulnerable residents with special needs were confined in high rise buildings without access to basic social services, supplies or vital information. Approximately one third of affected NYCHA residents were seniors. Many of these seniors were mobility impaired, on life-sustaining equipment and had chronic health problems. Affected NYCHA developments were also home to many low-income families that lacked the financial resources to cope with the residual effects of the storm.

Cooperation

NYCHA's administration's response was not tenant centered. NYCHA placed a much greater focus on the infrastructure and equipment needs of their buildings than the needs of their tenants. CBOs responded in large numbers to fill the void. Despite being eager and able to assist tenants, NYCHA was reluctant to cooperate with CBOs that were attempting to provide outreach in NYCHA buildings. CBOs looked for direction from NYCHA, OEM, and the Mayor's office on how they could be of service but often did not receive it. In some cases, CBOs reported that the Mayor's Office was requesting guidance from them. Federal aid organizations provided additional manpower for the outreach effort, but it took nearly two weeks before their presence was felt. The emergency response in NYCHA developments was inadequate. The City must work with NYCHA administrators and CBOs to create a comprehensive outreach plan for NYCHA.

⁸ http://www.nyc.gov/html/fdny/pdf/cert/cert_fact_sheet_011507a.pdf

⁹ <http://www.sanleandro.org/services/emergency/triad/success.asp>

difficult for CBOs providing aid in NYCHA developments. In many developments NYCHA staff members were unwilling to provide basic information and closed community centers - which often served as centralized locations for correspondence.

Best Practices: In San Francisco, local CBOs have representatives present at the city's Emergency Operation Center through an umbrella agency Community Collaborative Group (CCG)¹⁰. The city is also developing an online app where residents in need can connect with CBOs, a tool that is particularly useful during recovery periods.¹¹ Seattle has developed Emergency Communication Hubs in neighborhoods across the city where emergency responders can gather and communicate with responders in other neighborhoods through a secure radio network.¹² The



City should consider affixing Emergency Communications Hubs with regional field offices in the borough recovery director structure that it is currently developing, as an integrated command and communications solution.¹³ NYCHA developments that had community centers open during the storm provided a set gathering point for information sharing for all stakeholders and were able to coordinate tenant services effectively. The City should make certain that community centers in affected NYCHA developments remain open during the next major emergency.

b) Residents experienced delays in receiving critical emergency supplies.

Residents often had to wait for urgent supplies such as drug prescriptions, medical equipment and specialized meals to be delivered which were not readily available. This problem was exacerbated in many NYCHA developments when CBOs were not allowed to enter buildings without security personnel present. The process of acquiring special needs supplies was inefficient because multiple CBOs were attempting to acquire them on an ad hoc basis without a working inventory of where those needs would be located. Some CBOs were able to efficiently track needs and distribute supplies through regional database software applications. However, these database systems and the CBOs that were using them were unconnected so there was no way for one CBO to know how to obtain a supply that they were lacking that may have been available on another database.

Best Practices: Humanitarian aid workers have historically used a Supply Management System (SUMA) to compile a comprehensive inventory of supplies in disaster affected areas world-wide.¹⁴ San Francisco is currently developing a city-wide comprehensive database of resources and participating CBOs called the Coordinated Assistance Network (SF CAN) that will be used to address the supply sharing problem in addition to several other social service delivery issues.¹⁵ The City should consider incorporating supply data from regional databases into a consolidated city-wide GIS system so emergency managers can improve real-time situational awareness of regional supply needs and direct distribution accordingly – an approach that has been used in Japan's response to earthquakes and tsunamis.^{16,17}

¹⁰ http://www.cnjg.org/s_cnjg/bin.asp?CID=10859&DID=59820&DOC=FILE.DOC

¹¹ <http://www.buzzfeed.com/justinesharrock/san-francisco-is-building-a-social-network-for-emergencies-o>

¹² <http://westseattlebeprepared.org/about-the-hubs/what-are-the-hubs/>

¹³ http://www.nyc.gov/html/recovery/downloads/pdf/sandy_aar_5.2.13.pdf

¹⁴ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CkoOkhu9nyY>

¹⁵ <http://sfcard.blogspot.com/2008/11/bay-area-can-coordinated-assistance.html>

¹⁶ <http://www.americansentinel.edu/blog/2011/03/24/gis-technology-critical-to-managing-japan-disaster/>

¹⁷ <http://www.esri.com/software/arcgis/ba-server/key-features>

3. COORDINATION

a) There was no set standard for performing outreach and assessing neighborhood needs.

Each CBO had their own method for how they enlisted and positioned volunteers for outreach. In many neighborhoods there was no communication being relayed on outreach efforts between CBO volunteers, NYC Service volunteers and other relief workers. Despite best efforts, some areas of neighborhoods received infrequent outreach or no outreach at all. Some residents encountered repeated door-knocks from multiple organizations performing the same role. In addition, the information that was provided to residents was not uniform. Many residents did not receive information on available resources like benefits and assistance programs. Immigrant communities were particularly vulnerable as language barriers were present and undocumented residents were ineligible for federal disaster benefits. Also,



information that was gathered by monitoring forms varied, making it difficult to effectively track needs. The inability to track the needs of residents was a particular concern in NYCHA developments because NYCHA's 'vulnerable resident' lists did not encompass all residents who required aid and CBOs were not granted access to them.

Best Practices: International Red Cross has created guidelines for the assessment and reporting of disaster needs.¹⁸ Similarly, FEMA has developed Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) so that their on-ground assessment team members have guidelines on how they will execute their roles. The City of Sonoma has developed the program Sonoma Citizens Organized to Prepare for Emergencies (SCOPE) that trains and sets guidelines for volunteers on how to perform neighborhood outreach.^{19,20} In San Francisco through their Neighborhood Emergency Response Team (NERT) program, volunteers are grouped into predetermined teams that perform outreach in designated neighborhoods²¹ and all volunteers are equipped with consistent monitoring forms and information packets in multiple languages.²² Going forward, the City should include CBOs in the preliminary needs assessment and the vulnerable populations/homebound door-to-door Task Force and Action Plan the City is planning to implement – a procedure adhered to in California's Standardized Emergency Management System (SEMS).²³

b) CBOs faced difficulties directing aid to underserved locations.

Some neighborhoods had an abundance of well-organized CBO volunteers that employed the maxim 'neighbor helping neighbor' to full effect and reached all residents in need. However, in some neighborhoods that lacked CBO manpower there were numerous vulnerable residents that did not receive sufficient aid. In addition, in some neighborhoods various

¹⁸ http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:d4D_huTMboJ:parkdatabase.org/documents/download/2000_Disaster-Emergency-Needs-Assessment_Disaster-Preparedness-Training-Programme_IFRC.pdf+&cd=5&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=us

¹⁹ http://www.sonomacity.org/uploads/Disaster_Council/Scope_Doc.pdf

²⁰ <http://www.sonomacity.org/default.aspx?PageId=503>

²¹ <http://www.sf-fire.org/index.aspx?page=868>

²² <http://www.sf-fire.org/index.aspx?page=864>

²³ http://www.calema.ca.gov/PlanningandPreparedness/Documents/SEMS_Guidelines_Complete.pdf



CBOs had ample resources available but did not have relationships or agreements formed before the storm that enabled resources to be pooled and transferred within and across neighborhoods to high-needs populations. In addition, many CBOs who had emergency supplies had difficult transporting them to residents with urgent needs in underserved neighborhoods because of city-wide fuel shortages.

Best Practices: The transfer of services and resources across jurisdictions is referred to as 'Mutual Aid' in disaster management. It is been used on a larger scale by counties and states²⁴ and FEMA has endorsed its application.²⁵ The San Francisco Bay Area cities of Oakland, Albany and El Cerrito have established this framework on a local level by forming city-wide coalitions of neighborhood organizations called Communities of Oakland Respond to Emergencies (CORE), Albany Local Emergency Response Team (ALERT) and Neighborhood Emergency Assistance Team (NEAT) that secure designated areas of their city and transfer services to other areas when necessary.²⁶ Using an analogous approach, during Sandy some neighborhoods had a connected coalition of CBOs where resources were transferred freely. These neighborhoods were better able to address resident needs than Sandy affected neighborhoods that did not have these relationships established.

²⁴ http://www.californiavolunteers.org/documents/Education/Introduction_to_DRS_Trainers_Manual.pdf

²⁵ <http://www.fema.gov/preparedness-0>

²⁶ <http://www.escholarship.org/uc/item/8zv0b5gz#page-18>

RECOMMENDATIONS

Hurricane Sandy revealed the latent weakness in New York City's efforts to reach communities in need and providing vital aid. CBO organizations demonstrated a willingness and capacity to support the efforts of the City, and represented an under-utilized resource. The Administration's *After Action* report affirmed the need for the City to develop a more collaborative, community-based disaster response, yet there were a number of concerns raised by CBOs that the Office of the Public Advocate worked with during Sandy that were not sufficiently addressed in the Administration's report. Guided by the feedback provided by CBOs convened in our series of discussions and established best practices in emergency response, the Office of the Public Advocate urges the City to adopt the following additional recommendations to harness the power of CBOs in preparation for the next major disaster:



1) Formalize the collaborative plan

- ✓ Align response strategies with disaster prone states like California by identifying and incorporating key CBOs providing aid in the City's emergency management plan. Solidify relationships with CBOs by integrating them into the VOAD network and NYC Service, and establish roles by extending MOUs.
- ✓ Clarify funding eligibility and reimbursement policies with CBOs prior to the next major disaster and expedite additional vendor contracts with CBOs, particularly those providing specialized care.
- ✓ Achieve the response capacity benchmark set by Los Angeles, by bolstering a 3-fold increase in emergency training for CBO volunteers in CERT, CPR, and First Aid. Ensure each NYCHA building is equipped with at least 1 CERT team.

2) Enhance the communications network

- ✓ Establish direct points of contact between CBOs, OEM and on-site emergency managers. Ensure CBOs are represented in the City's Emergency Operations Center (EOC) and incorporated in emergency communication systems. Set a binding agreement between CBOs and NYCHA staff to openly share essential information.
- ✓ Develop additional communication access points for CBOs and other emergency responders through new web-based applications and integrated neighborhood communication hubs, similar to those established in Seattle. Oblige NYCHA staff to keep community centers open in all NYCHA developments that will be affected.
- ✓ Improve supply distribution by incorporating CBOs in regional databases. Integrate regional data into a city-wide needs inventory through a GIS platform - akin to Japan's system.

3) Strengthen on-site coordination

- ✓ Partner with CBOs to develop neighborhood specific emergency plans and designated door-to-door outreach teams that are well coordinated with other relief workers – matching efforts in Sonoma.
- ✓ Ensure outreach teams are trained under a set of SOPs. Equip teams with consistent monitoring forms and comprehensive informational material in all 8 widely spoken languages, as modeled by San Francisco's NERT. Afford outreach teams expedient access to NYCHA buildings and vulnerable tenant lists.
- ✓ Facilitate the creation of neighborhood coalitions of CBOs throughout the City and develop Mutual Aid agreements so CBOs will be poised to openly transfer resources within and across neighborhoods. Ensure CBOs transferring urgent resources have access to the City's backup fuel sites.