



January 3rd and 16th Snowstorms & Power Outages

Incident After-Action Report/
February 16, 2022

ALBEMARLE COUNTY
OFFICE OF EMERGENCY
MANAGEMENT ❄️ ⚕️ ☣️ ⚡️ 🔥

Incident Overview

Incident Name	January 3 rd & 10 th 2022 Snowstorm and Power Outages														
Response Dates	1/3/2022 - 1/17/2022														
Date of Jurisdiction's Emergency Declaration	Saturday January 15 th , 2022														
Type	Real-World Incident														
Jurisdiction	Albemarle County (VA)														
Scope	<p>January 3rd: Snowfall: An average of about 8” throughout the County. The snow was very heavy and wet. This coupled with high winds toppled trees and powerlines throughout much of the Region and State.</p> <p>County customers without power: Approximately 38,300 @ 1300 on 1/3. Approximately 72 hours later 21,807 customers remained without power (17,775 were customers of Dominion Va Power). There are 55,350 total power customers within Albemarle County all served by 4 power companies (46,000 of those are Dominion customers).</p> <p>January 16th: A storm was predicted for 1/16 with similar results including widespread power outages. Though the County planned for a repeat of the 1/3 storm and its aftermath the 1/16 storm did not result in heavy wet snow pulling down trees and powerlines causing widespread and extended outages.</p>														
Mission Area(s)	Protection, Response, Recovery														
Core Capabilities (check a minimum of four Core Capabilities)	<table border="1"> <tr><td><input type="checkbox"/></td><td>Critical Transportation</td></tr> <tr><td><input checked="" type="checkbox"/></td><td>Mass Search and Rescue</td></tr> <tr><td><input type="checkbox"/></td><td>Environmental Response/Health and Safety</td></tr> <tr><td><input type="checkbox"/></td><td>Fatality Management Services</td></tr> <tr><td><input checked="" type="checkbox"/></td><td>Health and Social Services</td></tr> <tr><td><input type="checkbox"/></td><td>Logistics and Supply Chain Management</td></tr> <tr><td><input checked="" type="checkbox"/></td><td>Mass Care Services</td></tr> </table>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Critical Transportation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Mass Search and Rescue	<input type="checkbox"/>	Environmental Response/Health and Safety	<input type="checkbox"/>	Fatality Management Services	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Health and Social Services	<input type="checkbox"/>	Logistics and Supply Chain Management	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Mass Care Services
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	<input type="checkbox"/>	On-scene Security, Protection, and Law Enforcement
	<input type="checkbox"/>	Operational Communications
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Operational Coordination
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Planning
	<input type="checkbox"/>	Public Health, Healthcare, and Emergency Medical Services
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Public Information and Warning
	<input type="checkbox"/>	Risk Management for Protection Programs and Activities
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Community Resilience
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Situational Assessment
	<input type="checkbox"/>	Supply Chain Integrity and Security
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Long-term Vulnerability Reduction
Threat or Hazard	Weather Event	
Point of Contact	Name: John Oprandy Title: Deputy Chief - Emergency Management Phone: 434-296-5833 Email: joprandy@albemarle.org	

Incident Summary

On January 3rd, 2022, Albemarle County was impacted by a significant snowstorm. The storm produced approximately 6 to 8 inches of heavy, wet snow throughout the region accompanied by high winds. The heavy, wet snow acted more like a heavy ice coating, clinging to power lines and tree limbs, weighing them down considerably. The extra weight, coupled with the high winds, brought trees and power lines down in the region by the thousands. Within the first 24 hours of the storm, 70% of customers (residents and businesses) in Albemarle lost power. 72 hours later, nearly 40% of customers were still without power. The wide-spread impacts of the storm, inconsistent data from power companies, and telecommunication gaps in service limited reliable information.

In the aftermath of the storm, the County Incident Management Team (IMT) worked both internally and at a regional level (City of Charlottesville and University of Virginia) to provide public information, stand up warming and charging shelters, provide access to water, answer questions from the public, and guide residents to necessary resources and services. Ultimately on Monday, January 10th, County staff conducted a search and rescue-style welfare check on residents presumed to be still without power one week after the storm.

As power was restored and demands on County response services decreased, another storm, expected to be similar in nature, was predicted. The IMT immediately began planning for the possibility of supporting residents, already weary and still rebounding from the effects of the first storm, through another widespread power outage. Thankfully, this storm was much less significant than initially projected and very few customers within the County lost power. Those that did were restored quickly.

In addition to what was considered a very significant event, the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic added challenges. At the time of the storm, the County was under a declared state of emergency due to the pandemic. CDC recommendations and County protocols evaluating the impacts and risks to community and staff health and safety influenced many IMT decisions. The County's depth of staff was also impacted by COVID since many essential personnel were out sick or quarantined due to the virus.

Core Capability

Planning

Mission Area: All

Description: Conduct a systematic process engaging the whole community as appropriate in the development of executable strategic, operational, and/or tactical-level approaches to meet defined objectives.

Strengths

- The Regional Emergency Operations Plan (EOP) - although a County-specific plan is identified as a need, the regional plan provided a good reference for the County's decisions and operations.
- Regional Emergency Management partners met frequently keeping the lines of communication open; City, UVA, and ECC partners were ready and willing to help (and did so).

Areas for Improvement

Observations:

- The County does not have a County-specific Emergency Operations Plan and many among County staff are not familiar with the existing Regional EOP (which the County currently uses in lieu of its own).
- Clear plans on when and how the County, City, and University will come together into a regional EOC or Multi-agency Coordination group are not determined.
- The organization was not as prepared for the first storm of the season as it could have been. Tasks/activities to ready the organization for such events were, at best, not coordinated and, at worst, not conducted.
- This storm occurred during a holiday weekend. Not every department in the organization has identified key essential staff, created lines of authority, and created/updated an emergency contact list - nor is this information available in one concise place easy to obtain and quickly update just before or during a disaster.
- The County's snow removal plan, including many volunteer fire stations, worked well overall. Gaps were identified, particularly related to depth in staff qualified to perform snow removal operations. COVID reduced available staff considerably. Fire Rescue and Police both provided staffing for snow removal. The snow removal plan may need updating in the future to review this capacity and determine facility priorities.
- Plans to support the families of essential workers during a disaster are not in place. Essential staff are expected to be at work regardless of circumstances or challenges at home which causes stress for staff and families. The ability of staff to volunteer for additional disaster-related duties may be impacted by these stressors as well.
- Notification processes and triggers exist for the regional form of emergency management/EOC but not for the County Incident Management Team (IMT) regarding communicating an escalating event and launching an IMT.
- Pre-planned and communicated levels of readiness to meet the anticipated threat are not identified for the County.
- The County does not have a Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP) and many of the observed areas for improvement may be addressed with a COOP.
- In addition to the County EOP, specific annexes addressing specific situations (such as a snow event) have not been created and exercised - the County IMT was left solving problems/issues in the moment that could be pre-planned and then regularly exercised to ensure knowledge of the plan and efficient/effective operations.
- The County has not regularly exercised plans that do exist and currently has many new staff in key positions.

- Key relationships between the County and those with significant influence in companies providing vital public infrastructure may exist but may be siloed. The relationships are not identified and tracked across the organization to ensure connections are established and maintained.
- There was some confusion, or questions, centered around what it means to be an essential employee during an emergency declaration and what “call back” or “emergency call back” means. Likewise, there were questions about compensation mechanisms for “call back” and “emergency call back,” particularly for those employees outside of public safety.
- Although communication was received from some (Rappahannock Electric, Dominion, and VDOT), there was no direct contact with utility companies and/or VDOT ahead of the impending storm to understand plans and actions being taken in preparation.
- County Board of Supervisors members, though communicated with throughout the event, have not recently received information and education on Emergency Management plans, practices, and processes. More clarity on the role of a Board of Supervisors member during an emergency may be needed and additional tools/information may need to be provided during the emergency for a BOS member to engage with constituents.

Core Capability

Health and Social Services

Mission Area: Recovery

Description: Restore and improve health and social services capabilities and networks to promote the resilience, independence, health (including behavioral health), and well-being of the whole community.

Strengths

- This event challenged us to specifically identify the affected populations/groups - we had to think and act creatively, which we did, to focus efforts on those most vulnerable to the power outages - manually overlaying power outage maps with maps indicating the County’s most vulnerable populations.
- Key community partners were used for communication with and assessment of vulnerable populations. Connections with Ed Brooks, Yancey Community Center, and Dan Rosensweig, Habitat for Humanity, were particularly helpful.

Areas for Improvement

Observations:

- There are areas/neighborhoods of the County where key community members are not identified to aid in connecting the County to social networks in all phases of emergency management.
- There are many areas of the County that are not easily identifiable as an individual neighborhood or community.
- The County does not have a single comprehensive list or database of community groups, neighborhood associations, church groups and other community resources that may be helpful before, during, and after an emergency or disaster.
- Agencies, such as Piedmont Housing Alliance and Habitat for Humanity, may not have established emergency plans for supporting vulnerable populations they house.

Core Capability

Mass Care Services

Mission Area: Response

Description: Provide life-sustaining and human services to the affected population, to include hydration, feeding, sheltering, temporary housing, evacuee support, reunification, and distribution of emergency supplies.

Strengths

- DSS and Parks and Rec staff quickly volunteered to open our first warming centers.
- Having personnel (Parks and Rec) living across the street from a community center (Greenwood) made it very easy to open and staff that as a warming center.
- The shower at Baker Butler Elementary was well used/received.
- The warming centers were appreciated by those who attended - stories of charging hearing aids and just being able to talk with someone in a warm place were shared.
- The warming centers were well received by the general public - appreciation was shown through social media.

Areas for Improvement

Observations:

- Warming centers were stark - only a place to sit. Cots, food, water, device charging outlets/cords and other basic necessities were not initially provided.
- Use of schools, particularly school shower facilities, included some challenges. Wifi and cell signals were weak, rooms were cold in some cases, shower water (showers are rarely used) was cold.
- A method/process for identifying those County staff willing and able to take on other duties during a disaster is needed. Identifying in advance County Staff who can be officially re-deployed (in addition to those who volunteer) will increase staff to help with shelters and other disaster/crisis related tasks.
- What a warming center is, what amenities are expected/provided, and how they operate were not previously defined by the County nor communicated in advance to the community.
- Though a pet-ready shelter was believed to have been pre-planned and equipped for the region it was discovered the facility is no longer prepared to be pressed into service as such.
- Use of hotel rooms in the region was not well coordinated/communicated within the County/City/UVA region. Duplication of efforts and inefficient use of hotel room resources resulted.
- Hotel rooms were scarce in the area - it was reported by several staff that none were available. Rooms reserved by the ECC for emergency use were cancelled and sold to others.
- The question of how to transport people and families who could not transport themselves, especially those with medical conditions, to warming centers or hotels was raised repeatedly among various staff.
- Once at the warming center facilities, signage indicating where to park, where to enter, which hallway to proceed down, etc. were sparse. Some confusion existed on where to go and what to do.
- Warming Center amenities, other than basic necessities, did not consider children. Parents were left attempting to keep children quiet sitting in a chair.

Core Capability

Operational Coordination

Mission Areas: All

Description: Establish and maintain a unified and coordinated operational structure and process that appropriately integrates all critical stakeholders and supports the execution of core capabilities.

Strengths

- The IMT worked well together in planning and implementing objectives - attributed to the amount of time the group has worked together as an IMT over the last 2 years.
- People stepped up to take on roles and tasks, prioritizing them over many others, to help the County respond to these events.
- Operations, though independent, were well coordinated with the City and University

Areas for Improvement

Observations:

- Some essential staff were taken out of play by the loss of power/internet and the inability to get away from home due to road conditions and downed trees.
- The structure and decision-making process of the Incident Management Team (IMT) was not familiar to all members of the team.
- There are no training records indicating who among County Staff have received National Incident Management System (NIMS) training, or IMT training.
- Essential staff expected to fill roles on an IMT are not identified
- An efficient technology-based system of communication and coordination is not fully developed to aid in operational coordination
- Essential staff often have challenges at home in terms of managing household, family, and neighborhood responsibilities during times of disaster or emergencies.

Core Capability

Public Information and Warning

Mission Areas: All

Description: Deliver coordinated, prompt, reliable, and actionable information to the whole community through the use of clear, consistent, accessible, and culturally and linguistically appropriate methods to effectively relay information regarding any threat or hazard, as well as the actions being taken and the assistance being made available, as appropriate.

Strengths

- An Information telephone line was created and the recording was offered in multiple languages.
- Flyers printed in English and Spanish
- Use of CodeRed to enlist the help of neighbors
- Use of ACPD temporary road signs
- Use of key neighborhood leaders (i.e. Ed Brooks in Yancey/Esmont) for communication
- Social media, email, and traditional media were effective channels for those with access to internet, tv and/or radio.

Areas for Improvement

Observations:

- Although the information line could be recorded in multiple languages, once it was staffed with live operators English was the only language available.
- Common language used by the public to identify facilities was not used to identify sites. (ie.

Scottsville Community Center, which is better known in the community as “Old Scottsville School” or “Scottsville School Apartments”).

- Additional signage needed - temporary road signs; A-frame or lawn signs to direct people from near cross-streets or sidewalks; in-building signage directing residents to help.
- Expand use of church and other neighborhood networks to get the word out during a disaster when communication is down.
- CodeRed appears capable of being used more effectively. Training, effective system configuration, and clear process/protocol does not sufficiently exist.
- Social media platforms have emergency notification components which should be explored and implemented in concurrence with other strategies.
- There is very little, if any, direct contact information for County residents within County records.
- Public information and warning rely heavily on technology, electricity, the internet, and cellular phone coverage. Many of these were out of service during this event.
- The public information phone line took an excessive period of time to stand up due to some technology-related challenges.
- The regional Joint Information Center was not officially “stood up” but several people involved were using that language in describing the coordinated communication efforts. Not all efforts were coordinated and it was not communicated specifically that the JIC was formally mobilized.

Core Capability

Community Resilience

Mission Areas: Mitigation

Description: Enable the recognition, understanding, communication of, and planning for risk and empower individuals and communities to make informed risk management decisions necessary to adapt to, withstand, and quickly recover from future incidents.

Strengths

- There were many stories heard of neighbors helping neighbors - the community’s attitude towards resilience is strong.
- A number of people in the community offered assistance - further evidence of a positive climate for resilience

Areas for Improvement

Observations:

- Community awareness of the expectation of residents to sustain themselves for a 72-hour period seemed low - many seemed unprepared for the task.
- Expectations are unknown, and capabilities of the County are low, to support those most vulnerable with specific tangible aid in their homes or neighborhoods before or during an event (i.e. mobile charging trailers, solar chargers, batteries, flashlights, hand warmers).
- Snow remaining on sidewalks, and improperly cleared from streets, poses a problem for mobility and safety of pedestrians and drivers, impeding community resiliency. This issue may also increase the impact of a second storm following closely behind the first.

Core Capability

Situational Assessment

Mission Area: Response

Description: Provide all decision makers with decision-relevant information regarding the nature and extent of the hazard, any cascading effects, and the status of the response.

Strengths

- Staff reacted quickly from immediate lessons learned in the aftermath of the 1/3 storm and were better prepared for the possibilities associated with the 1/16 storm.
- A single situation assessment was created and communicated among the IMT for the 1/16 storm.
- A local Meteorologist, Travis Koshko, was utilized by the team for discussion and help in refining the situation assessment and likely impacts of the 1/16 storm.

Areas for Improvement

Observations:

- The 1/3 storm caught the majority of the organization flat-footed. Awareness of the storm's arrival and timing, as well as its possible impact, were either unknown or underestimated.
- A consistent, concise, organization wide situational assessment tool is not utilized.
- Who is responsible, organization wide, to communicate a situation assessment (and its urgency), to whom, and what those individuals are expected to do once it is received is not defined.
- There was very little detail or specific information provided by power companies as to the magnitude of the problem and the specific customers affected. In most cases, requested information on those without power was refused.
- The County IMT relied too heavily on the estimated restoration times from Dominion Power in making its decisions.

Core Capability

Long-term Vulnerability Reduction

Mission Area: Mitigation

Description: Build and sustain resilient systems, communities, and critical infrastructure and key resources lifelines so as to reduce their vulnerability to natural, technological, and human-caused threats and hazards by lessening the likelihood, severity, and duration of the adverse consequences.

Strengths

- Critical infrastructure within the County was identified ahead of time with Dominion VA Power. Other priority facilities have also been identified.

Areas for Improvement

Observations:

- Tree trimming and right of way maintenance is integral to preventing power outages. Though some utility rights of way throughout the County are well maintained, others are not.
- It was unknown during the storm aftermath whether or not critical infrastructure had been identified with power companies other than Dominion.

Core Capability

Mass Search and Rescue Operations

Mission Area: Response

Description: Ensure the capacity for timely communications in support of security, situational awareness, and operations by any and all means available, among and between affected communities in the impact area and all response forces.

Strengths

- Residents appreciated the overall concern and the fact that welfare checks were conducted.

Areas for Improvement

Observations:

- The inability to obtain accurate information from power companies as to individual homes and buildings without power hampered the team's goal of targeting welfare checks on those most vulnerable.
- Sufficient staff to conduct a timely and widespread search and rescue operation is not available at the County level. If the region is impacted, it is not available at the regional level either. State resources (i.e. National Guard Troops) will need to be called to adequately conduct a search and rescue operation for even a fraction of the County.
- Tracking of those homes that had been checked, when, and by what crew was cumbersome at best.