

COPING WITH A super storm

At the end of October, millions of people in the northeastern U.S. were severely affected by Sandy—a superstorm that was downgraded from a hurricane after it smashed into southern New Jersey with forceful 85-mph winds.

As Sandy tore through, storm waters flooded the streets of Atlantic City and ripped up a part of the famed boardwalk. A record-breaking 13-ft surge of seawater flooded New York City's financial district, subway systems and substations, causing a major power outage and turning the nation's largest city into a ghost town.

At the time this issue of *Water & Wastes Digest* went to print, a levee had broken in northern New Jersey, flooding towns with more than 3 ft of water; 7.5 million people had lost power across the East Coast; and at least 17 people were killed, according to reports.

In addition to all of the personal and emotional damage, storms of this magnitude bring heavy losses to public infrastructure. A Bloomberg report projected Sandy's economic toll to exceed \$20 billion as cities and states begin to repair damaged infrastructure.

These challenges hit close to heart for public water and sewer treatment plant officials who must monitor massive storms like Sandy carefully to ensure that there is no impact on water systems that may result in either planned or unplanned shutdowns of water services and compromise to water quality.

In the case of Sandy, a significant number of treatment plants are located along the shore, many of which could have been affected by the storm. At the time of print, for example, a leak at a Maryland water reclamation plant was causing roughly 2 million gal of raw sewage per hour to rush out into the Little Patuxent River, according to *The Baltimore Sun*. The leak was caused by an overflow resulting from power loss.

Thankfully, overall there have been relatively few major incidents, according to the latest reports.

The events of Hurricane Katrina in 2005 have resulted in a greater awareness of drinking water systems' vulnerability during natural disasters. Enhancements to security, technology, as well as the systems' physical ability to respond to various emergencies help minimize plant downtime and ensure reliable water and sewer services. Anticipation, preparation and effective communication to customers during a severe crisis are critical to emergency response operations.

Emergencies are inevitable. Unfortunately, it often takes a crisis or a natural disaster to brutally remind us how dependent we are on the otherwise out-of-sight water infrastructure. It is vital that water and wastewater organizations nationwide continue to develop effective emergency operations and preparedness planning. It is this type of smart emergency preparedness that mitigates the impacts of massive natural disasters.



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Water & Wastes Digest is published exclusively for the 80,000+ decision makers in the municipal and industrial water, wastewater and water pollution industries. These individuals actively design, specify, buy, operate and maintain the equipment, chemicals and services used for water treatment. Editorial content in this audited publication highlights new products and technologies concerning the supply, collection, treatment and distribution of drinking water; the collection, treatment and disposal of wastewater; and hazardous waste pollution control. A product directory is included in the annual June Buyer's Guide.

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