



June 20, 2018

Testimony of Anthony DeVita, Assistant Chief of Operations, FDNY
Oversight Hearing- New York City's Emergency Planning for Coastal Storms

Good morning Chair Borelli and all of the Council Members present. My name is Anthony DeVita and I am the Assistant Chief of Operations at the New York City Fire Department. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today about the Fire Department's Emergency Planning for Coastal Storms. In addition to our partners at New York City Emergency Management, I am joined this morning by Chief Fred Villani, the Assistant Chief of EMS Operations.

The Fire Department puts a great deal of thought into planning for coastal storms and hurricanes. Hurricanes and severe storms can significantly disrupt normal fire operations. Such storms may be accompanied by flooding, damaging winds, and storm surge. Depending on the size, strength, and track of the storm, large coastal and inland areas of the city can flood, which means that Fire Department units in those areas will be faced with an increased call volume, civilian evacuations, restricted access to response areas, and the possible evacuation of FDNY quarters. We plan, conduct drills, and establish protocols to ensure that the Department can effectively prepare for and react to a hurricane that impacts New York City.

We also anticipate the ways in which a storm will impact our response to emergencies. Roads may become blocked by flooding or trees and debris. Apparatus may be negatively affected, including punctured tires, engine failure, electrical issues, and adverse effects of saltwater. We may even face the effects of civil unrest or opportunistic terrorism.

In order to meet these challenges, the Department engages in intense planning – at every level – for operating during a major coastal storm. Senior leadership takes steps to increase staffing and activate additional resources, including working with our partners at New York City Emergency Management. In addition, Firefighter Transport Teams are activated to support the Homebound Evacuation Program. We also ensure that adequate procedures are in place to secure sufficient fuel for apparatus vehicles and emergency generators. We coordinate with fellow city agencies at the appropriate level of command to determine resources available during the storm. This may include, for example, coordinating with the NYPD regarding street closures and traffic diversion, coordinating with the Department of Parks and Recreation regarding tree removal, and coordinating with the New York National Guard and United States Coast Guard, to name but a few.

FDNY divisions, battalions, and units compile lists of streets that are subject to flooding and could become impassable. Surveys are made to identify high ground locations within the affected area where apparatus can be staged before the area becomes isolated. They also survey locations and conditions of institutional occupancies such as hospitals, nursing homes, and correctional facilities. Where necessary, pre-planned procedures for these



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locations are developed and evaluated during training and drills. Units also maintain a list of hydrants located in their administrative area that are prone to becoming submerged during a storm.

We've taken measures to protect our facilities that are most vulnerable to flooding, including installing flood barriers, and we have mitigation projects currently underway at a number of such facilities that will involve raising electrical and communications equipment above flooding levels and installing generators on elevated platforms. EMS has the ability to employ EMS Station Relocation Trailers, which allow the Department to relocate the essential components of an EMS station.

Units also take steps to cover and protect exposed equipment and ensure that reserve apparatus are properly equipped and serviceable. FDNY facilities prepare for severe weather using checklists of supplies and equipment that is procured in advance of the start of hurricane season. Members ensure that Department property is stored to minimize the risk of water damage, and appropriate warnings are posted in areas that can become hazardous if flooded, such as near electrical panels and appliances. A determination is made as to whether fuel tanks should be drained in quarters that are expected to flood. Companies in areas prone to flooding plan for the potential to be relocated to Host Companies and ensure that appropriate preparations are made to accommodate them.

Using assessments of the storm and weather forecasts, senior operations leadership will determine the need for increased staffing and alternate scheduling. The Bureau of EMS may institute longer tours and the Bureau of Operations may allow flexible staffing to increase personnel availability. We have the ability to increase staffing at both PSAC I and PSAC II to handle greater call volume.

A storm may also impact the type of equipment that the Department uses during operations. Rescue, Squad, and Cold Water Rescue units are equipped with life preservers and cold water rescue suits. The Department will use high-axle vehicles to transport personnel and equipment to areas that have been flooded, and conduct evacuation, rescue and patient extraction in places that become difficult to access. Special Operations personnel may deploy marine resources such as waders, rafts, and a variety of boats. We've also secured federal grant money to enhance our capabilities and resilience to major storms. We've trained and equipped a number of specialized teams to rescue victims in flooded areas, including 10 Swift-Water Teams, SCUBA teams, and the Urban Search and Rescue Team. We've purchased zodiac boats, flood rescue boats, High-Axle vehicles, and dewatering equipment. We continue holding ongoing trainings and drills to practice responding to a major storm, covering flood rescue operations, and incident management.



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FDNY also mobilizes its Incident Management Team for managing department operations pre- and post-storm and supporting DOHMH with its Post Emergency Canvassing Operation (PECO).

During the storm itself, unit deployment is adjusted on an evolving basis to ensure that the Department is able to perform at the highest levels possible. All requests for information, directives, and orders are channeled through Department leadership at the Fire Department Operations Center (FDOC), Borough Command, and in the field. Reports on weather conditions and other pertinent information are transmitted via the FDOC to the Bureau of Communications and to units as necessary. Department Mobile Command Centers may be deployed to areas of the city that may have become isolated.

Throughout the storm, the Department remains in close contact with various agencies for continuing reports on weather and ground conditions. Senior leadership will also develop messages for transmission to public media by the Fire Department's Office of Public Information (OPI). OPI conveys safety messages and updates to various news media and radio stations. During extreme weather, OPI will work with local media to seek assistance reaching viewers/readers/listeners with critical messages, such as shutting off utilities or evacuating an area.

The Department may also request that media outlets transmit news for emergency personnel such as notifying off-duty personnel of an imminent recall. OPI uses its significant social media reach for these tasks as well.

Field units are responsible for being aware of the flooding conditions in their response areas, and they make surveys to determine developing conditions, including the status of main arteries that have become impassable, response areas that are flooded, locations of downed trees, live wires and submerged vehicles, and whether relocation of the unit is necessary. These developments are transmitted up the chain of command so that storm-specific operating procedures can be developed and adjusted as necessary.

FDNY also plays a key role in preparations for the evacuation of medical facilities. In advance of evacuation orders, FDNY members survey medical facilities to touch base with facility incident managers, review evacuation procedures and gather information to forward to OEM and State Department of Health. FDNY also manages the transportation section of the Healthcare Facility Evacuation Center.

We know that the dynamics of hurricanes have nearly limitless variables. No two storms are alike, and variations in the size, speed, and location of the storm can lead to vastly different operating conditions. Accordingly, FDNY members are highly skilled at adapting



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to evolving events. Especially during hurricanes, flexibility is emphasized at all command levels. Members are passionate about protecting the life and property of New Yorkers and they will not let storm conditions deter them from fulfilling that mission.

I would now like to briefly address Introduction 13. This bill would allow outdoor residential fire pits consisting of a freestanding vessel that is not designed for cooking in which a contained outdoor fire is made from gas burners or from burning wood. We have concerns about this bill, but we would like to continue discussing this idea with the Council. Backyard wood-burning fire pits generate cinders in close proximity to combustible homes and vegetation, and in particular we are concerned about the enhanced potential for structural or brush fires. There are some safety mechanisms that could help mitigate this risk, but enforcement of those measures presents a challenge.

As drafted, this bill would create an exception in the Emissions Standards subchapter of Title 24 of the Administrative Code, which covers Environmental Protection and Utilities. If we are able to find a solution, we believe that the legislation should also address Title 29, the New York City Fire Code, and that the Fire Department should be able to issue rules to guide the exemption, including, for example, to require that the vessel be made of appropriate fireproof material and that it must contain a spark-guard and screen. We look forward to further discussions on this topic.

We would be happy to take your questions at this time.

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Name: Anthony DeVita, Assistant Chief of Operations

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