

MAYOR BLOOMBERG ISSUES ORDER FOR MANDATORY EVACUATION OF LOW-LYING AREAS AS HURRICANE SANDY APPROACHES

Sunday, October 28, 2012

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Mandatory Evacuation Order for All People in Zone A; Discusses Safety Precautions All New Yorkers Should Take Before and During the Storm

Visit NYC.gov or Call 311 for Information about Evacuation Zones and Steps to Take to Prepare for the Hurricane

The following are Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg's remarks as delivered this morning at the Office of Emergency Management in Downtown Brooklyn:

"Well thank you all for coming. We are here at the City's Office of Emergency Management, and once again I wanted to thank Pamela Mitchell for signing for us today.

"Our purpose this morning is to update you on the City's preparation for Hurricane Sandy. I have talked to Governor Cuomo this morning, and our staffs have spent a lot of time with his staff and the MTA's staff to make sure that we're all coordinated, and I'm happy to say that I've never seen a coordination that I thought worked as well. Everybody understands that we all have responsibilities, and the cooperation that we've gotten from the State is everything we'd asked for.

"And I also had a conversation with the Governor volunteering our services for after we're out of danger, because there's likely to be a lot of damage if the hurricane continues to stall upstate and inland, and so our Police, Fire, Sanitation services perhaps will be able to help other parts of the state and the region that are less fortunate than we are.

"Last night we said this was a serious and dangerous storm. Nothing has changed there. The latest forecasts from the National Weather Service are for roughly the path and magnitude of the storm that we talked about yesterday. What they have changed is the magnitude of the storm surge that we are expecting in the coastal areas.

"The surge, particularly at high tides – and there's a high tide roughly every 12 hours, so tomorrow morning – tonight, tomorrow morning, tomorrow night, the next morning – that's when the tide is in, and if the wind is going in the right direction, it brings an enormous amount of water in and can flood lower-lying areas, and so that's what we're talking about. And what they said is the surge will be a few feet more than what they predicted yesterday. They now are talking about a surge from six to 11 feet. The gale-force winds are going start late this afternoon and growing overnight. The worst of the storm will still be on Monday night, and that's the worst of the surge. But tides overnight this night will lead to flooding in low-lying coastal areas – those designate as Zone A. There'll be a period tomorrow at low-tide when there won't be a surge, but then there the high-tide. There won't be a lot of water, but then the big one will be coming actually tomorrow night. Having said that, the one tonight can do plenty of damage.

"So I don't want anybody to go to bed tonight thinking that they can spend tomorrow worrying about the night – the night after. We've got to take some preparations today. And we anticipate that the surge will hit a lot of low-lying areas, and that the possibility of flooding will continue into Tuesday afternoon.

"In light of these conditions, I'm going to sign an Executive Order mandating evacuation of the Zone A areas. I'm also ordering that all of the City's public schools be closed on Monday.

"Now first, as to the evacuation zone: Let me stress that we are ordering this evacuation for the safety of the approximately 375,000 people who live in these areas. If you live in these areas, you should leave them this afternoon.

"Low-lying areas – Zone A – include: Coney Island, Manhattan Beach, and Red Hook and other areas along the East River in Brooklyn; all of the Rockaways, and also Hamilton Beach and Broad Channel in Queens; almost all the coastal areas of Staten Island; City Island, a small patch of Throgs Neck, and other patches of the South Bronx are also part of Zone A; and Battery Park City and stretches of the West Side waterfront and of the Lower East Side and East Village in Manhattan.

"If you want to find out do you live in Zone A, it's very simple: Just call 311 or go to the City's website at nyc.gov. Type in your address, or give your address to the operator, and they will tell you if you are in Zone A.

"If you live in one of the 26 public housing developments in Zone A, be aware that all elevators there will shut down at 7 pm tonight. So it really is important that you leave this afternoon.

"Also, the MTA has announced that they will start shutting down service of subways starting at 7 tonight, buses at 9 tonight. So if you need mass transit to leave Zone A, there really is a timeline when if you don't get there before they stop, you're going to be- have to find another way to get out.

"Let me stress: If you don't evacuate, you're just putting your own life in- you're not just putting your own life in danger; you are endangering the lives of first responders who may have to come in and rescue you. And we hope you don't face those kinds of dire situations, but you

could.

"My concern is for all the people, and particularly for the first responders who are willing to put their lives on the line, but there's no reason to have extra risks just because some people said, 'Well, maybe I'll wait it out,' and then later on changed their mind.

"If you do live in Zone A, your first option should be to seek shelter in the homes of family or friends in the city outside of Zone A during the storm, and you have all day to do that.

"As of 9 am this morning, we've also opened 72 evacuation centers in public schools around the city. You can, once again, find their by calling 311 or going to nyc.gov.

"If you live in Zone A and do not have a safe place to stay with friends or family out of Zone A, these shelters that I've talked about – the 72 – provide a place to sleep and meals, and there will be room for your pets, so take your pets along.

"If you are going to use one of these shelters, we strongly urge you to get there via public transportation. All of these shelters have at least one entrance usable for wheelchairs. But they might not have parking, so if you want to drive, there might not be a place to put your cars.

"If you require further information, you can call 311, or visit the Office of Emergency Management website, or the website of the Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities, which will also provide information about accessible transportation.

"But I want to reiterate that this evacuation is mandatory. It is for your own safety. If you cannot evacuate yourself and need assistance, call 311 and we will be sure to make sure somebody comes and helps you.

"Now, we will not be, in general, evacuating patients in the hospitals and chronic care facilities in Zone A, although we have evacuated or are in the process of evacuating a small hospital in downtown Manhattan.

"The reason for all of this is that the shelters have facilities, they have backup generators, and it's dangerous to move people when they're elderly. So on balance, we think they'll be fine. Every one of the shelters has been contacted more than once, and we're satisfied that it's an intelligent decision to leave them in place.

"The teams from the City Health Department are at these facilities making sure that the emergency generators are working and that they have back-up fuel supplies. And yesterday these facilities were also ordered to increase staffing immediately, and they have. Patients are also being moved to higher floors, where they should be safer in the case of flooding. And all of them have discharged patients that don't really require their services to reduce the number of people they have to take care of.

"Earlier this morning, Governor Cuomo and the MTA announced that they have begun to put in effect the contingency plan that they described Saturday. As I said before, they'll be closing down the City transit and suburban commuter rail systems tonight. Last subway runs will be at 7 pm; last bus runs will be at 9 pm. In the meantime, they are adding extra staff during the- today to be able to provide more transportation for people who want to leave Zone A.

"They do have to make sure that their equipment doesn't get damaged. Otherwise, we would not have subway trains when this is over or buses when it's over. So I think they are taking the kind of appropriate action that they should. That does put some pressure on everybody to use their facilities, however, while they're still functioning.

"Let me repeat what I said earlier: This is a serious and dangerous storm. For those in Zone A, evacuation is mandatory. In or out of Zone A during the storm, however, the safest place to be is indoors.

"If you live in a high-rise and lose power, you may lose water as well. So I suggested yesterday, fill a few pots of water and leave them on the sideboard so you can drink. If- you can use them for other- the wash.

"During the height of the storm, use staircases. Avoid using elevators. You never know when power would go out. You don't want to be stuck in an elevator. And if you are, obviously our Fire Department will come and rescue you, but they've got enough to do, so if we can avoid calling on them for those kinds of things, they'll be there for real emergencies.

"Stay away from windows and close your drapes. As we said yesterday, flying objects can go right through a window. Now, gale-force winds are something that almost all buildings in the city are built to handle, but there are old buildings where sometimes pieces of the building fly off. We think that construction sites are all tied down, and that's not as much of a worry as some of the older buildings. But if you don't go outside, and you don't go near your windows, you don't run the risk of getting hit by flying objects.

"As I said, the public schools will be closed on Monday. We'll make a decision Monday afternoon, evening about Tuesday. Our hope is that we can be open on Tuesday, but we will close the schools on Monday. Teachers who work in schools where we have opened shelters have volunteered to report to their shelters for serving the public, and that's great. We will need them.

"Street cleaning rules and parking meter rules are suspended citywide on Monday, but City offices are open and City employees should make every effort to report to their jobs on Monday morning.

"Now we will, if we have any more updates, put them out later in the day. We will try to notify everybody in Zone A. It's part of it depending on the fourth estate to do that. Part of it will we have signs up at intersections, and Police Department speaker- loudspeakers from cars will go around and try to notify everybody. NYCHA's been knocking on all the doors in their Zone A facilities, and hopefully people will understand that it's in their interest to get out.

"And a lot of people say, 'Oh well, I'm just going to tough it out.' If down the road, you can't tough it out and we have to come in with our first responders saving you, those people can't- those first responders put their lives in danger and aren't available for true emergencies.

"Now's the time to take the kind of sensible precautions that we said yesterday, even outside of Zone A. Make sure you have drinking water. Make sure storm drains and rain gutters are clear of debris. Secure outdoor items that might blow away in high winds.

"City parks and marinas, incidentally, will be closed as of 5 pm today until further notice. So please – and some people in marinas want to ride this out – this is a dangerous storm, and that's just not the smartest thing to do.

"If you are going anywhere by public transportation today, just plan to complete your trip by 7 pm. This is critical: If you live in Zone A and must evacuate, do not wait until the last minute to get to public transportation. No system can accommodate every single person if they all show up at the same time. That's not what they're designed to do. So it would make a lot of sense to leave a little earlier. An extra couple of hours would probably make your evacuation trip a lot easier, and it certainly will help everybody else.

"Stay inside as much as possible after sunset tonight. There's no reason why you can't go to the store today to get the kind of stuff that you need, or even be a little bit outside. But just remember, as these winds blow and grow during the day, which- and they'll grow to gale-force winds sometime tonight, the chances of a branch coming down or something are great.

"And we've been through a lot in the last 11 years. We've had experience with hurricanes. We've had experience with a transit strike and a blackout and more. So we know what to do, and I'm completely confident that all of the City agencies have made all the preparations that are appropriate, that they're working together.

"We'll certainly get through this, but we'd like to get through this with nobody getting hurt, and that's a lot more important than property damage. My guess is that with an exception of some of the flooded areas, there won't be a lot of property damage.

"But that's not our first priority. Our first priority is keeping everybody safe, and because of the surge we think it's appropriate that I sign an order mandating evacuation from Zone A.

"We all pull together in tough times. I'm sure your friends and families outside of Zone A would just love to have you for dinner tonight and to stay over. And if you have to stay on a couch, it might not be the most convenient thing the world – or even if you have to sleep with a blanket on the floor – but it's a lot better than running risks of having people get hurt or worse.

"We have an effective plan to keep New Yorkers safe and to recover from this as quickly as possible, and we will do that.

"Let me before we take questions just try to summarize in Spanish."

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Contact: Marc La Vorgna/John McCarthy (212) 788-2958

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