

MAYOR BLOOMBERG UPDATES NEW YORKERS ON CITY RESPONSE TO HURRICANE SANDY

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

"Once again, Lydia Callis is signing for us, and thank you. We're joined by Senator Chuck Schumer and Council Speaker Christine Quinn, and we're here to update you on Hurricane Sandy which has now officially left the New York City area. But I think it's fair to say the path of destruction that she left in her wake is going to be felt for quite some time.

"Make no mistake about it, this was a devastating storm, maybe the worst that we have ever experienced.

"Our first responders have been doing a heroic job protecting our city and saving lives – and they are still fighting fires and conducting live-saving search and rescue missions. We owe them an enormous debt of gratitude.

"The storm brought something like 23 serious fires to parts of Staten Island, Brooklyn, Queens, as well as City Island and the Bronx.

"The terrible fire on Breezy Point is now under control, but we believe we lost more than 80 houses. The search and recovery operations there are ongoing. If any of you saw the pictures on television it looked like a forest fire out in the Midwest. The winds were just devastating, blowing from one building to the next one, and those buildings were close together.

"We are hoping and praying that there was no loss of life in those fires, but even if we can save every life we know that many people have lost their homes. I want them to know that they have our full support in the days and weeks ahead.

"The 76 shelters we opened will remain open today – and we will continue to keep shelters open until people displaced by the storm can safely return to their homes or find temporary housing.

"Our first priority in this storm was – and continues to be – protecting lives. That's why we ordered an evacuation of the areas most at-risk, and why we worked so hard to get people out.

"Sadly, this storm claimed the lives of people throughout the region, including at least 10 in our city – and tragically we expect that number to go up as information continues to come in.

"I did want to extend my condolences to all the families who lost loved ones in the storm, and ask all New Yorkers to keep them in their thoughts and prayers.

"In addition to the lives we lost, the damage we suffered across the city is clearly extensive – and it will not be repaired overnight. The two biggest challenges facing our city going forward are getting our mass transit system up and running and restoring power.

"This morning we have begun the work of clearing and reopening bridges and roadways – both of which will take some time, and the best way New Yorkers can help us get this done quickly is to stay off the roads.

"The work is well under way. East River bridges have already been reopened. The work of getting our mass transit grid and our power grid restored, however, is going to take more time and a lot of patience.

"MTA CEO Joe Lhota has described this as the worst disaster the agency has seen in the 108 years the subways have been running. And Con Ed has described the damage done to its power systems as unprecedented in scope.

"So clearly – the challenges our city faces in the coming days are enormous.

"The MTA and Con Ed both have strong leaders and extraordinarily dedicated workers. They are working extremely hard – and they will be working around the clock to get their systems fixed.

"Our Administration will move heaven and earth to help them so we can get back up and running as quickly as humanly possible. But the damages that they face really are enormous.

"Here's the information that we have as of this moment regarding Con Ed and the MTA: The most recent report has approximately three-quarters of a million New Yorkers without power. There are something like 326 buildings in 59 public housing developments without power. That's about 60,000 people in more than 26,000 apartments. And many of them are in Zone A.

"The steam system in Manhattan south of 42nd Street was shut down as a preventive step by Con Ed. That affects heating, air conditioning, ventilation systems, including many of our hospitals. Because they shut it down preemptively, we're hopeful that the steam system can be restored fairly soon. I spoke to Con Ed CEO Kevin Burke to offer any assistance we can provide. We will talk to him again later on, but I think it is fair to say that you should expect given the extent of the damage, power may be out in lots of places for two or three days, and maybe even a little bit longer than that.

"There is extensive flooding in all under-river subway tunnels. Subway yards where rail trains are typically stored also flooded, and I think that shows the wisdom of Joe Lhota in moving trains out of there to higher ground. I don't think there was any damage done to the rolling stock, but the tunnels all flooded and that's going to be a big problem to get them back going.

"Public transportation remains closed until further notice is a good way to think about it. There is no firm timeline for the reactivation of bus or train service, but I'm sure the MTA will do everything it can to have limited bus service, perhaps this afternoon, and hopefully we'll be able to announce, or Joe Lhota will be able to announce, restoration of most bus service by tomorrow. We certainly think the roads by tomorrow will be clear and free of water.

"All major airports serving the metro area are closed today. Runways are flooded and there are no flights leaving or arriving. How much damage was done to the navigation equipment and lighting around them we don't know yet. To help

"To help people get around, I have signed an Executive Order that permits cab drivers to pick up multiple passengers, even if a passenger is already in the cab. It will also allow livery and black cars to pick up passengers off the street anywhere in the city. These measures will be in place as long as MTA service is out. If you use one of these cars, please make sure the car has a TLC license plate.

"Now let me bring you up to date on our hospitals. We reported last night that NYU- Downtown and the Manhattan Veterans' Affairs Hospitals were closed. NYU Langone also had to be evacuated overnight. That is virtually complete.

"Bellevue hospital has lost power, but at the moment is operating on backup power.

"Coney Island Hospital has been evacuated. The Department of Health is sending people to each of the hospitals and chronic care facilities in Zone A. We've had significant challenges at many of our hospitals and health care facilities. Fortunately, as of now there has been no storm related fatalities at any them.

"There are more than 6,100 people in our emergency shelters, and I'm happy to say there are more than 2,200 city staff working in those shelters right now.

"A number of our shelters lost power last night, but we were able to get backup generators to those that didn't have one.

"We've received almost 4,000 tree service requests since the storm began – those are for damaged or fallen trees. The majority of those are in Queens.

"Let me just urge everybody: 311 for downed trees, please. Or text 311 to report damaged trees. They represent a real and serious danger, and we've seen very tragic proof of that today.

"Yesterday a partially damaged at a site on West 57th Street required evacuation of the immediate vicinity. The Department of Buildings has determined that the crane is currently stable, however we can't fully secure the crane until the wind dies down. The procedure there, when the winds die down, will be to try to get the boom and strap it to the building, and then we could reopen the streets, and then over a period of time the contracting company will have to figure out a way to build a new crane on top and take that one down.

"Schools, as you know, are closed today. And I'm announcing they will also be closed tomorrow.

"As to City employees, here's what we've told them: New Yorkers need your help today. Working for the City, we have an obligation to help others. If your office is open and if you can safely – and I repeat safely – get to work, please do so. If your office is closed and you can safely report to a shelter to assist with operations, please do so.

"For example, all HRA centers are open for the people who need to access benefits, including replacement food and stamp vouchers for people who lost food as a result of the storm. In addition, we are beginning to reach out to small businesses to help them recover their business and stay in business.

"311 has long waiting times right now, so please use 311 online or text 311. Verizon had some problems with their lines, but we've managed to keep some of the 311 lines open.

"911 has been going without a hitch. Delays got up to five minutes, last time I checked they were minimal. But 911 has to be reserved only for life-threatening things, not for a tree, please. We've just got to make sure that if somebody has a real emergency we can get to them.

"And in terms of real emergencies, if you see a power line down, don't go near it. We've had some people killed for stepping in a puddle where a power line had also touched the water.

"We expected an unprecedented storm impact here in New York City, and that's what we got. So while the worst of the storm has passed, conditions are still dangerous. I just can't stress that enough.

"We will have some coastal flooding in effect today until about 3 pm. We'll update you if that changes.

"But stay away from the parks. They're all closed. Don't go near damaged trees, beaches, boardwalks or seawalls. People have lost their lives. I know it's fun to look and it's fun to challenge nature, but nature is an awful lot more powerful than we are and we just don't need any more fatalities.

"That's a recap of where we are. Our two biggest challenges going forward will be getting our transit system and power grid up and running, and we'll do everything humanly possible to assist the MTA and Con Ed in doing that.

"This morning, we continue to focus on live-saving operations – not only fighting fires, but protecting our hospitals and nursing homes.

"But we will get through the days ahead by doing what we always do in tough times, by standing together shoulder to shoulder ready to help a neighbor, comfort a stranger, and get the city we love back on its feet.

"I will continue to update you throughout the day. Later in the day I'll be serving some of the areas where there's the most severe damage.

"We'll take a few questions, but before let me just try to summarize for our Spanish-speaking New Yorkers."

- 30 -

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