



Stephanie Rawlings-Blake
Mayor
City of Baltimore

Robert Maloney
Director
Mayor's Office of Emergency Management

Memorandum

Date: March 7, 2016
To: The Honorable Bernard C. "Jack" Young—*president, Baltimore City Council*
Councilman James B. Kraft—*chair, Judiciary and Legislative Investigations Committee, Baltimore City Council*
From: Robert Maloney—*director, Mayor's Office of Emergency Management*
Re: *January 2016 Blizzard, Emergency Response*

In January 2016, Baltimore City experienced a major blizzard, which created hazardous conditions that persisted beyond the storm's approximately 36-hours of snowfall. Thanks to an effective response, led by the Department of Transportation, critical City services remained operational throughout the emergency, ensuring that damage to property, personal injury, and loss of life were kept to a bare minimum. In addition, Baltimore City as a whole was able to resume regular business much more quickly than expected.

The after action analysis currently underway has identified certain strengths in the City's response, as well a number of areas for improvement. A summary of the major strengths and areas for improvement is included here. Additional recommendations to improve operating procedures for future incidents, as well as further lessons learned from this incident will be included in the after action report, which will be released in the coming months.

Major Strengths

Critical Services and EMS

- One of the main goals for the emergency response was to maintain continuity of 911 services and, when necessary, take immediate actions to ensure the City's ability to provide critical services. There was some concern that the severity of the storm could potentially cause delays in responding to calls for fire suppression and EMS services. Thanks to effective snow removal efforts and inter-agency coordination, fire and EMS response times saw no generalized or significant delays. Fire and police were able to navigate the city and respond to every emergency.
- The lack of power outages in the city was remarkable, especially considering the high winds during a large portion of the blizzard. And by targeting snow removal efforts in the areas of these outages, DOT ensured that BGE repair crews (and, in one case, a Baltimore Housing contractor) were able to respond as soon as weather conditions were safe and restore power as quickly as possible.

- MOEM facilitated the rental of a number of 4-wheel-drive vehicles, which were of great use to BCFD and BPD—agencies that currently lack a sufficient number of weather-ready vehicles.
- All BCFD battalion chiefs were equipped with 4-wheel-drive vehicle and plow blade. This helped to keep the firehouses (and the surrounding streets) clear and accessible, helping to ensure continuity of fire and EMS services.
- DGS snow removal crews placed heavy emphasis on keeping BPD district stations (and the surrounding streets) cleared. This was beneficial to the police districts and their public safety operations.

All Hazards Staging Area and Incident Management Team Support

- MOEM activated its All Hazards Staging Area at Pimlico Racetrack. The staging area was incredibly advantageous in a number of ways.
 - The neighborhood streets directly surrounding the staging area were given high priority for snow removal, in order to facilitate city-wide snow removal operations. However, this was also an important gesture to the community surrounding the staging area, which, as a central hub for resource deployment, saw an abundance of heavy equipment traffic.
 - In one instance, a fully operational All Hazards Staging Area was a literal life saver. When a contractor suffered a sudden cardiac arrest, the on-site BCFD medic crew—equipped with a full complement of Advanced Life Support equipment—was able to reach the patient within two minutes and provide emergency defibrillation, saving the man’s life. The medic crew was on-hand as part of the standard operating procedure for MOEM’s All Hazards Staging Area.
- Prior to the blizzard—with the consensus of the lead agency, DOT—MOEM arranged for assistance from the State of Ohio Butler County Incident Management Team (IMT), a nationally recognized Type II IMT. This team’s assistance was of great value to the All Hazards Staging Area and to the City’s emergency response operation as a whole.

Logistics for Emergency Response Personnel

- MOEM provided 4-wheel-drive transportation service to and from the EOC for key emergency response personnel. This operation supported the safety and wellness of emergency response personnel, ensuring their safe passage. The service was very well received and should be rolled-in to future emergency responses as needed, however, it was a very resource intensive operation for MOEM, and some research should be done to determine the best agency to house this function.
- MOEM also provided hotel rooms near the EOC, which were made available to employees working out of the EOC. This reduced the travel times needed by these employees, and ensured that they could continue to staff the EOC, despite Snow Emergency Phase III travel restrictions. It also enabled personnel to obtain sufficient rest, outside of the chaotic environment of the EOC.

Coordination with Health Care Institutions

- We maintained strong lines of communication with Baltimore City health care partners. Conference calls involving a consortium of area hospitals, dialysis centers, BCHD, and MOEM were made

multiple times per day. These communications enabled health care providers to more effectively coordinate with patients and transportation providers—decreasing the volume of requests to 311 and the EOC.

- In preparation for the storm, MOEM worked with BCHD to urge dialysis providers to schedule dialysis treatments early. This shifted the burden of those facilities, increasing services in the week leading up to the storm, but decreasing the need for dialysis treatment during the heaviest portions of the storm. 479 patients were scheduled to receive dialysis on Friday, and dialysis centers were able to remain open until all scheduled patients received treatment.
 - Focusing on dialysis logistics during the pre-storm period helped mitigate excessive burden on the City's 911 services during the storm for dialysis/critical care emergencies.

Major Areas for Improvement

Staffing and EOC Presence

- As in previous prolonged incidents, keeping operations fully staffed around the clock proved challenging. The majority of City agencies do not have a sufficient number of employees who are adequately trained and expected to serve in an EOC role during extended events.
 - The shortage of personnel created conditions in which employees became overworked and dangerously fatigued. Many team members were required to work 14 – 16 hour shifts (or more in some cases) for days at a time.
- On several occasions, one or more agencies did not have a representative present at the EOC. The purpose of full EOC activation during an emergency response is to enable core and support agencies to respond to issues expeditiously, as they emerge, as outlined in the City's Emergency Operations Plan (EOP). To facilitate the effectiveness of the EOP, required agencies must have a representative present—at the physical location of the facility—at all times during an emergency response.

Critical Care Patient Transport

- When the Maryland Transit Administration advised of its decision to keep MTA Mobility services suspended longer than expected, BCHD worked to effectively arrange transport for all dialysis and critical care patients. The department did an outstanding job, working with MEMA, the National Guard, BPD, BCFD, and TransDev contractors, to ensure that dialysis was provided for those most in-need; however, there were definite shortcomings.
 - BCHD is not able to maintain a list of patients, along with their schedule for dialysis; however, such a list would greatly assist in prioritizing calls for transport and allocating the limited resources available for transport.
 - Because of the tracking methods used by private dialysis centers and patient transport contractors, BCHD was not able to provide up-to-the-minute data regarding the number of patients transported or the number of patients who have received treatment. These numbers were only available at the end of each day—too late to inform the day's transport operations during an emergency response.

Sheltering

- When private shelters were filled to capacity, it took entirely too much effort to open, staff, and supply additional shelters. There is no dedicated funding source to provide support when unforeseen sheltering is needed; we must be able to more easily provide necessary resources for staffing, nourishment, transportation, accommodation, sanitation, and other considerations.
- Transporting homeless individuals to shelters with available space became very resource intensive, especially when the storm worsened and private organizations cycled down their transport operations. We were not prepared with sufficient resources to make our response an efficient and timely operation. The collective agencies need to do better.

Refueling Operations

- Fuel delivery needs far exceeded the capacity of City agencies. Even though the City maintains three tanker trucks (one in BCFD, two in DGS), only one of these was able to be operationalized, due to an absence of drivers with both a commercial driver's license (CDL) and a hazmat endorsement.
 - When the BCFD fuel tanker experienced engine trouble and was pulled from service for repairs, refueling operations had to be put on hold until mutual aid was obtained.

CC:

Khalil Zaied—deputy mayor for operations, Office of the Mayor

Fire Chief Niles Ford—Baltimore City Fire Department

Connor Scott—assistant deputy mayor for operations, Office of the Mayor

Angela Gibson—legislative liaison, Office of the Mayor

Capt. Roman Clark—special assistant to the fire chief, Baltimore City Fire Department

Tereina Thomas—special assistant to the fire chief, Baltimore City Fire Department

Marguerite Murray—staff, Judiciary and Legislative Investigations, Office of Council Services