



703-356-0551
Fax 703-821-4275
TTY 711

E-mail: dranesville@fairfaxcounty.gov
Web site: www.fairfaxcounty.gov/dranesville

**COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA
COUNTY OF FAIRFAX**

McLean Governmental Center
6649-A Old Dominion Drive
McLean, VA 22101



**JOHN W. FOUST
DRANESVILLE DISTRICT SUPERVISOR**

**BOARD MATTER
SUPERVISORS JOHN FOUST AND GERALD HYLAND
JULY 31, 2012**

**June 29 Storm
Staff Follow-Up Report**

BACKGROUND: Madam Chairman, on July 10, 2012, this Board received a preliminary summary of information regarding the June 29 storm from the County Executive. As noted in that report, “The Office of Emergency Management will conduct a complete after-incident report, bringing in County agencies, partner agencies and external partners.”

The purpose of this Board Matter is to request that the Board of Supervisors direct that specific issues identified herein be included in staff’s review and that the Board direct staff to prepare and present a comprehensive report to document the results of the review and to make recommendations for improving response to future disaster events.

I anticipate that, in its review and report, staff will address a broad spectrum of issues regarding the storm and its aftermath. This Board Matter is not intended to limit the scope of staff’s review to the specific items identified herein.

Warning of Potential Disaster

My records indicate that on Friday evening, June 29, at 9:08 p.m., the County’s Office of Emergency Management sent the first notice of Severe Thunderstorm Watch to County personnel. This was followed by a notice to County staff on the Emergency Alert Network at 9:58 p.m. It appears that OEM sent its first Severe Thunderstorm Warning alert to the community at large on the Community Emergency Alert Network (CEAN) at 10:03 p.m. According to the EAN alert, the storm had already entered Fairfax County at 9:44 p.m. The County Executive’s report indicates that the EOC was activated at a “monitoring level” about one hour later, around 11 p.m.

According to the synopsis of events prepared by the Fire and Rescue Department that is included in the County Executive’s report, “The local evening news reported that a large line of thunderstorms were moving east and could affect the Washington Metropolitan area later in the evening. As the evening progressed, media sources were indicating that the storm had not weakened and would affect the area around [9 or 10 p.m.] with damaging winds.” The Weather channel started reporting on the effects and path of the storm as early as Friday morning.

- Why did OEM wait until 9:08 p.m. to alert County personnel and 10:03 p.m. to alert the community at large of this storm and its potential impact?
- Were preparations made by the county during the day on Friday to plan and prepare for the storm and its aftermath? If so, what was done? If not, why not?
- Did Dominion take any steps on Friday to position additional crews to deal with the aftermath of the storm? And, if not, why not?

County's 911 Response

County staff has reported that immediately after the storm hit, and before Verizon 9-1-1 service stopped working, the emergency call center was inundated with 9-1-1 calls. Residents have reported that, during that most critical time, they were unable to get through to 9-1-1. At Chairman Bulova's request, the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments has directed its technical and other committees with expertise in 9-1-1 service, telecommunications and related matters to compile, assess and identify actions required to address the Verizon 9-1-1 service issues during the June 29 storm. County staff should review and report on the County's (not Verizon's) performance including the following:

- What will be done to ensure that the County's 9-1-1 center is prepared to handle a massive influx of emergency calls that is inevitable following a significant natural or man-made disaster?
- What is the County's protocol to notify the public when 9-1-1 service is overwhelmed or not functioning and can any improvements be made?
- What is the County's protocol for handling emergency calls when 9-1-1 service is overwhelmed or not working and can any improvements be made?

Cooling/Warming Centers

The County issued the first announcement of available cooling centers on Saturday June 30. Due to lack of power to public facilities, the first cooling center did not open in McLean until Wednesday July 4 and no cooling centers were opened in Great Falls.

- In the event of a massive power outage, what can be done to ensure that power restoration to major public facilities such as recreation centers, community centers and libraries is made a priority so these facilities can serve as cooling or warming centers?
- Does the County maintain a list of facilities that can be used as cooling/warming centers and, if not, can one be prepared?
- What are the costs and issues to ensure that each region of the County has at least one substantial public facility with adequate generator power to heat and cool the facility in the event of a power outage?

Setting priorities for Power Restoration- General

The County Executive's interim report, in the Key Highlights section, states "Prioritized critical infrastructure needs by EOC staff in conjunction with Dominion Virginia Power and the County's Facilities Management Department."

- How are Dominion's restoration goals and priorities set?

- What is the acceptable time for power restoration of power to high priority facilities?
- What is the acceptable time for power restoration to low priority facilities (including personal residences)?
- What role does the County staff working in the EOC play in setting priorities for power restoration?
- How did OEM and FM staff make determinations regarding what infrastructure was critical and the priorities for power restoration to those facilities?
- Is there a specific list of facilities that are a priority for power restoration, and if not, can one be prepared?
 - Can the Supervisors review the list to ensure it includes essential facilities in their districts?

Setting Priorities for Power Restoration- McLean and Great Falls

The following critical facilities in McLean did not have power restored until July 2: Chesterbrook Assisted Living Facility; Powhatan Assisted Living Facility; Lewinsville Senior Residences; McLean Community Center; and, Spring Hill Recreation Center. In addition, the Library, which could have served as a cooling center, also did not have power restored until July 2. Typical power outage duration in Great Falls was between 5 and 7 days. Most Great Falls residents do not have water or septic when their power is out. Facilities in Great Falls that could be made a priority for power restoration to serve as cooling/warming centers include: the commercial center; Fire station; Library; and Elementary School.

- If these McLean and Great Falls facilities are not on a priority list for power restoration, should they be added to the list?

Traffic Management

This storm caused downed trees and power lines that blocked dozens of roads in the county. In addition, power outages knocked out traffic signals and caused dozens of intersections to go dark. At one point, so many streets were closed that Police were reporting there were not enough “road closed” or “detour” signs.

- What is the status of the County’s efforts to add power generators to operate signals at major intersections in the event of a power outage?
- Should the County anticipate the potential magnitude of these events and add appropriate signs and other resources to the Police’s inventory?
- Can/should the Police take a more active role in directing traffic through darkened intersections?

Communication with Supervisors

It has been reported that County staff in the Emergency Operations Center were working with Dominion to establish priorities for power restoration. Members of the Board of Supervisors and their staffs are very aware of the situations and needs in their own districts. They are not part of the team that works out of the EOC. However, staff that does report to the EOC should be communicating with Supervisors during the emergency and recovery effort.

- Can staff recommend a protocol to ensure that County personnel in the EOC communicate on a regular basis with the Supervisors during disaster recovery efforts to determine the needs they have identified and the priorities they recommend?

Communications with the Public

Many County residents received critical information about the storm recovery status and efforts via local radio networks, especially WTOG.

- How can the County best utilize the local broadcast media to assist in getting information to the public during an emergency event?

Minimizing duration of future outages

No one should be without power for a week or longer, especially when it is freezing outside or temperatures are 90 degrees plus. In addition to being extremely inconvenient it is very dangerous. Understandably, Dominion had to prioritize the limited resources they had available. However, more resources would have meant quicker power restoration for many of its customers.

- Will Dominion work with the County to set a reasonable goal for restoring all power and commit to meeting that goal in the event of a massive power outage?
- What can Dominion do to get more resources to the area when a massive power outage occurs?

Minimizing extent of future outages

Mass power outages happen too frequently and their effects are too prolonged and too severe. In the interim between outages, Dominion's focus should be on improving its infrastructure and making it less vulnerable to natural disasters.

- What is Dominion doing to improve the ability of its infrastructure to withstand the devastating effects of either man-made or natural disasters?
 - Should major transmission and distribution lines be underground?
 - Can improvements be made to make it easier and quicker to bring customers back on line?
 - Can changes be made to Dominion's power distribution grid to reduce the number of outages that occur and/or to make power restoration more timely?
 - Can Dominion identify the most vulnerable lines and the ones that cause the most frequent and significant disruptions and present a plan for addressing them?
- If Dominion is going to designate certain communities to be the last to get their power restored, then during the periods between massive power outages, can Dominion work to improve and strengthen the infrastructure in those communities?
- What are other utilities doing to improve the ability of their infrastructure to withstand the devastating effects of either man-made or natural disasters?
- What does County staff recommend be done by Dominion and other utilities to protect and improve their infrastructure?

Coordination between VDOT and Dominion

Numerous reports suggest that there was insufficient coordination between VDOT and Dominion regarding tree removal. VDOT crews would go out to a site but be unable to remove fallen trees because there were downed power lines. In other reported cases, Dominion could not ground a line because they needed VDOT to clear debris. The crews would leave and then have to return after the other crew took care of the predecessor activities.

- What is being done to improve coordination between VDOT and Dominion crews?

Dominion web dashboard

We received many complaints about Dominion's web dashboard which is intended for use by residents to review outage information. Residents complained that the website does not provide basic information such as whether a crew has been assigned to repair an outage.

- What is being done to improve Dominion's web dashboard?

MOTION: Madam Chairman, we move that the Board of Supervisors direct the County Executive to address the issues and questions raised herein in the after-action report County staff is preparing on the June 29 storm event and the subsequent recovery efforts.