

Winter Storms Put a Damper on the Holiday (continued from page 1)

Periodic power outages within the city, as well as longer sustained outages to outlying areas, had left some citizens vulnerable. On December 24, at around 2:00 PM, the power went out in town for good, and remained out through Christmas until the early morning hours of December 27.

The city had previously procured several large generators from Halton Rentals which were ready and in place when the power went out on the 24th. One was used to power the Sentry Market to provide a food source for citizens, another was set up at the Middle School which was being prepared as a site for an emergency shelter, and a third was used to power the water plant to provide drinking water for citizens. The city was not charged for those generators until they were actually put into use.

The city opened the emergency shelter on December 24 at the Middle School, providing a warm place to stay and hot meals for those without power. "In my opinion, that's what it's here for," said Superintendent Ken Cox, when he was later thanked for the use of the facility. The shelter was run by



National Guard Humvees helped reach citizens isolated by poor road conditions.

city employees, school staff and volunteers. It was given limited assistance from the Oregon Trail Chapter of the Red Cross, who provided some blankets, emergency meals, and other supplies, but no staff. "We are continuing to monitor situations all over the state," said Chapter Emergency Services Director Eric Corliss. "We are available to provide support, and want to try to augment the local community response."

Vital services were shut down with the power outage, including the only public fuel station, and citizens were forced to wait near the Wilcox and Flegel card-lock in the hopes of purchasing fuel from someone with a card, to run generators. The City eventually

updated weather and other pertinent information for citizens, including where shelters would be established, and emergency contact information. "My motto is 'We would rather be safe, than sorry,'" said Vernonia Mayor Sally Harrison, in response to the decision to notify residents of the predicted weather conditions and flood warnings. "I would rather be over-prepared."

An attempt was made by the City to manage media coverage, attempting to release pertinent information through television interviews with local outlets that came to Vernonia to cover the event, and through radio interviews. Chief Kay, acting as the city Public Information Officer, attempted to contain fears about flooding, while still getting information out to local citizens by all means available.

Poor road conditions, deep snows and an inability to reach citizens without power on Keasey, Stoney Point, Mellinger and Pebble Creek Roads, forced the Incident Command to request additional resources on December 27, with Oregon National Guard troops in three Humvees arriving that afternoon. Local medical personnel and a police officer were able to travel in those Humvees, traveling every road in the fire district to do welfare checks on most residents, bringing food, water and other needed supplies. Power was restored to most area residents on Saturday, December 27.

The heavy rains and warmer temperatures that had been predicted thankfully never materi-

alized, and Vernonia was spared any flooding on Rock Creek and the Nehalem River. Volunteer crews, Public Works crews, County crews, and contracted workers began slowly clearing roads, uncovering drainage grates on city streets, and clearing parking areas. The emergency shelter was closed at 7:00 PM on Sunday, December 28.

The Joint Incident Command, which had continued to meet and hold daily briefings each morning for four days, met for the last time on Monday, December 29, at which time the City Council rescinded the declared State of Emergency.



One of several Incident Command briefings that were held during the Snow emergency



Over 500 visitors used the shelter between December 24th and the 28th.

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