

Ready from A1

there,” said City Manager Richard Meyers. “If it had been a snowstorm that stayed in blizzard conditions for the whole week, it would have taxed our equipment, our resources and we would have needed somebody else’s help.”

The Disasters

The other disasters, while less severe, caused evacuations along the affected areas. Flooding saw historic rates of water released from Dorena Reservoir to prevent overflow and the fire put a network of about a dozen agencies to the test, seeing at least 86 emergency personnel respond to the event.

While each disaster posed its own challenges and learning moments, the snowstorm stood out most saliently as a small taste of what a truly catastrophic incident such as the Cascadia earthquake might bring.

Though no deaths directly related to the storm were reported by PeaceHealth Cottage Grove Community Medical Center or emergency services, damage to the area was extensive and some residents reported more than two feet of snow. Many roads outside of town were impassable, blockaded by fallen trees and barriers of snow, effectively cutting off many rural residents from in-city resources. Fuel stations and grocery stores were understaffed and overwhelmed by throngs of customers stocking up. A state of emergency was declared.

In a damage assessment scheduled to be submitted to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) today, the full index of damage and costs

estimates a \$251,175 price tag.

In response to the carnage, emergency services became inundated with calls and incidents.

From Monday through Thursday the week of the storm, police department data reported 44 welfare checks, 60 fire or medical calls and 10 burglary alarm responses. In all, 328 emergency and 875 non-emergency calls came in, bloating the phone lines to two or three times the normal amount.

Power companies, too, scrambled to respond to a high volume of inquiries and outage reports. When the sun broke on the first day, Cottage Grove was completely without power save for those with generators. The city’s main electricity provider, Pacific Power, reported more than 3,300 Cottage Grove customers affected by the power outages and 44,000 throughout its coverage area, though the company fully restored power by the end of the week.

Grade Report

Despite the seeming disorder, city and county officials remain largely pleased with Cottage Grove’s response to the disasters.

Meyers felt that the city’s habit of looking ahead set it apart from other Lane County cities outside the Eugene-Springfield area.

“That’s one of the reasons we were successful,” he said. “Let’s plan for the next thing and if we don’t need it, let’s put it away afterwards. ... That helped us a lot, that we were constantly thinking of that.”

Though the city’s speed of plowing during the snowstorm was a source of frustration among some residents, Meyers credits the upgrading of the plow equipment last fall as eas-

ing much of the strain.

“If we’d had the older equipment it would’ve been much more difficult to have handled the situation,” he said.

Keeping main arteries open to traffic for basic resources came first and, as welfare check requests and emergency incidents began to roll in, the city also prioritized its plows to clear the way for emergency responders before finally getting around to smaller residential streets.

At the time, South Lane County Fire and Rescue Division Chief Joe Raade spoke to *The Sentinel* about the district’s response.

“The fire district was able to weather the storm well and is definitely prepared for the next time this occurs,” he said.

City facilities such as water and wastewater treatment plants also proved to be ready for inundation.

“We didn’t have any hiccups or any issues as far as backed-up sewer lines. Our waste treatment plant functioned,” said Cottage Grove Public Works and Development Director Faye Stewart. Though, “It was touch and go. It was close to capacity.”

Keeping basic operations up and running during the power outage caused by the snowstorm was instrumental to much of the city’s ability to respond effectively. Generators at treatment plants and other municipal facilities passed this test.

Additionally, city data

had been stored electronically and moved to an online cloud.

“So, we could still go operate anywhere,” said Meyers. “Any place that had electricity we could go and run the city.”

With this technology, Meyers predicted that if a large enough catastrophe struck, the city could still set up in a tent with a generator.

“Those kinds of things we’ve put together — we just hope we never have to use,” he said.

Attendance of city staff remained high during the snowstorm as well, a characteristic owed to staff being individually prepared enough to come to work, assured that their families were safe at home.

“Virtually every one of the employees got to work in the middle of the storm and stayed here and worked with their focus on the city’s well-being,” said Stewart. “Our staff is a strength. We have seasoned employees with long tenure and are very skilled in multiple areas.”

During the snowstorm, the city opened a warming center at the Community Center and arranged for American Red Cross stations during both the snowstorm and flooding.

The city had also stocked up on bags and sand to prepare for warmer March weather after the snow.

“We went ahead and brought in a couple more dump truck loads of sand

with concerns that the snowmelt might cause some flooding,” said Stewart.

A sandbag filling site was set up and concerned citizens eagerly accepted the gift, a token of the city’s foresight.

“As a matter of policy, we try to keep some level of material on site and available,” Stewart said.

Then post-disaster, the question was raised of what to do with all the natural debris. In response, lot space was made for fallen branches and trees, giving an opportunity for citizens to help clean up their neighborhoods. A gnarled hill formed from the amount of wood hauled in before it was ground down to chips.

Selling three quarters of the wood chips to a local company covered hauling costs and the rest of the chips have been left for citizens to use as needed. The city plans to use the remainder for parks and beautifying other city sites.

“There were a lot of positive comments from citizens in the community who really felt that that was just a great offering the city did by giving them a place to bring their storm damage and then make the product available for them, too,” Stewart said. “It worked out really well.”

A month later, the flooding event had comparatively minor impact, especially within city limits.

“For the most part, we

didn’t suffer a lot of damage from the flood event,” said Stewart. “It was more toward Creswell and some of the county areas.”

City concerns revolved around keeping water flow areas free of debris and finding a dry place for affected residents coming from the outskirts of the city. And because the city had already restocked sand and sandbags in anticipation of a quick snowmelt, citizen access to these was swiftly laid out.

A discrepancy between impacts within city lines and in county jurisdiction was partly due to higher standards in city limits, which stipulate that houses in flood zones are raised two feet above base flood elevation; Lane County’s standard is just one foot.

“We have a lot of things that the city has already been doing for many decades,” said Cottage Grove City Planner Amanda Ferguson.

Tactics to curb the threat of flooding include buying up properties with housing dangerously close to rivers, effectively running treatment facilities, using ponds as flood storage areas, maintaining a storm water system, street sweeping programs and using the city’s golf course as irrigation and flood storage.

Ferguson, who is also the flood plain manager and community rating system (CRS) manager for the city, has used these aspects to

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