

After Action Report – Winter Storm Mara 2023

Situation Synopsis

- A significant icing event unfolded between the late afternoon hours on January 30 and mid-morning of February 2, 2023.
- Freezing precipitation led to widespread ice accumulations up to three-quarters of an inch.
- Ice buildup caused damage to trees and power lines. Power outages in Pflugerville affected approximately 10,800 customers.
- The extreme scale of debris led to disaster declarations and required large scale cleanup efforts for weeks after the incident.

Improvements Implemented from Previous Storms

Emergency Management:

- Emergency Management Coordinator was hired to develop an Emergency Management Program.
- Emergency Operations Center (EOC) has been established with supporting documentation, plans, and staff.
- Regular EOC and emergency management training has been held since September 2022.
- An EOC Winter Weather Tabletop Exercise was conducted on January 23rd.

Public Works:

- Created and implemented a Public Works Emergency Action Plan (EAP).
- Developed a Critical Facility List with Oncor to ensure power restoration is prioritized for city critical infrastructure.
- Emergency generators were installed for water treatment facility and lift stations (grant funding is currently pending for the Colorado River lift pump station).
- Established emergency fuel agreements with vendors to provide emergency fuel supplies.
- Purchased snow removal and de-icing equipment (2 snowplows and one tailgate sander).
- Master keys and chain of custody were created for access to city facilities and vehicles.

Police Department, P+C, Finance:

- Purchased 16 AWD vehicles that are currently in operation.
- Updated pay policy for exempt and non-exempt employees during emergencies.

Communications:

- Appropriate personnel have been provided city issued cell phones, Government Emergency Telecommunications Service (GETS) accounts, and emergency radios.
- Acquired CivicReady communications platform for internal and public emergency communications.
- Updated Emergency Communications Plan.

Response Actions

Emergency Management Operations:

- The Emergency Management Coordinator (EMC) monitored outages and grid conditions and attended daily meetings with regional partners.
- Warming Center and shelter information was communicated to staff and the public.
- Locally, the Library and Recreation Center were open to the public as warming centers during business hours.
- The four senior living facilities within the city were contacted and offered assistance.
- Wellness checks conducted for all residents on the State of Texas Emergency Assistance Registry (STEAR) for powered medical devices.

Public Works Operations:

- Public Works phones were staffed 24/7 during the event.
- Roads and bridges were treated for ice accumulation, as necessary.
- Waste Connections was contracted for dumpsters and curbside debris removal.
- Two debris removal sites were established at Railroad Avenue and the Recycle Center.
- KC Tree was contracted to collect, chip, and remove debris from the two debris removal sites.
- Field crews conducted debris removal operations from February 6th to March 31st.
- A total of 149,481.5 cubic yards of debris were collected and removed.

Public Works Water/Wastewater:

- 24-hour staffing for facility operations, alarm response, resident calls, and other divisions support as needed.
- Responded to numerous power outages throughout recovery at various remote sites and helped support operations staff when needed.
- Responded to numerous intermittent outages at the Lake Pump Station and ran the facility on the generator for roughly 16 hours.

Parks & Recreation:

- The Recreation Center was open as a Warming Center during normal business hours.
- Staff addressed small wind-related issues in the parks throughout the day.
- Portable generators were available to deploy throughout the city as needed.
- Weekend and on-call staff conducted debris removal operations at all park facilities and properties.
- Heaters were placed in the pipe infrastructure housing of pool facilities and park restrooms to help prevent pipes from freezing and breaking.

Communications:

- Social media channels were routinely updated with relevant information and were actively monitored, providing responses to resident's questions as needed.
- A prominent red banner was added to the City's website linking to the preparedness page. The preparedness page was used to share information with the public and included links to local and national services.
- Provided Community Impact with City preparedness tips for residents.
- Signs were placed at all City public buildings welcoming residents to visit the City of Pflugerville Library and Recreation Center during business hours.
- Social media posts on City and PD pages: how to shut off water video, winter weather prep tips, US National Weather Service updates (on-going), 4Ps video, post detailing how to sign up for Nixle alerts, www.WarnCentralTexas.org and the US National Weather Service alerts.

Lessons Learned / Improvement Plan

Operational Communications:

- The Emergency Management Coordinator should conduct daily coordination and response meetings with greater lead time before an expected incident.
- City departments should ensure operating procedures and timekeeping policies are communicated to city employees in a timely manner.
- The Emergency Management Coordinator will ensure that information on policy and operations should be better communicated to the Mayor and City Council to help facilitate timely decision making.

Operational Coordination:

- Create a list of emergency vendors and ensure current contracts have emergency clauses. This includes ensuring increased demand for resources can be met.
- Purchasing and payroll guidelines and decision points should be added to emergency response documents and policy.
- Acquire additional equipment for road treatment and debris removal, as well as vehicles with all-weather capability.
- Establish a centralized call center/dispatch to better coordinate department calls for service from the public.

Public Information and Warning:

- Incorporate strategy meetings to address changes in public communication and timing.
- Create message templates and include images to enhance effectiveness. (CivicReady)
- Departments provide real time updates and information to communications to reduce lag time.

Situational Assessment:

- The Emergency Management Coordinator will schedule updates and planning meetings with greater lead time prior to the arrival of the storm.