

METROPOLITAN WASHINGTON COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS

Leadership Forum on Snow Response: Proposed Implementation Agenda

April 14, 2010

After the Blizzards of 2010 buried the region under more snow than it had experienced in 100 years, COG Board Chairman Kwame Brown called for an After-Action Leadership Forum on Snow Response to begin collecting important lessons-learned from the experience. The April 5 program examined the region's expectations and performance in clearing roadways and railways, and how well local, federal and state government officials worked together to manage the response to the storms. On April 7, the Chief Administrative Officers Committee reviewed the recommendations made during the Forum and added several of their own after a high-level discussion of the experience of managing the storms. The following list is a compilation of the major steps needed to improve the region's performance during major storms. The activities below will be reviewed by the COG Board at its April 14, 2010 meeting. Relevant committees and COG staff will follow up, providing the COG Board with periodic updates, resulting in a summary report on action and implementation prior to the 2010-2011 snow season.

Review and Revise Snow Plans

The COG Board will request that before the next snow season, each member jurisdiction review and revise its snow response plan, and direct the revision of the regional snow plan to incorporate many of the lessons learned during the Blizzards of 2010 before the next snow season. Local governments are encouraged to develop plans for snow accumulation above 15 inches. Officials will consider uniform policies for sharing software and/or systems for identifying power outages and the status of plowing operations.

Uniform Parking Practices and Coordination

The COG Board will encourage member jurisdictions to adopt uniform parking practices during major snow storms. The CAOs committee and participants in the after-action forum suggested that requiring residents to park vehicles on a particular side of the street would, in most cases, help facilitate snow clearance. It is requested that the Metropolitan Development Policy Committee discuss, draft and coordinate this proposal.

Communications and Public Messaging

The COG Board will request that the region's Public Information Officers develop public messages to improve communication about safety, health concerns, travel, sidewalk clearing, and power outages during snow emergencies. The messaging system should be tailored to traditional and new social media outlets.

The participants recommended that a well thought-out set of messages would improve public compliance with rules and help set realistic expectations for government actions. Messaging

for non-English speakers and addressing cultural differences is also needed. The PIOs should work closely with emergency managers and transportation officials to draft the messages.

Regional Pool of Equipment and Staff

The region will assess the feasibility of establishing a pool of all-hazards equipment and staff, including the support of contractors, to handle extended operations during snow storms.

Several jurisdictions called on snow-plow contractors from as far away as Buffalo, NY and Richmond, VA. Jurisdictions are encouraged to have contractors in place before the next snow season and, when their plowing is done, plan to share those resources with other governments. RESF 1 and 7 should discuss the local coordination needed and methodology.

Develop Federal Aid Agreements in Advance

There is a need to determine and set agreements for the kinds of federal assistance that can be requested and/or expected during snow emergencies.

In some instances, federal rules prohibited federal departments and agencies from sharing snow plows and other equipment. During major storms, it is important to maximize the use of federal assets. RESF 7 and COG's legal team should work with the Office of National Capital Region Coordination with the Department of Homeland Security to clarify federal regulations about assistance that can be provided to local jurisdictions.

Re-Commitment to Teleworking

Local governments and businesses will be encouraged to increase the capability for employees to telework, especially during snow storms and other weather emergencies.

Allowing key employees to work from home or a regional telework center during a major storm would significantly reduce the cost of shutting down the government and businesses. Governments may need to better define policies for telework and administrative leave. Public and private human resources offices should be encouraged to address the issue. COG's Commuter Connections/Telework program in DTP is a resource on this issue.

Appeal of FEMA's 48 - Hour Rule

FEMA's 48-hour rule says the government will only reimburse jurisdictions for snow removal during a designated 48-hour period when a record or near-record snowfall impacts a state and the President issues a disaster declaration. The rule limited the assistance available in February because the operations included the time needed to clear and then haul away snow. COG's Emergency Managers Committee and Chief Administrative Officers Committee (CAO,) will advise the COG Board on this issue and opportunities to request FEMA and/or Congressional delegation review.