

## Fires add to evacuations

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In Vernon, the storm began with a major gas leak and evacuations when a tree fell on a gas main on Old Town Road, "and just sheared the pipe right in half," Emergency Management Director Michael Purcaro said. "We were one of the first towns to open a shelter, and that was in response to that incident."

Approximately 120 residents spent the night at the shelter at Vernon Center Middle School and many more have been filtering through to warm up, grab a bite to eat, shower, and charge electronics.

The Vernon Police Department has received over 2,000 phone calls since Saturday, and Lt. Mel Hardy asked that residents call police only to report an emergency. Do not call the police department for weather and power updates, school openings, or the hours for the shelter, Hardy said.

Residents seeking shelter at VCMS are welcome to bring pets, but are asked to bring crates, food, and other necessary supplies. Animal Control Officer Craig Segar is at the shelter and Purcaro said they've already housed seven dogs and one pet rat so far.

Schools are closed today and Tuesday, and Purcaro said the shelter will remain open continually as long as there's a need.

In addition to the early gas leak, emergency crews responded to a couple of structure fires, multiple car accidents, and a lot of injuries, but no deaths have been attributed to the storm in Vernon, Purcaro said.

The generator at the Water Pollution Control Authority's sewage-treatment plant caught fire with a nearly 5,000-gallon container of diesel fuel nearby, Purcaro said, and the storm has created many such dangerous situations for cleanup crews and town workers.

The Emergency Operations Center received close to 400 service calls due to the storm, and the town has a liaison from Connecticut Light & Power to help

facilitate cleanup, but Purcaro said there are still multiple road closures and the situation isn't expected to improve any time soon.

Rockville General Hospital was on generator power for the duration of the storm, but electricity was restored as of 2 a.m. today, Purcaro said. CL&P has restored power to the town's other two high priority areas, a major high voltage line that went down down on Center Road and the sewage treatment plant, Purcaro said.

While municipal crews have been clearing debris, Purcaro said it's too dangerous for town workers to clear obstructions that have power lines involved.

"We've got one CL&P truck working with us, and we've got hundreds of locations that need to be addressed, so it's going to be a slow process," Purcaro said.

Residents who want to dump tree limbs and storm debris can bring it to the Horowitz Pool area of Henry Park and trash and recycling pickup will not begin until Thursday.

Many residents are using generators, and Purcaro urged extreme caution, as electricity may back-feed into downed power lines.

"The real difference here between Irene and the snowstorm, is you could see the power lines in many cases with Irene. But here we've got snow, and it's deep snow," Purcaro said. "Just be mindful that there may be power lines buried under the snow that you might not be able to see. Assume they're live and just avoid any lines."

Keep generators outdoors and be mindful of carbon monoxide, he added.

In terms of Halloween celebrations, "we're not telling people not to trick or treat, but use good sense and judgment," Purcaro said. Parents are urged to stay with children if they do go out, and be extremely careful as snapped power lines are still draped across many driveways and front yards.

The hunt for gasoline has been intensifying since the storm began, and Purcaro said he waited an hour for fuel Sunday at the gas station formerly known as Famous Johnnie's, at the intersection of West Street and Union Street.

When waiting in line, "please be patient," Purcaro said. "This is a difficult time for everybody, there's obviously a lot of tension. We've had to send

police to a couple locations because people are just becoming impatient and frustrated."

While few people sought shelter after Hurricane Irene, "we've got people coming to the shelter from all walks of life," Purcaro said. "It's freezing cold out there and people want to stay warm and get some food."

Early Sunday, pedestrians in the downtown Rockville area of Vernon were streaming into the Rockville Corner Market on West Main Street, the only shop open within several blocks. But the store was without power and taking cash only, forcing individuals on food stamp benefits to look elsewhere for supplies.

Food stamp benefits are distributed through Electronic Benefit Transfer cards, and state Department of Social Services spokeswoman Kathleen Kabara said today that there is no way for stores to track those benefits without an electronic card swipe machine.

"If there isn't power, there's no way to assess if there's money, similar to a debit card," Kabara said. "In order to be able to use it, they have to find something that has power."

Stafford

Town officials are staffing an emergency shelter and helping to provide meals to keep residents warm and fed while the town is completely out of power, First Selectman Michael P. Krol said today.

Many workers are being sent to assist with Meals on Wheels and congregate meals for the elderly, as well as at Stafford Middle School, 21 Levinthal Run, where an emergency shelter has been set up.

Town Hall offices and personnel are relocating to the Community Center, 3 Buckley Highway, which has a generator.

The middle school shelter opened Sunday night and will be open 24 hours until power is restored, Krol said. Workers are attempting to provide two hot meals per day for lunch and dinner.

Showers will also be available. Residents in need of shelter should bring bedding, pillows, and toiletries, Krol said. While officials are attempting to locate more cots, many people will have to sleep in chairs or on the floor, he said.

Krol said the town is preparing to be without power for a week or more.

While emergency personnel have cleared many trees from the roadways, downed power lines still litter many roads, and most roads are down to one open lane, Krol said.

He advises residents to stay off the roads at night, avoid any power lines, and conserve gasoline, as no gas stations in town are open.

Both the Big Y supermarket, 87 West Stafford Road, and the Stafford Food Center, 37 West Main St., are open and operating on generator power. The Beehive food truck, 55 West Stafford Road, is also operating and serving hot meals, Krol said.

Halloween trick-or-treating is officially canceled, Krol said. With no working streetlights, the town is too dark for children to safely navigate, he said.

Krol also said the damage from the storm is the worst he's ever seen.