

Officials not leaving anyone unchecked

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In the days since a freak October snowstorm hit Connecticut, many elderly or at-risk residents' relatives have been concerned for their loved ones' safety.

But local police and emergency officials say they are taking the glut of so-called "welfare checks" in stride and ensuring that everyone receives the help they need.

Windsor Police Department spokesman Capt. Thomas LePore said police responded to 73 welfare checks between Oct. 30 and Wednesday, most of which were calls from individuals who grew concerned after being unable to reach friends or relatives by phone.

The town's Health Department maintains a list of at-risk people, LePore said, so police have been monitoring those individuals as well.

"We have gotten a lot of calls in here, specifically Monday," Windsor Health Director Charles Petrillo said. "Grownup children could not reach parents and friends could not reach friends."

Petrillo said everyone entering the town's emergency shelter — even for a quick cellphone charge or cup of coffee — must sign in, giving officials a master list to cross-reference should a welfare check be needed.

In Vernon, Emergency Management Director Michael Purcaro said the town "put together a comprehensive electronic database" at the Vernon Center Middle School emergency shelter, "so anybody that comes to the shelter gets registered and we share that information in confidence with the Police Department."

When police receive a call for a welfare check, they first go to the database to see if a person already has signed in, which helps to avoid unnecessary home visits and saves valuable manpower, Purcaro said.

While police and health officials are asking people to “hunker down with friends and neighbors” if they can’t make it to a shelter, Petrillo said so few in Windsor have electricity there’s hardly any warm homes to hunker down in.

“We’re making sure that everybody’s being handled in one way or another, we’re not leaving anyone out there uncertain,” Petrillo said.

All welfare checks have had positive results so far, Petrillo said.

Vernon has organized a shuttle bus system that stops at each school every hour to collect residents and bring them to the middle school. But some residents are unable to walk to one of the six pickup locations, and Purcaro said the town has them covered.

“We worked out a deal with Ace Taxi, so if anybody needs transportation to shelter, at no charge, they can call and someone will pick them up,” Purcaro said.

Police officers patrolling the downtown Rockville section of Vernon in particular are also checking in on residents they know might be at risk.

For those with health concerns, Petrillo said residents staying at the shelter must be autonomous, though individuals with 24-hour medical aids can stay with their caretakers.

There is always a nurse on duty at the shelter to take care of minor issues, Petrillo said, but if anyone has a serious medical crisis, “we treat it just like a normal emergency.”

Tolland Fire Chief and Emergency Management Director John Littell said his town has been monitoring senior housing and residential care facilities such as Woodlake at Tolland and Winding River, which were on generator power after the storm.

In residential areas, “we’ve done roughly 75 to 100 different welfare and wellbeing checks,” Littell said.

Twice, he authorized forced entry into homes and emergency workers found individuals with carbon monoxide poisoning, which “pretty much probably saved the person’s life,” Littell said.

Some residents have relocated to hotels or relatives’ homes until power is

restored, so Littell said those people are urged to let the town at least know they're safe and, "if you've relocated, please call us when you get back."