

'Tremendous' use of shelter

Published: Wednesday, November 2, 2011 11:50 AM EDT

The Journal Inquirer's mayoral forum scheduled for tonight has been canceled, as Vernon Center Middle School is being used as an emergency shelter. Located at 777 Hartford Turnpike, the school's gymnasium has been housing hundreds of residents since the storm hit thanks to a generator.

"We've had tremendous utilization of the shelter," Emergency Management Director Michael Purcaro said today. The town's supply of 220 cots quickly ran out, with about 170 being used at the shelter and the rest being used by firefighters, town workers, and their families camped out in firehouses and the ambulance building. Approximately 250 people have been staying at the shelter overnight.

The town requested an additional 100 cots, and on Tuesday the Air National Guard delivered 92 cots, pillows, and blankets, Purcaro said.

The middle school shelter has been serving approximately 400 hot meals three times a day, and while that supply is stable, Purcaro said, the town requested additional water and MREs from the state to ensure that food could be distributed in the community. The Army National Guard delivered the MREs and bottled water around midnight, and Purcaro said those in need of food should go to a shelter, as any food that had been left in refrigerators or freezers without power is no longer safe to eat.

Refuse and recycling pickup has been canceled through Friday. To assist with disposal of spoiled food, a trash bin is available at the transfer station on Hockanum Boulevard. Residents will be able to dispose of perishable items and household food waste from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Bulk items will not be accepted for disposal.

The town is providing a shuttle bus to the shelter at the middle school, which will pick up residents on the hour until 9 p.m. Pickup will be at Northeast School, 69 East St.; Maple Street School, 20 Maple St.; Skinner Road School, 90 Skinner Road; Rockville High School, 70 Loveland Hill Road; Center Road School, 20 Center Road; and Lake Street School, 201 Lake St.

Residents are asked to bring bedding, shower supplies, and toiletries, a crate or other necessary pet supplies, and chargers for cellphones or electronics. Hot food and drinks are available to all.

The Senior Center at 26 Park Place is open as a warming center and an electronics charging station from 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. Residents are reminded that the center is not being used as an overnight shelter.

Residents in need of potable water can obtain it at Henry Park, 120 South St., next to the Lottie Fisk Building. Residents can access the park from both McLean Street and Kevin Drive. Water will be available daily from sunrise to sunset. Bring a clean container. Potable water also is available at the middle school shelter.

The town is asking residents to monitor their water supply and not drink tap water that is discolored, has an odor, or may be otherwise tainted.

Residents who wish to dispose of tree limbs and debris may bring it to the Horowitz Pool parking lot at Henry Park.

While CL&P reported that 100 percent of customers were without power after the storm, that number has crept downward and was at 89 percent as of 8 a.m. today.

Purcaro said many businesses along Route 83 and Route 30 have had power restored.

There have been some incidents of carbon monoxide poisoning, Purcaro said, including a case where five individuals showed symptoms, some of which were serious and required transportation with advanced life support.

"We actually had some people charging their cellphones off of their car with the garage door closed while the car was running," Purcaro said.

While there have been no reports of electrocutions in Vernon, Purcaro said, residents should assume that all power lines are active and lethal, regardless of size or location. With backfeeding generators, "it might not be this arcing, sparking power line," Purcaro said, but the jolt could still be deadly. There have been incidents of chainsaw injuries as well, and Purcaro urged caution when moving trees and urged residents to wait for professionals before going near any lines.

In terms of general mayhem, "obviously in these times, there's been an

increase in certain calls. We've had issues with fights breaking out at some of the gas stations," Purcaro said. "I know the chief has reported in our morning briefings that we've had a couple of breaking and enterings," but it's unclear whether such criminal activity is related to fallout from the storm.

"But overall, it's not that bad," Purcaro said. "People seem to be helping each other and cooperating even though it's a very difficult and frustrating time for everybody."

Gas stations open: Two at the intersection of Union and West streets in the Rockville section of town.