

PREPARING FOR A NEW YORK HURRICANE:

A Readiness Review



Prepared by the Office of
Rep. Anthony D. Weiner

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Overview

It has been six months since Katrina ravaged New Orleans and the Gulf coast. As we move forward, it is crucial that New York learn the lessons of that disaster.

The *Weather Channel* has called New York one of the five most hurricane prone cities in America, citing only Miami and New Orleans as more vulnerable to damage from a storm.

Neighborhoods like Brighton Beach, City Island, Coney Island, the Rockaways, and the south shore of Staten Island risk severe flooding and damage in the event of a hurricane. New York City has prepared a plan for evacuation of these and other neighborhoods, but more can be done to ensure we are prepared for a serious storm.

This report finds that important Army Corps programs to secure New York's shoreline have been cut, that too many New Yorkers are unaware of the City's evacuation plan, and that a lack of insurance coverage could leave many New Yorkers without the help they would need to recover after a storm.

Storm Protection: Smart Plans – Dumb Budget

The Challenge

We can do two things today to help prevent a Katrina-like disaster from befalling the Big Apple in the event of a hurricane. First, we can invest in early warning systems to identify how best to shield ourselves from the ravages of a severe storm. Second, we can ensure that our shorelines are properly maintained to withstand the storm surge that accompanies any hurricane.

The Plan

Congress has authorized the Army Corps of Engineers to take the lead on both fronts.

In 1992, Congress directed the Corps to develop an “Atlantic Coast of New York Monitoring Program” to collect data on beach erosion and sea conditions, enabling engineers and scientists to identify areas most susceptible to erosion, storm surges and hurricane force winds. The program costs \$1.4 million a year to maintain.

Second, the Corps is charged with constructing infrastructure along our coasts to ensure that storm surges do not overwhelm the adjacent neighborhoods. These projects fall into two categories: replacing sand washed away by natural erosion and building structures to hold back waves and storm surges.

Over the past six years, the Army Corps of Engineers has worked on three different shore protection projects in New York City:

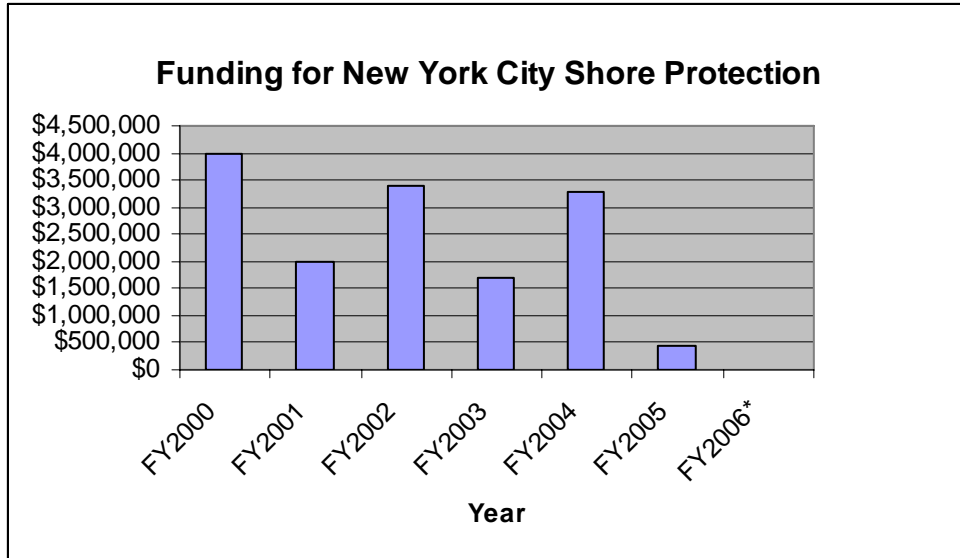
- The south shore of Staten Island: This project runs along 13 miles of coast from Ft. Wadsworth to Tottenville. The project is in study phase.
- The Rockaways: This project will renourish a 100 foot berm along the 6.2 miles between Beach 149th Street and Beach 19th Street.
- Coney Island/Brighton Beach: This project will construct a series of T-groins to retain sand on the beach and stop it from accumulating in Gravesend Bay.
- In 2007, Sea Gate will receive \$2.4 million, even while all other projects in New York City are zeroed out.

The Problem

Since 2001, right after President Bush was sworn into office, funding for the “Atlantic Coast of New York Monitoring Program” has been zeroed out – leading to a \$7 million shortfall – and forcing the Army Corps to shut the program down.

And while the City’s Congressional delegation was able to secure adequate funding during the Clinton administration, President Bush has dramatically slashed funding for shore protection, putting a halt to efforts to renourish beaches with fresh sand

and construct groins and jetties along the ocean shorefront. The president proposed that funding for all programs be zeroed out again in 2007.



*2007: All funds continue at zero except at Sea Gate.

South Shore of Staten Island –

| | |
|--------|-----------|
| FY2000 | \$350,000 |
| FY2001 | \$400,000 |
| FY2002 | \$209,000 |
| FY2003 | \$250,000 |
| FY2004 | \$275,000 |
| FY2005 | \$155,000 |
| FY2006 | \$0 |

Coney Island and Brighton Beach –

| | |
|--------|-------------|
| FY2000 | \$300,000 |
| FY2001 | \$600,000 |
| FY2002 | \$900,000 |
| FY2003 | \$450,000 |
| FY2004 | \$1,750,000 |
| FY2005 | \$250,000 |
| FY2006 | \$0* |

The Rockaways –.

| | |
|--------|-------------|
| FY2000 | \$3,320,000 |
| FY2001 | \$1,000,000 |
| FY2002 | \$2,284,000 |
| FY2003 | \$1,000,000 |
| FY2004 | \$1,250,000 |
| FY2005 | \$50,000 |
| FY2006 | \$0 |

Grade: C-

Recommendations

1. Congress and the President should guarantee funding for beach renourishment and for building groins and jetties.
2. Congress and the President should restore the Atlantic Coast of New York Monitoring Program by providing \$1.4 million in funding every year.

***2007: All funds continue at zero except Seagate programs.**

Emergency Readiness: Big Plans with Blind Spots

The Challenge

The greatest challenge when officials hear that a hurricane is headed for any area is evacuating residents of the neighborhoods that will be the most severely affected. Hurricane Katrina taught us that more attention has to be paid to the evacuation of special needs populations: the disabled, those without means of transportation, and senior citizens. Citizens have to be able to access critical information without electricity or access to the Internet – as those may be disabled in the event of a storm.

The Plan

New York City's Office of Emergency Preparedness (OEM) has a detailed plan for the evacuation of low lying areas throughout the City. The Department's website delineates three evacuation zones based on the susceptibility of each neighborhood to hurricane force winds and storm surges.

OEM clearly identifies the steps that residents should take in the event of an evacuation:

- New York State law requires the Mayor to issue an order or recommendation of evacuation. If he issues an order for a particular zone, it is mandatory for those residents to evacuate immediately.
- Evacuees are then to report to a designated "reception center." The City urges evacuees to use mass-transit because only 11 of the 23 reception centers have parking facilities. New Yorkers can find their assigned "reception center" by accessing OEM's website or by calling 311.
- After reporting to a reception center, a person will then be transported by either van or bus to a shelter where they will stay for the duration of the storm. These shelters are selected based on two criteria: safety from storm surge and the proximity from a reception center. They will be operated by the American Red Cross Staff and other organizations that will work in conjunction to provide food and health services.

The Problems

Despite its efforts to post additional signs directing residents to evacuation routes and hurricane "reception centers," OEM is not adequately prepared to help the City's most vulnerable citizens in the event of a storm.

Additionally, OEM relies heavily on people accessing evacuation information via the Internet. Not every New Yorker has access to the web, especially seniors. Although the City has published a document called "Ready New York" that provides information on hazards such as hurricanes, the City has not done a good enough job distributing this document to residents in every borough.

A survey conducted by the Hazards Management Group for the Army Corps of Engineers found that only 13% of New Yorkers living the most vulnerable neighborhoods had ever read the pamphlet.

Percent of New Yorkers by borough that had seen “Ready New York”

| | |
|-----------------------|------------|
| Manhattan: | 15% |
| Queens: | 13% |
| Brooklyn: | 7% |
| Bronx: | 10% |
| Staten Island: | 10% |
| NEW YORK CITY: | 11% |

Source: Baker, Earl J. The Hazards Management Group, Inc. April 2005

The study also found that just over one in five New Yorkers knew whether they lived in an evacuation zone.

Percent of New Yorkers who knew if they live in an evacuation zone

| | |
|-----------------------|------------|
| Manhattan: | 12% |
| Queens: | 34% |
| Brooklyn: | 7% |
| Bronx: | 19% |
| Staten Island: | 30% |
| NEW YORK CITY: | 21% |

Source: Baker, Earl J. The Hazards Management Group, Inc. April, 2005

Grade: **B-**

Recommendations

1. New York City should set up a program modeled on Miami’s Emergency Evacuation Assistance Program to ensure that individuals with special needs are not left behind in the event of a storm. EEAP was designed to track and evacuate the City’s most vulnerable residents in the event of a natural disaster. The program maintains a registry of residents that would need help during an emergency evacuation, and operates special needs facilities, with trained healthcare staff and generator-powered healthcare facilities.
2. New York City should expand distribution of “Ready New York” that those who are unable to receive instructions through the Internet and 311 are able to access the appropriate instructions ahead of a storm, or after it has knocked down electrical and telephone lines.
3. New York City should begin a targeted public awareness campaign to increase the percentage of people living in evacuation zones who know that they are at risk.

Insuring Against Disaster: Not In Very Good Hands

The Challenge

In the wake of any disaster, residents of affected neighborhoods need help getting back on their feet. A collaboration of federal and private insurance policies are needed to keep New Yorkers in “Good Hands.”

The Plan

Generally, residents of disasters receive help from two types of insurance policies:

- Homeowners insurance, which compensates victims for damage done by the wind and the rain.
- Flood insurance, which compensates victims from damage done by storm surges.

The Problem

First, President Bush has proposed a 25% cut to the Federal Flood Insurance Program, which provide additional coverage to areas devastated by rising tides. In 2005, the Federal Government deposited more than \$3 billion into the National Flood Insurance Fund. But next year, President Bush has proposed cut that funding to a little more than \$2.3 billion – a 25% cut.

Second, private insurers which provide homeowners are beginning to withdraw from the New York market.

Grade: D

Recommendations

Congress should reject the President’s proposed cut to the Federal Flood Insurance Program, and private insurer should be encouraged to provide homeowners insurance in New York City.

Sixteen members of the New York Congressional delegation, including Congressmen Weiner, Nadler and Meeks recently sent a letter to the Chairman and CEO of Allstate asking that the company reconsider its decision not to offer new homeowners policies in the greater New York City area.

Methodology

For the section entitled “Storm Protection: Smart Plans – Dumb Budget,” the shore protection projects were taken from the annual federal Energy and Water Appropriations bill from the years 1999-2005.

For the section entitled “Emergency Readiness: Big plans with Blind Spots,” the New York City Office of Emergency Management was used to determine the Cities evacuation plan. It was then compared to other Cities’ plans and to a behavioral study conducted by Earl J. Baker of the Hazards Management Group, Inc, released in April, 2005.

For the section entitled “Insuring Against Disaster: Not In Very Good Hands” cuts to flood insurance were determined by comparing the President’s FY 2007 budget request to the amount that was obligated for the flood insurance program in FY2005.