



# State of New Hampshire Department of Safety

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## Homeland Security and Emergency Management

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Together, NH residents, first responders, emergency management personnel, in-state and out-of-state utility workers, non-profit relief agencies and hundreds of volunteers met the challenge and demonstrated remarkable resiliency in responding to and recovering from one of the worst ice storms in the history of this state. This report is an overview of the events, successes and challenges faced by those responders, along with recommendations for improvement. Under separate cover is the report from the NH Public Utilities Commission which focuses on the response of the utility companies.

Power outages impacted 211 of our 234 communities. Regrettably, four residents perished and over 100 received injuries that were in some way attributable to this weather event. Many residents survived frigid temperatures and subsequent winter storms for as many as 14 days without power. Businesses were impacted at a time when they were already experiencing severe economic challenges during the critical holiday shopping season.

After the power was restored, Governor Lynch directed Tom Getz, the chair of the Public Utilities Commission and me to jointly conduct a thorough "After-Action Report." The intent was to identify what worked well and what we can do to improve our response. The Public Utilities Commission focused on the work of the utility companies' response(s). A joint "after-action core team," made up of local public safety officials, state agency representatives, FEMA and the NH Municipal Association, focused on the rest of the joint response and worked tirelessly in this effort. We owe them a debt of gratitude. We participated in 10 public comment meetings and four debriefings with public safety and local government officials. We opened an on-line public comment site, conducted two informal surveys and met with many constituent groups to receive valuable input on what worked well and what needed improvement.

The entire after-action process has been remarkably beneficial and we have already begun making improvements. We have developed better working relationships with utility companies. We have trained more than 700 first-responders in the use of a web-based emergency operations center communications system. We have improved our ability to get messages to the public through traditional radio stations and other media outlets and we are exploring new means of communicating, including the use of social media networks such as Twitter, Facebook and other Web 2.0 technologies. The Department of Safety, the Governor's Office and legislators are working to pass a bill to create a statewide emergency notification system. We have signed a memorandum of understanding with "211 New Hampshire" so that citizens can have access to a simple 3-digit, non-emergency telephone number for disaster information. We are expanding our training programs and improving our ability to share preparedness information with the public including the construction of a new web site called "ReadyNH." This past summer, we held a preparedness conference for 400 public safety and private sector emergency response officials to share "model practices" and success stories from the ice storm response. And we are completely revising the State's Emergency Operations Plan to incorporate "lessons learned."

In short, much has been learned and we intend to continue putting that knowledge to use, as we improve our ability to work with local communities, the federal government and the private sector to better manage large scale disasters. Citizens, families and businesses also have a role by better preparing for emergencies further enhancing our resiliency as a state.

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