

**Presentation to Massachusetts Municipal
Management Association**

Town of Scituate, Massachusetts



March 17, 2011

**“Weathering the Storm”
Emergency Management and Response**



About Scituate

- 2011- Celebrating our 375th Anniversary
- 18,301 population, 30,000 in summer, 16.9 square miles
- Popular vacation and day tripper destination for shopping and boating, canoeing and kayaking, swimming, fishing, surfing, sailing
- 6 beaches, 17 parks and athletic fields, 18-hole water view public golf course, two private golf clubs
- Extensive bikeways, trails and conservation lands
- Vibrant harbor with two town-owned marinas and boat yard; five miles of coastline
- \$68 million budget
- 96% residential, 10% secondary homes; thickly settled
- Strong community participation
- Historic Charm: Lawson Tower, Two lighthouses, Irish Mossing Museum, Grist Mill

Scituate Harbor



Snapshot of Blizzard of 2010 December 26-27, 2010

- Tidal Surge with Coastal Flooding –one tide; 90+ mph wind
- Seawall Breach and significant beach erosion
- Evacuation of 80 families starting at 1:00 a.m. on Dec. 27
- Two house fires, third fire two days later
- State of Emergency Declared (in addition to Governor's)
- Tons and tons of beach over wash with road damage and debris
- Downed trees with live wires; widespread power outages
- No response from National Grid for 16 hours
- 400 homes damaged

Downed Trees and Power Lines



Flooding













Fires













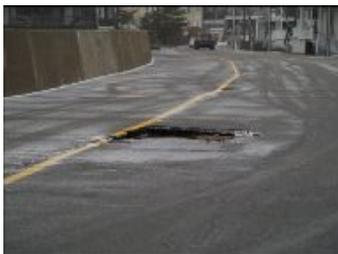
Media



Safety Checks



Infrastructure Damage



Road Clearing

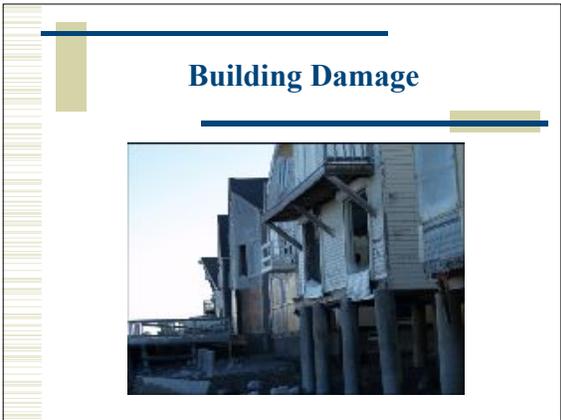


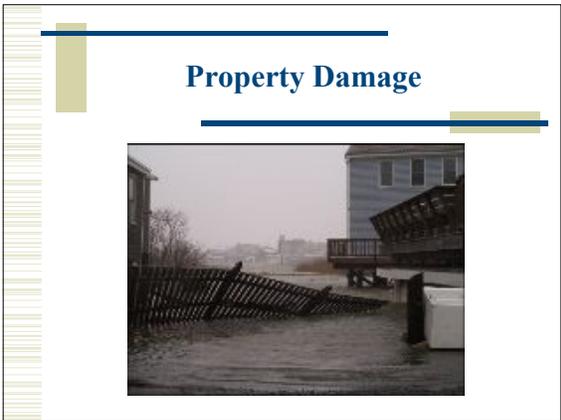


Seawall Breach

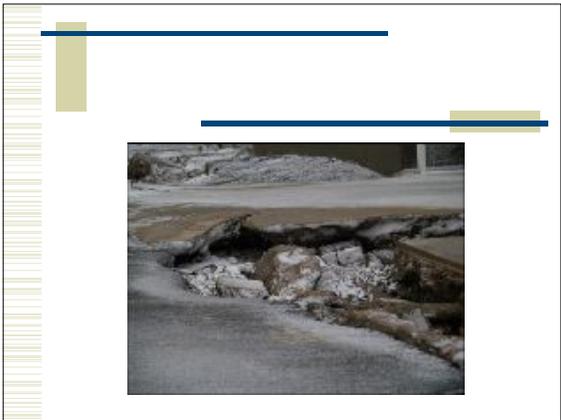


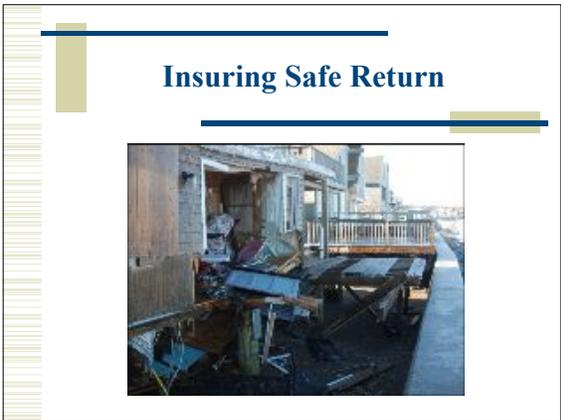




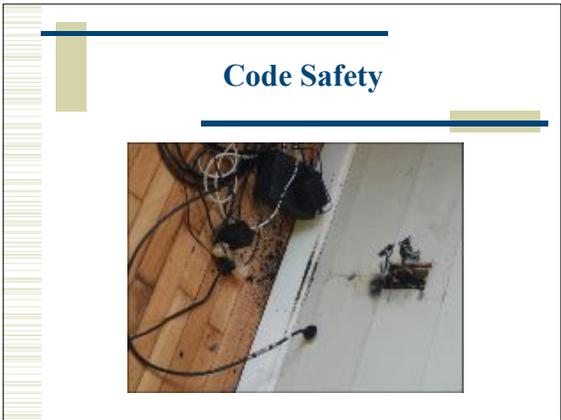


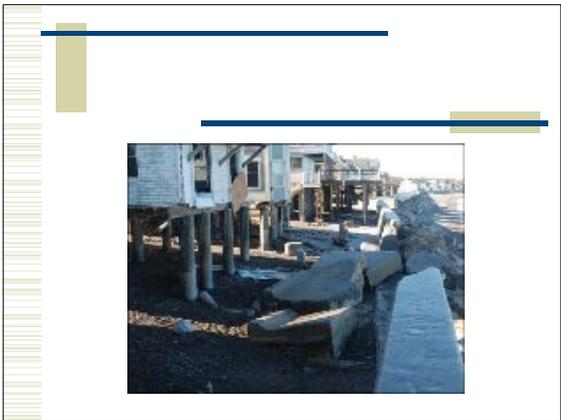


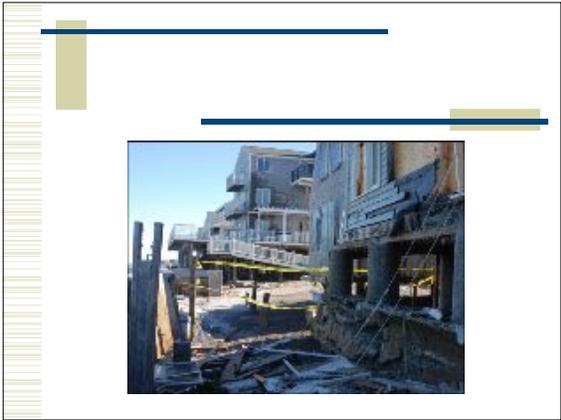


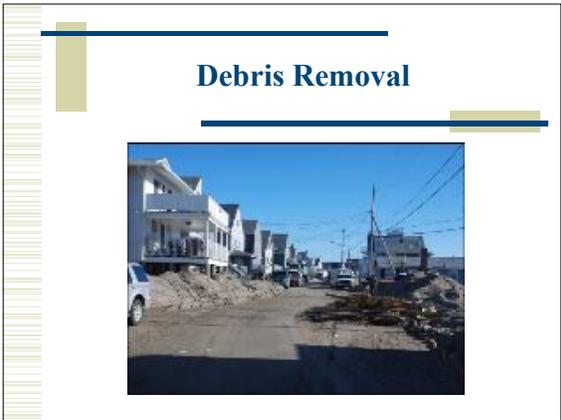




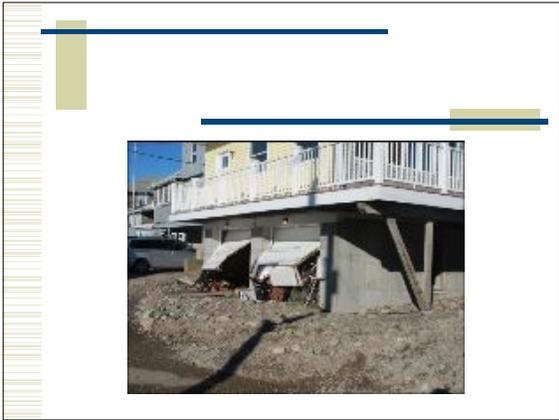














Emergency Response

- Emergency Response Plan activated
- Pre-Emergency Planning Meetings should be held if situation warrants
- Long history of storms: Blizzard of '78, No Name Storm of 1991, community well-schooled in storm response and departments coordinate together well
- All police, fire and DPW personnel available (was vacation week), intra-agency communications in place (Plymouth County Sheriff's Office, MEMA, Red Cross)
- All vehicles fueled and DPW equipment in place
- Public safety employees trained in emergency response and know steps necessary to correct hazardous situations (protocols with power, cable, telephone, gas companies, at risk residents)
- Weather forecast accurate on storm, but not on wind, which created tidal surge
- Regular town business must continue—ambulance and police calls
- Mutual aid not available as all towns experiencing storm conditions
- Large incidents tax all available resources. Must insure hierarchy of response: immediate safety of residents, regroup, insure properties and infrastructure safe, regroup, manage and coordinate mitigation

During Storm

- Emergency Shelter at High School activated for people *and* animals
- State of Emergency Declared 3:30 a.m.
- Trouble shooting National Grid lack of response
- Excellent and vital communication between town departments
- Good rotation of staff to guard against fatigue
- Quick response from vendors providing services during emergency (towing, repairs, gas company, telephone)
- Ongoing reports of officer location to OIC to insure no responses by singular individual.

Media Interface During and After Incident

- Important to get as much information as possible out there that is ACCURATE and TIMELY
- Channel all inquiries through Public Information Officer (PIO).
 - Clear delineation of each person's role
 - There will be work arounds on this by media; make sure message is same. Insure PIO is articulate, confident and reassuring that everything is under control but also be truthful
 - Website updated every two hours with important information (numbers for power, phone cable outages, street closings)
 - Cable access to provide updates
 - Reverse 911- may not always be appropriate with changing conditions. Used in specific areas for specific situation not general broadcast-creates future expectations
- Releases to newspapers, interviews
 - Insure consistent message, make sure your facts are right
 - Don't ignore; they will show up and camp out until you make yourself available
- Press Conferences—provide press release with details

Resources Local and External

- LOCAL
- C.E.R.T. Citizen Response Emergency Team (shelter)
 - Local clergy
 - Locally based resources: St. Vincent DePaul, Food Pantry, businesses, S.E.R.F.
- EXTERNAL
- Red Cross- (shelter)
 - Executive Office of Public Safety (inspections)
 - MEMA/FEMA (damage inspections, assessments, audits)
 - Plymouth County Sheriff's Office – Command Center
 - National Guard (equipment)
 - Department of Conservation and Recreation (equipment)
 - Coordinated Assistance Network

After Storm-Mitigation

- Shelter—finding lodging for those displaced
- Clean-Up—hiring of private contractors to clear roads, repair seawall breach
- Damage to equipment: lost pumper, fluid change out police vehicles, salt water damage to DPW loader
- Safety: Keeping gawkers away, removing those that don't want to leave, combating complacency
- Inspection of all seawalls for any compromises; road repair and temp. patches
- What is a town expense?
- Inspection of 400 houses to insure safe to return; deputize additional staff
- Work with MEMA and FEMA on paperwork for storm damage costs. Be accurate, if you don't know say you don't know. You don't have all the answers so soon

Engaging with Elected Officials

- Email to Governor's Office, cc to State Rep on storm situation
- Use your legislative officials
 - Let agencies know what is going on and what you need for resources (funds, trouble-shooting, equipment)
 - DCR, DPU, MEMA, FEMA, surrounding towns
- What they will want:
 - Site visits: will notify media in advance they are coming, sometimes not under your control
 - Some will be orchestrated: who will be there, what vehicle, etc.
- Still happening: March 12 with Senator Kerry; May 23 re: National Grid Hearing

The Manager's Role

- Know what your Emergency Plan is; keep it with you
- Support your personnel; ask what they need and get it for them, they are in charge, not you, but also monitor their hours
- Get a scanner and a television for your office
- Have Gear identifying you as an Emergency Responder
- May serve as PIO
- Keep your Board informed and involved and away from response departments.
- Contact and receive permission from DOR to deficit spend (\$165,000 storm clean-up, one million seawall repair, \$430,000 pumper)
- Create separate account(s) to track all incident costs
- Get the message out: what resources are needed immediately and during mitigation
- Keep meticulous records and documentation, photograph damage right away
- Keep track of logs, emails, complaints, reports; other pertinent information
- Hold agencies with role accountable for fulfilling that role. Same for town staff
- Engage elected officials for state/federal assistance. Follow-up.
- Provide regular updates on mitigation at meetings
- Say Thank you, then say it again publicly and often.
- Debrief-what went right; what went wrong; what we could have used and did not have

What we learned

- Proud of response: no loss of life and no injuries; staff reacted rapidly to constantly changing conditions
- Training pays off—don't cut it in budget
- As prepared as we were, incidents can throw curveballs at you and you need to adjust and sometimes be creative because it is not covered in the "Plan"
- Many folks left and then came back and couldn't get into their homes due to damage and needed lodging; better way to get this information
- Donations came in and were in excess of need; where to direct overflow
- People don't always need shelter, but warming place just to ride out storm
- Meet with those affected by storm and ask what we could have done better
- Many do-gooders—but need one central coordinating effort
- Fire Department could use an amphibious vehicle and more wet suits- \$1,200 each (FEMA grant)
- Continue Hazard Mitigation Grant to elevate houses (150 and growing)
