

WINDSTORM RESPONSE AND RECOVERY

By Michael J. Beck

It has been just over three weeks since an unprecedented, hurricane-force windstorm struck Southern California. Pasadena was ground zero and this was no small event. Damage estimates to public and private property here are approaching \$30 million. The governor declared a state of emergency and state and federal officials have been touring Pasadena and other affected communities to assess the damage.

From 10 p.m. Nov. 30 to 1 p.m. Dec. 1, over 4,650 incoming calls were processed at our police communications center – more than 10 times the regular volume. The city of Pasadena placed additional fire apparatus into service and received mutual aid assistance from 11 other fire jurisdictions. While about 6,300 power customers lost service, Pasadena Water and Power worked hard through the night to avoid power loss to the entire 62,000-customer system.

In the immediate aftermath, the main focus was clearing streets and restoring power to affected customers. Ninety-five percent were back on within 72 hours although it took up to a week for some customers, despite around-the-clock assistance from utility crews from four other cities and private contractors. There were many homes with damage to wires connecting them to the electrical distribution system. In cases where it could be done safely, temporary connections were provided. Overall, the damage to our power distribution systems was so extensive that four miles of wire was needed to make repairs and crews worked about 20,000 man-hours in a period of 10 days – the equivalent of six months of work for normal staffing levels.

The magnitude of the cleanup is enormous. Pasadena has 325 miles of streets, roughly the distance from here to San Francisco. Yet by 8 a.m. on Dec. 3, all primary and secondary streets were made passable for traffic. In just one week our public works crews collected a year's worth of green waste – 18,000 tons. The focus now is on clearing trees and other debris from residential streets. Before all streets are cleared it's expected that crews will have collected a staggering 90,000 tons of debris (180 million pounds).

It's likely to take several more weeks but it will get done just as quickly as possible. While cleanup continues, we must also turn our attention to more normal activities: maintaining parks, streets and other infrastructure and preparing for Jan. 2 New Year's events. It is possible that debris may remain curbside a little longer than expected.

Since the windstorm, I've spent a great deal of time with city work crews and have witnessed first-hand their diligent, non-stop emergency response and recovery. I am immensely proud of our employees and have been pleased to hear from many residents who appreciate the effort. I've also been impressed with residents who helped clean their neighborhoods so Pasadena could return to normal.

I invite the community to participate in any of the public meetings set to review our collective experience: Jan. 14, 10 a.m., KPCC Crawford Family Forum, 474 S. Raymond Ave.; Jan .17, 7 p.m.,

Jackie Robinson Center, 1020 N. Fair Oaks Ave.; and Jan. 19, 7 p.m., Creveling Lounge at Pasadena City College, 1570 E. Colorado Blvd.

I also invite everyone to visit www.cityofpasadena.net/windstorm_2011 for updates on street cleanup, emergency preparedness tips, disaster relief information for homeowners, a brief survey and much more.

The worst windstorm in our lifetimes became a learning experience for us all on how to be prepared for the next disaster. I want to thank the Pasadena community for the patience and determination exemplified over the past few weeks and into the near future.

Michael J. Beck is Pasadena's City Manager.