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Planning for the Worst while Hoping for the Best

NJDOT conducts annual Hurricane Evacuation Exercise



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Certain events become unforgettable in our society's collective memory.

Superstorm Sandy, the catastrophic hurricane that in 2012 struck the mainland US, Puerto Rico, Haiti, Dominican Republic, Jamaica, Cuba, the Bahamas and Canada, is one of those events.

Sandy hit the U.S. with full force, taking the lives of **233 people** and causing **\$70 billion** in damages with **\$37 billion** in New Jersey alone. Living through a natural disaster of this magnitude was sobering to say the least, and reinforced just how vital it is to prepare for these types of situations.

In response to Superstorm Sandy, **annual hurricane evacuation exercises** were implemented at the New Jersey Department of Transportation (NJDOT). Each year before the official start of hurricane season, NJDOT partners with the New Jersey State Police, the New Jersey Turnpike Authority and the South Jersey Transportation Authority to conduct an emergency evacuation exercise called Contraflow to practice and refine response activities in the event of a major hurricane or other natural disaster.

Contraflow reverses traffic on a section of state highway so that it moves in the opposite direction of standard roadway travel. To put it plainly, an eastbound lane would shift to westbound or vice versa so that all lanes are traveling in the same direction. In the event of an actual emergency, Contraflow would be initiated on highways that serve as Coastal Evacuation Routes to increase the traffic flow out of shore communities—**getting more people to safety faster**.



Pictured: NJDOT crews staged cones, barrels and Variable Message Boards along the side of designated state highways that serve as Coastal Evacuation Routes as part of the Contraflow hurricane evacuation exercise.

Contraflow is a battle plan should the worst become a reality. It's a plan we hope we never have to execute.

Recently, NJDOT and our partners conducted the annual Contraflow exercise. During the training event, crews staged cones, barrels and Variable Message Boards along the sides of designated highways, without actually reversing the flow of travel or closing the roads.

The following key shore evacuation routes were activated during this year's drill:

- **Atlantic City Expressway** (entire length from Atlantic City to Washington Township)

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- **Garden State Parkway** (mile post 0 in Lower Township to mile post 38 in Egg Harbor)
- **I-195** (mile post 6 in Robbinsville to approximately mile post 34 in Wall)
- **Route 72** (mile post 13.8 in Barnegat to approximately mile post 29 in Ship Bottom)
- **Route 47** (mile post 16 to 21 in Dennis, and approximately mile post 32 to 35 in Maurice River)
- **Route 347** (mile post 0 in Dennis to approximately mile post 9 in Maurice River)

The drill provided first responders from the various agencies a realistic scenario in which coastal evacuation would be necessary. The goal was to quickly and efficiently move people out of harm's way within a 12-14 hour timeframe.

This year's scenario stated that New Jersey was under a Hurricane Watch that included the Atlantic Coast, tidal locations and back bays in New Jersey, Delaware Bay, Raritan Bay, Long Island waters and New York Harbor. The setup classified the storm as a Category 1 Hurricane. Landfall was anticipated at approximately 5:00 a.m., south of Atlantic City, with a 48 hour warning.

Emergency personnel used the drill to test agency-specific plans, practice effective communication and share information. Effective communication between agencies is absolutely vital during emergency situations, and like the saying goes, "**Practice makes perfect.**"

Contraflow is an extremely complex plan and only implemented in absolutely dire circumstances. Should



Pictured: NJDOT Senior Director of Operations Christopher Feintheil spoke with CBS Philly about the importance of hurricane evacuation drills and how interagency communication is vital during emergency situations.

Contraflow be activated in a real emergency, the plan would go into effect 24-48 hours prior to the expected event. If ever faced with this situation, I urge residents and visitors to follow the evacuation instructions immediately. **Don't wait.** By acting immediately, you not only ensure your own safety, but the safety of first responders as well.

Safety is NJDOT's top priority. Whether it's a blizzard or a hurricane, we will continue to practice these types of life saving measures, and **we will be prepared.**

Diane Gutierrez-Scaccetti
Commissioner

