

March storm madness in Weston: Water, water everywhere

Written by Patricia Gay

Wednesday, 09 March 2011 12:32



Weston took a beating in Monday's rainstorm, which swept through town, flooding homes and stranding motorists who suddenly found themselves navigating waterways instead of roadways.

It's estimated that more than four inches of rain fell before the storm subsided Monday, March 7. The rain melted piles of snow that had been sitting idly from past winter storms, causing rivers to overflow and spot flooding throughout town.

The Weston Communications Center started receiving storm-related calls around 3 a.m. Monday, and police, fire, and EMS spent the entire day responding to residents in need.

Police Sergeant Matt Brodacki, who worked from 7 a.m. to midnight on Monday, said some of the more dramatic incidents included: Rescuing a family by canoe from a flooded home on Lyons Plain Road; evacuating an elderly man from his home on Slumber Corners, where 11 of the road's 15 houses had flooded; and rescuing four minors who decided to go white-water rafting on the Saugatuck River during the peak of the flooding.

Motorists also felt the storm's sting. "People would drive down the road, get stuck, and couldn't make their way back," Sgt. Brodacki said.

Police responded to so many incidents involving stranded motorists that they lost count of how many calls they went on, Sgt. Brodacki said.

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Among the many cars that got stuck were three Mini Coopers that were rendered inoperable after driving on water-soaked roadways. Also, a Honda CRV on Valley Forge Road was swept off a private driveway into swirling white water rapids.

Dispatch also received many calls about flooded basements.

Closures

Around 7:43 a.m., Communications Center Manager John Ojarovsky sent out a Code Red phone alert informing residents that several roads were closed due to flooding, including: Route 57 at Samuelson Road, Route 53 between Godfrey Road East and Lord's Highway, Calvin Road, Cartbridge Road bridge, Davis Hill Road at Fern Valley Road, Pent Road and the "S" turn at Godfrey Road West, Old Easton Turnpike, Old Mill Road near Cobbs Mill Inn, and Old Redding Road at the Route 136 bridge.

During this time, the only bridge in town that was passable was the one on River Road. The bridges on Cartbridge Road, Davis Hill Road, and Godfrey Road East were deemed impassable, as was the Wells Hill Road bridge that connects Weston to Easton.

By Tuesday, after things had a chance to dry up, all the roads and bridges in town were re-opened.

Reminiscent

While the flooding damage from Monday's storm was reminiscent of the nor'easter in 2007, fortunately the damage wasn't as extensive.

The 2007 storm caused such extensive damage to the bridge on Cartbridge Road that it had to be demolished and a new bridge was constructed in 2008.

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But while the waters from the Saugatuck River breached the bridge on Monday, the bridge maintained its structural integrity. “The new bridge was designed so water would flow over it when the river floods,” Sgt. Brodacki said.

Around 8 a.m., Governor Malloy directed the Department of Emergency Management and Homeland Security (DEMHS) to activate the state Emergency Operations Center (EOC) in the event towns and cities need assistance due to flooding conditions and to monitor conditions across the state.

In addition, Gov. Malloy ordered the Military Department to pre-position equipment and troops in areas of the state which were expected to receive the brunt of the flooding.

Shortly after the governor’s announcement, Weston public schools announced they had changed from a two-hour delay to closing schools for the day. The schools’ Web site said the closure was done at the prompting of the police.

“When Dan Clarke called from the schools I told him there were nine roads closed from flooding and major arteries were impassable. You didn’t want to add another 2,000 cars to this day as well as more stranded motorists.” Sgt. Brodacki said.

Weston Police Chief John Troxell found it odd the school said what it did about the police, but it didn’t bother him. “If the school administration wants to blame police for closing the schools on Monday then so be it,” said Weston Police Chief John Troxell. “Our concern is for public safety, not the school calendar.”

Rescues

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Around 7 a.m., firefighters rescued a family on Lyons Plain Road, whose home was flooded with five feet of water. The family and their pets were transported to land in a neighbor's canoe and brought to the Lyons Plain firehouse where they waited for the flood waters to recede.



In another rescue, a resident on Slumber Corners noticed her neighbor's home was getting flooded. Since her neighbor was an elderly man, the woman was concerned. She called dispatch and helped firefighters navigate a private roadway, which had turned into a lake, to the neighbor's house. The furnace in the elderly man's house had stopped working because of the rising water, and he was evacuated.

Slumber Corners turned out to be a particularly wet spot with visible flooding at 11 of the road's 15 houses.

The most unusual rescue call came around 2:30 p.m. A motorist reported four individuals in a rubber raft navigating the violent rapids of the Saugatuck River.

Max Burns and John Dillon, firefighters at the nearby Lyons Plain firehouse, rushed to the river as the raft approached the bridge at Cartbridge Road. The men were able to get control of the raft and bring it safely to shore.

"It was an extremely dangerous situation," said Sgt. Brodacki. "The raft was headed for Cartbridge and there was only about five inches of air under the bridge. With all the logs and debris in the river, it could have been a disaster once they hit the crest of the bridge," he said.

He recalled a similar incident in Wilton, where experienced kayakers died trying to navigate rapids.

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Rescued from the raft were four minors, under the age of 18, who were going for a joy ride in the raft. Only one was wearing a life vest — a very small children's vest, Sgt. Brodacki said. A parent was called to pick up the kids.

"They all thought it was a big joke. They had no clue what they were getting involved in. The water would have sucked the raft right under the bridge," Sgt. Brodacki said.

He credited Max Burns and John Dillon for facilitating the rescue. "They did an incredible job. In my mind, their quick thinking avoided a catastrophe," he said.

Praise

Sgt. Brodacki also praised the public safety employees who worked during the storm to ensure the town was safe.

"There were five or six police officers on duty, fire department volunteers, EMS crews, the town highway department and even CL&P workers out there helping," he said.

He believes the communications center dispatchers, who handled hundreds of phone calls, were unsung heroes. "The phones did not stop ringing. They were handling 9-1-1 calls and routine calls at the same time," he said.

Monday's storm was one of many significant weather events Sgt. Brodacki has worked through during his years on the Weston police force. His schedule has called for him to work during many blizzards and natural disasters including the nor'easter of 2007.