

Two weeks after Hurricane Sandy: Hoboken, New Jersey residents seek aid

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Two weeks after Hurricane Sandy sent the Hudson River flowing through the streets of Hoboken, residents of the New Jersey city came to the local high school seeking aid from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and other agencies.

The hurricane's storm surge, mixed with fuel and sewage, came over the tops of cars and stranded many of Hoboken's residents in their homes for days, with some being rescued by the National Guard.

Only by Sunday, nearly two weeks after the storm, was power restored to the city, but many buildings still remain dark because of storm damage. Gas has also been turned off to many residences because of concerns by the local utility company, PSE&G, over damage to lines.

Public transportation, including the PATH commuter rail line to New York City, has yet to be restored. According to *Forbes* magazine, the city has the highest rate of public transportation use in the country, with more than half its residents working across the river in New York City. Hoboken Terminal, a major PATH stop and a depot for six New Jersey train lines, is still closed after signals and other electrical equipment suffered severe damages.

The city's economy had previously been based on industry and the docks, but lost both beginning in the 1970s, going into decline. In the 1990s and 2000s, Hoboken, which boasts Frank Sinatra as its favorite son, experienced an upscale business and residential boom as a lower-cost bedroom suburb to New York City. With 50,000 people living in one square mile, it is the fourth most densely populated municipality in the US.

Around 200 people turned out at the Monday night

meeting at Hoboken High School. Many complained that insurance companies were refusing to cover their flood damage and that FEMA had failed to provide aid. Some charged that the utility company had shut off their gas even though their equipment had not been damaged.

Among those present were some of Hoboken's poorest residents, whose precarious living conditions have been rendered virtually impossible in the storm's aftermath.

Rosalind Delacruz, who works part time as a school crossing guard, said she had been homeless since being evicted from a public housing apartment more than a year ago because of a charge that her daughter had not fully reported her income.

"Since Hoboken Housing Authority threw me out, I have been homeless," she said. "I have slept on the street, been to shelters and stayed with my daughter some. All this time I have been working.

"After Sandy, I stayed with my brother in Jersey City for a little while. Now I am staying in the one shelter in Hoboken. I am a diabetic. Some nights you can't get a bed so you are stuck in the streets. Since Sandy, more people have come to the shelter. You have to get in line early. People get frustrated over who is and isn't going to get a bed, and they get in fights over it. I am here because I am displaced, and I am looking for the resources to find a place to live. I just need a stable place to stay."

Lisa Barbosa, who works in sales, described the situation she and her fiancé faced, showing photos of flood waters and destruction to her home taken on her iPhone.

“We live on Monroe Street in Hoboken, which is 10 to 14 blocks from the Hudson River where the surge came from. During Irene, we got 14 inches of water in the house. That was enough damage, because our house doesn’t have a basement; it is built on a slab. We thought we were prepared and that the city was prepared for any storm this time.”

Lisa cited the city’s building of an \$18 million pump, completed in October 2011, to deal with flooding that has particularly affected Hoboken’s low-lying southwestern neighborhoods. She added that she and her fiancé had also bought two sump pumps and put in a new drain.

“But there was a surge from the Hudson River that rushed through the whole town,” she continued. “It reached us about 8:40. It poured four feet of salt water into our house and has ruined it. We got the robo phone calls from the city warning us, but we thought we were prepared, and that the city was prepared.

“The power went out about five to seven minutes before the water started rushing through. Then we evacuated to a higher level. We walked out, shut our front door, and prayed for the best.

“The other day I heard that 10,000 cars still needed to be towed out of Hoboken. The first night, you could only see the tops of cars. The whole city was under water. Hoboken was hard hit because the city is essentially at sea level. It took a day and a half for the water to recede. Tuesday it was still two to three feet.

“The power and the heat were shut off, and the first people didn’t start getting power in Hoboken until Sunday. Our home is not habitable.

“Why don’t they do something like build a levee? With all the talk about budget cuts, they don’t even talk about this. They didn’t give us the figures here about how many people have had their homes totally destroyed. We don’t know how many people lost their lives here.

“My fiancé and I were going to get married shortly. We can’t now. With two storms like this in 14 months, I’m scared to go to sleep at night.”

Shamequa Clark is a young worker from Jersey City who works at a bank in Hoboken, which was flooded and is expected to remain closed until January.

“We are conducting business out of the drive-through across the street, she told the WSWS. “We have power there, and I was able to get back to work on Election Day. All our workers were called back to work, but each of us will lose an hour of work each week. I used to work 30 hours a week. Now, I only work 29.

“We could have gone back to work before November 6, but there was no public transportation anywhere in New Jersey until then, and I need public transportation. It is terrible, but the stations were flooded.

“I have a friend whose grandmother lives in Curries Woods public housing in Jersey City. She is wheelchair-bound. The elevator stopped working in her building. She didn’t have lights or heat for two weeks. She was homebound for that time. I don’t know how she survived.

“When the poor are cold and children are cold, they don’t get heat or light. But for Wall Street, they get heat and light in a day.”



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