



New York City Comptroller
Scott M. Stringer

NEWS

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COMPTROLLER STRINGER AUDIT: NYCHA WOEFULLY UNPREPARED FOR NEXT MAJOR EMERGENCY

Housing Authority Fails To Learn Lessons from Superstorm Sandy

Faulty emergency contact information puts tenants with disabilities at increased risk

No systematic plan for preparedness drills and training

Ad hoc emergency staffing plans are a recipe for disaster

Three years after Sandy, NYCHA says fixes are on the way...over the next five years

(**New York, NY**) – The New York City Housing Authority’s (NYCHA) current emergency preparedness and disaster recovery plans would leave more than 400,000 public housing tenants at extreme risk in the event of a crisis, according to a new [audit](#) released today by New York City Comptroller Scott M. Stringer. The audit found alarming deficiencies in NYCHA’s plans to assist tenants with disabilities, disaster trainings and drills, emergency staffing policies, reporting systems, and generator inventory management.

“More than three years after Superstorm Sandy struck New York City – damaging 402 NYCHA buildings and shutting off essential services including heat, hot water, electricity, and elevators for tens of thousands of residents – we found that NYCHA is still woefully unprepared to face another emergency,” commented Comptroller Stringer. “The Authority has failed to learn from its botched response to the 2012 disaster, and as a result their more than 400,000 tenants are at extreme risk in the event of another crisis. It’s well past time for NYCHA to do its homework, and *actually* prepare for the next emergency.”

Auditors’ findings include:

Incomplete Tenant Information Increases Risk to Tenants With Disabilities – NYCHA

claims that assisting residents with disabilities is a top priority during emergencies, but auditors found that the Authority's data on these vulnerable tenants was incorrect and incomplete, which could leave NYCHA residents with disabilities to fend for themselves in a disaster:

- Property managers did not have accurate emergency contact information for 80 percent of tenants who used wheelchairs or life sustaining equipment, such as oxygen.
- Property managers' tenant lists failed to include any information on tenants who:
 - Have a variety of other mobility issues, including amputees, and those who use walkers, crutches or canes;
 - Were blind or had vision impairments;
 - Were deaf or had hearing impairments; or
 - Had mental or psychological disabilities.
- Information for twenty-five percent of tenants with disabilities in the Tenant Data System was not consistent with the tenants' files.

“In a crisis, it is essential for NYCHA to have up-to-date information on who its most at-risk tenants are, and where they live, so that they can receive the emergency services they need – or be evacuated. NYCHA needs to get its house in order now, and not wait till we are in the middle of the next hurricane to figure out who needs help,” Stringer said.

Emergency Drills and Trainings Uncommon and Unhelpful – Emergency drills are an indispensable part of preparing staff and identifying issues that might arise during a crisis. NYCHA, however, has not taken this responsibility seriously, holding only a few drills in select locations, and failing to hold any drills in three quarters of its developments.

- During FY 2014, NYCHA failed to conduct training events at 78 percent of its developments, and did not schedule training events at *any* development between October 2014 and December 2015.
- In the rare event that drills and exercises *were* held, NYCHA failed to follow its own process, which calls for the creation of “After Action Reports,” which are used to identify strengths and weaknesses. During FY 2014, NYCHA neglected to create these reports for 93 percent of all drills.

“People's lives, safety, and homes depend on NYCHA taking the simplest, most basic steps to prepare for disaster. The Housing Authority must – *must* – accelerate its disaster preparations now,” said Comptroller Stringer.

NYCHA Emergency Leadership Roles are Not Identified or Adequately Defined – NYCHA’s Emergency Preparedness Manual does not define who is in charge during an emergency, and staff instead relied on an *ad hoc* command structure.

- When given various emergency scenarios, NYCHA officials were unable to tell auditors exactly who would be in charge.
- The mandated Incident Command System (ICS), which is designed to ensure a chain of command for every emergency, was used nominally, if at all. In fact, two NYCHA borough directors explained that most emergencies are “considered part of day-to-day business,” and therefore didn’t warrant completing the paperwork associated with the ICS.
- In direct violation of NYCHA’s own policies, none of the NYCHA developments surveyed by auditors had established a staffing plan to maintain essential services during an emergency.
- NYCHA lacked a plan to coordinate staffing when employees could not reach their usual workplace during an emergency.

NYCHA Unable to Properly Track Generators – NYCHA lost track of the vast majority of its generators, reducing the Authority’s ability to respond to power outages.

- NYCHA failed to provide any information about the existence of generators at 55% of its developments.
- The information they did provide was grossly inaccurate.
- Auditors inspected thirteen developments in person, and found that 95 percent of generators’ inventory tags did not match NYCHA’s central list.

“The great irony is that NYCHA actually has plenty of generators, but their central office doesn’t have any idea where they are, and the individual developments don’t keep an inventory of their equipment,” commented Comptroller Stringer. “That highly embarrassing fact means that this essential equipment could sit useless and unused in the case of an emergency, leaving NYCHA residents in dark, unheated apartments during and after the next Superstorm. Ask any workman – knowing where the tools are is step number 1 in getting the job done right.”

Auditors made 19 recommendations, including that NYCHA:

- Ensure that information on *all* disabled tenants is current, accurate, and sufficiently comprehensive, so that these vulnerable residents can be easily identified and assisted during an emergency.
- Develop and implement an emergency preparedness plan:

- Identify NYCHA’s resources, critical services, and the operations needed before, during, and after an emergency;
 - Clearly define an emergency command structure, including roles and responsibilities;
 - Include straightforward instructions for when the Incident Command System should be used;
 - Specify how NYCHA will disseminate critical information to employees, residents, community groups, and other City agencies during an emergency.
- Require each development to create, maintain, and continually update a staffing plan to maintain essential services in the event of an emergency. This plan should include each employee’s contact information, home location, and means for reporting to work if public transit is not available.

“NYCHA has employed the ostrich method of emergency planning – sticking its head in the sand and hoping that we never have another major disaster,” Stringer said. “NYCHA executives have acknowledged that its emergency preparedness plan is deficient, and say they have started creating a new plan that will be rolled out during the next five years – but when it comes to ensuring the safety of NYCHA tenants, five years is an absurdly long time to wait.”

To read the full audit, please click [here](#)

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