

WEATHERING THE STORM

Rebuilding a More Resilient New York City Housing Authority Post-Sandy

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A REPORT BY

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

When Hurricane Sandy hit New York City on October 29th, 2012, approximately 80,000 people residing in over 400 New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) buildings lost many essential services such as electricity, use of elevators, heat and hot water. The City's response to Hurricane Sandy was slow and communication to residents before, during and after the storm was inadequate. As a result, many community-based organizations stepped in to provide relief to residents in need. More than a year after Sandy, residents in hard hit areas across New York City still face serious problems related to the storm such as mold, elevator malfunction and rodent infestation. 24 temporary boilers which remain in 16 developments break down easily leaving residents with sporadic heat and hot water. These problems were uncovered and exacerbated by Sandy but they are not new; policy choices and disinvestment over the last decade have caused NYCHA residents to live in an ongoing state of neglect.

As an estimated \$3.2 billion federal dollars comes into New York City for relief and resiliency efforts (including \$308 million for NYCHA) and NYCHA revamps its Hurricane Emergency Procedure, several community organizations across the City, in conjunction with the Alliance for a Just Rebuilding, including Community Voices Heard, Good Old Lower East Side, Families United for Racial and Economic Equality, Red Hook Initiative, Faith in NY and NY Communities for Change have come together with research support from the Community Development Project at the Urban Justice Center to assess how NYCHA residents living in storm-affected zones are faring and to develop solutions for how NYCHA and the City can address the issues exposed by Sandy.

Research Findings

For this research, participating community groups surveyed public housing residents living in NYCHA buildings in Zone 1 (formerly Zone A) as well as a few heavily impacted buildings that were formerly in Zone B, collecting 597 surveys in total. Surveys were conducted in Coney Island, Lower East Side, Far Rockaway, Red Hook and Gowanus. The main findings include:

1 Weak government response and poor communication with NYCHA residents created a gap that community groups filled.

2 NYCHA apartments, buildings and grounds are desperately in need of repairs. Sandy exacerbated existing repair needs in NYCHA buildings, many of which were already outstanding.

55%

of survey respondents had repair needs in their apartment before Sandy

40%

had **new** repair needs as a result of Sandy

62%

were told they would have to wait 6 months or more to receive repairs

3 Mold, a serious problem for NYCHA residents prior to Sandy, has gotten worse since the storm and is impacting the health of residents.

34%

had visible mold in their apartment **prior** to Sandy

45%

have visible mold in their apartment **after** Sandy

Of those that have reported the mold problem

34%

said NYCHA cleaned up the mold poorly

38%

said NYCHA has done nothing

56%

of those with mold reported that the mold has affected their health.

4 People in NYCHA need jobs. Although Sandy provided opportunities for employment and training for public housing residents, NYCHA did not take full advantage of this opportunity.

64%

of those surveyed are not currently working

84%

have **NOT** been informed of job opportunities with NYCHA

Recommendations

While this report reveals some of NYCHA's major challenges in the wake of Hurricane Sandy, these findings and the related recommendations come at an opportune moment for public housing residents in New York City. We are encouraged by the City's new leadership, including Mayor Bill de Blasio, NYCHA Chair Shola Olatoye, City Council Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito and the new Chairs of two pertinent City Council Committees – Ritchie Torres, Chair of the Public Housing Committee and Mark Treyger, Chair of the Committee on Recovery and Resiliency. We are hopeful that these new leaders will learn from the past administration's mistakes and tackle these challenges head on. The additional resources coming into the City for rebuilding and resiliency post-Sandy and the revamping of NYCHA's Emergency Procedure allow our new leaders to set a higher standard and pilot initiatives that could have ripple effects across the broader NYCHA system. The following recommendations were developed by those on the ground who witness NYCHA's problems on a daily basis. We offer practical and effective solutions that will make NYCHA a better place to live for its 600,000 residents.

Greater Communication and Coordination with Residents and Community-Based Organizations (CBOs)

- 1 NYCHA and the Office of Emergency Management must improve communication with NYCHA residents before, during and after a natural disaster and pay special attention to ensuring that seniors, people with disabilities and people with limited English proficiency get the information that they need.**
- 2 NYCHA and OEM must improve coordination and communication with each other and with Community Based Organizations in Sandy-Affected Areas.**
- 3 NYCHA, the Mayor and the City Council should invest in creating vibrant community centers within NYCHA developments so that these can serve as community resources during natural disasters and beyond.**

Tackling the Long-Term Mold Crisis and Addressing the Health and Safety of Residents

- 4 NYCHA must go beyond temporary, surface-level fixes for mold and address deeper infrastructure and chronic, uncontrolled moisture issues such as leaky roofs and old pipes.**

- 5 NYCHA should create a program modeled on Back Home, Back to Work (BHW), piloted in Sandy's aftermath, to provide job training to public housing residents in how to conduct safe and healthy mold remediation.**

Increasing Transparency and Accountability Measures to Improve and Expedite Repair Process

- 6 Each month, NYCHA should make public the list of outstanding repairs categorized by building or development and update it monthly.**
- 7 The City should create a Watch List for NYCHA properties, similar to the "NYC Worst Landlord List" (for private housing) and later the "NYCHA Watch List" set up by Mayor de Blasio while he was the Public Advocate. This will allow the public to know where the highest need exists and create public will to address the issues in these developments accordingly.**

Creating a Resilient Infrastructure for NYCHA

- 8 NYCHA should create more resilient infrastructure by installing Cogeneration (CHP) capacity in Zone I developments.**
- 9 NYCHA should replace temporary boilers and move all boilers and critical wiring systems of Zone I developments on to higher ground.**

Increasing High-Quality Job Opportunities and Economic Resiliency for NYCHA Residents and Workers

- 10 NYCHA should ensure that more jobs go to residents, particularly jobs created with CDBG-DR funds coming to NYCHA for Sandy recovery.**
- 11 NYCHA should establish robust pre-apprenticeship programs and connect residents to them so that they can be trained and prepared for the apprenticeship slots and subsequent jobs that open up.**
- 12 NYCHA should ensure that more work is going to high quality union contractors through adopting job standard language for all Requests for Proposals and Requests for Qualifications.**

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NYCHA has the opportunity to really help Red Hook before we are hit with another Sandy. They have a way to actively prevent the loss of power, heat and hot water if they act on what they have learned from Sandy. I hope we don't have to wait another year before we see these changes.

—Red Hook Houses resident
RED HOOK

The mold situation in my apartment started before Sandy hit. It started in my closet area and moved up the wall to the ceiling. I submitted a ticket to NYCHA and they came out to fix the mold. But all they did was paint over it.

—Gravesend Houses resident
CONEY ISLAND

It was difficult to get a job prior to Hurricane Sandy, but after the storm it seemed almost impossible for a large number of folks.

—Carleton Manor resident,
FAR ROCKAWAY