



Civic Engagement During Natural Disasters and Extreme Weather Events

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Back in mid-February central/southside Virginia experienced a horrific ice storm that left some individuals without power for weeks. Nottoway County felt the aftermath of that storm particularly hard. Trees, limbs, and other debris scattered our streets, alleyways, yards, and driveways after the storm and still do today. Nottoway County and the Town of Crewe are slowly cleaning up the storm debris two months after the disaster.

During the storm, and particularly after, several civic engagement strategies were implemented to keep citizens informed of what was going on and how things were progressing. The Town constantly sent out Facebook messages pertaining to the opening of emergency shelters, transportation options for citizens to get to the emergency shelters, the availability of water, other incoming weather events, and the preparation of meals by our volunteer fire department and other civic groups. We also used our Code Red system to make phone calls and send out text messages to inform those citizens that may not have access to Facebook. Our Police Department was also very active patrolling the streets and directly interacting with our citizens to inform them of the latest happenings. The officers were proactive in this situation and sought to assist citizens as they could throughout this weather event. Our Public Works Department was the backbone of the Town during and after the event clearing streets and alleys, as well as responding to requests for service from our citizens.

In conclusion, severe weather events and other natural disasters require a tremendous amount of proactive civic engagement. Citizens are the most vulnerable during these events and expect information and services from their local government. It is vital to get information out to citizens in a timely and accurate manner in as many ways as practically possible including social media, phone/text, and direct contact.