

*City of Cedar Rapids, Iowa  
August 2020, Derecho Event  
After-Action Report (AAR)*



**CEDAR RAPIDS**

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City of Five Seasons®

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# Derecho August 2020

## City of Cedar Rapids- AAR

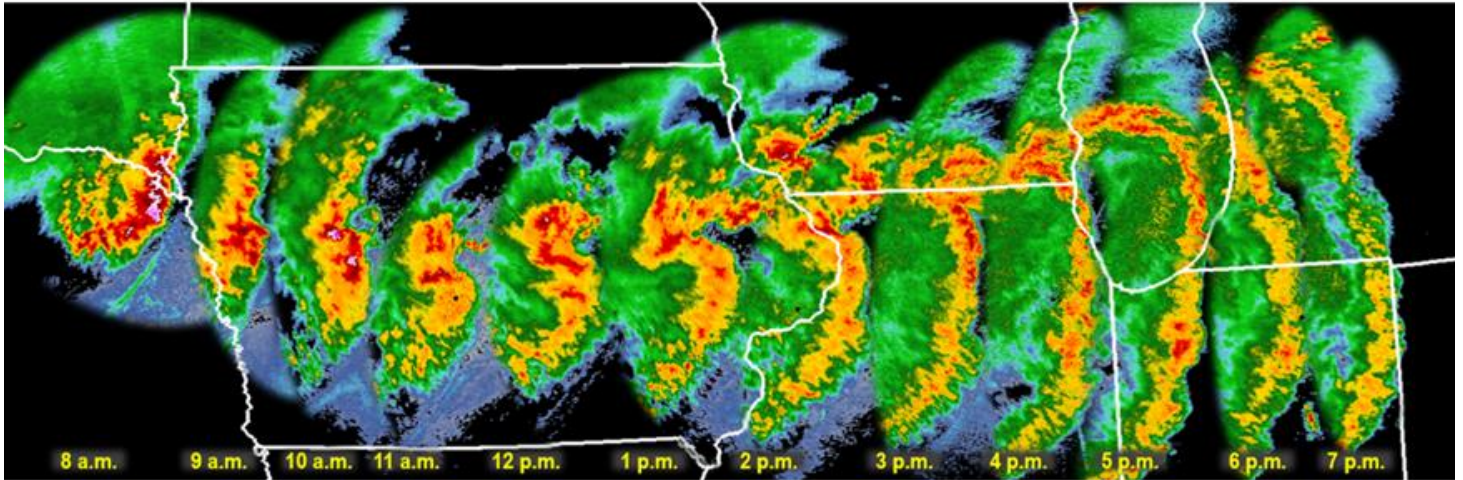
### OVERVIEW

<b>Event Name</b>	Derecho August 2020
<b>Event Date</b>	August 10, 2020
<b>Scope</b>	The City of Cedar Rapids secured Atchison Consulting Service to perform a 3 <sup>rd</sup> party strategic level review of the response actions taken for the August 10, 2020, Derecho event. The outcome of the review process is found in this AAR to include the strengths and opportunities for growth.
<b>Focus Area</b>	Operational Communications Operational Coordination Mass Care Situational Assessment Risk and Disaster Resilient Community
<b>Impacts (Examples, not all inclusive)</b>	Power outages Cellular communication disruptions Historic levels of debris management Structural damage to homes and businesses regionally
<b>Objectives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify what the City of Cedar Rapids did well in the preparedness and response to the Derecho Event.</li> <li>Identify what the City of Cedar Rapids wasn't prepared for when the Derecho impacted the city.</li> <li>Identify what the City of Cedar Rapids learned and is still learning from the Derecho Event</li> <li>Identify new opportunities for growth to strengthen preparedness, response and recovery to All-Hazard Disasters.</li> </ul>
<b>Event Type</b>	August 10, 2020, Derecho. Natural- Caused Event with devastating damage that impacted the entire City of Cedar Rapids. While adapting to a global pandemic with restrictions including; shuttered businesses, remote working, mask mandates, social distancing, travel restrictions, and closures across the world, Iowa was impacted by a derecho. (A line of intense, widespread and fast-moving windstorms characterized by damaging winds) The derecho on August 10, 2020 produced hurricane-force sustained winds of 75pmh, including gusts in excess of 140mph in the Cedar Rapids area.
<b>Sponsoring Organization</b>	City of Cedar Rapids
<b>Authored By</b>	Atchison Consulting Service team members

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August 10, 2020 Derecho: Lowest Angle NWS Radar Reflectivity at One-Hour Time Steps  
All times in CDT

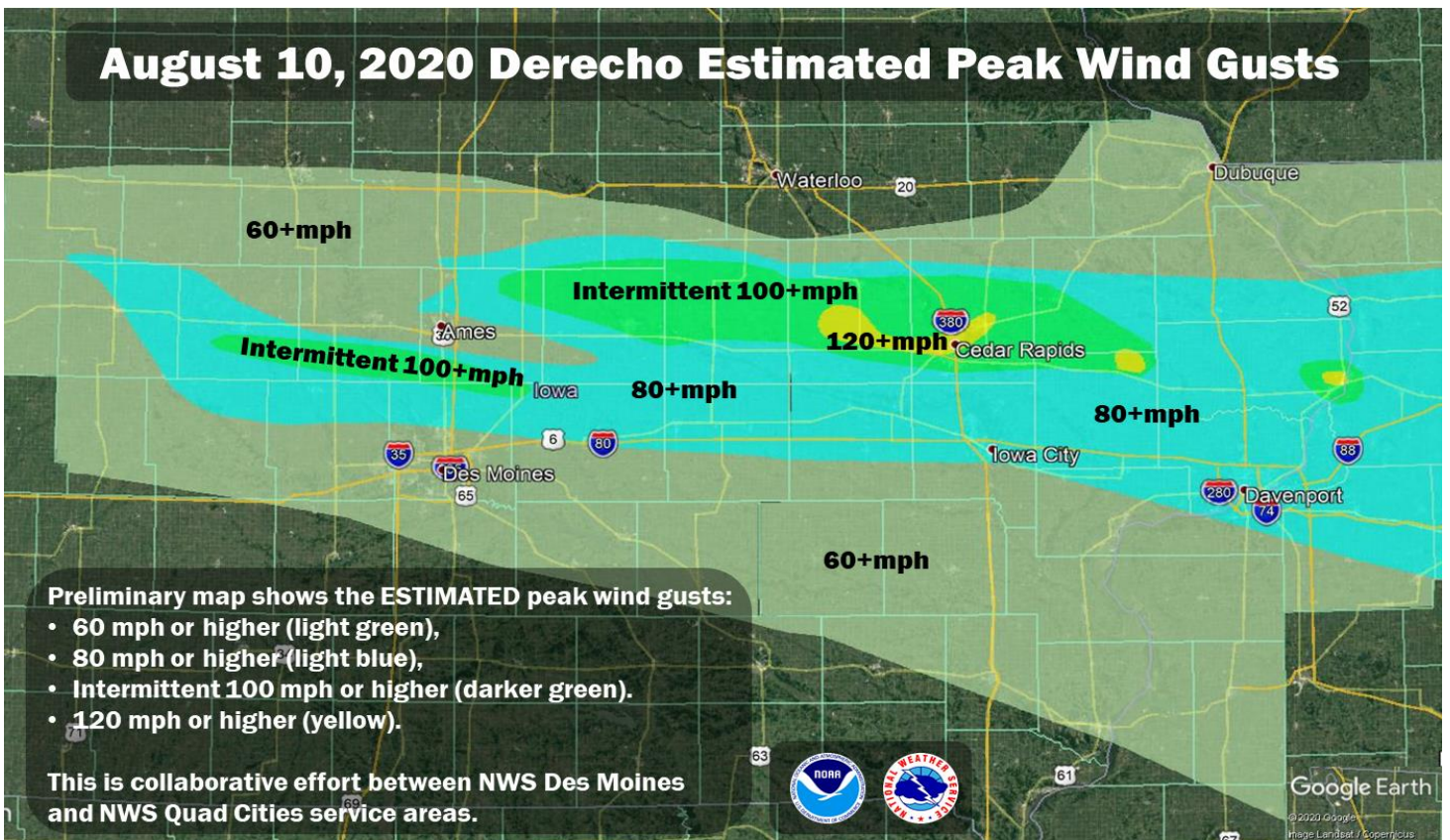


This long-lasting, severe wind thunderstorm complex (known as a derecho) produced hundreds of reports of damage along with likely a few tornadoes.

NWS Chicago | [weather.gov](http://weather.gov)

Aug 11, 2020

### August 10, 2020 Derecho Estimated Peak Wind Gusts



## **HANDLING INSTRUCTIONS**

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The title of this document is: ***City of Cedar Rapids, Iowa August 2020 Derecho Event After-Action Report (AAR)***

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

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This After-Action Report (AAR) is intended to provide a strategic, 3<sup>rd</sup> party review for the City of Cedar Rapids employees' response to the August 10, 2020, derecho. Throughout this report you will observe the strengths; highlighting the flexibility, adaptation, fortitude, and dedication employees exemplified. You will also read opportunities for growth. Due to extreme circumstances with virtually no-notice for the magnitude and severity of imminent destruction and barriers never encountered before that employees would have to face. These unprecedented and history making circumstances brought to light the opportunity to examine response actions taken against existing plans, processes and procedures.

The August 10, 2020, derecho proved to be Cedar Rapids greatest disaster in years. This event confronted the entire city with a storm that presented an enormously complex incident environment. Employees had to operate without primary methods of communication, extended power outages, and with COVID restrictions still in full effect.

City employees were operating at maximum capacity, many stepping into roles and responsibilities they had not served in prior to the derecho. The response to the derecho encompassed more than just traditional emergency responders such as police and fire. Personnel throughout the city in all departments had a role in to this disaster response. They had to operate on a greater scale and for longer periods of time than they had in recent exercises or real-world incidents.

There was success in many areas, in part from the implementation of corrective actions from lessons learned in previous storms such as the floods of 2008 and 2016. Employees that participate in disaster preparedness training and exercises each year relied on core competencies that have been built over the years. There were countless actions of dedicated emergency responders, city employees and citizens helping citizens, who worked selflessly during the incident to help their fellow Iowans.

With opportunity for growth in what we do well **and** what challenges us, the experiences and lessons learned from the August 2020 derecho will serve as a catalyst and will be an important contribution for strengthening preparedness and developing a new level of resilience and readiness for the City of Cedar Rapids.

Resiliency is widely used across the country. It is important to remember that resiliency is defined as: how well we absorb stressful situations, the capacity to recover critical functions and the ability to thrive in unpredictable circumstances. Being resilient, is in fact, dealing with the unknowns. Those things that are many times unpredictable and sometimes those things we think are improbable, yet most always have significant consequences. It becomes easy to criticize, when the focus is on managing short-term expectations and not the totality of the situation.

City leaders have committed to better understand their strengths, identify opportunities for growth and continue to build resiliency in Cedar Rapids for All-Hazard Disasters. One aspect of building resiliency is the partnership, collaboration, and communications with external organizations. During disasters and events that are smaller in scale, these partners support local incident management response actions. When disasters, such as the derecho, are classified as large scale or catastrophic, there is a transition of specific functions from local incident management to identified partners that will lead the coordination efforts.

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Throughout this report there are references to some of those organizations involved in the coordinated response. It is important to note that this report is not intended to evaluate coordinating agencies or jurisdictions outside of Cedar Rapids.

Throughout this report, the focus of strengths and opportunities for growth are directed to processes/procedures, not individuals or specific departments. The structure of this AAR is centered around five (5) Core Capabilities. Core Capabilities were established in the National Preparedness Goal, which defines what it means for communities to be prepared for all types of disasters and emergencies. The definition for each capabilities selected are listed below:

- **Operational Communications:** (FEMA definition) Ensure the capacity for timely communications in support of security, situational awareness, and operations by any and all means available, among and between affected communities in the impact area and all response forces.
- **Operational Coordination:** (FEMA definition) Establish and maintain a unified and coordinated operational structure and process that appropriately integrates all critical stakeholders and supports the execution of core capabilities.
- **Situational Assessment:** (FEMA definition) Provide all decision makers with decision-relevant information regarding the nature and extent of the hazard, any cascading effects, and the status of the response.
- **Risk and Disaster Community Resilience:** (FEMA definition) Assess risk and disaster resilience so that decision makers, responders, and community members can take informed action to reduce their entity's risk and increase their resilience.
- **Mass Care Services:** (FEMA definition) provide life-sustaining and human services to the affected population, to include hydration, feeding, sheltering, temporary housing, evacuee support, reunification, and distribution of emergency supplies.

Through the lens of these capabilities, employees shared what went well, what surprised them, what they learned/ are still learning and what opportunities for growth have been identified.

This AAR should be used as an improvement planning tool for departments, agencies and organizations to create and enhance plans, strengthen organization structures, evaluate equipment, provide focus on training and extend exercise opportunities to external stakeholders and the whole community.

Atchison Consulting Service team members were honored to work with the City of Cedar Rapids and are pleased to provide you a valuable AAR for the August 10, 2020, Derecho.



## **CAPABILITES ANALYSIS**

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The following section provides an analysis related to each of the five (5) selected Core Capabilities. It is intended to provide high level context capturing strengths and opportunities for growth.

The strategic nature of this report focuses on processes and procedures rather than specific city departments, people or specific resources. By taking this approach, city leadership will be able to review, revise and in some cases develop strategic planning guidance and individual departments will be able to take the information and enhance and implement operational and tactical plans, policies and procedures to strengthen their respective department's specific capabilities.

The analysis for each Core Capability includes:

- The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) definition of the Core Capability
- A section dedicated to Strengths identified during the incident response
  - Major strength area stated;
  - Followed by an analysis
- A section dedicated to Opportunities for Growth during the incident response
  - Area for improvement stated;
  - Followed by an analysis; and
  - Examples and/or areas that will be improved by addressing processes

## **CAPABILITY 1: OPERATIONAL COMMUNICATIONS**

*(FEMA definition): Ensure the capacity for timely communications in support of security, situational awareness, and operations by any and all means available, among and between affected communities in the impact area and all response forces.*

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The widespread damages the derecho caused, significantly reduced and delayed operational communication processes. Although communication was not optimal, employees exemplified strengths and adapted to the situation by implementing atypical response capabilities. Some of which were developed as new challenges and barriers arose.

### ***Strength: Employees proactively adapted to overcome the barriers brought on by the derecho.***

The derecho impacted communications unlike any other disaster that can be remembered. As primary communication technology began to fail, some overflow and redundant system processes worked as planned. With long-term power and cell service outages, city employees implemented contingency methods such as runners and sharing equipment that did work. As gaps were identified, some employees stepped up into unfamiliar roles and created atypical solutions. City leadership met daily to share information and provide strategic guidance. A few specific examples of these strengths include:

- When it was identified some functional needs for the community were not being met and those that provided those functions were not readily available, employees were proactive, stepped up and filled roles to provide citizens the help and support needed.
- Director level coordination was elevated from weekly to daily meetings. These meetings were conducted at the same time each day throughout the disaster response period to support operational understanding and make key decisions.
- Secondary communication methods such as ‘runners’ and printed materials were utilized to overcome power outages and cell phone outages.

### ***Strength: Employees’ commitment to service was demonstrated through their immediate response actions to support citizens by any and all means available.***

When traditional methods of communication weren’t available, some employees developed forms and created new processes to overcome the communication gaps.

Traditional response centric employees relied on skill sets developed through annual training to overcome the barriers and challenges caused by the aftermath of the derecho. Partnerships and relationships that have been established and fostered over the years, came together in the disaster to provide solution alternatives and enhance operational communications.

- Some employees developed templates and forms to establish consistent methods of communication when primary technological means weren’t available.
- Communication was provided to and through the media both directly and indirectly.

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- Due to strong relationships created over the years, non-response partners such as print media, grocery stores, gas stations, and hardware stores, donated resources such as a paper for print and locations for citizens to collect important disaster related information.
- Many employees participate in annual training and exercise opportunities that test communication policies, coordination efforts, and the functionality of equipment.

***Opportunity for Growth: There is a need to formalize and institutionalize atypical actions that were taken during the derecho to overcome communication challenges.***

Timely communications during any disaster is a challenge. As seen during the derecho response, any delay in the communication process can compound stress to employees, leadership and citizens. For the City of Cedar Rapids, the communication process was challenged due to unexpected and unanticipated long-term power outages across Iowa. One example of this was the decision to delay press conferences due to the lack of power throughout the entire community and the inability to view information in video form. Inadvertently this decision led to a negative tone from some media outlets which compounded the already stressful environment. This example highlights the opportunity to formalize and socialize communication processes that are atypical compared to current methods that are rapid and quickly accessible.

Employees were committed to collecting information 24 hours a day, some working around the clock answering requests while off duty. They understood that communication capabilities throughout the city were challenged without having a timeline for complete restoration.

Communication methods developed to overcome the situation were slower, less efficient and completed with paper rather than technology. These methods were ultimately successful; therefore the communications team should review the City's emergency communication plan to ensure all atypical communication methods used are captured for future disaster response. Informing community members of this new non-traditional information sharing process during the disaster was also a challenge.

As employees and leadership navigated through a disrupted communication process and highly elevated calls for service through 911 centers, some challenges included:

- Delayed knowledge of external partners that *weren't* available to support response efforts that have been depended upon in past disasters, including, but not limited to:
  - Mass Care Services needed for feeding and sheltering citizens
  - Underserved populations, vulnerable populations, refugee and immigrant needs
- Delayed ability to verify factual information being received;
- Coordination and communication for restoration of power and cellular communications

As the communication challenges persisted, it was noted there is a need to develop additional processes for alternate means of communication when the primary methods are not available and identify additional personnel that could support gathering and vetting information 24 hours a day.

To mitigate these challenges in future disasters, consider conducting a review and update for the Continuity of Operations plan (COOP). This will help manage expectations, provide clear roles and responsibilities and minimize confusion. Additional challenges that can be addressed in the COOP plan identified from this specific disaster include:

- Development of a process for allowing entry of appropriate personnel into the Incident Command Center. This will ensure operations staff can effectively focus without disruption from those who don't have an active role in the response.
- Identification of primary and secondary meeting locations for executive leadership and media briefings, expected briefing schedules during disaster response and recovery periods, and expectations of information that will be shared.
- Identification and location of primary and backup equipment.
- Clearly defined situation thresholds, (trigger mechanisms) that alert leadership to changes in the situation.

***Opportunity for Growth: There is a need to revise and enhance plans and procedures and develop an annual disaster training program for employees and elected officials.***

Throughout the interview process, it was noted by all participants, that there is an interest to better understand disaster procedures, crisis communications and how these things differ from day-to-day communications. Additionally, employees are interested in institutionalizing cross-training opportunities throughout all departments to increase skill sets and maximize staffing during disasters.

Several employees stated that while they were happy to step up and fill gaps that were identified, cross-training for alternate roles had not been conducted prior to this disaster. All departments should consider identifying cross-training opportunities for employees specifically for disaster response. By doing so, it will support improvements for:

- Understanding roles and responsibilities for specific positions during disaster response and recovery;
- Identifying lines of succession for disaster response roles;
- Strengthening understanding of plans and processes for disaster response and recovery

As plans are being revised, consider developing a formalized process that will increase the efficiency and effectiveness to communicate with displaced homeowners and vulnerable populations. Some employees shared concern that due to the significant disruptions of communication services, gathering and sharing information with displaced homeowners and vulnerable populations was difficult. Although information was being distributed by the police department and neighborhood resource centers, implementing a formalized processes will help overcome these challenges in future disasters.

## **CAPABILITY 2: OPERATIONAL COORDINATION**

*(FEMA definition) Establish and maintain a unified and coordinated operational structure and process that appropriately integrates all critical stakeholders and supports the execution of core capabilities.*

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Though challenges of historic levels of debris made most roads impassable, technological challenges of power and communication failures, and city-wide infrastructure damage, employees came together to establish and maintain a unified and coordinated operational structure.

***Strength: There was no delay to activate the City Incident Command Center, activate the Incident Management Team (IMT), and establish incident command immediately upon the storm ending.***

Cedar Rapids employees exemplified fortitude, dedication to service, genuine passion and concern for all citizens affected by the derecho immediately after the imminent danger had passed. While on-duty personnel immediately established incident command and began response efforts without hesitation, off-duty personnel made their way into the city by any method they could. There were many stories of employees who left their homes (also damaged by the storm) by foot and walked miles to get to work in order to help the community.

Employees established and maintained a unified and coordinated operational structure that integrated internal as well as external stakeholders in response to the devastating storm. Examples of these strengths include:

- Employees from all departments immediately deployed to respond and support citizens.
- The disaster declaration process began immediately after the storm had past.
- When Linn County Emergency Management Agency was initially unable to coordinate Mass Care Services, Cedar Rapids employees became proactive and began the coordination process.
- There was no hesitation to establish the Incident Command Structure (ICS) and the Incident Management Team (IMT) immediately activated and followed all protocols.

***Strength: Emergency planning, training and exercises conducted each year, contributed to traditional response personnel being able to adapt and overcome coordination challenges.***

Employees across multiple departments throughout the city work well together, training and exercising capabilities each year to strengthen response actions. Procedures and processes for emergency contracts have been established and put into place as a result of lessons learned from other historic events. Creative solutions were established when all primary and most secondary methods were not available. It is through these examples and others like them, that the city has built and continues to strengthen operational coordination capabilities. Other examples include:

- The city was able to receive and secure volunteers and resources that were offered immediately after the storm ended due to established relationships.
- Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP) was started prior to the pandemic and continues to be updated.
- Incident Command training is offered and conducted to response personnel each year.

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**Opportunity for Growth: *There is a need to develop additional pre-scripted information for specific threats and hazards that will help inform all employees, elected officials and external stakeholders.***

Maintaining a unified and coordinated operational structure, executing established processes and integrating all critical stakeholders that support a response can be a challenge for any size event. For a disaster such as the derecho, in the middle of a pandemic, is a scenario that would be called ‘unrealistic’ in most cases. For the City of Cedar Rapids, this was reality and through this unprecedented situation come opportunities for growth. Through the lens of operational coordination, developing additional informational messaging prior to a disaster occurring is one area that the city can improve. Employees and teams have shown proficiency in developing pre-scripted messages for a variety of situations. The derecho however, showed areas in which developing specific information through messaging prior to an imminent threat, risk and/or hazard would help inform coordination efforts that occur during a disaster and will help manage expectations throughout the whole community. By implementing this type of messaging ahead of disasters, it will help improve the following areas:

- Reduce confusion and improve understanding;
- Provide clear expectations to the public and communicate appropriate jurisdictions that are to lead the coordination of specific disaster functions;
- Provide clear expectations to the public and communicate to jurisdictions that support specific disaster functions;
- Provide a unified and coordinated execution of emergency processes.

**Opportunity for Growth: *There is a need to incorporate specific coordination challenges from the derecho into preparedness, response and recovery plans.***

Success of operational coordination is highly dependent on the understanding of roles and responsibilities, expectations, resources and equipment needed to respond to disasters. The derecho reinforced the need for revising and enhancing plans, policies and procedures that address and promote optimal coordination. Although most employees are trained, they were given a situation with barriers and obstacles that most couldn’t imagine. Cedar Rapids encountered a no-notice, state-wide devastating storm, that didn’t leave any part of the city untouched. This storm took out power for two weeks, created communication disruptions never before encountered and every road in the city and surrounding areas were impassable with debris. Revising current plans that incorporate the challenges specific of this event, will give a platform to the city, that will set up further success in the response to future disasters. Incorporating situations such as this into plans, policies and procedures will help improve the following areas:

- Identify additional employees to staff 24/7 operations;
- Identify primary, secondary and tertiary backups to equipment;
- Identify primary, secondary and tertiary backups to personnel positions;
- Identify alternate communication systems and methods;
- Identify and train all employees on emergency processes;
- Identify and train all employees on alternate facility locations when the primary is inaccessible;

**Opportunity for Growth: *There is a need to inform all employees, elected officials, and all external stakeholders who are impacted by or support disaster response, of the standardized, appropriate resource request process.***

When disasters occur, the primary responsibilities for incident command is to protect life and property, manage personnel and equipment resources, and maintain accountability for responder and public safety. When incident command identifies functions and tasks that exceed current capabilities, processes have been established to appropriately integrate additional support (personnel and equipment). When these processes and procedures are not fully understood, the ability to maintain operational coordination can be easily disrupted.

It was difficult to establish operational coordination with some external partners due to the severity and magnitude of the event. Compounded by the pandemic and restrictions that were in place, support services such as feeding and sheltering weren't available through normal standardized processes.

There was increasing pressure and calls for National Guard soldiers to come into Cedar Rapids to 'have a presence' as they have in past disasters. As incident command continued to gather information about the magnitude of the situation and began to identify a list of requests to make to the Linn County Emergency Management Agency, there were challenges surrounding:

- Identifying and defining missions the National Guard are able to support;
- Educate and inform the community how to request specific resources by mission;
- Coordinating support services for a large scale disaster when the primary partners are unavailable;
- Phone calls from outside the city circumventing processes and creating disruptions.

At the root of these challenges, is the core principle of understanding the importance of following standardized process for requesting resources that is incorporated into emergency plans with contingency actions. This disaster highlighted the need to strengthen the understanding of processes and incorporate them into plans, policies and procedures. By informing, training, and implementing appropriate standardized processes, it will strengthen:

- Understanding what capabilities additional resource partners can provide throughout changes in circumstances;
- What the National Guard will and will not provide and knowing they are the State resource of last resort;
- What mass care service providers are currently capable of providing.
- What coordination services are led by external partners and the thresholds that trigger the transition of lead roles from the City's incident command to external partners.
- Understanding how the resource request process flows and how decisions are made outside of the control of local incident command and who needs to make the official request.
- Understanding the trigger mechanisms that alert incident command that additional resources are needed.
- Understanding that Iowa Homeland Security and Emergency Management Agency will ultimately decide what additional resources requested will be assigned. (See Appendix A)

### CAPABILITY 3: SITUATIONAL ASSESSMENT

*(FEMA definition) Provide all decision makers with decision-relevant information regarding the nature and extent of the hazard, any cascading effects, and the status of the response.*

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***Strength: City leaders and employees applied lessons learned from previous disasters that assisted in the decision making process.***

Cedar Rapids has encountered its' share of small and large scale disasters. Each one of those disasters, just like the response to the derecho, provided an opportunity to learn from challenges and adopt new or enhanced actions. The commitment to learn from all situations and adapt to changing response environment proved to show strength in response to the derecho. Although this no-notice event was unlike any other disaster the city has seen, the incident command personnel knew their roles, the capabilities their individual departments had and adapted to the challenges and barriers they were presented. Some department employees created assessment tools that could be used on and offline to help provide damage assessment information, others implemented a buddy system that was created from other disaster situations when communication was limited. The majority of participants that took part in the interview process noted the following strengths:

- Many employees applied lessons learned from the 2008 and 2016 floods and other disasters to the derecho response.
- Many employees felt that each department understands their mission to support citizens.
- Several participants indicated that some training and Standard Operating Procedures were developed, printed and distributed as the response was progressing.
- An App to give situational assessment of damages to infrastructure was developed and used successfully both on and offline .
- Procurement established vendors prior to the derecho to support rapid disaster response and recovery efforts.

***Opportunity for Growth: Incorporate a formalized process into response and Continuity of Operation plans to inform employees, leadership, elected officials, and community members how they should expect to receive situational updates during a disaster response.***

Due to the magnitude and severity of damages, it took longer to grasp details of the common operating picture. Even though response efforts were fully activated and city leadership discussions were underway, there were delays in gathering and providing information to capture the extent of the hazard, delays in understanding the cascading impacts, and not a clear understanding if information going out was being received by citizens due to the ongoing power outages.

The City should consider expanding their information sharing by establishing a formalized public facing Situation Report that will inform city employees, external partners, and the citizens of disaster response actions and accomplishments for each operational period.



Formal situation reports that can be distributed to various audiences are not currently available. A formalized plan to develop critical information requirements and identifying personnel that would be responsible for developing and disseminating within situation reports are not currently available. Developing a standardized situation report form, updating the Continuity of Operations plan, and Emergency Operations plan will help improve:

- Provide a common operating picture that will help leadership make informed decisions;
- Provide all external partners and citizens with scheduled informational updates;
- Situational awareness of actions being taken and what has been accomplished;
- Additional resources that have been requested
- Anticipated and scheduled activities that would have impact to the community the following operational period.

**Opportunity for Growth: Review the current formalized process and incorporate lessons learned from this disaster to enhance information sharing with all citizens, including vulnerable populations.**

As power outages continued and cellular signal for phones was spotty, there was concern from city leaders and incident command that information may not be getting to all citizens. Although alternate methods of communication through print and social media updates were occurring, along with emergency response personnel conducting welfare checks, the challenge of ensuring information was being received and understood remained on the minds of leadership. The City should consider researching, developing and implementing tools and enhance current processes to strengthen situational awareness for all citizens, including vulnerable populations.

By developing and implementing a standardized process that incorporates vulnerable populations, it may strengthen:

- A stronger understanding of additional resource needs that vulnerable populations may not be able to communicate during a disaster;
- Confidence and greater preparedness levels throughout the community.

## **CAPABILITY 4: RISK AND DISASTER RESILIENCE ASSESSMENT**

*(FEMA definition) Assess risk and disaster resilience so that decision makers, responders, and community members can take informed action to reduce their entity's risk and increase their resilience.*

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### ***Strength: Disaster preparedness initiatives have been incorporated and implemented for many years.***

The City of Cedar Rapids is committed to mitigating impacts from All-Hazards disasters. Each year, employees participate in training and exercises within their departments to better understand and strengthen capabilities. Investments have been made over the years by partnering and contracting with subject matter experts that help build best practices from lessons learned. Natural disaster preparedness information such as:

- Tornado watches and warning and actions to protect lives;
- Severe thunderstorm watches and warnings and actions to mitigate dangers from storms;
- Winter Storms/ Blizzards watches and warnings and actions to prepare for these storms;
- Flood/ Flash Flood watches and warnings, and the actions to take to save lives and property.

City employees and community members alike are aware of threats, hazards, risks and know life safety actions to take when given a window of warning prior to the imminent impact of a threat. Although there was no warning for the magnitude and severity for the derecho event, the preparedness training and information that is shared each year, contributed to community preparedness for this disaster.

During the interviews that were conducted for this report, many participants referenced the following disaster preparedness efforts:

- Consistent preparedness actions for all people to protect themselves when common natural disasters are imminent are shared every year on multiple occasions;
- Training and exercises are conducted each year.

### ***Strength: The City understands and is committed to building resilience through lessons learned from past disasters.***

The City of Cedar Rapids has established good networks of people, vendors and resources over the years. They have used past disasters as the catalyst to develop advanced teams such as the city's Incident Management Team (IMT), a pre-vetted list of vendors that support disaster response and recovery efforts, and good mutual aid partnerships. This coordination effort fostered by city employees and encouraged and supported by leadership, will continue to build resilience against All-Hazard disasters.

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***Opportunity for Growth: Develop a comprehensive annual risk assessment to review gaps, update capabilities and advancements and identify desired outcomes as it relates to All-Hazard disaster threats, risks and hazards.***

The derecho identified progress the city continues to make and also showed areas for growth when responding to situations that haven't been encountered before such as:

- Damage to the entire city, not just an isolated area;
- Impacts and challenges of a pandemic;
- Long-term power and communication technology failures;
- Extreme debris management challenges and nearly all roads impassable.

Many employees stated they have a general understanding that when there is a disaster and/or interruptions occur, there will be guidance and directions provided to them for how to respond. The damage from the derecho presented new challenges to field employees outside of the traditional emergency response personnel and who are not usually involved in a disaster response.

Employees incorporated creative contingency methods to address and resolve gaps created by the extreme situation. Consideration should be given to formalize and institutionalize these solution alternatives as best practices that can be used for future disasters.

Cedar Rapids employees should evaluate the opportunity to participate in the Linn County Emergency Management Agency Threat Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment (THIRA) program. Consider enhancing the data from this process with City specific vulnerabilities. This process will contribute to strengthening:

- Knowledge of all potential hazards, threat and risks;
- Provide enhanced approaches to notice and no-notice events;
- Provide the opportunity to discuss desired outcomes;
- Create new targets to increase capabilities for each department;
- Provide a greater understanding of potential impacts;
- Develop additional preparedness actions that will increase risk and disaster resilience.

Although the City of Cedar Rapids has trained personnel, resources, and strong infrastructure to respond to and recover from many types of disasters, we can be assured that there will always be 'something' that we don't have and/or need when disasters strike. Whether that be the need for:

- Additional people
- Additional facilities;
- Additional resources (equipment, parts, technology, etc.).

Participating in the Linn County Emergency Management Agency's THIRA program will support increased resilience and strengthen capabilities across all departments for future disasters.

## CAPABILITY 5: MASS CARE SERVICES

*(FEMA definition) provide life-sustaining and human services to the affected population, to include hydration, feeding, sheltering, temporary housing, evacuee support, reunification, and distribution of emergency supplies.*

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***Strength: Established relationships have helped the City respond to and recover from All-Hazard disasters.***

The City of Cedar Rapids has long standing relationships with partners in and around the community that provide mass care services. One example is the Linn Area Partners Active in Disaster (LAP-AID). This group was established after recognizing the needs stemming from the 2008 floods. It is comprised of more than 40 health and human service providers. LAP-AID, additional non-governmental agencies and volunteer organizations work hard to support vulnerable populations and all community members in their time of need. Continue to foster relationships with all mass care service providers, conduct training and information sharing workshops throughout the year to maintain understanding of current capability strengths and limitations.

***Opportunity of Growth: There is a need to identify additional personnel to serve in liaison positions to coordinate and work with mass care service providers.***

Disaster response begins and ends at the local level. When the IMT was developed, liaisons were identified to assist with the coordination of services such as mass care. When a disaster exceeds specific levels, a higher level of coordination and transfer of responsibilities occur. As the magnitude and severity of the impacts from the derecho were revealed, it became evident that a transfer of responsibility to lead mass care services needed to be elevated. It was noted during the interview process that more liaisons are needed to support that coordination. Consideration should be given to:

- Identify personnel throughout all departments who have an interest and skills for coordinating services;
- Provide training and validate the employees understanding of the position and responsibilities through exercises;
- Inform employees of thresholds and trigger mechanisms to elevate and transfer responsibilities.

During discussions with over 70 participants, there is a desire to better understand mass care services, and associated roles and responsibilities. There is a general understanding that external mass care service providers will lead hydration, feeding, sheltering, temporary housing, evacuee support, reunification, and distribution of emergency supplies.

When a disaster occurs within the City of Cedar Rapids, many times they are equipped to respond and recover without the assistance of outside support. In some cases, this means that incident command will coordinate directly with partners such as the Red Cross, and/or other partners to assist with specific needs for a 'set number' of displaced citizens. Within a Continuity of Operations plan, there are established thresholds, also known as 'trigger' mechanisms so that when a disaster exceeds a specific level, incident command knows that specific need(s) have exceeded the City's capabilities to directly support and coordinate these functions. Incident Command and Linn County EMA then communicate to ensure these functions are transferred to and coordinated through the County level.

## Derecho August 2020

### City of Cedar Rapids- AAR

As additional employees train and prepare to serve in liaison roles during a disaster response there should be strong consideration given to providing greater detail within the Continuity of Operations Plan that will address:

- Lines of succession for Mass Care liaisons;
- Triggers, decision points, escalation and de-escalation for transfer of responsibilities for mass care services;
- Expected actions and responsibilities;
- Contingency actions to take if primary coordination partners are unable to provide services.

The City of Cedar Rapids should continue to foster relationships with all mass care service partners to establish a stronger understanding of resources available, capability changes and restrictions throughout the year. The city should continue to coordinate with Linn County Emergency Management Agency to identify and ensure Mass Care services are providing meaningful service to vulnerable populations under their purview.

## **CONCLUSION**

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Everyone benefits when we enable, encourage and foster professional curiosity and courtesy to those we work with internally and externally. Through constructive, conflict-resolution type discussions we better understand the complex and dynamic environment of ever-changing threats, hazards and risks.

As seen throughout this AAR, in strengths and in challenges, there is room for improvement. Preparedness and resiliency is created, enhanced and sustained through a living program that includes:

- Developing, reviewing and revising plans;
- Training employees, elected officials, external stakeholders and citizens;
- Exercising planning assumptions and processes;
- Creating an environment that encourages collaboration with all levels of government and private sector partners.

As Cedar Rapids leaders and employees continue to build resilience capabilities and learn from the experiences, the derecho will serve as a catalyst for yet another example of resiliency and new best practices for the future.

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