

Karen's Corner



My heart is heavy as I reflect on the recent torrential rains that left so many communities in a state of complete devastation. While I did not endure the unfathomable loss that countless residents are now facing, I live near a community that was greatly impacted by flooding and I am deeply saddened by the tragic results.

Despite the widespread impact, many of our employees managed to open the affected county offices to serve our fellow West Virginians. A testament to the dedication of our workers are the stories of some employees who went to check on children and families and became stranded as roads were covered and bridges were torn apart. I am thankful for not only their willingness to go above and beyond, but for their safety through this event.

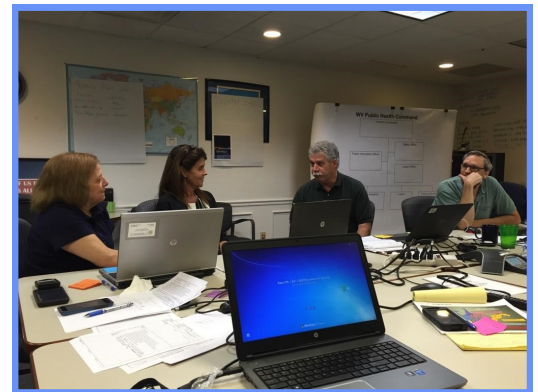
I am also grateful for our employees who worked with our state and local partners to help people through this situation. In coordination with Governor Tomblin's Office, groups including DHHR's Bureau for Public Health/Center for Threat Preparedness, West Virginia Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Management, West Virginia National Guard, U.S. Coast Guard, Red Cross, Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), local emergency responders and hundreds of other

heroes came together to help those in need, demonstrating West Virginia's true strength and resilience. Their work continues as we rebuild West Virginia.

With at least 20 lives lost and more than 1,000 homes destroyed, I want you to know that I am thinking of you, your family, neighbors and friends, and all of West Virginia as we work to recover from this natural disaster. To prevent further tragedies, it is important that we protect our health, and encourage others to do the same, while working through flood clean up.

If you or someone you know needs assistance, please call our Customer Service hotline, 1-877-716-1212. To apply for FEMA assistance, visit <http://www.DisasterAssistance.gov> or call 1-800-621-FEMA (3362). Additional support and resources are being coordinated by the local emergency manager for your county. You can find the telephone numbers for county emergency management offices on the West Virginia Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Management, <http://www.dhsem.wv.gov/Important%20Contact%20Numbers/Pages/default.aspx>.

As we work to recover, I am reminded of a line from one of our state songs, "The West Virginia Hills": "Many changes I can see, which my heart with sadness fills; but no changes can be noticed in those West Virginia hills." While we cannot count all that is lost, we are West Virginians, and that's enough to pull us through.



Secretary Bowling meets with employees in DHHR's Center for Threat Preparedness.

Department Employees Share Flood Survival Stories

Department employees statewide have been personally and professionally affected by the violent rain and flash flooding in June 2016. While the state works to rebuild, stories of survival and hope are being shared. Below, two employees from Kanawha County reflect on their unexpected overnight experience when a roadway washed away.

On June 23, Carla Harper, Program Manager with the Bureau for Children and Families, determinedly drove through heavy rain to be with her three children as the flood waters rose, making her trek home nearly impossible. After trying several different routes and sitting on the interstate for two hours, Carla decided to refill her car's gas tank at the Elkview Crossings Mall. She then stopped at the mall's McDonald's for coffee when she was told the only known exit out of the shopping center collapsed due to rushing floodwater. She was trapped, along with approximately 500 other shoppers and employees at the plaza.

During this time, Carla found another DHHR team member, Information Technology Client Technician Jim Hicks. Jim and his family were eating dinner at an Elkview Crossings Mall restaurant when the bridge collapsed. Jim, his wife, his two

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Department Employees, cont.

children and his mother-in-law made the most of this bad situation, turning it into a camping adventure. Although the water was turned off in the stores and restaurants, some businesses “went above and beyond, staying open later than usual and even giving away bottled water and food the next day,” Jim said. “We took turns napping in the cars and checking our phones.” The family also played games and ate snacks to pass the night away. The next morning, emergency workers helped the family carefully down a knotted rope to 84 Lumber, where their friends drove them to a safe place.

Carla also made it to safety and home to her children, and now faces the challenge of the loss of her parents’ home, which was destroyed by the flood waters. She is thankful for the many volunteers who have come to check on her family, providing hope and support as they move forward from this tragic event.

Flood Clean Up Precautions

DHHR's Bureau for Public Health is encouraging West Virginians to take precautions during flood clean up efforts to reduce injury and illness. The following important tips can help residents protect their health.

Be aware of the effects of exposure to mold during the clean up process.

- Common reactions to mold are cough, congestion, runny nose, burning eyes, headaches, sneezing and sore throat.
- Children, pregnant women, older people and people with weakened immune systems may be more sensitive to mold than others.
- Signs of indoor mold growth include staining on surfaces, a musty odor, dark spots on or around vents, water stains and peeling or curling of vinyl floors or wallpaper.

Take mosquito bite precautions while conducting flood clean up.

- Remove flood-water debris on and around your property.
- Empty or drain potted plant bases, tires, buckets or containers, and roof gutters.
- Drain any pooled rainwater or floodwater that may have collected in containers around your property.
- Be sure to wear insect repellent.
- Wear long sleeves and pants while conducting flood clean up.
- Dispose of potential mosquito breeding sites by emptying stagnant pools of water around your house and yard, if possible.

Never use generators and charcoal or gas grills inside your home, basements, garages, or other enclosed spaces due to the risk of carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning.

- Residents should not operate these appliances near an open window or window air conditioner which may allow fumes to enter the home.
- The most common symptoms of CO poisoning are



Elkview Crossings Mall bridge

PHOTO CREDIT: Sam Owens, Charleston-Gazette Mail

headache, dizziness, weakness, nausea, vomiting, chest pain, and altered mental status.

Use caution and be aware of the risk of chain saw injury during tree or debris removal.

- Wear a hard hat, safety glasses, ear plugs, thick work gloves, chaps, and boots.
- Trees entangled in power lines must be deferred to the local power company.

Take precautions while beginning clean up to reduce injury and illness.

- While working, keep hands away from mouth and face.
- Disinfect all wounds and dress them immediately.
- Wear protective clothing (rubber boots, rubber gloves and eye protection).
- Wash hands often using clean water and soap.

Check immunization status to ensure you are protected against tetanus.

- Tetanus is preventable by making sure a person is up to date on their tetanus immunization.
- This is done by getting a tetanus booster every 10 years.
- For persons with a wound that has been exposed to flood water, the recommended interval between doses of tetanus-containing vaccine should be shortened from 10 years to 5 years.

Use caution when using food following power outages or after being exposed to flood waters.

- All fresh fruits and vegetables, including home garden produce, should be destroyed.
- Foods such as cereals, bakery goods, dried fruits, flour, frozen foods, sugar, salt and similar foods in paper or plastic containers or wrapping should be destroyed.
- All meats, including fresh, dried, frozen and home canned should be destroyed.