

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SENATE STATE AFFAIRS STANDING COMMITTEE
ANCHORAGE, AK**

September 24, 2012
10:03 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Senator Bill Wielechowski, Chair
Senator Albert Kookesh
Senator Kevin Meyer
Senator Cathy Giessel

MEMBERS ABSENT

Senator Joe Paskvan, Vice Chair

OTHER LEGISLATORS PRESENT

Senator Bettye Davis
Representative Cris Tuck
Representative Pete Peterson

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

HEARING: DISASTER RESPONSE AND PREPAREDNESS - FOCUSING ON
LESSONS LEARNED FROM RECENT WINDSTORMS IN SOUTHCENTRAL AND
INTERIOR ALASKA.

-HEARD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

No previous action to record

WITNESS REGISTER

BRADLEY EVANS, CEO
Chugach Electric Association
Anchorage, AK

POSITION STATEMENT: Participated in the discussion regarding
lessons learned after the September windstorms.

PHIL STEYER, Director
Government Relations and Corporate Communications
Chugach Electric Association
Anchorage, AK

POSITION STATEMENT: Participated in the discussion regarding lessons learned after the September windstorms.

DON ZOERB, Assistant General Manager and CFO
Matanuska Electric Association (MEA)
Palmer, AK

POSITION STATEMENT: Participated in the discussion regarding lessons learned after the September windstorms.

DAWN BRANTLEY, Emergency Programs Manager
Anchorage Office of Emergency Management
Municipality of Anchorage
Anchorage, AK

POSITION STATEMENT: Participated in the discussion regarding lessons learned after the September windstorms.

KEVIN SPILLERS, Director
Anchorage Office of Emergency Management (OEM)
Municipality of Anchorage
Anchorage, AK

POSITION STATEMENT: Participated in the discussion regarding lessons learned after the September windstorms.

RAY FAUST, Member
Mayor's Task Force on Public Safety
Municipality of Anchorage
Anchorage, AK

POSITION STATEMENT: Participated in the discussion regarding lessons learned after the September windstorms.

MICHAEL O'HARA, Deputy Director
Division of Homeland Security/Emergency Management (DHS&EM)
Department of Military & Veterans Affairs (DMVA)
Fort Richardson, AK

POSITION STATEMENT: Participated in the discussion regarding lessons learned after the September windstorms.

MARY JONES, Coordinator
East Side Seniors
Anchorage, AK

POSITION STATEMENT: Participated in the discussion regarding lessons learned after the September windstorms.

BARBARA BACHMEIER, representing herself
Anchorage, AK

POSITION STATEMENT: Participated in the discussion regarding lessons learned after the September windstorms.

DENNIS BRODIGAN, Director
Matanuska-Susitna Borough
Department Emergency Services
Palmer, AK

POSITION STATEMENT: Participated in the discussion regarding lessons learned after the September windstorms.

TIM COLBATH, Co-founder and CEO
Alaska's Extended Life Animal Sanctuary
Nikiski, AK

POSITION STATEMENT: Participated in the discussion regarding lessons learned after the September windstorms.

MATT GHO, representing himself
Anchorage, AK

POSITION STATEMENT: Participated in the discussion regarding lessons learned after the September windstorms.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[10:03:16 AM](#)

CHAIR BILL WIELECHOWSKI called the Senate State Affairs Standing Committee meeting to order at 10:03 a.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Kookesh, Meyers, Giessel and Wielechowski.

Hearing on Disaster Response and Preparedness - Focusing on Lessons Learned from Recent Windstorms in Southcentral and Interior Alaska.

[10:03:54 AM](#)

CHAIR WIELECHOWSKI announced the business before the committee would be to hear from various parties about disaster response and preparedness, focusing on the lessons learned from the recent windstorms in Southcentral and the Interior. Representatives from from at least two electric utilities, a phone and internet provider, the Municipality of Anchorage, and the State of Alaska would offer testimony. Emergency response personnel on the Kenai Peninsula and the MatSu Valley may also offer testimony if their schedules permit. At noon, the focus would shift to citizens who wanted to offer suggestions about how to improve ways to prepare and respond to natural disasters

BRADLEY EVANS, CEO, Chugach Electric Association, Inc. ("Chugach"), introduced himself and informed the committee that conducting "lessons learned" exercises was part of Chugach's normal operations.

10:06:59 AM

PHIL STEYER, Director, Government Relations and Corporate Communications, Chugach Electric Association, Inc. ("Chugach"), observed that it had been a tough September. He relayed that the original intent of the meeting was to discuss the September 4-5 storm window and subsequent activity, but since then three other significant windstorms hit the Anchorage area.

The first storm was largely a cottonwood tree outage; the Chugach system had thousands of cottonwoods tip over at the root base. He surmised that tens of thousands went down in the Anchorage Bowl. He explained that electric lines were engineered to withstand forces from snow, ice, and wind, but not necessarily to withstand a heavy, crashing cottonwood tree. He displayed a graph that showed when and the number of customers affected during the first wind event, and described the preparations for the storm. Chugach held crews over, notified staff and contractors, and brought the media into the power control center to do a story. The storm hit Tuesday night and at the peak about 31,000 customers lost power. About 85 percent of those customers were reconnected within 24 hours.

MR. STEYER explained that Chugach prioritized its activities and responded to 50-70 police and fire calls that first night. Other than safety calls, Chugach applied resources to could get the most customers back initially. Working from the generation point outward to the customer, they first worked to get the primary feeder lines from distribution substations back on line. The outages declined sharply through the next day during which time the initial assessment was done. A detailed assessment was done after the winds died down and workers were able to enter densely wooded areas safely. In a Thursday press conference, Mr. Evans said that it would take days to restore power throughout the system, and the last customers had power restored on Sunday night. He noted that a Thursday bump in outages diverted resources, but was the result of two events that could occur any given day. A citizen dropped a tree on a line and a raised dump truck box hit an overhead line.

10:12:48 AM

Twelve crews were working the night the storm hit and 20 crews were working the next night. At the peak, 30 crews were in the field working on restoration. Chugach kept the media apprised throughout the process and answered more than 11,000 phone calls on 54 incoming trunk lines. He acknowledged that there were probably just as many calls that went unanswered.

MR. STEYER said that Chugach realized that customers were frustrated for two reasons: first because it was difficult to get through on the phone; and second because they didn't get an answer about when their power would be restored. He displayed a map of the DeBarr Substation feeder line number 152 to illustrate why it wasn't possible to tell a customer when power would be restored. Service locations that are fused taps off a primary line were without power longer and when a tree was on a service line, the customer waited even longer. He sympathized with those customers who were frustrating to be the only one in the neighborhood without power.

10:19:35 AM

MR. STEYER said that after the first storm, Chugach activated new tools on its website, including an online report of a power outage and a map of customer-reported outages. He noted that the site linked to an ADN Compass article that discussed how Chugach crews tackled the storm-related outages. He explained that the online report gives customers three ways to identify the location of the outage: phone number, name, or member number and pin. These new tools were available and helpful when the subsequent September storms hit. More trees went down in the first storm, but all the storms caused similar distribution problems.

He explained that crews can only clear trees from rights-of-way or easements that Chugach has a legal right to clear. With the exception of the "danger tree program," the company does not have the right, without permission, to go deep onto properties and clear trees. With permission from the property owner, the certified arborist on staff can remove, at Chugach expense, a tree that is in danger of falling into the right-of-way or easement or onto a power line. Chugach removes between 8,000 and 10,000 dangerous trees every year.

10:25:18 AM

MR. STEYER said the online report capability certainly took the pressure off the phone lines during the second and third storms. During the second and third storms, the respective numbers of online outage reports were 109 and 358. Total phone calls for those storms were 3,570, as opposed to 11,170 for the first storm. He noted that in addition to the new website, customers were able to get information through Facebook. He opined that Chugach did very well operationally in the field, but it could have done better in keeping customers informed.

MR. STEYER thanked the legislature and administration for the appropriation to automate the Hope substation. It will make it easier to sectionalize problems and reduce response times.

He displayed a slide of a downed power line that crossed the flooded Chuitna River near Tyonek. A cottonwood fell into the line and the current worked the tree into the middle of the river. He reiterated that it had been a tough September.

[10:28:54 AM](#)

CHAIR WIELECHOWSKI asked if Chugach had seniors and the disabled on a priority list to ensure their safety during emergencies.

MR. EVANS said the dispatchers tell people who call with emergency reports to call 911. Chugach was sensitive to the issue and tracked certain individuals but there was no guarantee that they would be put at the head of the queue.

CHAIR WIELECHOWSKI asked if, because of the recent storms, Chugach had identified any transmission or infrastructure needs.

MR. EVANS responded that Chugach would need to finish the final analysis of the distribution system before it could provide a list of projects to increase reliability during a similar storm.

[10:33:01 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PETE PETERSEN asked what percentage of lines were underground and if there were plans to switch more overhead lines to underground. Constituents posed the question because their utility bills include a surcharge for underground wires even when the service was overhead.

MR. EVANS responded that the percentage of underground line increased a little every year and Chugach spent more to bury line than the surcharge brought in. He also observed that burying power lines was just a partial solution. It could be problematic in the winter when the ground was frozen.

MR. STEYER added that the Chugach system had about 2,000 miles of line that included 500 miles was transmission line and 1,500 miles of distribution line. Fifty-five percent of the distribution system was overhead and 45 percent was underground. He explained that the 2 percent surcharge on customers' bills stemmed from a municipal ordinance that intended to allow the utilities to recover some costs and accelerate the pace of converting to underground lines. Chugach raised a little more

than \$3 million a year through the surcharge. A full explanation of how the money is spent is on the website.

10:37:57 AM

SENATOR MEYER asked if it was problematic for Chugach when people used their own generators during power outages.

MR. EVANS said not if the interconnect requirements were followed carefully. The interconnect device isolates the generator from the grid so there is no chance of back-feeding power into the grid.

SENATOR GIESSEL asked if Chugach participated when the state did tabletop exercises to simulate a disaster.

MR. EVANS said yes and his experience was that someone with much higher authority than his would direct the operations during a level IV event. He estimated that the September outages rose to level III, which calls for invoking mutual aid from other utilities. Chugach did that.

10:41:40 AM

REPRESENTATIVE TUCK noted that a number of constituents were irritated about the inability to get through on the phone. He asked how many of the 54 incoming phone lines were dedicated to customer calls.

MR. EVANS responded that all 54 were dedicated to incoming customer calls; additional lines were used for inter-utility and inter-agency calls.

REPRESENTATIVE TUCK said a neighbor suggested that Chugach use a ski report style of message.

MR. EVANS said his personal preference for disaster communications was the radio because it was generally the most reliable. Streaming messages works, depending on the scope of the outage. It would be cumbersome to report all 35 crew locations in one streaming message.

REPRESENTATIVE TUCK extended thanks on behalf of the community.

MR. EVANS extended credit to the many unseen heroes who worked behind the scenes to support the crews in the field.

CHAIR WIELECHOWSKI thanked Mr. Evans and Mr. Steyer, and recognized Don Zoerb and Suzie Deuser from Matanuska Electric Association.

10:45:39 AM

DON ZOERB, Assistant General Manager and CFO, Matanuska Electric Association (MEA), explained that MEA was largely a retail distribution utility that was formed in 1941. It serves 58,000 metered locations with 4,100 miles of line. About 2,400 miles is overhead line and the rest is underground. The service area covers the Parks Highway from Eagle River past Talkeetna and the Glenn Highway to Lions Head. Significant weather events result in dispersed outages and travel time is a factor in the response plans.

At the worst of the storm, MEA had 18 crews in the field working on 23 distribution feeders and 5 substations that were out of service. At one point, 14,000 customers lost service when a tree fell into the Eklutna transmission line. Although that was relatively easy to rectify, the effect of outages at the transmission level can be much more significant than at the distribution level, he said.

MR. ZOERB emphasized that in any significant event the number one priority is safety. It was therefore difficult to predict where a crew would be next or when individual services would be restored. Crews were always subject to relocation to accommodate public threats.

Matanuska Electric Association was very pleased with its response to the outage because of lessons learned from earlier storm events. Over the last three years, MEA upgraded the service vehicle fleet and aggressively accelerated the right-of-way clearing program. In the last year, the company put laptops and an automated mapping system in vehicles, and installed a new state of the art phone system. There was plenty of notice of the recent storm and the outage center was fully staffed to take incoming calls. However, MEA prefers people report outages using the automated system, which communicates directly to dispatch the location of an outage, based on the incoming caller ID. A caller can still talk directly to a person if needed. Significantly, MEA had functional capabilities in place on both Facebook and Twitter prior to the event. The public affairs staff used this venue to push information out to the public, which was successful and appreciated. MEA also implemented a pilot smart meter system from Sutton to Lions Head. It needs

more work, but the idea is to identify problems and deploy resources more quickly and efficiently.

He explained that following any major outage, all staff that was involved sit down and critically analyze what worked, what didn't work, and what could have been done better. An issue that emerged this last time was that all computer connections and phone service was lost between the district offices and the Palmer headquarters. The cell network continued to work and that was a lesson learned for next time. MEA will have charged cellphones in all remote locations at all times. A matter of ongoing debate is how to deploy the workforce more effectively. There isn't a single correct answer, but it is clear that people need rest and it's more efficient to work in the daylight.

MR. ZOERB summarized the all hands event. MEA had engineers in the field scoping out work ahead of the crews; meter readers guided contract crews around the system; warehouse workers delivered materials directly to crews in the field; and pallets of prepackaged kits of items commonly needed during an outage were ready and waiting in the warehouse. He concluded that the MEA system was fairly well hardened; the weak spots had been identified and the problems remediated.

CHAIR WIELECHOWSKI thanked Mr. Zoerb and recognized Russell Girten from Alaska Communication Systems (ACS). He noted that both ACS and Anchorage Municipal Light & Power submitted written testimony.

[10:59:34 AM](#)

RUSSELL GIRTEN, Vice President of Network Service Delivery, Alaska Communication Systems (ACS), introduced himself and Ted Moninski, Legislative Affairs Consultant for ACS. He said his team looks after the management of the voice, data, and Internet networks statewide, and prepares for future events. He noted that ACS customers were primarily affected by the loss of power because of the storm, not a telecommunication service outage. He explained that the ACS crisis management team constantly tested the crisis management program for preparedness and received support from the ACS executive team in Anchorage. When a critical event occurs, issues related to public and customer communications are transferred to the backup network management center in Hillsboro, Oregon.

MR. GIRTEN said the emergency response plan was enacted at about 11:20 a.m. on September 4. Formal internal communications processes were engaged and some employees were released before

the end of their shift to ensure that they were adequately rested and ready for action when the storm hit. The first storm-related reports came from Internet customers in Seldovia at 4:05 p.m. Voice and Internet customers from Homer experienced issues at about 6:45 p.m. These were the result of commercial power outages and technicians were dispatched with portable generators.

The first impact that ACS saw in the Anchorage Bowl was at about 7:45 p.m. when wireless data service was disrupted due to a commercial power outage. Ten wireless and wire line sites were out of service by 10:00 p.m. The ACS headquarters and the Denali office also experienced commercial power disruptions at 10:00 p.m. Services related to internal communications and customer communications were sent to the Hillsboro, Oregon location.

The Denali outage was particularly important because visibility into wireless and wire-line networks was lost. The failure was unexpected and ACS learned some things from that experience. The North Wire Center, which serves most of downtown Anchorage, experienced a power disruption shortly thereafter. That location serves as the municipality's emergency operations center, and the ACS generator did not engage as expected. Batteries and other power systems were fully functioning so services were not disrupted. Technicians replaced a faulty fuel flow restrictor and AC power was restored to the site just before 2:00 a.m.

Shortly before 1:00 a.m. on September 5, ACS received word that many locations on Tudor Road were without power. Of particular concern was the wireless and wire line service to Providence Hospital and surrounding area. Crews installed a generator to provide power to the hospital and no services were disrupted. At about 4:45 p.m. ACS responded to a similar power disruption in the Mountain View area.

Facilities engineers began work on generators serving the ACS headquarters at about 3:00 a.m. and restored power at about 4:45 a.m. When those repairs were complete, a full assessment of the network indicated that about 30 percent of the wireless network in the Anchorage area was without power and internet connections in the eastern, midtown, and Dimond areas were hard hit. Most of those events went unnoticed by customers due to overlapping and redundant systems.

ACS voice services are DC powered so voice service customers had continuous service. However, there were some isolated outages when trees fell on access services for individual subscribers.

None of the 911 services were affected at any time. Power was restored to all sites by the end of the day on September 7.

On September 5, the Anchorage-based call centers received 1,169 calls. Further investigation was required on 589 of those calls. Sixty ACS customers experienced an outage-related issue and many had to reset their equipment. The storm may have affected 30,000 ACS customers, and it directly cost the company between \$250,000 and \$300,000. The upgrades to the crisis management program that ACS is evaluating because of the storm include the service arrangement at the North Wire Center; the network connections used by the Anchorage network management center; and standardization of generator connections. There are ongoing concerns about the integrity of the rail bed between Anchorage and Fairbanks.

MR. GIRTEN said ACS was well prepared for the storm because of the significant commitment of its engineering and customer service teams to deliver quality service to Alaskans. Preparedness was also a result of the federal funding to support the delivery of high quality service in Alaska. He expressed appreciation to the legislature for its support in maintaining these critical programs.

[11:10:11 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE TUCK commented that a number of people were not aware that the phone jack into the wall does not use power.

MR. GIRTEN said he'd incorporate that recommendation in future communications.

CHAIR WIELECHOWSKI thanked Mr. Girten and recognized Dawn Brantley from the Municipality of Anchorage.

[11:11:16 AM](#)

DAWN BRANTLEY, Emergency Programs Manager, Anchorage Office of Emergency Management, Municipality of Anchorage, said her duties include emergency planning and preparedness, community outreach and public information.

KEVIN SPILLERS, Director, Anchorage Office of Emergency Management (OEM), Municipality of Anchorage, said he oversees the emergency operations center. He said Ms. Brantley would provide context and an overview of OEM's response during the "great cottonwood outage of 2012."

[11:12:32 AM](#)

MS. BRANTLEY clarified the roles and responsibilities of the Office of Emergency Management (OEM) and the Emergency Operations Center. The OEM is a department within the municipality that conducts city emergency preparedness and planning activities on a day-to-day basis. The EOC is both the physical coordination center for emergency and disaster response operations, and the group of municipal employees and partner organization liaisons that serve as staff in the EOC during response operations.

The EOC is activated in response to an event that potentially threatens life or safety, and exceeds the capacity of responding agencies day-to-day resources and capabilities. It coordinates the response activities of the municipality, working behind the scenes to support the lead agency's response. Trained municipal employees or liaisons from the appropriate agencies fill the 48 functional positions. When an event occurs, the OEM director or city administration determines the appropriate scaled response, according to the municipal emergency operations plan.

Response operations level I occurs when a situation or threat requires increased public information and has the potential for agencies to take coordinated actions. If activated, the EOC would monitor situations and conditions to determine if there were mass care needs or support for first responders was required. This level of activation could result from an approaching significant weather event, the potential for a public health situation, or the plausible threat of a terrorist event.

Response operations level II occurs when a situation or threat requires a partial activation of the EOC. EOC hours of operation may extend beyond the regular workday to monitor mass care and first responder support needs. Staffing will likely be supplemented by other agencies during a level II activation.

Response operations level III occurs when a major situation or threat requires a full activation of the EOC on a 24-hour rotational basis with all trained municipal staff either participating or on call. The consideration of a disaster declaration does not automatically necessitate a level III activation.

The EOC responds to and assists with mass care needs, not individual assistance. Social service agencies provide individual assistance on both a day-to-day basis and during emergencies. The municipality becomes involved when care needs

exceed the local Red Cross and other agencies' ability to provide individual assistance.

MS. BRANTLEY said that on Sunday September 2, the National Weather Service notified OEM of a forecasted severe wind event with the potential for power outages, and OEM began monitoring the situation. Other municipal agencies were alerted. Based on significant changes in the forecast, the OEM established response operations level I and the emergency public information network (EPIN) was activated on Tuesday. Other municipal departments and EPIN were updated and the public was notified through public information channels. The OEM monitored the situation and stayed actively engaged with the National Weather Service, Anchorage office. As the storm struck overnight, Anchorage fire, police and 911 dispatch increased staff and responded to the escalating needs of the city. AFD prioritized calls and responses with life safety being the top priority, followed by property protection, then environmental conservation.

11:20:05 AM

The Anchorage police dispatch center saw unprecedented call volume. In a typical 24-hour period, APD dispatch receives 450-600 911 calls. On September 4 and 5 the respective numbers were 1,368 and 961, although many were not serious life and death emergencies. The longest average answer delay was just under two minutes. Two additional dispatchers were called in overnight to assist with the 911 calls and public works brought on extra crews to remove debris from municipal property and drainage areas.

The OEM staffed the EOC beginning at 4:30 a.m. Wednesday, and operated on extended hours throughout the weekend of September 8-9. The state emergency operations center was notified of the activation early Wednesday morning, September 5. During the day, OEM monitored conditions and received regular updates from the weather service, the utility companies, the city manager, AFD and 911 dispatch, area hospitals, public works crews, and the media. Information about the municipal response to the storm and power outage was provided through the media, social media, and the OEM webpage. By 7 a.m. September 5, city government had been restored to normal operations following the power outage.

A new webpage on muni.org outlined the aggregated information about the windstorm, other weather events, power outages and additional helpful information including a list of who to call for common problems or questions. The Alaska 2-1-1 call center

was activated during normal business hours to answer questions from the public and help with referrals to social service agencies as needed. The Fairview Recreation Center opened on Sunday morning as a day-use shelter, because some individuals still were without power. It saw no activity that day.

The OEM conducted a preliminary damage assessment, beginning Saturday September 8 with assistance from APD, AFD, and the MOA property appraisal department. The agencies conducted extensive windshield surveys and provided the documentation to the OEM. Individuals were also able to report damage to their homes and businesses through an online survey. Estimates of damage and response costs were compiled from departments, utilities, and hospitals for the preliminary damage assessment.

[11:23:49 AM](#)

Throughout the series of storms and power outages, the OEM learned how important it is for the utilities to be actively engaged with the public. The OEM passed along all information it received. Over the last two weeks, the OEM Facebook page reached over 18,000 people with information about the storms.

This series of storms was also a learning experience for the public about the importance of emergency preparedness. The OEM educated more than 3,600 Anchorage residents in 2011, and has 118 trained leaders for emergency watch neighborhood programs. This is important because neighbors are the immediate source of help after an emergency.

MS. BRANTLEY stated that OEM and EOC are trained to support and coordinate response and that is exactly what happened during the September windstorms and power outages.

[11:25:57 AM](#)

CHAIR WIELECHOWSKI asked if the OEM was involved in discussions regarding a declaration of emergency.

MR. SPILLERS responded that the type of damage and economic impact was evaluated and the municipality decided it would not issue an emergency proclamation or ask for state assistance.

CHAIR WIELECHOWSKI asked what procedures were in place to help seniors and vulnerable individuals during an emergency event.

MS. BRANTLEY explained that the OEM actively teaches personal preparedness so anyone who needs special assistance will know to contact family members, friends, or neighbors who can help. The

OEM also worked with the Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (VOAD) and the state to identify volunteer organizations that could assist individuals who were disabled, seniors, or low income with tree and debris removal. Alaska 2-11 screened calls, gathered information, and connected individuals who needed assistance with the volunteer groups. The disaster registry program was not activated because it is an evacuation assistance database.

MR. SPILLERS added that it would be difficult to maintain an accurate database on everyone who may have some sort of condition, and it wasn't an effective use of resources to ask first responders to check on individuals. It is better to rely on neighborhood watch, neighbors, churches, and community groups, once conditions are safe.

[11:29:19 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PETERSON asked if shelters such as the Fairview Center would have opened sooner if the weather had been colder.

MR. SPILLERS answered yes; weather conditions are carefully monitored.

CHAIR WIELECHOWSKI said he supports neighbors helping neighbors, but it's something to think about for the future, because there were a lot of seniors and vulnerable people who were very isolated and without power for many days.

SENATOR MEYER asked what level of emergency would trigger a request for assistance from the state. He further questioned whether the National Guard might have helped remove trees so that Chugach Electric could more readily tend to the power lines.

MR. SPILLERS explained that a utility that needs assistance makes a request specifically through the OEM, who goes to the state. The OEM was proactive in asking that question and the answer was always that the response was within the utility's capability to respond. When there is a heightened level of response, OEM always notifies the state that assistance might be requested.

SENATOR MEYER asked if the Anchorage area was at risk for flooding.

MR. SPILLERS said the OEM received several calls in that regard, mostly because of clogged drainage systems. Problems in the

Chugach area were relayed to state highway personnel. Public works is proactive in clearing debris before ice forms and causes other problems.

CHAIR WIELECHOWSKI thanked Ms. Brantley and Mr. Spillers and recognized Ray Faust from the Anchorage Mayor's Task Force on Public Safety.

11:33:56 AM

RAY FAUST, Member, Mayor's Task Force on Public Safety, Municipality of Anchorage, said the task force was primarily addressing the difficulty the public had getting information about when their power would be restored. He suggested consideration be given to using the AM radio to make public service and emergency announcements, because it was still the most reliable means of communication. He said probably 80 percent of neighborhoods pooled resources and helped one another, but many people either don't know their neighbors or don't have the ability to pool resources. He suggested developing plans to deploy emergency power to those small enclaves when needed, because it was more than just an inconvenience for some people to lose all their food in a power outage.

MR. FAUST suggested consideration be given to using high definition satellite technology to identify downed trees and other obstructions instead of waiting for a report from someone on the ground. It certainly worked after the Haiti disaster to quickly identify ingress and egress routes.

11:39:08 AM

SENATOR DAVIS joined the committee.

CHAIR WIELECHOWSKI thanked Mr. Faust and recognized Michael O'Hara from the Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Management.

MICHAEL O'HARA, Deputy Director, Division of Homeland Security/Emergency Management (DHS&EM), Department of Military & Veterans Affairs (DMVA), stated that the mission of DHS&EM is to protect lives and properties from hazards and provide rapid recovery from disasters and events. He delivered a PowerPoint describing the ways and to what the division responds to disasters.

Hazards to which DHS&EM responds - Earthquakes, floods, volcanos, severe storms such as those recently experienced,

tsunamis, wildfires, avalanches, terrorism, pandemic influenza, and others.

State department responsibilities for hazards and threats - DCCED for economic issues and flood insurance for communities; DEC oil and hazardous materials; DHSS for human and health issues; DNR for natural resources and wildfire; DOTPF for public works and roads; DPS for search and rescue; and DMVA for coordinating natural disaster events and terrorism.

Partnerships - Alaska Partnership for Infrastructure Protection (APIP), communities, boroughs, local emergency planning committees, Native corporations, federal emergency management, other state agencies, National Guard, U.S. Coast Guard, Federal Homeland Security, Alaska Command, faith-based organizations and others.

Sections within DHS&EM - Preparedness, Operations, Planning, Analysis, Mitigation, Disaster assistance - the recovery element for public assistance and individual assistance, and Program support,

Preparedness - Citizens are advised to be prepared to be on their own for seven days. The windstorm event was an opportunity for individuals, families, and neighbors to better prepare to "take care of our own." When one family is better prepared, it frees emergency services for those who really need the help.

Outreach programs - The website www.ready.alaska.gov has very good programs including a family emergency planning template, a 7 day emergency supply kit list, and emergency go kits. He highlighted the responder ready program, which facilitates responder preparedness. Other outreach examples include earthquake information, tsunami ready programs, tsunami hazard models; evacuation models; and earthquake cottage simulator. DHS&EM facilitates training programs for local communities and conducts simulation exercises. He highlighted an Alaska Shield cold weather exercise last winter with the municipality that looked at sheltering opportunities and refueling capabilities of emergency generators. There are also state plans for response. He noted that Governor Parnell put forth several initiatives for catastrophic emergency cold weather power systems, emergency water purification systems, and a catastrophic food assurance program.

[11:48:17 AM](#)

Exercise and outreach - The State Emergency Operations Center responds when a community initially calls for help. It has satellite communications and 24-hour capability to alert and warn communities and communicate with the weather service and tsunami warning centers and utility operations centers. Situation reports on the website give current updates on whatever events are going on in Alaska. The state worked with Mr. Spillers from the Anchorage Emergency Operations Center to coordinate response and resources, but it did not overtake the local community. All disasters are local. It's a matter of sovereignty, and the state expects the same when it asks FEMA to help with a state disaster. Sometimes a community will ask for rotation relief at its emergency operations center. That is the current experience with flood conditions in the MatSu and Kenai boroughs; an incident management team from the DNR forestry division is providing relief.

Disaster declaration process - The municipalities did not declare a disaster emergency for the wind event, but certain communities in the MatSu Borough required additional assistance. Kenai and the Kenai Peninsula Borough declared disasters and requested state assistance because of flooding. Some of that was augmentation of emergency operation centers.

Damage assessment - DHS&EM is going down to the peninsula today to start advising on damage assessment, although things are still in response mode. Governor Parnell last Friday issued a state disaster declaration and the preliminary damage assessment will help determine a threshold for requesting federal resources. At this point, there have been no federal government response requests and no life safety issues. The current situation is evacuation and sheltering.

Social media - This is an area of significant improvement in communications. The municipality and borough Facebook pages are providing up to date critical information.

Planning analysis - DHS&EM provides emergency operations and evacuation plans for local communities.

Local government responsibilities - DHS&EM supports local communities in their response to local disasters.

Local community planning - the three basics are emergency operations plans for locals, evacuations plans, and hazard mitigation plans. DHS&EM also assesses the movement of goods and services throughout Alaska as it affects infrastructure.

Mitigation - \$1 dollar spent in mitigation saves \$4.

Disaster assistance - There are both public assistance and individual assistance programs in the event that the state declares a disaster. It helps communities rebuild critical infrastructure and helps individuals return to some semblance of normalcy. The legislature several years ago increased the maximum individual amount to \$15,000.

Program support - DHS&EM does grant management and provides administrative support of departmental programs.

MR. O'HARA offered to answer questions.

[11:55:43 AM](#)

SENATOR GIESSEL commented that other public groups would benefit from the individual preparedness presentation that DHS&EM gave recently in Kenai.

MR. O'HARA said DHS&EM takes full advantage of non-life-threatening events to get individuals and communities to reflect on disaster preparedness. DHS&EM provides the tools by which individuals, neighborhoods, and communities can be better prepared. Twice a year DHS&EM brings local community leadership and emergency managers into Anchorage to discuss emergency preparedness and help write plans. Mass medical service is the focus of next week's conference.

SENATOR GIESSEL asked when the last statewide tabletop exercise for a major disaster took place.

MR. O'HARA said the last segmented Alaska Shield exercises in 2008 and 2010 were an energy disruption in cold weather and a response to a seismic event. The 2014 Alaska Shield is a full-scale exercise in March to tie in with the 50th anniversary of the 1964 earthquake. Plans have been underway for more than a year for the March field exercise with tabletop exercises to discuss what a '64 earthquake would do to the current population and critical infrastructure.

[12:00:14 PM](#)

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI thanked Mr. O'Hara and recessed the meeting.

[12:10:10 PM](#)

CHAIR WIELECHOWSKI reconvened the meeting and recognized Ms. Bitzer.

12:10:25 PM

KAREN BITZER, Director, Alaska 2-1-1, said this was the only 2-1-1 in the nation that was co-located with a municipal emergency operations center. It is a valuable partnership. She said they were very active during the response to the windstorm in Anchorage, the MatSu Valley, and Kenai. In the past, they assisted with emergencies statewide such as "Juneau unplugged" and flooding in Eagle.

The windstorm provided an opportunity for Alaska 2-1-1 to test its skills and they appreciated the cooperation with the emergency operations center. They sat in on weather service updates and were able to understand what Chugach Electric was experiencing. She noted that the Chugach website was very helpful and that they were able to assist with the online outage reports for individuals who did not have Internet access.

She said their call volume is typically 80-90 calls per day, and this increased to 670 calls in a three-day period. They communicated with the Red Cross, referred calls about food safety to the Cooperative Extension Service, provided information about where to buy dry ice, and worked with a local food pantry that stocked ice for those who couldn't afford to buy it. They generally worked with vulnerable populations and sometimes referred them to other agencies.

She concluded that Alaska 2-1-1 works every day to assist with health and human services and is poised and ready to assist during a disaster.

SENATOR GIESSEL asked what their funding source is.

MS. BITZER said they receive funding from grants, AHFC, the Mental Health Trust, the governor's budget this year, and the United Way.

REPRESENTATIVE PETERSON asked if there was a plan to make people more aware of Alaska 2-1-1.

MS. BITZER replied they work intently to let the public know that 2-1-1 is a "go to" number. They are doing additional outreach this year on the Kenai Peninsula and Tanana Chiefs Conference, about 12 percent of calls now come from the MatSu

area and they've been asked to do work in the Nome region. They also work with police dispatchers

12:17:20 PM

MARY JONES, Coordinator, East Side Seniors, said these 30 seniors meet twice a month to do educational, service, and social activities. A number of agencies talked to the group about emergency planning and the need to have on hand supplies to last for three days. She went online to get the supply listings, but could only find \$90 and \$100 kits. People who live on \$500 a month can't afford that, and they were very isolated during the storm. Four members ended up in the hospital. She said the storm was a wakeup call and the members decided they need help getting together the fundamentals of an emergency kit and a better answer to how to get help. "We need answers at the trench level, the ground level. What do we do for those first three days and how do we notify anybody that we help?"

CHAIR WIELECHOWSKI agreed that the legislature and the administration needed to work on this.

12:23:37 PM

BARBARA BACHMEIER, representing herself, emphasized the importance of being prepared and learning what went right and wrong during the September windstorms. She said she was a write-in candidate for State House District 13 and learned first-hand the dreadful experiences her potential constituents experienced. Many people lost power for up to five days and, therefore, the contents of their fully stocked freezers. This was a significant loss, and to keep this from happening again required some serious outside the box thinking. She suggested that military resources could be used in the future to provide emergency power and could have been used recently to remove trees that fell on roads and power lines. She agreed with previous testimony that AM radio was a reliable source for public service messages.

12:28:57 PM

DENNIS BRODIGAN, Director, Matanuska-Susitna Borough, Department of Emergency Services, Palmer, AK, said he was asked to give an update on the flooding in the MatSu Borough. He relayed that both valleys experienced unusually high amounts of rainfall and diverse flooding with significant property and infrastructure damage. The borough conducted several evacuations and closed 14 roads over the last week. The borough declared a disaster on September 20 and asked for state assistance, which the Governor granted on September 21. Shortly after evacuating the village of Talkeetna, the borough asked for state support from the State

Emergency Operations Center for a type II incident team to relieve beleaguered local EOC personnel. He expressed appreciation for the state assistance.

All the rivers and creeks in the area were from one to five feet into flood stage. Fifty people were physically evacuated from homes and four shelters were set up, although only 11 people took advantage of them. Three structures washed away and there's been significant infrastructure damage. Bridges were particularly hard hit and the Alaska Rail Road lost about 500 feet of rail along Gold Creek north of Talkeetna.

The borough is transitioning from response to recovery and is working with the type II team today to assess the disaster. He reiterated thanks to the state.

[12:32:53 PM](#)

TIM COLBATH, Co-founder and CEO, Alaska's Extended Life Animal Sanctuary, Nikiski, AK, said he would address emergency sheltering and the federally mandated accommodation of people with pets and service animals. He said that more than one third of Alaska households own pets and more than 50 percent of those pet owners will not evacuate or seek shelter without their pets. He highlighted that the Pets Evacuation and Transportations Standards Act passed in 2006 and that Alaska had made little change in practices for emergency sheltering. Only the Kenai Peninsula Borough had an emergency sheltering draft plan that considers people with their pets. He said that Alaska's Extended Life Animal Sanctuary stood ready to help with compliance in Alaska, which by FEMA standards was compulsory by January 1, 2014.

CHAIR WIELECHOWSKI remarked that he was unaware of that interesting information.

[12:37:48 PM](#)

MATT GHO, representing himself, Anchorage, AK, said he would like to talk about using city resources to remove storm debris from private land. He explained that he helped a neighbor cut up and move debris from five trees that had fallen on the neighbor's property. He heard that four forestry trucks were being deployed in Anchorage to help remove debris, but when he called city officials, he was told that city resources would only be used to remove debris in the rights-of-way, parks, and streams.

MR. GHO said it would be more helpful if the municipality acted as though it was on the same team as its citizens. Everyone experienced the same disaster and it only made sense to use available resources to help people in need. He tried to work a compromise with city officials, but got the same unhelpful response. He concluded that he would like to advocate for the city to be a better team player and use its resources to help people in need.

At ease from 12:41 p.m. to 12:51 p.m.

[12:52:01 PM](#)

CHAIR WIELECHOWSKI found no further testimony and adjourned the Senate State Affairs Standing Committee meeting at 12:52 p.m.