Winter Storm Uri After Action Report: Findings Report

City of Austin, Texas

Homeland Security and Emergency Management
With Support from Hagerty Consulting, Inc.
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What is an After-Action Review?

A usually and customary structured review of an incident or event.

Includes recommendations for the purpose of continuous improvement.

Identifies what went well, best practices, and areas for improvement.
After-Action Reporting Process: Document Review

Over 75 documents were reviewed including:

- Stakeholder AARs and Reports
- Incident Action Plans
- Situation Reports
- Shift Change Reports
- Resource Trackers
- Winter Storm Meeting Minutes
Winter Storm After Action Reporting Process: Stakeholder Engagement and Interviews

- **422 lines of data compiled into the Findings Matrix.**
  - Observations, strengths, areas of improvement, and recommendations

- **242 stakeholders were identified and invited to participate in the After-Action reporting process.**

- **70+ meetings were conducted both in person and virtually.**

- **190+ individuals completed interviews from…**

- **70 organizations, agencies, departments, or offices…**
**After-Action Reporting Process: Survey**

- 191 respondents participated in the 56-question survey.
- Participants from a diverse background were provided the opportunity to complete the survey.
- Answers were anonymous.
- Data was analyzed for trends.
- Questions ranged from job function to personal experience during the storm.

**Total Survey Participants:**

191
Winter Storm Uri AAR - Structure
Findings: A More Uncertain Future

Winter Storm Uri
Precursor for Future Disasters.
Findings: Preparing for Uncertainty

Winter Storm Uri was a precursor of future events. The City and County will likely be required to respond to storms of greater intensity combined with equally challenging emergencies.
Findings: Increasing Cost of Disaster Events

U.S. 2021 Billion-Dollar Weather and Climate Disasters

- Western Drought and Heatwave 2021-ongoing
- Western Wildfires Summer-Fall 2021
- California Flooding and Severe Weather January 24–29
- Northwest, Central, Eastern Winter Storm and Coldwave February 10–19
- Texas and Oklahoma Severe Weather April 27–28
- Texas Hail Storms April 12–15
- Hurricane Nicholas September 14–18
- Louisiana Flooding May 17–18
- Hurricane Ida August 29–September 1
- Ohio Valley Hail Storms June 17–18
- Eastern Severe Weather March 27–28
- Southeast Tornadoes and Severe Weather March 24–25
- Tropical Storm Fred August 16–18
- Tropical Storm Elsa July 7–9
- Southeast Severe Weather July 7–9
- Winter Storm After Action Report: Findings Report
**Findings: Overlapping Emergencies**

As the storm approached on February 10, 2021, the EOC and City and County departments had operated for **11 months on the COVID-19 response**.

Winter Storm Uri required rapid mobilization amid the ongoing emergency for the COVID-19 response operations.
Findings: Building from Strength

After Action Review

Opportunity to Better Prepare and Respond.
Findings: A Resilient Community

1000+
Residents provided shelter

1 million+
Gallons of drinking water distributed

170,000
Shelf stable and prepared meals distributed

Photo credits from Left to Right: (top) Austin HSEM, (bottom) Austin Fire Department, ADRN, Austin Energy
Community Engagement

The actions of community groups proved essential during the winter storm. At the same time, there were significant gaps in implementation and coordination between government, elected officials, and community response operations.

WHAT ACTIONS SHOULD BE TAKEN?

- Implement best practices for utilizing community-based organizations
- Revise disaster plans with considerations for additional non-profits, private sector, and community-based service delivery organizations
- Codify roles and responsibilities between stakeholders, and contingencies when organizations are not available.
FINDINGS OVERVIEW:

Equity

The storm disproportionately impacted vulnerable populations. Departments worked to address needs. At the same time, there were gaps in planning and operations for unhoused, elderly, lower-income residents, and other vulnerable populations.

WHAT ACTIONS SHOULD BE TAKEN?

- Implement policy on equitable availability and distribution of goods and services.
- Include provisions in planning that address the needs of the vulnerable.
- Codify role of Equity Office in planning and EOC operations
Emergency Staffing

Staff and volunteer shortages hindered operations. City and County departments do not have adequate staffing models for multiple-response operations. Support agencies could not provide volunteers due to COVID-19.

WHAT ACTIONS SHOULD BE TAKEN?

- Commission an analysis to evaluate appropriate staffing levels
- Continue to resource alternative staffing schemes, such as the reserve workforce and engagement with the private sector
- Require mandatory training of identified City and County staff in disaster response operations
FINDINGS OVERVIEW:

Infrastructure

The storm caused outages in water, power, communication, and transportation infrastructure. These outages had additional, or cascading, impacts, on community, emergency, and medical services. These were not envisioned or accounted for in planning.

WHAT ACTIONS SHOULD BE TAKEN?

- Revise planning assumptions for multiple-hazard events
- Investigate adding resilient infrastructure for essential facilities
- Identify shelters with durable infrastructure
**FINDINGS OVERVIEW:**

**Mass Care**

The lack of comprehensive planning hindered coordination, service delivery, and implementation of sheltering, feeding, water distribution, and other components of mass care, as defined by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). There were gaps in staffing, services, and other aspects of the response operations.

**WHAT ACTIONS SHOULD BE TAKEN?**

- Establish a comprehensive and scalable mass care plan that builds on current planning.
- Develop a comprehensive operational disaster feeding plan, that also builds on current planning.
- Include provisions on sheltering operations within revised mass care planning.
FINDINGS OVERVIEW:

Preparedness

Many in the community were unprepared for the storm, an understandable outcome given the event’s unprecedented impacts. Personal preparedness is important to better plan for and respond to an event with system-wide impacts.

WHAT ACTIONS SHOULD BE TAKEN?

- Emphasize strategies for personal preparedness, resilience, and fostering social connections
- Implement best practice programs for personal preparedness in supporting staff
- Identify programs, resources and approaches to improve or encourage whole community resilience and risk reduction, including businesses, non-profits, community groups.
Next Steps

Whole Community Response
Build and Better Utilize Resource & Capabilities.
## Actions Taken

### RESOURCES
- Shared EM position with Austin Water
- Implemented disaster reservist-contactors

### RESILIENT SYSTEMS
- Initiated Resiliency Hubs program
- Invested in transportation and utility equipment

### PLANNING
- Updated emergency plans & procedures
- Implemented enhanced EOC and shelter trainings

### COMMUNICATION
- Revised and improved community outreach plan
- Established accessible alert system
Next Steps

Implement 132 recommendations in Improvement Plan

Coordinate preparation for Winter Weather

• Austin-Travis County Winter Weather Seminar | November 17, 2021
• Austin-Travis County Winter Weather Table-Top Exercise | Mid-December, 2021

Coordinate as a community to enhance resilience at all levels
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