



Tropical Storm Isaias After Action Report

October 20, 2020

I. Storm Tracking

Tropical Storm Isaias (ee-sah-EE-ahs) developed 155 miles south of Ponce, Puerto Rico at 11 pm AST (Atlantic Standard Time) on Wednesday, July 29, 2020. The tropical storm quickly moved northwest over the Dominican Republic on Thursday, July 30, 2020. As the center of Isaias emerged over open waters, the storm intensified to a Category 1 hurricane. The hurricane continued moving towards the northwest and through the Bahamas before weakening back to a tropical storm at 5 pm on Saturday, August 1, 2020. The forward speed of the storm slowed as it turned towards the north on Sunday, August 2, 2020, paralleling the east coast of Florida. By Monday, August 3, 2020, Isaias began to increase its forward speed as it approached the Carolina coast. Isaias also intensified back to a Category 1 Hurricane with maximum sustained winds of 85 mph, making landfall near Ocean Isle Beach, North Carolina at 11:10 pm. Isaias's intensity weakened back to tropical storm strength as its forward speed increased to near 30 mph early Tuesday morning, August 4, 2020. The center of Isaias passed approximately 130 miles west of Westport at 3 pm on August 4, 2020.



II. Storm Isaias in Connecticut

Although Isaias was a tropical storm, typically characterized by high winds and heavy rains, it was ultimately the high winds that posed the greatest hazard to the State of Connecticut. Based on Forest Service data, Connecticut is a densely forested state. The effect of Isaias's damaging winds created dangerous situations due to the number of trees that were damaged and felled by the storm. Across the State, there were over 1,152,000 storm-related power outages with full restoration taking 9 days.

During the storm, a 66-year-old Naugatuck, Connecticut resident died when he tried to remove branches from in front of his vehicle on Andrew Mountain Road and was struck by another falling tree. Another man was indirectly killed in a chainsaw accident while helping a friend cut some downed trees from the storm in Newtown, Connecticut.

Tropical Storm Isaias is considered the Connecticut's 4th worst weather event with damage comparable to Hurricane Sandy in 2012.

III. Impact of Isaias on Westport

The center of Isaias passed approximately 130 miles west of Westport at 3 pm on August 4, 2020. Tropical storm force winds extended well east of the center of circulation. The highest sustained wind speeds ranged from 35 to 55 mph, with gusts 60 to 80 mph. These winds caused widespread damage across Southern Connecticut.

The highest rainfall totals in the region were across New York's Lower Hudson Valley and Northeast New Jersey with amounts dropping off considerably to the east. Although flooding rainfall and coastal flooding was predicted, the Westport area received less than half an inch of rain and was fortunate not to experience any significant flooding.

A National Weather Service (NWS) damage survey confirmed an Enhanced Fujita scale, (EF) or EF-1 tornado touched down in Westport at approximately 1:40 pm on August 4, 2020. The tornado occurred from a discrete, low topped storm cell, moving north northwest from Long Island Sound and over Saugatuck Shores. The cell produced a waterspout over the Sound, which made landfall as an EF-1 tornado. A tornado warning was issued at 1:38 pm. The waterspout was captured on video by an amateur meteorologist as it was moving towards Saugatuck Shores around 1:40 pm. The tornado produced severe damage to a single- family house on Surf Road. The roof and portions of the second floor's supporting wall structure ripped off and debris was tossed approximately 30-50 feet north on the property and into the street. In addition, the tops of several pine trees in the front and side yard were either sheared or snapped off. The tornado likely lifted and possibly tracked north as a funnel cloud for another 1 to 2 miles before dissipating. Based on an eyewitness report, the funnel cloud could have touched down as a waterspout on the Saugatuck River, south of Route 1. Downstream damage reports are inconclusive for tornado damage, but consistent with damaging 40 to 50 mph straight line sustained winds. Gusts 60 to 70 mph were observed between 2 pm and 5 pm across southwestern CT from Tropical Storm Isaias.

While few homes and property were damaged or destroyed, tree damage was widespread and significant. The area of damage was not confined to a single neighborhood, but rather was spread across the entirety of the town. At the height of the storm, 97% (12,226 Eversource customers) of Westport was without power. Fortunately, there was no loss of life or significant injuries attributable to the storm.

The majority of residents and businesses were left without power, cable, cellular and/or Wi-Fi service, making most of the town's public communications and notification systems ineffective and inaccessible. Traditional television news and information sources were unavailable as well. Nixle emergency alerts that require cellular service for receipt were not received. Further, at times, Nixle alerts reference online information links, which, again, were inaccessible. Residents had to seek Wi-Fi service in order obtain town messages and send their questions or concerns to the Town via email. Without cellular service, cell phones were rendered inefficient and at times, useless, as a means to communicate.

Widespread power outages meant that most traffic control signals in town were non-functional. The Police Department (PD) deployed freestanding STOP signs at key intersections but did not have a sufficient number to install at every intersection typically controlled by an electronic signal.

Westport's electrical utility provider, Eversource, was overwhelmed and unable to provide a timely and coordinated response. First, its communications system seemingly was unable to manage the volume of calls it was receiving. Customer service representatives were unable to provide accurate information, or in some cases, provided no information at all. Secondly, Eversource was unable to provide crews to Westport in the immediate days after the storm. When crews did arrive, they focused on power restoration, rather than make the roads safe prior to clearing. Eversource was unable to track technicians and information on their website was inaccurate. Eversource promised a restoration date within 7 days. For the vast majority of residents, restoration was completed by August 12, 8 days after the storm.



IV. The Town's Response to Storm Isaias

For the first time in modern memory, town staff was required to respond to two simultaneous emergencies – COVID-19 and Storm Isaias. The Emergency Operations Command (EOC) Center was already activated due to COVID-19 and had spent considerable time previous to this event discussing the potential impact a natural disaster could have on Westport during the pandemic. The EOC had prepared staff to respond in a way that upheld the health and safety of residents and staff. Emergency responders and Town Officials were prepared to respond to this devastating storm well in advance of its arrival.

The original weather prediction of the effects of Isaias on Westport was that it would be a flood event and first responders were prepared to respond to flooding. However, the prime cause of damage resulted from the windstorm. Responders quickly shifted efforts and were able to respond with haste to circumstances resulting from the wind damage.

Emergency management staff and town officials participate in the annual State Emergency Preparedness Exercises that help prepare personnel for large scale disaster and emergency situations. Using this training, staff responded swiftly and tactfully to an unprecedented number of 911 calls during Isaias.

Westport's Police, Fire and Public Works received and handled an unprecedented number of calls and requests for assistance in a very short period of time. In the first 24 hours the Police and Fire dispatch centers received over 2,500 calls for assistance from the public. Despite this abnormally high call volume, first Responders were successfully able to respond to every medical call, life threat, and other significant emergency call in spite of the devastation caused by the storm. There were no deaths reported in Westport as a result of Isaias.

After the storm, Eversource was not deploying crews to Westport. A particular situation to note is that when this occurred, DPW went to nearby Norwalk to commandeer an Eversource crew to work in Westport. Despite

Eversource's delays and the need for the DPW to wait for Eversource's "make safe" crews, as soon as Eversource de-energized its wires, DPW crews worked as swiftly and as efficiently as possible to clear debris from roadways.

Storm Isaias Emergency Response (August 4 – 11, 2020)*

	Police	Fire
Incoming Calls*	2,645	2,541
Incidents	674	542

NOTE: 2,645 calls were received by 9-1-1, of which 2,541 were responded by both Fire & Police.

There was a concerted and coordinated effort on behalf of all of the departments to respond to a myriad of public inquiries – whether calls or emails, and keep residents informed despite inefficiencies with Eversource. Even though these departments did not have key strategic information from Eversource, they worked to answer what they could and triage issues. A significant amount of time was also spent coordinating with the cable providers as their outages lasted longer than Eversource's.

The Selectman's Office moved quickly to engage the public and keep residents informed. Westport has many platforms that it engages to communicate with the community, including its website, email, and social media. Other non-traditional methods such as the Nixle emergency alert system, message boards on Post Road and Westport's radio station, WPT 90.3 FM were employed in the aftermath of Isaias. The communications channels had already been expanded due to COVID, and the largest number of public viewers than ever before were receiving town messages prior to Isaias. Residents frustrated by the lack of information supplied by Eversource turned to the Town for updates and information. However, due to the power outage, many residents could not access technology to receive the town messages. And, while town personnel worked diligently to put out the information that it did have, there was additional frustration due to the minimal and oftentimes inaccurate information that was provided by the utility companies. The Town did not have any additional insight than what was provided to the general public.

Westport officials made the strategic decision to hire a retired Eversource Engineer and Westport resident, Mr. Chris Swan, who was previously deployed in Westport during his career. Mr. Swan is well aware of the electrical infrastructure in Westport, is familiar with this community and knows how to achieve efficient restoration. Mr. Swan was a vital source of information and his expertise and knowledge was a crucial part of maintaining communications with Eversource, town officials, and residents. Undoubtedly, Westport would have experienced severe setbacks if not for Mr. Swan's interactions and intervention between the town and Eversource management.

The Human Services Department manages two voluntary emergency registries to assist at-risk residents during times of emergency. The registries were used to contact registrants before the storm and to check on their welfare afterward. Human Services offered short-term crisis counseling while also providing information, resources, and referral to distressed residents. The Human Services Department worked around the clock, in collaboration with emergency personnel, to address storm-related concerns from upward of 400+ households. Members of the Human Services team made in-person visits, at significant personal risk, to assess the needs of vulnerable residents delivering food and water to those with limited supports. There was limited use of the cooling center and hotel rooms that were arranged as proactive measures.

Throughout the storm's aftermath, Human Services' Center for Senior Activities managed and operated a short-term distribution center for food and water while also serving as a charging station. Staff also worked the cooling center at Greens Farms Elementary School for several days. Human Services made arrangements with several area hotels to reserve rooms for medically fragile residents that lacked the necessary resources or capacity to remediate their critical daily needs without power or phone service.

There were no resident deaths or serious injuries, no injuries to staff, and very little damage to town equipment. Despite many factors outside of the town's control, from managing the pandemic, to blocked roads to faltering communications, the town staff coordinated with one another effectively to respond to one of the worst storms in recent memory.

V. Emergency Operations Command Center

When an incident occurs that cannot be handled solely on scene, the town convenes municipal leaders and department heads into one group called a “Unified Command.” This group allows the leaders to jointly provide managerial direction through a common set of incident objectives and strategies. It includes the Emergency Management Director and heads of several town departments and the First Selectman. The Unified Command can include the Board of Selectmen, because the three members are trained in the incident command system and are the second and third back-up to the First Selectman for overseeing town staff and operations. The Unified Command follows the National Response Plan that was created in Homeland Security Presidential Directive 5 that provides for a single, comprehensive approach to domestic incident management. The objective is to ensure that all levels of government have the capability to work effectively and efficiently together, using a national approach to incident management.

VI. Departmental Operations

Westport's Emergency Operations Command Center (EOC) Events Log

• 8/3/20 10:19:16	• EOC opened
• 8/4/20 19:42:26	• Report of Tornado damaged in Westport
• 8/4/20 22:17:40	• Report of home destroyed and roof in roadway blocking street
• 8/5/20 10:26:15	• 260 road closures with 2/3 involving wires. 97 percent without power
• 8/6/20 17:48:07	• 176 road closures with 57 needing make-safe
• 8/7/20 16:47:60	• 58 roads remain blocked w/ wires, 82 percent w/o power. 2nd make-safe crew requested.
• 8/7/20 19:36:02	• National Weather Service confirms EF-1 Tornado struck Westport
• 8/8/20 10:19:44	• Charging stations and Wi-Fi identified. Yard Waste site hours updated.
• 8/8/20 13:41:34	• National Guard now in town supporting Eversource
• 8/9/20 10:06:51	• 49% without power. 3 roads need Make-Safe, 44 roads "passable"
• 8/10/20 15:59:39	• Westport Cooling Center opened
• 8/11/20 10:49:25	• Westport Cooling Center open 1100-1900 hours
• 8/13/20 11:14:05	• 38 customers without power. Altice reports 297 without cable or internet
• 8/14/20 10:21:44	• EOC closed

Staffing Preparation

- **Police:** The staffing levels of the PD were bolstered by administrative staff, non-patrol officers and extra duty hires in anticipation of the storm. As the storm began during the normal day shift (0700-1500) of the department, additional personnel were already on hand. All officers working during day shifts were advised

that they would be held over due to the impending severity of the storm. Additionally, available officers from the next night's midnight shift (2300-0700) were ordered in early. Plans were made to stagger these officers to ensure we had available resources and manpower for the coming days as well.

- **Fire:** The staffing level of the Fire Department (FD) was 15 line personnel, 1 Assistant Chief, 3 Lieutenants and 11 Firefighters. On the day of the storm, the decision was made to increase the on-duty staffing by adding 2 Lieutenants, 3 Firefighters and 1 dispatcher. The scheduled Assistant Chief and the Deputy Chief were on vacation and not available. The Fire Chief was also present and acting as the Emergency Management Director for the town.



- **Human Services:** Human Services role is to respond to the needs of our most vulnerable residents, including those with young children, seniors, and people with disabilities who have limited resources to address basic needs like food, water, and shelter. The Town of Westport Department of Human Services staff of 11 full-time and 2 part-time worked with the Town's Emergency Management Team to respond to Storm Isaias. Human Services regular hours of operation are 8:30 am-4:30 pm.

Equipment

- **Police:** All available patrol vehicles were stocked with caution tape and cones to assist in warning motorists of potential danger. A high-water rescue vehicle and department Humvees were also preloaded with equipment should they be needed to access otherwise impassable terrain. Further, an officer was assigned to a department pick-up truck, which was loaded with stop signs and barricades in order to close roads and deploy stop signs at potentially dangerous locations.

The supply of portable stop signs generally allows for coverage of 10-15 intersections. Historically this has been enough to deal with localized power outages. The PD cannot practically or economically stock enough equipment to deal with an outage greater than 90 percent of the town. As power returned to intersections, the temporary stop signs were moved to other intersections as needed.

Beach Preparation

- **Police:** Police Captain Paulsson and Jen Fava, Director of Parks and Recreation, coordinated a safety plan for the beaches. In past storms, the PD has had numerous occasions where it had to launch its Marine Division in dangerous waters to rescue swimmers, kite surfers and boaters. In preparation for the storm, an officer was designated to Compo Beach to assist in closing the beach early and preventing swimmers / surfers from launching.

- **Parks:** Early forecasts for Tropical Storm Isaias indicated the possibility of significant coastal flooding prompting the National Weather Service to issue a coastal flood warning on the afternoon of August 3, 2020 for tides 2 to 3 feet above normal with waves of 4 to 7 feet. Based on the forecast Parks and Recreation took protective measures including the following:
 - Boarded up Compo Pavilion
 - Installed flood gates and closed up South Beach restrooms at Compo
 - Moved vehicles and equipment to higher ground
 - Installed barricades at top of staircases along Soundview Ave
 - Removed and stored Mobi-mats
 - Moved benches and tables at Compo to higher ground
 - Moved lifeguard chairs away from water
 - Shut off fuel and electric on gas docks
 - Notified boat owners to secure boats
 - Removed windscreens from pickleball and tennis courts

Call Taking

- **Police:** The storm moved in rapidly and the department prioritized calls that endangered life threats over various other property related issues. Within the first 24 hours of the storm and subsequent clean-up, PD received over 264 calls for service.

The PD dispatch center is normally staffed with a sworn police desk officer as well as a civilian dispatcher. As the storm increased in intensity so did the number of calls for assistance. Two additional desk officers and a civilian dispatcher assisted with answering and prioritizing incoming calls.

- **Fire:** With the storm rapidly moving in during the afternoon, the department's dispatch center was immediately forced to triage incoming calls. Some of the priority calls included a building collapse, trees that fell on cars trapping people, a propane gas leak that was caused by a tree falling on the propane tank and a generator fire that impinged a house. Calls included 153 calls for power lines down, 60 calls for carbon monoxide emergencies, 28 calls to check buildings damaged by falling trees and 19 to assess storm damage.
- **Selectman's Office:** Immediately after the storm, the Selectman's email addresses and phone lines were receiving a constant stream of emails and calls with frustration, support, requests and/or questions. The vast majority of emails and phone messages received a response, whether delegated to staff, responded to by the First Selectman or answered in a press release.

Incident Response

- **Police:** At 1311 hours, the department received a call that a large tree had fallen onto an occupied vehicle on Wilton Road. Numerous police resources were dedicated to that incident, as well as additional support from Westport Emergency Management Services (WEMS), the FD and the town DPW Highway Department. In that incident officers were safely able to extract the operator who was uninjured as a result of the fallen tree. While on scene, officers witnessed numerous trees coming down onto the roadway nearby.

Multiple witnesses reported a tornado in the Saugatuck Shores area. The second floor of a home under construction, 9 Surf Road, was torn off and dropped in the middle of the roadway. It was later confirmed a tornado had touched down in that area.

Officers were instructed to patrol their assigned patrol zones with their cruise lights activated so residents were aware of their presence since many areas had no electricity or cell phone service in the event of an emergency.

- **Fire:** During the first 7 days, the FD responded to 542 incidents, which is a 166 percent increase over the normal call volume; on average the Westport Fire Department responds to 49 incidents in 7 days. While responding to emergencies it became very dangerous, not only with the weather conditions, but also with communication failure.

In the hours and days following the storm, carbon monoxide emergencies became a significant and potential deadly problem. Permanent and portable generators were installed and used improperly causing exhaust to back up prompting alarms and high readings inside homes.



Help to Residents

- **Human Services:** In the aftermath of the storm, Human Services worked around the clock in collaboration with emergency personnel to address storm-related concerns from upward of 400+ households. Human Services Staff contacted approximately 100 pre-registered residents in advance of the storm to encourage preparedness for possible storm damage via the Nixle system and direct phone calls both in advance of the storm and after the storm passed.

Post-storm, DHS fielded 325 incoming calls from residents seeking information and assistance with accessing resources, asking for welfare checks on neighbors and navigating restoration requests through Eversource and Optimum. Several of the calls required lengthy follow up to discern critical needs and make referrals. Social workers made home welfare visits to 21 trapped residents to ensure that their basic needs were addressed. Human Services staff traversed downed wires and trees with the Fire Department and the Community Emergency Response Team's (CERT) support in some instances. They brought food, water and other supplies to sustain them until power and road access was restored. With the support of CERT, a shower center was activated at Staples High school.

Human Services ran a cooling center at Greens Farms Elementary School for 15 hours over three days. The Center for Senior Activities served as a staging area for food and drinking water distribution and also served as an outdoor charging station for residents after the storm. Human Services staff relocated five medically fragile households to hotels after the storm, at times personally escorting these individuals to the hotels in neighboring communities.

The loss of cellular and internet services caused significant disruption to internal and external communications making it challenging to provide residents with information. Many calls were from residents wishing to get in touch with loved ones or inquiring about contacting emergency services. Several previously unidentified households with vulnerable populations were discovered as a result of the storm's

aftermath. The Department of Human Services continues to receive new applications for their Emergency Registries since Storm Isaias exposed the significant needs of isolated seniors and others with disabilities. The registry offers pre-emergency outreach calls and welfare calls after incidents to reassure and assess our most vulnerable population's future needs.

Intradepartmental & Interdepartmental Communications

- **Police:** The PD main radio communications system went down in the midst of the storm. The backup radio system was then utilized, but coverage was fair at best. Urban Areas Security Initiative (UASI) radios were brought to the police dispatch center in the event the backup system failed. Due to damage to cell phone towers, cell phone service was also severely limited for days. AT&T coverage appeared worse than Verizon.
- **Fire:** Dispatch and line personnel struggled to keep up with the call volume. The storm also hit very quickly causing communications failures. FD radio communications system went down at the height of the storm and the UASI regional radio system was used as the backup. A fallen tree caused the radio communication system failure. The FD also lost its mobile computer dispatch system due to damaged phone lines and large area power failures crippling the cellular phone network which slowed the flow of information between dispatch and units in the field.
- **Human Services:** Human Services collaborated with and solicited support from the FD, the Director of Emergency Preparedness, WPD, EMS, DPW, the Westport Public Schools, Red Cross, and CERT. Past regional emergency resources like Red Cross, DCF, and Adult Protective services offered limited support due to COVID restrictions and a trend toward less regionalized services. De-regionalization, combined with COVID-19, presented new challenges like food resourcing and home visits that DHS staff would have previously delegated to field workers or state/local agencies. Human Services went well above and beyond in their capacity as social services providers to participate in field outreach, making service calls on behalf of residents, speaking with caregivers, and providing one on one support to distraught seniors and families who were not able to get in contact with their loved ones or access resources.

Public Information, Community Notification & Warning

- **Selectman's Office:** The initial public message was issued the day of the storm. It addressed the expected storm conditions, the closures that were already underway and it included the FD's pre-storm checklist.

Key public information tasks always include: 1) answering incoming calls; 2) responding to emails; 3) issuing press releases; 4) using Nixle notifications; 5) interacting with the press; 6) composing social media posts; 7) keeping the website updated; 8) broadcasting from the 90.3 FM WWPT radio station; and 9) hosting press conferences. These activities are carried out between the First Selectman's Office and the FD with feedback from most town departments with operations impacted by the storm. The goal for this storm, similar to most anticipated emergency communications, was to reach the most residents and keep the public informed on the storm response and planning.

Despite all of these efforts, there were public accusations that the town was not communicating. This criticism was mostly due to the fact that many residents were left without power, cellular or WiFi service, thereby making most of the town communications ineffective. For instance, press releases are issued and sent as emails, the website and most local news articles are accessed online, social media requires a WiFi or cellular connection and Nixle requires cellular service or often leads the reader to an online link.

Compounding the issue of local communications was that Eversource was providing insufficient or inadequate information to its customers or to the towns. Its outage system was not functioning, they were not answering calls or answering curtly, they had limited information on their website and they were not

responding to our inquiries. The Selectman's Office had to use the outages information on Eversource's website, which often times proved inaccurate. Restoration was slow to commence and when it did, it was not organized. Westport was working very hard to inform residents about Eversource's progress and plans, but overall information was either not being received or was lacking. In order to give residents a sense of restoration status, Westport used DPW data on the progress of road clearings as an indicator of progress, which proved to be a mostly reliable and useful metric.

The Town of Westport Website & Social Media

The screenshot displays the Town of Westport's digital presence. On the left, the website features a prominent orange header for 'Tropical Storm Isaias Recovery Updates' and a sidebar with navigation links like 'Residents > Emergency Information & Alerts >'. The main content area includes a post dated 08-10-2020 titled 'Westport Update on Tropical Storm Isaias', detailing the impact of the storm and the town's response. To the right, two Facebook posts from the 'Town of Westport' page are shown. The top post, dated August 9, provides a 'Westport Update' on power status (38% w/o power) and road conditions (16 partially blocked, 41 roads passable). The bottom post, also dated August 9, mentions the activation of the Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) and includes a video of team members in safety vests.

- Fire Marshal:** The Westport radio (WWPT-90.3FM) community broadcasts were done once or twice daily and repeated on a continuous loop. They overviewed the general conditions and reviewed safety practices. The scripts were written based on EOC meetings and public information messages. Many messages were done collaboratively by the Fire Marshal and the First Selectman. Radio broadcasts were also recorded and posted to social media. Overall, there was a positive response from listeners.

Road Blockages, Debris Clearing & Make Safe

- Police:** A large section of Saugatuck Avenue became inaccessible as trees fell all along the route between Interstate 95 and Duck Pond Road. Access to the Saugatuck Shores was gained by traveling through Norwalk via Exit 16.

- **Public Works:** The DPW Highway Division was unable to address the highest priority function of clearing trapped roadways for over 60 hours after the storm passed due to the lack of Eversource "Make-safe" crews. The Highway Division cannot touch anything that involves wires until Eversource verifies de-energization. An Eversource "make-safe" crew was finally established three days after the storm, but was only able to support one clearing crew. Highway personnel were finally able to commandeer a second Eversource crew approximately 72 hours after the storm, but was not able to ensure that they would continue to be available. As a result on day four, the two highway crews were "leapfrogging" with the one Eversource crew; one highway crew would work with the Eversource crew until wires were de-energized and then the Eversource crew would move to the next location to meet the second highway crew, while the first finished clearing the trees and freeing up the roadway.

Damage Assessment & Blocked Location Tracking

- **Police:** The Police Dispatchers logged downed trees/wires and locations of road closures in the in-house Computer Aided Dispatch System. In the past, the dispatchers would also log this information in an Excel conditions report that would be shared with DPW. Due to the volume of incoming calls, an Excel sheet could not immediately be created. Without the Excel sheet, DPW was not receiving the information promptly. Once this was realized, an Excel log was created and shared. Updating this data took some time, since dispatchers needed to update both the system and the spreadsheet. By 2300 hours on August 4th, over 205 incidents of trees and/or wires down were reported.
- **Public Works:** Accounting for all of the blocked locations proved very challenging. This was performed using an Excel spreadsheet that was periodically saved and distributed to EOC personnel. Not all supervisory personnel were adept at the input of information into the spreadsheet and all entries had to be made by the one person utilizing the spreadsheet.

Damage assessment was also a challenge in that crews tasked with clearing roads were also doing damage assessment. Reports of damage also came in from Fire and Police dispatch centers, but much of it was duplicative and inconsistent in format.

Traffic & Intersections

- **Police:** Although the town experienced widespread outages that affected a significant number of traffic lights the police department responded to only 2 accidents where the traffic signal was non-functional and there was no traffic control in place. Variable message signs were deployed in each direction on Post Road East in the area of the Sherwood Island Connector advising motorists to treat intersections without functioning traffic control signals as if there were stop signs there. Press releases and social media posts were distributed advising of the same. Despite all efforts to regulate traffic flow in spite of these conditions, police continued to receive multiple complaints regarding motorists traveling through intersections without stopping; regardless of the temporary measures in place at these locations.
- **Selectman's:** Since power was out at intersections and the road conditions were very poor, residents were advised to remain at home for almost 48 hours after the storm.

Town Facilities & Back-up Power

- **Public Works:** Initially all facilities that experienced power outages were properly transferred to generator power. On day two, the Senior Center generator shut down due to a radiator issue and DPW brought its portable backup generator in to take over. The generator at the Coleytown Fire Station experienced some starting issues related to a diesel injector but was able to run through the storm.

At Town Hall, upon power restoration, a power surge occurred through the small individual UPS units that were being used to protect all of the individual data servers. As a result, some of the switches and servers were irreparably damaged and had to be reconstructed from backup data, which took the IT department several days.

At the Water Pollution Control Facility (WPCF), as power restoration dragged on for over five days, DPW assigned personnel to work staggered shifts, so as to monitor the pump stations and plant generators for fuel and operation on a 24/7 basis. As a result, no malfunctions of the town's sewer system were experienced.

- **Parks:** Although the coastal flooding never materialized, Parks and Recreation did sustain a significant amount of tree damage on the Longshore property including one truck that was destroyed by a tree. Parks maintenance staff and Parks subcontractors are not trained in road clean-up and cannot work where there are downed wires. Instead, the town focused these resources where they could - on clearing the downed trees at Longshore and other parks. As such, they quickly cleared the damage done to Longshore. Power was lost both at Compo Beach (five days) and Longshore (seven days), which did slow some of the cleanup and reopening efforts. The Parks and Recreation office was able to stay operational because they do have a backup power generator.



At Longshore, by day three with intense heat, the irrigation system was unable to run due to lack of power which would result in the park's greens and fairways being burned out. DPW made an attempt to power the main pumps with one of the Police Department's spare generators but found that it could not be rewired to provide three phase power at 80 amps. (DPW tried to rent one from Sunbelt Rentals but by then, none were available in the State or region). DPW was able to power the control panel for the irrigation system using a small generator which the sprinklers for the greens and some fairways, but only with street pressure, not pumps.

Post-Storm Actions

- **Public Works:** Over 1,200 tons of wood was removed from the roadways between 8/8 and 8/21. DPW started bringing debris material to the Greens Farms railroad station #1 on August 9th. The contractor

started breaking up logs and grinding by mid September and was completed on September 25th. DPW then spent several days cleaning up the site. 5,100 yards of chip were removed from the site (not including what was chipped on the side of the roads with wood chippers.



- **Selectman's Office:** As noted in the report, most of the challenges experienced during the storm were a result of a failure of a variety of public utilities to be fully prepared to communicate among their own personnel, as well as with the Westport EOC. As a result, the First Selectman has presented testimony describing the utilities' failures to the Connecticut General Assembly and the Public Utilities Regulatory Authority (PURA), as well as documenting recommendations for improvements and regulatory changes. Moreover, the town is committing to improve senior level communications at Eversource, the cable and telephone utilities, as well as the wireless carriers to assure that these organizations are correcting the communications, procedural response and technology shortfalls that became evident during and after the storm.

VII. Summary of Challenges

1. **Staffing:** Crew Resource Management, Accountability and Logistics Support continue to be a problem during almost all major storm events.
 - i. Rotation of personnel is not always adequate. Working more than 16 hours during these kind of events poses a significant risk for injuries and accidents.
 - ii. Accountability or tracking staff for all departments working during a storm is an ongoing issue.
 - iii. Ensuring all staff working a major storm or other incident are fed. Working long hours in the field requires the need to ensure food is available.
2. **Technology:** Power outages impact technology, which leads to problems reaching residents, communicating internally and traffic safety.
3. **Data & Reporting:** Accurate tracking and reporting of road closures and downed wires between departments continues to be problem. A shared OneDrive document needs to be inputted and managed by all of the departments.

4. **COVID:** COVID provided an added challenge because all operations needed to consider social distancing and other related requirements. Specifically, opening showers, shelters, charging stations had to be reconsidered.
5. **Calls & Dispatch:** Departments struggled to keep up with the call volume and this caused issues with dispatch. Some responses were being duplicated by dispatching both fire and police to the same locations. It should be noted however that in many cases, duplicate responses to previously reported problem locations were warranted to reset or replace traffic control measures that had been moved by motorists. With the transition to a combined police and fire dispatch on the horizon (estimated January 2021), many of the perceived coordination issues between PD and FD should be resolved. This should also improve communication with other town departments as all First Responders will take calls from a single location. The combined dispatch is expected to be activated in the spring of 2021.
6. **WiFi and Charging Stations:** While COVID restrictions prevented public access to the interior of Town Hall and the Senior Center, enhanced exterior WiFi networks were established at Town Hall, the Library and other public buildings. Charging stations were enabled at Town Hall, the Health District and the Senior Center. A significant number of residents took advantage of these locations.

VIII. Lessons Learned

While Town Officials are proud of their coordinated and swift response to the storm, there were some lessons learned during Isaias that staff agree to address during future storms, namely:

1. It is important for staff to remain flexible, since weather situations are usually fluid and will change. The departments had planned for a flooding event, but this was a wind event. Westport was still prepared to respond.
2. Anticipate that technology will fail. During this storm the town public safety radio system failed, as it did during the March 2010 Nor' Easter. Cellular phones and data failed because of phone wires down and power outages. There will always be need to have a backup plan.
3. The town needs to advertise Westport radio WWPT 90.3FM and remind residents to have a radio at home with batteries. Residents have grown more reliant on their devices and have become accustomed to not needing a radio.
4. Aggressive tree pruning and removal should be more seriously considered.
5. It is important to continue participating in regional emergency response drills. These prepare staff to respond to multiple crises simultaneously and to think creatively about solutions.
6. Nixle is best used for short concise emergency notifications.
7. The PD is in the process of acquiring more signage in preparation for all but the most extreme cases where its supply had been sufficient.

IX. Specific Recommendations

1. Develop a plan for the failure of technology; specifically, internet failure. Create a technology checklist for proactive information ahead of storms when major power outages are expected. This would include a reminder about the town's radio station, where charging and Wi-Fi stations are located and traffic guidance in the case of signal outages. Incorporate Eversource's projected restoration times based on emergency type.
2. Improve senior level communications and relationships with Eversource, the cable and telephone utilities and especially the internet and wireless carriers.

3. Continue promoting residents and businesses to sign up for town news and to follow the town on social media.
4. Establish a town-wide mailing with emergency and preparedness information.
5. Establish an annual plan for Community Preparedness Education that will educate the public on being prepared for natural and manmade disasters.
6. All supervisors in all departments should attend National Incident Command System Training in National Incident Management System and Emergency Operations Center. Training is not just for the Fire Department.
7. Develop a shared Excel OneDrive file for the tracking and coordination road closures and downed wires between departments. Use this as a public indicator of storm response.
8. Update the Local Emergency Operation Plan (LEOP) and dedicate time annually for all departments to train.
9. Invest in minor technical improvements to the WWPT radio system.
10. Close all Parks & Recreation facilities immediately upon advice of incoming major storms and reopen them only after each location has been inspected and deemed safe.

Appendix/Related Links

[Westport's Isaias Webpage](#)

[Westport Fire Department After Action Report: Hurricane Irene](#)

[Eversource Tropical Storm Isaias 30-Day Event Report](#)

[U.S. Fire Administration Operational Lessons Learned in Disaster Response June 2015](#)

Authors:

Police Department, Lieutenant Matthew Gouveia and Lieutenant Jillian Cabana

Fire Department, Various staff

Parks & Recreation, Various Staff

Department of Public Works, Various staff

Public Information, Sara Harris, Operations Director