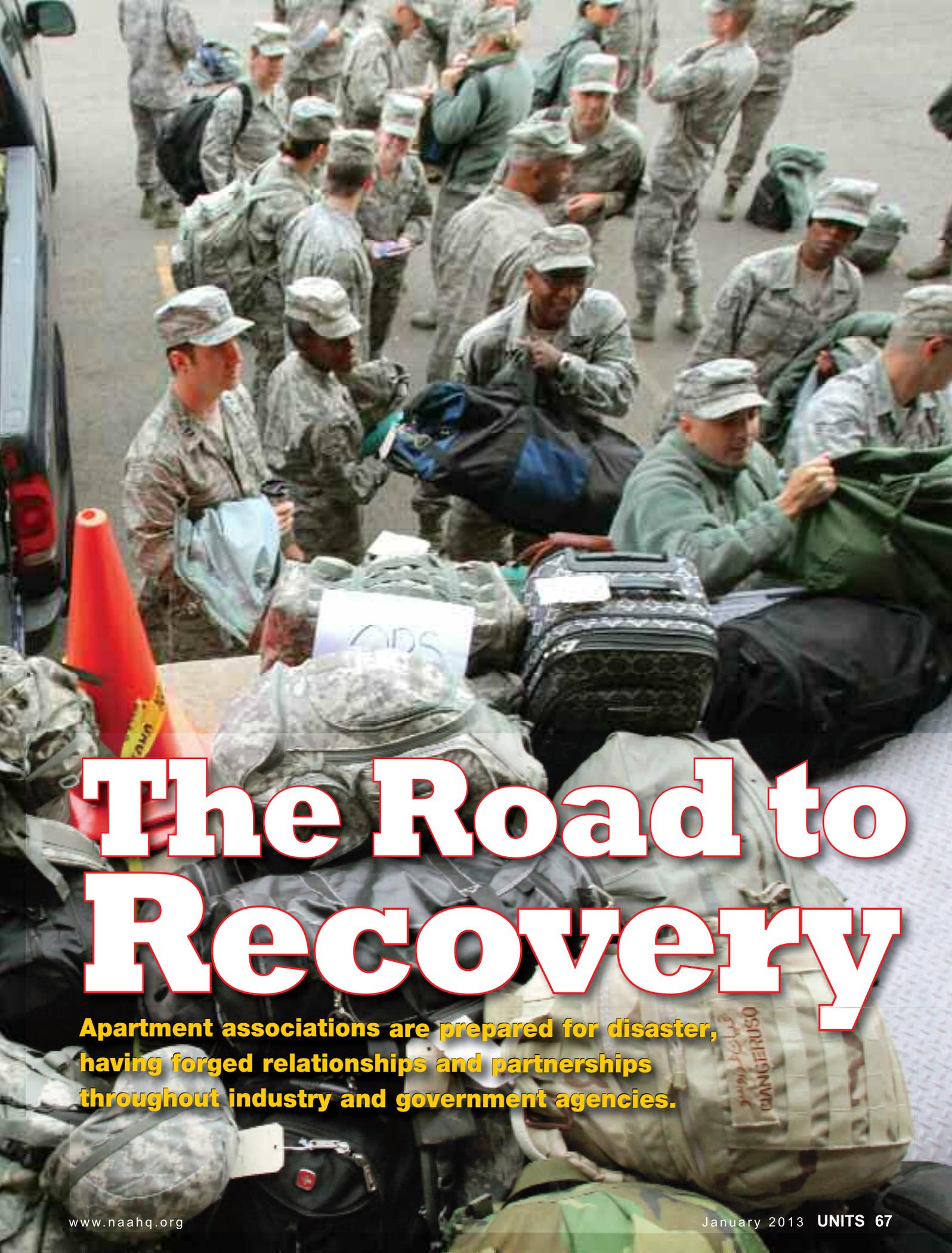




New Jersey Air National Guard members prepare to assist Superstorm Sandy victims. (U.S. Air Force photo by Master Sgt. Mark C. Olsen/Released)



The Road to Recovery

Apartment associations are prepared for disaster, having forged relationships and partnerships throughout industry and government agencies.



BY FRANK MAUCK

When “once-in-a-100-year” weather events strike with ever greater frequency, they serve as ominous reminders of the consequences of the unpredictable. They also function as reminders that multi-

family housing professionals have the tools, know-how, connections and drive to come to the aid of those impacted by natural disasters, most recently Superstorm Sandy.

Major weather events share a few common characteristics, such as homes left uninhabitable, prolonged loss of power, shortages of fuel and food and supply chain disruptions. Superstorm Sandy left in its wake more than 100 dead and, at the height of the storm, in excess of 8 million without electricity. Countless residences were left temporarily, or in some cases along the Atlantic shoreline, permanently uninhabitable.

With owners and operations staff working to restore power, pump water, ensure staff safety, prevent payroll disruptions and find temporary shelter for displaced residents, individual communities and apartment associations lent a hand to aid in the recovery process, from offering general preparation programs to coordination and communication to donating resources to those in need.

Pre-Planning Prevents Poor Performance

The best way to deal with disaster is through advance preparation. In late October, just prior to Superstorm Sandy making landfall, the Apartment Association of Greater Philadelphia (AAGP) was just finishing its disaster-training course. In attendance were operations professionals, many of who will be on the front lines during a variety of potential disaster scenarios.

“They just got trained,” says Pam Bennett, CAM, CAE, Association Executive for AAGP. “At the conclusion of the training each participant walks away with a bright-red binder that puts everything they need at their fingertips. It’s all the things that they’re going to need, and things they don’t even think of, to use when something happens.”

It’s a concept that has its parallels in the emergency community, from firefighters to law enforcement, as well as the military and sports. At its essence, this type of training and drilling seeks to avoid situations in which individuals must make decisions on the fly.

AAGP’s disaster training course was also delivered to members of the Apartment & Office Building Association of Metropolitan Washington (AOBA). “It’s a batten down the hatches checklist,” says Margaret Jeffers, Esq., Association Executive for AOBA.

“There’s a lot of resources available through Red Cross and [Department of Homeland Security], but nobody will do your plan for you. We build our plan in the workshop. It’s an outline for a solid community strategy.”

Beyond aiding in the preparation phase, apartment associations such as AAGP are able to serve important communications and coordination efforts during and immediately after disasters.

AOBA has gone through great lengths to protect its members. Following a yearlong process gathering a contact list for every community in its network, they had a way to reach out with important information and updates. “The goal is to be able to coordinate information—we have direct feeds to all emergency organizations and they’re delivered many different ways—phone calls, email and texts,” says Jeffers.

Shelter In Place

Jeffers places great emphasis on having the communications networks and contacts established well in advance, because in the thick of things, the ability to provide on-the-scene aid may be hampered by well-meaning local, state or federal officials, such as Gov. Jack Markell issuing level two driving restrictions (all non-essential motor vehicles are prohibited from roads and highways) prior to Superstorm Sandy’s landfall.

“Nature is going to do what she wants to do—fortunately, we got hit by the fairly tame eye of the storm; we didn’t get the devastating northeast quadrant of the storm,” says Kevin Wolfgang, President of the Delaware Apartment Association (DAA). “We’re extraordinarily lucky that there is very little recovery needed at the local level. We were expecting it to be really bad.”

DAA maintains a resource center on its website, with critical links outlining where to go and what to do during disasters. “We educate our members, and they educate their residents,” says Wolfgang. “There are common sense things to do with this type of storm—address your problem areas in advance by clearing drains and doing some wind preparation.”

When you face arrest for driving, you are severely limited in your ability to acquire and disseminate information; however, with new online networking tools, communities and associations have a method for maintaining contact. “Social media had an incredibly powerful impact,” says Wolfgang. “We could still communicate; information was accessible in real time. It’s better than a phone call or email.”

Garden State Suffers Sandy

One of the worst hit states was New Jersey, suffering the brunt of Superstorm Sandy and illustrating the worst of Mother Nature but in many ways showing the best of humanity.

“You learn a lot when you’re in the middle of it,” says Ron

Government agencies provide relief by removing restrictions and extending deadlines, such as HUD opening 55+ housing to displaced Sandy survivors (bit.ly/Yptl83) and IRS extending filing deadlines and suspending certain LIHTC requirements (bit.ly/RGospv).



Sailors and marines assist FEMA and local civil authorities with recovery following Superstorm Sandy in Hoboken, N.J. (Photo by U.S. Marine Corps photo by Cpl. Bryan Nygaard/Released)

Simoncini, President of Axiom Communications and a spokesperson for the New Jersey Apartment Association (NJAA).

Simoncini says that some areas of New Jersey were hit especially hard, some had the presence of mind and forethought to be prepared, while still others more inland were able to escape relatively unscathed compared to their coastal counterparts.

In the north, Hoboken experienced “unavoidable” devastation, as many first-floor apartment homes lay below sea level, a problem exacerbated by extended power outages.

Northeast of Hoboken, Simoncini highlighted one shining example of preparation: he says the Chief of Police in Lyndhurst had 12 Dumpsters ready in advance of the storm. “He put them where people could throw away their garbage.”

It may not sound like much, but consider how massive a task cleanup can be, especially when there is difficulty maneuvering large vehicles into areas that experience large-scale disaster. To put it into perspective, Associated Press reported that New York City alone removed approximately 271,000 tons of debris from flooded neighborhoods. That doesn’t include the limbs and trunks of some 26,000 damaged trees.

Simoncini says that on the multifamily side, the largest problems were loss of electricity, water in basements and roof damage.

“The multifamily infrastructure is better,” he says, indicating that power was restored for most multifamily communities within 48 hours, compared to a week or more for single-family homes. He says that one of the main reasons for this is the num-

ber of residents in any given building. In effect, utility companies have an order of restoration: first are locations with strategic relevance; second, priority is given to population density, where most multifamily properties take precedence.

Nevertheless, the effects of Superstorm Sandy were greater than most imagined. Knowing that New Jersey residents were in desperate need of help, several organizations sprang into action.

A Helping Hand

The Hurricane Sandy New Jersey Relief Fund was created by Gov. Chris Christie and his wife, Mary Pat, on the Saturday following the storm. The fund is intended to assist New Jersey residents who were affected by the storm.

The NJAA donated \$5,000, and announced it will match contributions to the fund from its members up to an additional \$5,000.

“We applaud Governor Christie and his administration, and we are eager to assist his efforts to help those impacted by Hurricane Sandy, and help the Garden State get back to normal as quickly as possible,” says Jean Maddalon, NJAA Executive Director. “Historically, our members have been very generous, and this initiative gives them another way to give to those in need.”

Additionally, the DAA, NJAA Charitable Fund and the Board of the NJAA Charitable Fund have all committed to contribute. NAA also donated \$25,000 in mid-November.

Beyond monetary donations, which according to many aid organizations are preferred over food and supplies immediately following crises, NJAA also coordinated with the Federal Emer-



Military personnel support state officials and FEMA in disaster response in Hoboken, N.J., after Superstorm Sandy. (U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 1st Class Martin Cuaron/Released)

gency Management Administration (FEMA) to help locate housing for those displaced by the storm.

Resident Aid

According to FEMA, if a residence cannot be easily be returned to safe and sanitary condition, local rental resources are the preferred first choice for housing disaster survivors. NJAA's members operate more than 170,000 apartment communities statewide, and it worked to provide a list of available apartments to the state Disaster Housing Task Force, which in turn is able to offer those to anyone requiring housing.

In mid-November, FEMA authorized funds increasing rental assistance provided to eligible disaster survivors in New Jersey. The approved increase is expected to make an additional 1,200 rental resources available for temporary housing of disaster-impacted families in New Jersey.

Another well-known organization providing disaster relief is the American Red Cross, and is one of the first organizations to come to the aid of multifamily residents. Donations were made from across the multifamily housing spectrum; two examples in which *units* is aware are NAA contributing \$50,000 and Pinnacle Family of Companies adding another \$5,000.

Beyond financial giving, the Red Cross is in dire need of blood donations. One member community worked in coordination

Read one member's barrowing, first-hand account of Superstorm Sandy in December units: bit.ly/ZIHLHJ.

For a primer on insurance for property damage and business interruption losses, visit: bit.ly/Usy0zS

with its residents to hold a blood drive to benefit Sandy survivors. "We had the whole community involved, with 56 residents signing up, and we even had the police sheriff and fire captain and their deputies and firefighters come," says Nichole Smith, Leasing Manager for Thayer Properties in Alabama. "It was a great success. We're going to do it annually in March."

With individuals, communities and networks of owners and operators focused on relief efforts, disaster survivors can rest assured NAA members are working hard to accelerate a return to normal. 🇺🇸

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A wealth of best practices for emergencies: bit.ly/Vkmp5G

