



## MEMORANDUM

**To:** All Councilmembers  
**From:** CURO  
**By:** Shannon Blanks  
**CC:** Paul Harang, Anita Curran  
**Date:** September 20, 2021  
**RE:** SWBNO Meeting 09.15.2021

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### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Sewerage and Water Board of New Orleans (SWBNO) Board of Directors (the Board) met Wednesday, September 15, 2021, via video and teleconference. In addition, the Board received updates on the general standing of the SWBNO. The complete packet for the meeting may be found [here](#).

New Orleans Mayor LaToya Cantrell opened the meeting to provide insight and background on the city's recent hurricane. On August 29, 2021, Hurricane Ida, a Category 4 hurricane, moved slowly over the city for approximately 12 hours. The storm damaged Entergy transmission lines rendering the utility incapable of delivering power during and immediately following the storm.

SWBNO operates 84 sewer lift stations across the city, of which 83 rely on Entergy power. All sewer lift stations are back to regular operation except for one on the Westbank located on Blair Street, being powered by a generator.

The Department of Public Works has begun cleaning the stormwater drainage network. So far, 430 catch basins and approximately 7500 linear feet of lateral lines have been cleaned. Additionally, more than 30 joint infrastructure projects have resumed activity, paying close attention not to disrupt recovery progress.

The damage assessments for city-owned facilities are ongoing. The estimated costs of repairs to date are approximately \$19 million.

### **Executive Director's Leadership Team Hurricane Ida: Post-Storm Report**

SWBNO provided services to the community throughout the storm and immediately after. However, SWBNO acknowledges that some residents experienced hardships for various reasons, such as flooding resulting from power losses. SWBNO is reviewing the causes and will develop improvement strategies to minimize or eliminate future incidents.

## **A. Preparation**

### **1. Power**

SWBNO's attention was on self-generating power. The Electro-Motive Diesel (EMDs) generators, frequency changers, and turbines 4, 5, and 6 were available for use. Various outage scenarios were outlined, and redundancy was created when possible. The outlines were critical for maintaining drinking water and drainage operations.

Before the onset of the storm, SWBNO switched to "island mode," where SWBNO turbines and backup generators supplied all power. The decision to self-power provided stable pressure in the drinking water distribution systems, enabled SWBNO to provide uninterpreted service, and avoided any boil-water notifications due to the widespread power outage. Moreover, New Orleans supplied potable water to neighboring parishes that could not produce drinking water.

### **2. Staffing**

Staffing levels and resources were increased to respond accordingly. Employees were positioned strategically and initially focused on drainage, then pivoted to address sewer issues.

## **B. Communication and Coordination**

According to SBWNO, its responsiveness to the storm resulted from consistent communications with internal and external partners throughout the event. Communications include the Mayor, intergovernmental agencies, businesses, contractors, vendors, media outlets, and community partners.

SWBNO also said that its communications with Entergy remained strong before, during, and after the event. In advance of the storm, Entergy provided ten generators to SWBNO.

SWBNO communicated publicly that it was experiencing power challenges. In response, several community members offered assistance. For example, Hancock Whitney Bank provided 20 power generators to several sewer pumping stations. Additionally, Canal Barge Company provided skilled mechanics to assist in various repairs.

Communication with the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality (LDEQ) and the federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) was necessary to inform the agencies that the East Bank Wastewater Treatment Plant was out of service and required sewer flows to be diverted to the Mississippi River. The diversion was permitted in this circumstance, and SWBNO remains in regulatory compliance.

SWBNO communications department provided briefings and updates to the Mayor's Office, the Board of Directors, national and local media outlets, and updated social media throughout the event and post-storm recovery. In addition, SWBNO delivered key messages in Spanish and Vietnamese. Multi-lingual messaging will be continued in the future.

## **C. Challenges**

Several challenges were encountered during the storm, such as:

- 1) **Sewer Pumps Stations** -No backup power sources were available at the sewer pump stations. SWBNO is developing a plan to provide backup power at select stations.
- 2) **Drainage Pumps Stations** - Backup power failed at drainage pump stations. The failures resulted in SWBNO updating maintenance and operations procedures.
- 3) **Communications** - Communication disruption due to loss of power and internet caused SWBNO's computer network and the state provided web-based emergency operations center (EOC) to go offline. Therefore, the utility relied on phone services and state-provided radio communication devices to communicate with field personnel.

#### **D. Emergency Response and Operations**

SWBNO utilized Emergency Command/EOC concepts to centralize information and leadership directives successfully. Approximately 500 essential employees were on staff to work through the hurricane. The leadership team secured meal services through Pigeon Catering and offsite housing through Hyatt New Orleans.

No accidents or injuries to staff were reported during the event.

#### **E. Customer Service**

Call center staff was embedded at the Carrollton Water Plant. Web-based phone services were disrupted during the event. A temporary hardline phone number was quickly established and circulated online via social media. The hardline also served as staff communications during the event providing important information to staff and retirees. The call center also relayed information to appropriate staff through fax and SMS as infrastructure issues were reported.

Customer service office hours have changed to the following:

- The downtown customer service center is open between 8:00 am and 5:00 pm. Monday through Friday
- The Westbank location is closed due to hurricane damage and will reopen by the first week of October 2021.
- The New Orleans East Satellite office is open on Thursdays from 10:00 am to 4:00 pm
- The Sanchez Center Office is closed. SWBNO will inform the public when the office reopens.

Payments may be deposited in the drop boxes at the Westbank and Downtown locations.

SWBNO recognizes the challenges presented by COVID-19 and Hurricane Ida. Customer Care Pay Plans remain available. Customers are encouraged to call SWBNO to discuss payment options

#### **F. Billing and Meter Reading**

SWBNO estimated several bills during post-storm recovery. However, meter reading activities resumed on September 14<sup>th</sup>.

#### **G. Revenue and Collections**

SWBNO has started assessing the revenue and collection impacts resulting from Hurricane Ida. The information is forthcoming.