Extension Disaster Education Network: Prepare, Educate, Assess

**Issues/Needs:** As the New York State member of the National Extension Disaster Education Network (EDEN), Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE) leverages access to campus educational resources, state and federal partners, and the interconnectedness of the state-wide CCE system to enable New Yorkers to use and share resources to enhance resilience and reduce the impact of disasters. In large scale disasters and emergencies, whether weather related or other types of hazards and threats, the ability of the CCE system to provide timely education, outreach, and situational assessment and awareness is significant.

**Response:** CCE’s NY Extension Disaster Education Network (EDEN) identified key areas for improvement after Hurricanes Irene and Lee damaged large areas of upstate New York in 2011. In the months following, a concentrated effort was put forth to develop a system-wide set of standard operating procedures, including provisions for rapid assembly of a Disaster All-hazards Response Team (EDEN-DART) tailored to the specific incident.

These preparations were formalized via the creation of the (EDEN-DART SOP), which was revised and enhanced through drills and table top exercises over the past 12 months. In late October of 2012, CCE NY EDEN-DART was activated for the first time in a “live” incident by New York EDEN’s Program Leader Keith Tidball several days before Hurricane Sandy made landfall in the New York City area on October 29, 2012.

Outreach to statewide extension associations and staff included phone calls and emails to association executive directors and a message to all system staff providing basic instructions on safety and preparedness. Situation reports were filed by most county associations within two days.
Direct linkages to the National Weather Service, the NYS Emergency Operations Center and other state government agencies allowed for close monitoring of the hurricane’s path and intensity.

Anticipated communications and disaster education resource needs were identified and compiled for rapid dissemination via Facebook, Twitter, email list serves, the CCE and NY EDEN websites, and the Cornell University Press Office.

The emerging picture that upstate New York’s agricultural sector had been largely spared was made possible early on by CCE’s extensive connections in every corner of the state. The focus then quickly shifted to Long Island, the Lower Hudson, and New York City, and resources were tailored for more urban environments.

A special Hurricane Sandy resource page was rapidly developed and posted on the NY EDEN website. With the help of Cornell faculty, new resources were gathered and packaged and others were verified. Social media figured prominently in the response. A new NY EDEN Facebook page was created and achieved 319 page views on Oct 29th, which were “liked,” shared, or otherwise viewed by 1,921 individuals (Facebook metric “viral”). NY EDEN also utilized Twitter and sent out 288 “Tweets,” with 64 followers receiving “tweets” and “re-tweeting.”

The Cornell CCE NY EDEN listserv was used to send out more than 50 emails containing important updates, talking points, and fact sheets, as well as instructions for associations on how to rapidly add to their websites Hurricane Sandy content and links back to NY EDEN for their stakeholders.

News media outputs both before and after the hurricane included NBC News (blog), USA Today, Huffington Post, Morning Ag Clips, NY Farm Bureau, Food & Farm Show/Foodstuffs web radio, multiple local radio and newspapers outlets, The Cornell Chronicle and others.

**Outcome/Impacts:** NY EDEN is now in a period of regular contact with CCE associations in counties most impacted by Hurricane Sandy. Educational and informational resource needs of constituents of those counties are being assessed. Current recovery issues and future needs will also be discussed and coordinated with neighboring states and the national EDEN organization. Leadership from affected CCE county associations is included in these efforts.

With an eye toward enhancing resilience and increasing preparedness for future adverse weather events, NY EDEN will continue to share resources and information with extension educators, emergency managers, and the system at large. A de-briefing of activities and lessons-learned from NY EDEN-DART Hurricane Sandy will be conducted, and results will be submitted for publication on the national EDEN website, the Journal of Extension, and other outlets.

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