

CHEAT SHEET

EACH WEEK THE PENDULUM DEBRIEFS COMPLEX EVENTS BY INTERVIEWING RELEVANT

Physical Plant on the front lines of campus clean

Tom Flood, director of Physical Plant, reflects on natural disaster preparation and recovery

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When forecasts started showing a "catastrophic" storm with Alamance County right in its path, Elon Physical Plant was tasked with battering down the hatchets. The department, broadly in charge of the school's infrastructure and facilities, took on the challenge of preparing campus for the worst. Tom Flood, director of Physical Plant, was at the helm this past week as steps were taken to ensure safety for students and buildings in the face of Florence's predicted wind and rain.



Tom Flood

Q: What informs your decisions when it comes to emergency preparedness?

A: We go off the incidences that we've had in the past and what we can project as the future. We're keeping note of what is being decided with students. Are they staying on campus? How many may we have to shelter, what is our response to electrical outage? Preparedness for things like emergency generators and sandbagging is based on our level of experience. One of the most significant was in August of this year when we had some torrential rain storms come through.

In one afternoon, we lost power to a major portion of campus at a time when we had six inches of rain in a two-hour period. So, when they were forecasting seven to 10 inches over seven days for the hurricane, I had a comparison saying, "Well that's a lot of rain, and if it comes all at once, we're going to have some problems."

Q: What did you learn from that August flooding? What kind of tweaks did you make?

A: The first thing we did the next day is look at those buildings and say, what can we do to fix this? Where did the water get in? How can we stop that? How can we make our facilities more resilient? So, we undertook more than a dozen projects in the last month to improve those situations.

We have a couple more we're still going to do. They're a little larger, so we weren't able to get them completed in the last 30 days, but they are still on the docket to be completed this fall. Adding some storm drainage at Carolina and adding some storm drainage by Global B, there'll be some construction activity for that.

Q: Is preparing for a hurricane similar to preparing for a snowstorm or an ice storm?

A: Ice storms are very similar in that your risk is the same risk, it's power outages. We could have a tree fall virtually any day of the year. A wind, a rainstorm, you never know. It's somewhat random. We have arborists that work in the trees every day to minimize risk. We remove anything that we can see is weak... Power outages are the thing that we can't control because we don't control the distribution system and we are a little bit at the mercy of Duke Energy to keep our power on.

Q: When you need all hands on deck to keep things running during a storm, how do you make sure all of your



Physical Plant workers pick up downed branches in Lambert Academic Village on Friday, Sept. 14.

employees can travel to campus safely?

A: All of our physical plant staff are emergency personnel, which means as part of their job description duties when they're hired, they know that they need to be here in any emergency response. That's just part of our job. It's part of who we are. We are running basically a small city and people depend on us for our service.

We always say if you have a risk, don't go on the road. If you have family to take care of, take care of them. We're not going to supersede that and put you in a difficult position.

We will allow people to stay. Often, we'll find people asleep in the break room. I had a new employee one time who was so concerned about getting here for a snow storm, we discovered him asleep in his car in a sleeping bag. So, we said, "For goodness sakes, come inside!" We usually set up some space in some facility as a bunk house if we need to. If they're worried about getting here or getting home, we take care of them, we feed them.

Q: How much did it cost to make all of the preparations?

A: The cost for the preparation was actually fairly minor because most of it was able to be done during the workday and the week. We brought in one backup generator so we would have the ability to keep Clohan Hall running for food services. That was probably the only single major expense that we had, and that was only a couple thousand dollars. We did run some hurricane response teams over part of the weekend, so we had multi-trades, specialty skilled here 24 hours a day until we finally pulled them Saturday evening.

Q: How many jokes have you gotten about your name this week?

A: This summer we had a series of torrential rainstorms all summer long, and yeah, I've gotten several this year about "I wish you'd change your name so it would stop raining."

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