

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**MAYOR BLOOMBERG UPDATES NEW YORKERS ON PREPARATIONS FOR HURRICANE IRENE**

*Mayor Issues Mandatory Evacuation Order for All People in Zone A Coastal Areas and All Parts of the Rockaways in Queens; Discusses Safety Precautions All New Yorkers Should Take Before and During the Storm*

*Visit [NYC.gov](http://NYC.gov) or Call 311 for Information about Evacuation Zones and Steps to Take to Prepare for the Hurricane*

*The following are Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg's remarks as delivered this afternoon at City Hall:*

"Well good afternoon. The sun is shining, but don't be misled. There is a very dangerous storm headed in our direction, and it could go slightly to the east or slightly to the west. It could speed up, it could close down, it could grow or diminish in intensity, but there is no question that we are going to get hit with some wind and high water that is very dangerous. And it's hard to believe when you look outside and see the sun, but it is in some sense the calm before the storm. And you only have to look at the weather maps to understand just how big this storm is, and how unique it is. And it's heading basically directly for us.

"We're here to bring you up to date on the City's ongoing preparations concerning Hurricane Irene, and let me start by saying we are opening, as of 4:00 PM today, 91 emergency facilities. They're a combination of evacuation centers and emergency shelters. They're being staffed by City employees, some on a volunteer basis.

"As you know, we think New Yorkers have the greatest workforce of any city in the nation, and I just wanted to start out by thanking them and their colleagues across the city for stepping up now and giving their time and effort to help New Yorkers who need shelter from the coming storm.

"The evacuation plan that we announced yesterday, I'm happy to say, is working smoothly. I'll discuss it in detail in a minute. And because Irene is now bearing down on us at a faster speed than it was yesterday, we are changing a few things. We are today issuing a mandatory - I repeat the word mandatory - evacuation order for all New Yorkers who live in the low-lying Zone A coastal areas in all five boroughs that are at greatest risk of damage relating to Irene, and we're adding to that the rest of the Rockaways, some of which are not Zone A, but are Zone B.

"Health Commissioner Tom Farley will be working with seniors homes and nursing homes and the two hospitals that are in the Zone B part of the Rockaways to try to find alternative sites for their residents. People who live in private homes, we want you to leave the Rockaways, and this is all due to the exposure to the ocean of the Rockaways, and the potential that emergency services may not be provided due to the closing of bridges.

"Bridges aren't going to fall down, but there is a point when the winds get so strong that they close because cars and trucks could be blown off them. What we're concerned about in the Rockaways, unlike other parts of the city that may be in low-lying areas, or even slightly higher, if something were to happen and you needed emergency services in the Rockaways, we're not sure that in the worst case we'd be able to get those services to you. So that is something that is different than yesterday.

"We're also moving up the time that we want everybody out, and that is by 5:00 PM tomorrow, Saturday. In a storm with wind and very high tides, there are risks that endanger public safety. I can't stress it enough. Please, nature is a force more powerful than any of us, and it really is better to be safe than sorry.

"The low-lying coastal areas that will be endangered most by storm surge include Coney Island and Manhattan Beach in Brooklyn, Far Rockaway and Broad Channel in Queens, South Beach, Midland Beach, and other low-lying areas on Staten Island, Battery Park City in Manhattan, and some small sections of the Bronx. As I said before, we are also adding a full evacuation of all people living in private homes are apartments in the Rockaways.

"In addition, you should know that MTA service, including subways, buses and railroads, will begin to shut down tomorrow at noon, and Jay Walder will describe that and other measures in a moment. Depending on the effect of the storm, let me just caution you also in regards to the MTA that service may or may not be restored in time for rush hour Monday morning, so I would urge employees to check with their employers regarding business openings on Monday.

"Now, we have never done a mandatory evacuation before - and we wouldn't be doing this now if we didn't think the storm had the potential to be very serious. The best outcome would be if the storm veers off to the east and doesn't hit us, or doesn't hit us hard, but we can't depend on mother nature being so kind. We have to prepare for the worst and hope for the best. And just because this is the first time we've had a mandatory evacuation of any part of the city, I just once again want to repeat this is very serious. Do not be fooled by the sun outside. That is the calm before the storm. And you can't wait until there are gale force winds and driving rains arrive, it will be too late then. You have to start your preparations to leave right now.

"Keep in mind, afternoon tomorrow you're not going to have the advantage of mass transit to help you do that. So if you were to leave today, that would be very helpful. And tomorrow, if you call Access-a-Ride, Jay Walder will talk about it, but they just don't have the capacity to take large numbers of people in any one day in a short span of time. So in spite of the good weather, if you want to be safe, now's the time to start moving.

"We expect that most New Yorkers affected by this evacuation order will find places to stay with relatives or friends who live in safer areas. However, as I said at the beginning of this, evacuation centers and shelters for those who need it will be open by 4:00 PM this afternoon, and they are staffed and equipped to accommodate the people we expect. But if the capacity were to be much greater than we have planned for, we certainly have the capacity to expand very quickly.

"We'll say more in a few minutes about how this system will work - a system that we put a lot of thought and effort into developing in order to avoid the kinds of problems that occurred during Hurricane Katrina. But let me first try to bring you up to date about the information about the strength and the path, and where this hurricane is likely to arrive in our area.

"The National Weather Service at the moment, and I keep reminding you this could change anytime, the National Service has put the entire New York metropolitan area under a hurricane watch, which means that sustained winds of 74 miles per hour or more are forecast - for Saturday evening through Sunday. At the moment, the strongest winds are expected to arrive early evening tomorrow, and to continue into late afternoon on Sunday.

"The current forecast is that Irene will reach the New York metropolitan area as a Category 1 storm. The ground speed of the storm has accelerated; gale forces winds of 40 miles an hour are the beginning of the storm, and they will grow significantly. We don't what they will grow to, but the full brunt of the storm if you're in its way, it's a lot more powerful than any of us. Certainly the best case scenario is very high winds and a lot of rain, and very, very high tides. Those are the things you're going to see, and we want to give you some ideas as to how to stay safe.

"As I stressed yesterday, our first obligation is to protect the most vulnerable New Yorkers in Zone A's low lying coastal areas. And I just wanted to bring you up to date on what we did yesterday. Hospital patients, those in nursing homes, homes for the aged and other New Yorkers who are in these homes yesterday were directed to leave by eight o'clock last night- or eight o'clock today. That has been done, everybody has been moved, there were no exceptions made by Tom Farley - and in all fairness, nobody even asked for exceptions.

"In the rest of the area, Coney Island Hospital, both campuses of Staten Island University Hospital, the Veterans Affairs Hospital in Manhattan, and NYU Medical Center on Manhattan's Upper East Side are evacuating their patients to other hospitals.

"Yesterday's Executive Order also covered eight nursing homes, one psychiatric facility, and eight adult care centers. All of those, as I said, have been or are in the process of evacuating. Most facilities are completing this process themselves. A lot of these facilities have contracted with people to help them, but in some cases City ambulance crews have been called in to help, and we're glad to provide that service.

"Another vulnerable population we are concentrating on is the homeless. We have four homeless shelters for families and four shelters for single adults in Zone A. The clients of these shelters will be relocated to our Bedford Atlantic shelter in Brooklyn and the El Camino shelter in Jamaica, Queens. We are also moving clients out of our intake center at 30th Street and 1st Avenue in Manhattan. At the same time, outreach teams are stepping up their activity to bring homeless clients who are living on the streets indoors.

"We are also taking steps to help those who, because of age, illness, or disability, are homebound. Home care providers are activating their emergency plans. On a case-by-case basis, we will authorize 'sleep-in services' to help clients that have complex needs and no other supports in the community. There are also 15 foster care residential shelters, you should know, in Zone A. Our Administration for Children's Services is working closely with the agencies operating those programs to ensure that each facility has a safety plan in place for all children at those facilities.

"Our other organizations are taking steps to keep their communities safe. For instance, many of the city's universities - including Fordham, NYU, St. John's and Columbia - are postponing the move-in date for incoming freshman from Sunday to Monday. So it's fun to move into college, it's an exciting time, but doing it in the middle of a hurricane probably would not be the best experience and way to start your college education. So I'm glad that they've seemed to move that.

"For some people, their port in the storm will be an emergency City shelter. We, as I said before, developed our Coast Storm Plan back in 2006 to prevent the kinds of problems we saw during Katrina when some centers and shelters were overloaded while others were strikingly empty. We put a lot of effort into designing a more efficient system so that when we need it - such as now - all we have to do is implement a plan, not develop it from scratch. That's why we work so hard when the weather is good to make sure that when something goes wrong we're ready.

"The centers and shelters are organized on what we call a solar system model. Five to 10 shelters are organized around each evacuation center, where the initial intake process would take place. The system is designed for efficiency in supplying and supporting the shelters, and to eliminate any bottlenecks that may develop, and to ensure that each location has sufficient quantities of food, water, blankets and other essential supplies. The shelters and centers will be staffed by City employees from non-first responder agencies. The first responders have plenty of other things to do.

"Employees who have been designated by their agencies to staff emergency shelters should be reporting to the assignment locations today. These sites will also be staffed by school safety agents and supplied with food from the Department of Education's Office of School Foods, and security will, of course, be provided by the NYPD.

"NYC.gov, as you know, just got so overloaded that unfortunately the system crashed a few times. It is currently experiencing three times its average volume of traffic, which has made access to the site problematic for some. Yesterday, NYC.gov had 4.3 million hits - shattering the previous high of 2.2 million on January 26th. To alleviate this pressure, we began adding additional servers yesterday and are also off-loading some traffic to external commercial servers.

"NYC.gov is back up and running, but if you are unable to access the site at any time over the weekend, you can receive updates via Twitter from @nycmayorsoffice and @notifynyc. But even if that doesn't work, you certainly can call 311, and it may take a few minutes, but we have additional staff in the offices keeping up pretty much with the demand.

"As Irene arrives, safety is going to become increasingly important, and we want all New Yorkers to keep a few things in mind. From 9:00 PM tomorrow evening until 9:00 PM Sunday, for those 24 hours, New Yorkers really should take the following precautions. First, stay indoors. It's fun being out, but this is dangerous. There is flying glass, there's tree limbs, there's who knows what - a basket, a piece of patio furniture that was left out unprotected. It's just very dangerous when the winds get this high and when the rains are so heavy that you can't see where you're going.

"Second, avoid being near glass windows. There's always a risk of flying debris shattering windows, and that risk increases if you're in a high-rise, on the 10th floor or higher. For your own safety, stay in rooms with no or few windows, and close the doors to rooms where there are more windows. Don't stand or congregate in a glassed in lobby or atrium, it's exactly the same problem.

"Third, many apartment buildings also have basement or rooftop mechanical equipment, such as water towers, pumps, water heaters, and the mechanics for elevators. They may be damaged by flooding, so a good precaution is to fill a bathtub or sink with potable water. High-rise residents should also be aware that flooding or wind damage may cause power outages that will prevent elevators from operating. If you can, take the stairs, particularly if it's only a few stories. It just reduces the number of people that may get trapped. Keep in mind, one of the things we're worried about is the safety of the public, but also the safety of our first responders who put their lives in danger to protect the public and to save the public. If the public took care at the beginning to not run some risks, it would be better for them and it would also be better for our first responders, and let our first responders focus on those who got themselves into trouble.

"The Buildings Department, you should know, did issue a stop work order that will suspend all construction in the five boroughs from 2:00 PM tomorrow until 7:00 AM on Monday. That includes renovations at City Hall, and also extends to the operation of tower cranes at the World Trade Center Site.

"Currently, 13 of the 24 tower cranes active in the city are located at the World Trade Center site. For those that want to know, this work stoppage will not have any effect on the scheduled opening of the 9/11 Memorial in time for the 10th anniversary of that tragic day. Since Wednesday, inspectors have been inspecting construction sites across the city to ensure equipment is properly secured. Working with other City agencies, they will continue conducting inspections over the weekend to make sure the stop-work order is being followed.

"The Department of Environmental Protection and the Department of Transportation are inspecting dozens of flood-prone locations to do everything they can to keep catch basins clear and able to handle the extra rain water. Having said that, the forecast for eight to 12 inches of rain is something that the system just is not going to be able to handle in every single case. So you know, when you go under a bridge and it's a catchment area, be very careful. Even if the grates were cleaned today, leaves and other stuff get washed in and then all of a sudden you have a flood where you didn't have one a few minutes earlier.

"As Irene approaches, keeping City streets free for buses and emergency vehicles - that is crucial. And for that reason, we're suspending alternate side parking and meter rules on Sunday and Monday. And as I said yesterday, if you live in a Zone A, don't park your car outside the door in a low lying area. Drive it to some place that's higher, even if it takes a little while to walk there and pick it up on Monday. You'll save your car. To ease travel around the City, starting at 9 pm Saturday we will implement a 'zone-fare' plan that will make most rides less expensive in taxis and will encourage group rides and permit livery drivers to make street pick-ups.

"It's the same plan we used during the transit strike of 2005. And every little bit helps. And when and if driving conditions become too hazardous, the Taxi & Limousine Commission does have the ability to send text messages to all drivers advising them of that.

"If sustained wind speeds reach 46 miles an hour and navigation becomes difficult, the Staten Island Ferry service may be suspended. Safety is the most important thing. I know it's inconvenient, but these boats are big, and it's very difficult to land them at the dock when the winds are blowing anything at that speed or higher. Commuter ferry services operated by the Economic Development Corporation will stop after this evening's rush hour. Once wind speeds reach 50 miles per hour, we'll take a hard look at closing the City bridges. Now keep in mind, some bridges are City bridges, some a TBTA bridges which Jay can talk about, some are Port Authority Bridges - so there's three different agencies involved, and the City bridges tend to be smaller and closer to the ground than something like the Verrazano, which is a TBTA bridge, or the George Washington, which is a Port Authority bridge. Each agency will look at each of their own bridges and make their own decisions.

"To clear City streets, we're also right now revoking City permits for street fairs, block parties, and similar events on Sunday, and in Zone A - low-lying areas - on Saturday as well. The rain forecast for tomorrow is such that I don't think very many people would go to these events anyway, but we just don't need any more traffic on the streets or things blowing around than is absolutely necessary. As to any such activities in other parts of the city scheduled for Saturday, we've amended their permits to require that they stop serving the public by 2:00 PM tomorrow.

"City beaches will be closed Saturday and Sunday and remain closed until they can be operated safely. Please, please, please, don't go in the water. The tides will be much stronger than people can cope with, and it's just a tragedy waiting to happen.

"We've placed similar restrictions on outdoor TV and film permits. Marinas run by the Parks Department will be closed starting 6:00 PM Saturday, and all customers will be required to leave. The Dave Matthews concert on Governors Island that was scheduled for tonight will go ahead, but the concert scheduled for Saturday and Sunday nights are cancelled.

"The Mets games for Saturday and Sunday have been cancelled. I talked to the Wilpons today pointing out that there would not be any mass transit to get people to and from Citi Field, and since over a third of their customers come via mass transit it obviously would be very difficult to get them there. Also, the forecast is, in any case, for rains that would prevent baseball from being played.

"Fans going to the Jets-Giants game Saturday over in New Jersey should know that MTA service will likely not be available to them, so after the game they can get back if they can to New York City, but they won't be able to get around - the buses and subways will not be running.

"And let me repeat one more time before I turn things over to Speaker Quinn, because of the danger of falling limbs or trees and blowing glass and furniture and who knows what, please stay out of the parks on Sunday. And if you can possibly do it, stay inside on Sunday. It's a good time to catch up or sleep late or anything, but it would be great if we could wake up Monday morning and say that there were no tragedies. Unfortunately with a storm this size, the likelihood, the dangers, is great, and the likelihood of tragedies exists. And we do everything we can to keep that from happening."