

FIA-FINS Storm Update—October 30, 2012

FIA and FINS have conferred on the following update for the FIA Board and the members of your respective communities. Please be advised that the situation on the Island is evolving, and the facts and timing of the information described here is subject to change. You may have read or heard about this information from other sources, but we want to summarize it all in one place for you.

1. The Storm: Sandy is still considered a weather event for Fire Island, with at least two more high tides (tonight and tomorrow) which may cause further damage to already compromised property, dunes and bay side infrastructure.
2. Health and Safety: As you have heard, approximately 120 people remained out on the Island during the storm. Officials have been in contact with these folks, and a County/State/ National Guard contingent transported many of them off the Island today. There may be more evacuations tomorrow as needed. It will come as no surprise to you that many of our year round residents and first responders opted to stay put and do what they can to help get the Island up and running again.
3. Incident command: In emergency events such as this one, an Incident Command protocol is put into operation, with representatives from all the responsible agencies. In the case of Fire Island, the IC team includes the County, State, two Towns, FINS, SCPD, and representatives of local Island Fire Departments. The Incident Command HQ is at the Fire Island Coast Guard station.
4. Suffolk County is the Lead Agency: Steve Bellone, Suffolk County Executive, held a press conference at the Coast Guard station this afternoon. He emphasized that health and safety is the key priority right now, especially the effort to determine that there is no one left on the Island who may need assistance. He went on to stress that the goal of the County right now is to promote the clean-up and restoration of services in main land communities. As you have no doubt seen on the TV news, these Long Island villages and towns suffered widespread flooding and devastation in the storm. Islip Supervisor Tom Croci reinforced the message that, while every effort will be made to support the Fire Island recovery, the mainland infrastructure and community needs must take priority.
5. Preliminary damage assessment : Aerial photos, quick tours by local officials, and reports from communities indicate that there is widespread and extensive damage to property and infrastructure on the Island. Various photos and eye witness reports that have been posted by people on the Island reinforce these assessments in graphic detail—“Like it was hit by a bomb” “Never seen anything like it” Individual communities have reported their losses in sobering messages, but there has not yet been an official damage assessment.

Although there were many overwashes (ocean to bay running water) in several communities, preliminary reports are that there are no actual breaches in

the developed sections of the Island. There are however two potential breaches (defined as water running from ocean to bay for three consecutive tide cycles) on the eastern end of the Island. (One is in the Wilderness area, and one down near Smith Point County Park). These areas will be monitored, and decisions will be made by a multi-agency task force about how and when to proceed.

6. Access to the Island: Access to the Island is currently being strictly controlled by County and State officials. There is currently no power throughout the entire island, and availability of water is also compromised in some areas.
 1. Only authorized individuals will be allowed back on the beach until health and safety conditions in the communities are assessed. This will be accomplished by teams of first responders, made up of SCPD, Park Rangers, State OEM officials and local FD members, who will go through each community and assess the conditions 'on the ground.'
 2. After the health and safety conditions on the Island have been verified, residents will be allowed back on the Island.
 3. The Fire Island Ferries terminals in Bay Shore were seriously flooded during the storm, and are still under water when the tide rises. Until the damage to terminal premises and equipment has been repaired, and until public access has been approved by the County, ferry service to the beach will not be available. The same is true for East End ferry companies. Please continue to check the ferry web sites for updates.
 4. Reports indicate that marinas and boat basins on the Island are still under water. The structural integrity of these mooring facilities has not yet been determined. The IC task force is stressing that it is not safe for private boats to try to come to the Island until further notice.

It has been a very long and stressful day for all Fire Islanders. We hope that this information on the day's events is helpful to you as you work to communicate with your residents. The damage assessment process will start in earnest tomorrow, and we will circulate another update at the end of the day (10/31) to keep you informed (to the best of our ability) in a very complicated and challenging situation.

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