

President's Message

A Community Effort

BY ALLAN K. FLEEGER, AIHA® PRESIDENT



A community's strength is rarely as evident as in times of crisis. For AIHA members in and around New York City and northern New Jersey, one such crisis began in late October with the arrival of Hurricane Sandy. By the time this issue of *The Synergist*® went to press in mid-December, some residents were still without power, and many faced extensive repairs. Needless to say, many of the people engaged in relief efforts did not have the proper equipment or training.

As the scale of the damage became apparent, AIHA's Board of Directors quickly approved a \$10,000 donation to the American Red Cross. Members of AIHA's New York City Metro and New Jersey Local Sections also came together to help relief workers and affected residents. The members who volunteered their time to coordinate the delivery of personal protective equipment, who walked New York's five boroughs to offer advice to people dealing with mold and other hazards, are living demonstrations of what we have long known: that AIHA has some of the most dedicated and selfless volunteers of any nonprofit organization, and that the altruistic motivation behind many industrial hygienists' choice of profession is alive and well.

Equipment Drive and Education

Soon after the hurricane made landfall on Oct. 29, AIHA member Jack Caravanos contacted the president of the New York Metro Local Section (AIHA-NYM), Damon Baumann, and suggested that members put together an equipment drive. PPE was urgently needed for relief workers and residents who were cleaning up after the storm. Caravanos, a professor of environmental health and industrial hygiene at Hunter College in New York City, offered to set up a distribution center at Hunter and help coordinate delivery of donated items to relief workers and affected residents.

Baumann then e-mailed AIHA-NYM's contacts and asked for donations of supplies. The request came to the AIHA office in Virginia, and AIHA forwarded the request to AIHce exhibitors and other companies.

One of those companies responded in dramatic fashion. Draeger Medical, Inc. donated more than 56,000 N95 respirators, which were gratefully received at the Hunter College drop-off. Over a single weekend, Caravanos and other AIHA volunteers distributed more than 40,000 of Draeger's respirators to relief workers.

In addition, Caravanos and a few other members volunteered to walk around affected neighborhoods and offer advice to those engaged in activities such as ripping out basements. These members are educating homeowners about the need to wear proper head and eye protection.

The New Jersey Local Section (AIHA-NJ) also contributed by taking up a collection for residents affected by Sandy at its November meeting. In mid-December, AIHA-NJ's president, Barry Weissman, represented the local section at a meeting of the New Jersey Industrial Safety Committee. The Committee discussed ways to help workers and homeowners. One idea was to create mold awareness training that volunteers could view on a DVD or tablet.

Ways to Help

For those of us who aren't affected by the storm, it's hard to believe that Sandy's effects were still being felt many weeks later. When contacted by *The Synergist*®, Mark Drozdov, past president of AIHA-NYM, gave this sobering account: "You're walking into people's houses and the walls are wet, the floors are soft, there's no heat, there's obviously no hot water and no electricity, and then you have mold growing. The fact that it's been over a month since the hurricane hit and they still don't have the basics speaks volumes."

But there are ways the rest of us can contribute. Caravanos has set up two "wish lists" on Amazon.com at <http://bit.ly/safetyensemble> and <http://bit.ly/sandyppe>. When you purchase items on the wish lists, they are shipped to the Hunter College site. Items include hand sanitizer, booties, Tyvek suits, and other PPE. A full ensemble can be purchased for around \$60.

On behalf of AIHA, I extend my sincere gratitude to everyone who has contributed to the relief effort, including Draeger Medical and the outstanding members of our local sections. Their response to this crisis has shown our profession at its best. 🙏

Allan K. Fleeger, CIH, CSP, is president of AIHA and global product stewardship and Regulatory Affairs manager, ExxonMobil Chemical Company, Houston, Texas. He can be reached at (281) 870-6113 or allan.k.fleeger@exxonmobil.com.