

To the VSNAP Committee

What ever happens, we might as well accept the fact that any given emergency will not play out as predicted. In preparation for this past event, the warnings were out there for days in advance. Anyone with a chain saw had it sharpened and ready. We were prepared for wind, fallen trees blocking the roadways and streams, and downed power lines, but what we got instead was massive flooding destroying our roads, our bridges our ditches and our driveways. It damaged virtually all of our municipal infrastructure.

If heavy weather were to threaten VY, then it is also going to affect all the surrounding towns – including the roads – the big roads and the small ones. Route 9 runs through the Town of Marlboro. The washouts on Route 9 meant that all traffic – cars, trucks, semi's, emergency vehicles – everything heading east or west, was detoured onto one or two small, steep dirt roads ill equipped in every way to handle the increased traffic. For a while there were no passable roads in or out of the Town of Marlboro – for anyone. Each time a large trailer truck went off the road, traffic in both directions was halted, sometimes for hours.

The coordination of information between the adjacent towns, the state police, VEM, the sheriff and the road crew was undependable and often incorrect. For a while the National Guard stationed west of us was directing people to town roads that were closed causing confusion and lack of confidence in the systems in place. Jurisdiction and authority for posting warnings or alerts at washed out sections of Route 9 within the town were unclear, creating extremely dangerous conditions for local and through traffic.

We tend to think in terms of being prepared to care for our own residents. However, there were many out of state travelers using Route 9 as a through road who suddenly became stranded, unable to proceed in either direction. The town's only small convenience store had no power, gas or phone, the one inn that was open was already full. Local families came forward to house and feed the stranded travelers.

Sociologist Charles Perrow describes his Normal Accident Theory as follows:

“As technological systems become ever more complex. disasters that appear to result from a confluence of bad coincidences become. in fact, unavoidable. as a failure in one part causes a failure in another and another in ways that no designer could predict.”

Marlboro was lucky – no lives were lost, only one house washed away, bridges and roads can and are being fixed by our excellent hard working road crew. However given our geography, infrastructure and the unpredictability of an unforeseen event, one has to wonder what would happen if a mass evacuation was necessary. I am not optimistic about the outcome.

Thank You
Lucy Gratwick
Select Board Chair
Marlboro, Vt.