

UNIFORMED
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FIRE OFFICERS
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ASSOCIATION

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Testimony on Hurricane Sandy and FDNY's Response
Before the City Council
January 16, 2013

1. Maintain the “Fabric of Fire Service” in NYC by restoring the 20 companies to permanent status in the Executive Budget and prevent the closing of any fire units in the foreseeable future

During and in the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy, the FDNY units, staffing, equipment and resources were extremely overtaxed yet performed heroically in spite of these limitations and the storm's extreme conditions. For example, of the 75 serious incidents (mostly fires) that occurred between Oct 29 and Nov. 1st, we estimate that 33 incidents did not receive adequate unit assignments compared to the requirements set by the Fire Department's Alarm level for staffing incidents. In 3 cases, incidents did not receive the proper alarm assignment level either, leading to even more drastic shortages in units on the scene in addition to overall problems maintaining situational awareness for the City as a whole (See Table 1).

NO serious incidents between October 29th and November 1st received a proper First Alarm Assignment of 4 Engines and 3 Ladders within NFPA guidelines of 480 seconds. Of the 75 serious incidents that occurred, only 39 (52%) even received the full alarm resource levels. The remaining 37 incidents functioned with less than 7 companies (See Table 2).

Thanks to the City Council under the leadership of Speaker Quinn and the support of the Fire and Criminal Justice Committee and its Chair Elizabeth Crowley, we had at least a fighting chance to save lives during this devastating storm.



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2. Adequate Supervision

Anytime there is a major incident like a hurricane, tornado, blackout, earthquake, etc. a plethora of complex emergencies occur with a host variables that adversely affect the safety for both responders and civilians. These emergencies require a tighter “span of control” due to the imposing dangers and technical complexity faced by the operating units. The normal span is one supervisor per five firefighters but in emergencies created by Hurricane Sandy, the span of control need to be tighter. Several units were operating without supervision to fulfill special assignments during the hurricane. This created an extremely dangerous situation for our firefighters and the civilians they were assisting. We were extremely lucky that we did not lose more civilians and any FDNY members. The UFOA strongly recommends that an officer be present anytime an FDNY unit is deployed during future major incidents. No FDNY units should operate without adequate supervision during these major events.

Additionally, there should be serious consideration of reopening a Division in Southern Brooklyn which is currently served by Division 8 in Staten Island. Due to the increase in population, housing and Fire Department workload, especially during major incidents like Hurricane Sandy and throughout the Brush Fire seasons, it's imperative to keep Division 8 dedicated to adequately service the citizens of Staten Island. A new Battalion should also be opened in South Queens because the workload has increased significantly and there has been a tremendous housing and population boom in the Rockaways which adds to the complexity of delivering adequate fire service because it is an isolated peninsula. For example, during Hurricane Sandy Battalion 47, which covers the entire Rockaway peninsula, was operating at a major fire at Beach 130 Street when the Breezy Point fire was reported. The first arriving Battalion to the Breezy Point fire responded from Grand Avenue in Elmhurst which was over 20 miles away.

3. UCT/ Dispatch Problems during the storm

A. Inefficiencies in *resource assignments, travel times and travel distances* happened throughout the hurricane.

On average, it took 27 minutes for the first 7 companies to arrive on the scene of an emergency, where the NFPA recommends that this should occur within 8 minutes to 90% of incidents. At the worst incidents during the storm, the time it took to fill the first alarm assignment was unacceptable. For example,

Breezy Point Box 8300: It took 1:35:26 for just 7 companies to be in place to the Breezy Point incident where 110 homes were lost. Of the first 7 companies, 5 travelled between 18 and 25 miles to get to Breezy Point, as most first arriving companies came from Manhattan.

At Beach 115th St. in Queens Box 1377: Up to 9 buildings were involved, it was not until 2hours, 25 minutes and 44 seconds after the incident was first reported that a 2nd and 3rd company were even *assigned* to the incident. It took 4 hours and 33 minutes for the 5th company (Engine 326) to arrive on scene.

At Beach 130th St. Bell Harbor Box 1407: Only 9 companies appear to have been dispatched to multiple buildings on fire, with the first arriving company, L012 was driving from West 19th St in Manhattan 20 miles to get to the incident for a response time of over 42 minutes.



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These three incidents are prime examples of drastic inadequacies in staffing levels, response times, and the amount of time it took to bring in the first Alarm Assignment of 7 companies, that a basic All-Hands working fire would get on a normal day in New York City. To make a comparison, according to data on over 15,000 structural responses between 2002 and 2010 for New York City, there were 310 fires that involved more than one building. On average, these incidents received 26 fire companies, and up to 223 companies total, yet the fires on Beach 130th and 115th street did not even receive a full first alarm assignment of 7 companies.

Hurricane Average Response Times

- The worst response times occurring between noon on Monday October 29th and noon on Tuesday October 30th, with response times to serious incidents averaging ***over 10 minutes.***
- For the 75 serious incidents that occurred between Oct 29 and Nov 1st, the average response time was 7 minutes, 43 seconds

B. Lack of Situational Awareness and Priority Setting

- a. Alarm levels were not properly classified

Some serious incidents during the hurricane were under-classified by alarm level leading to incident staffing shortages and increased risk to firefighters, officers and the public.

For example:

Box 1407/1408 at Beach 130th St: Several buildings were involved, yet the incident was only ever classified as an initial alarm which by definition is *less than a 1st alarm*, requiring 5 companies.

Box 1377 at Beach 115th St: Several buildings were involved, yet this incident was also only classified as an initial alarm (*less than 1st alarm*)

Box 8300 At Breezy Point: With 110 buildings involved, this incident was classified as a 6th Alarm by the department. In July of 2012, there were two 7th Alarms in Brooklyn, one involving a single multiple dwelling, and the other involving an abandoned factory, both of these incidents received higher staffing levels than the Breezy Point and Beach 115/130th St fires, although they were far smaller in size and impact. By the way, other than the WTC fire on September 11, 2001, this was the worse fire in NYC in 100 years.

- b. Poor resource tracking



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During the hurricane, there were several reports of companies passing one another to get to incidents in opposite directions. In addition, incident data show cases where resources were assigned but never arrived, or resources were reportedly working incidents, yet they do not exist in the incident history data. Understandably, companies were so strapped to assist, that the logistics of notifying their arrival to dispatch was not always feasible. However, the tracking of resources by whether or not they were available in *real time* must become a goal for the FDNY. Getting adequate resources to the people of New York in a timely matter became extremely difficult because of severe problems tracking and assigning resources during the hurricane.

For example:

NOBODY knew how bad Staten Island was. The availability of fire units in Staten Island were near zero during the storm. For an isolated island, this creates an even dire situation in providing the necessary resources to assist civilians in danger. When the FDNY is under stress, there is a communication breakdown as Boroughs are operating relatively independently of each other. This leads to a break down in situational awareness into the full extent of the crisis Citywide.

Combined, problems tracking resources and setting priorities under the current UCT system led to a tremendous lack of situational awareness and foresight CITYWIDE during the storm. Earlier incidents had adequate staffing, such as the crane collapse in Manhattan, but critical incidents through the night of Oct 29-30th had drastic shortages.

Lessons Learned:

1. Critical need to maintain the “fabric of fire service” in this City and keep all existing fire companies open. In fact, this incident again showed that we need more companies, not less.

For example:

- a. There is a need to open an Engine Company in the Starrett City section of Brooklyn which would not only solidify the fire service in that community but support Coney Island and the Western Rockaway Peninsula (43% of the serious fires in this area in the last ten years had response times greater than 4 minutes);
 - b. There is a need to open a Battalion in South Queens to provide better coverage for the Beach Channel and Rockaway Peninsula.
 - c. There is a need for another Division in Brooklyn to better cover South Brooklyn and to provide the ability to keep the 8th Division in Staten Island.
2. Our members are truly remarkable! Under the most adverse of conditions, our members proved once again their level of commitment, sacrifice, heroism, ingenuity, resourcefulness to serving the citizens of the City. What our members lacked in resources they made up in sheer determination to save lives no matter the situation. Again we are lucky we did not lose a single member, but proper supervision aids greatly in safer, more effective operations.



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3. Incident Management Team (IMT) performed a remarkable job and once again proved its invaluable worth to this City and Country. Our IMT was activated after Hurricane Katrina and received national recognition for its exemplary job after that disaster. NYC and OEM recognize the knowledge and abilities of our IMT and its time to increase the team and its availability to other communities in this country. FEMA pays for the training, activation and the backfill of staffing in the FDNY when deployed which is a win-win for the City. The more trained FDNY members we have in the IMT, the overall improvement to the entire Department.
4. The Universal Call Taking System (UCT) failed once again! This extremely expensive system is broke and needs a serious overhaul. The success of an effective operation of saving civilian lives and property is the proper prioritization of dispatching of our fire units to the correct emergency and the correct location of that emergency.

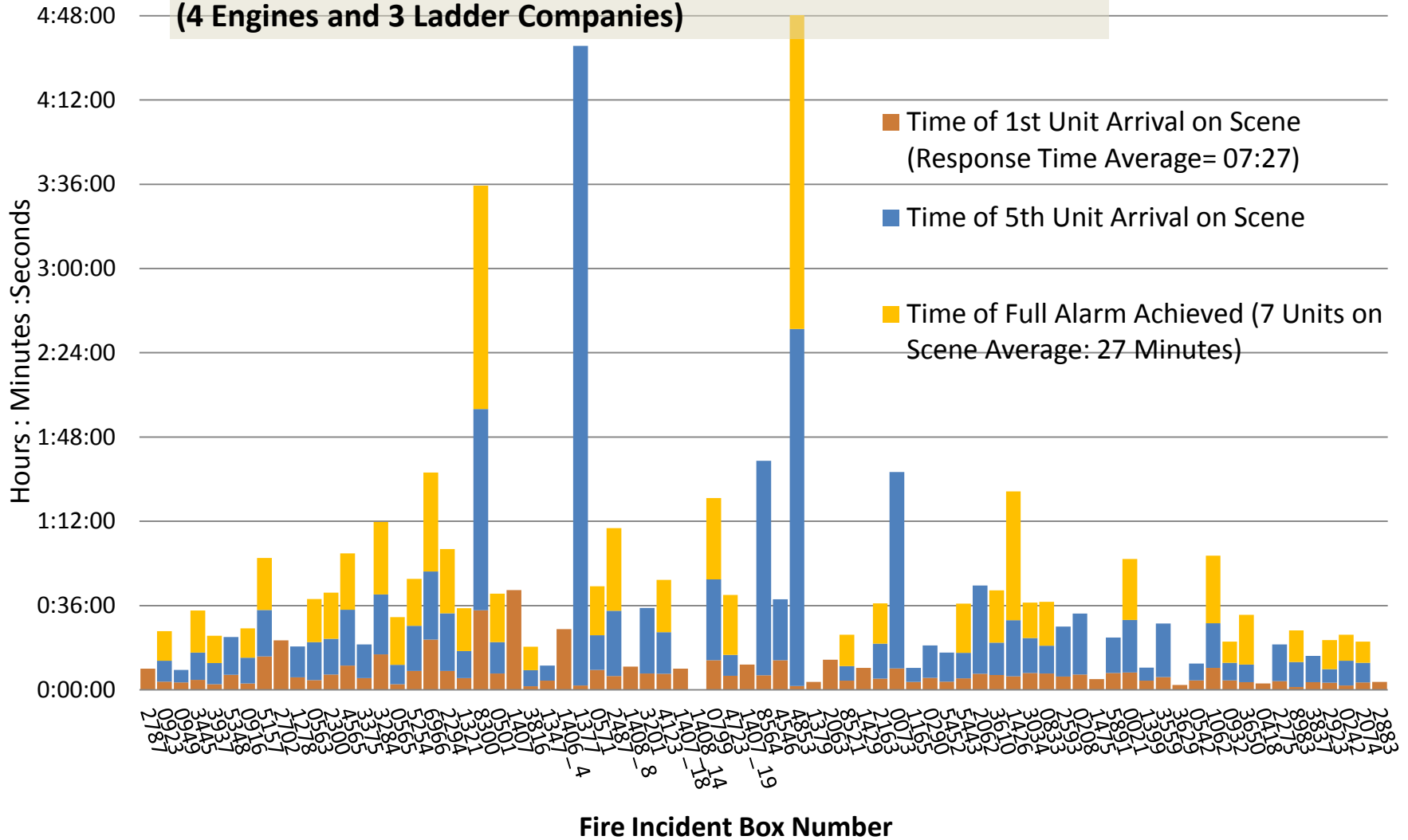


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Hurricane Sandy
Only 52% of the most serious incidents between Oct. 29 and Nov. 1
received a full First Alarm Assignment
(4 Engines and 3 Ladder Companies)

Amount of time it took to fill an incident with the 1st, 5th a 7th (full alarm assignment) during the hurricane



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Map B Box 8300 Breezy Point Fire

Start Date: October 29th 23:03:33 PM

| Order of Arrival* | Unit | Time Elapsed (h:mm:ss) |
|-------------------|------|------------------------|
| 1 | L124 | 0:33:56 |
| 2 | E329 | 0:44:47 |
| 3 | L702 | 0:51:25 |
| 4 | E014 | 1:13:33 |
| 5 | E023 | 1:26:00 |
| 6 | L012 | 1:27:17 |
| 7 | L159 | 1:35:26 |

* Note, Engine 10 from lower Manhattan arrived early on but there is no record in the data for this company's arrival. Therefore the estimate does not include Engine 10

 Box 8300

 8300 Company

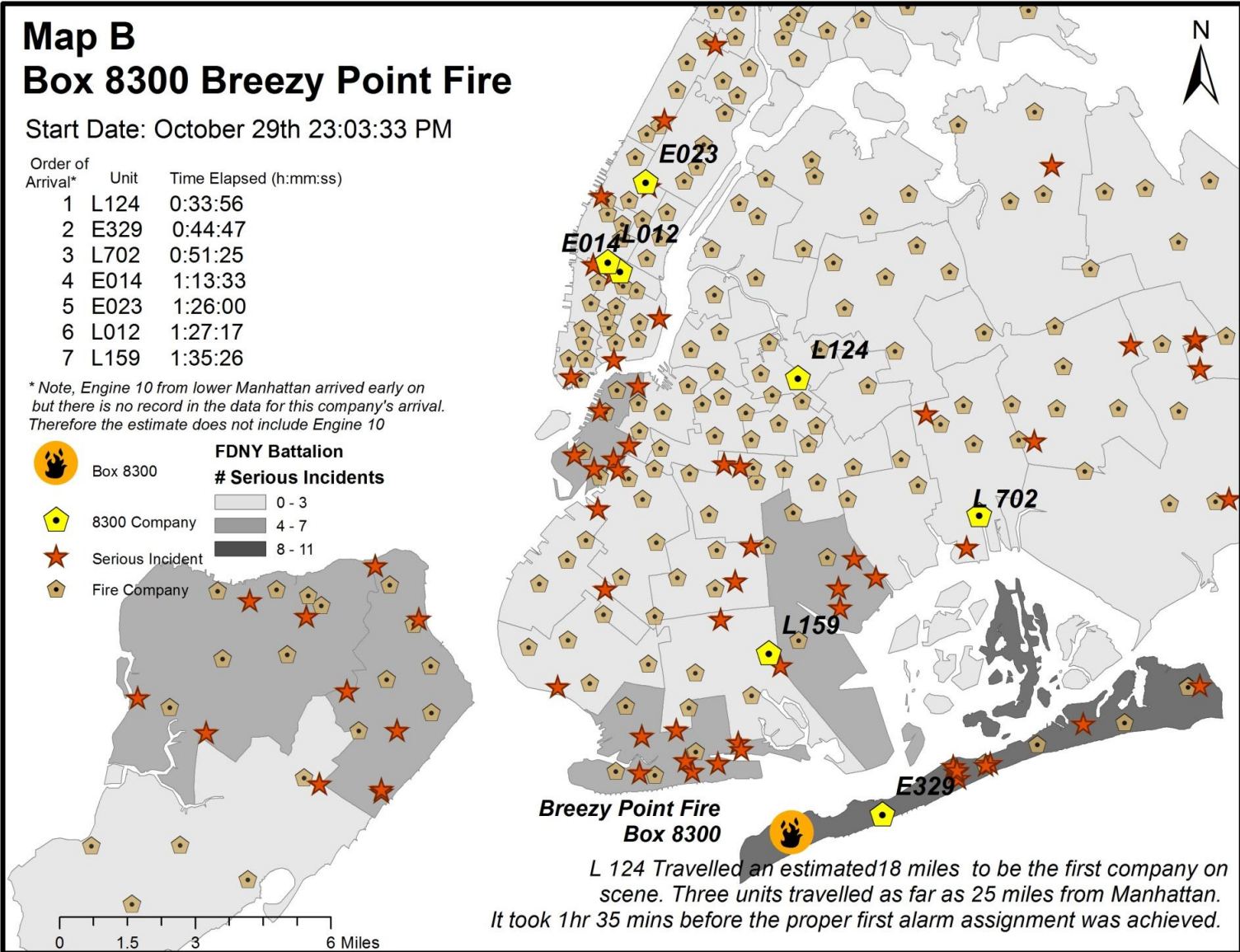
 Serious Incident

 Fire Company

FDNY Battalion

Serious Incidents

-  0 - 3
-  4 - 7
-  8 - 11



**Breezy Point Fire
Box 8300**

L 124 Travelled an estimated 18 miles to be the first company on scene. Three units travelled as far as 25 miles from Manhattan. It took 1hr 35 mins before the proper first alarm assignment was achieved.



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