

Hurricane Isabel Blows MWC

Hurricane Leaves Most Students In The Dark And Some Without Transportation

By AMY PRIBLE
Staff Writer

Hurricane Isabel was no lady when she slammed Mary Washington College late Thursday evening.

With wind gusts reaching up to 80 mph and trees snapping like twigs across campus, Isabel was one of the worst natural disasters to hit the college in some time.

According to Ruth Lovelace, director of Fire and Safety for Mary Washington College, it will still take a few days to begin to estimate the total damages done across campus.

"It's going to take a week to 10 days to even sort through the mess, let alone estimate total damages," she said. "There is a lot of roof damage and many, many trees down across campus, which I guarantee will end up costing the school a whole lot of money."

Lovelace was part of a team of professional staff members that carried out the college's Emergency Operations Plan (EOP) throughout the storm.

The EOP staff consists of representatives from Residence Life, campus police, Facility Services and Psychological Services, as well as a few other offices on campus. Headquarters were set up in meeting room one of Woodard Campus Center, complete with telephones, TVs, radios and a generator.

Staff members began preparing for the hurricane on Wednesday, constantly getting updates from the local weather service to assess what potential damage could be done to the college.

Lovelace said the decision to close early on Thursday came from President Anderson's office, but only after he had been briefed by several members of the college staff.

"Closing at 12:30 on Thursday was a really good call," Lovelace said. "They wanted to get a partial day in, and I don't think they could have done it better."

The Office of Residence Life and Housing briefed staff members on Wednesday night about hurricane

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Porsia Smith/Bullet



Peter Kelley/Bullet

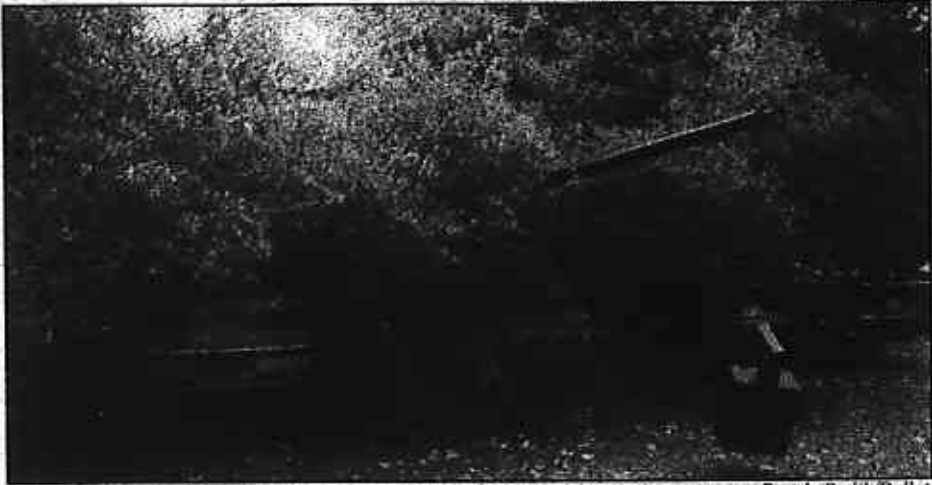
Above: A car becomes the unfortunate victim of a fallen tree in Sunken Lot.

Left: A tree is uprooted at Brompton, President Anderson's house.

Below Left: Construction workers are busy chipping debris at the MWC Apartments.

Below: A light pole smashes a car in Sunken Lot.

Campus Sustains Damages



Portia Smith/Bullet

Student cars parked in Sunken lot were damaged by trees and a light pole.

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preparations and "Shelter In Place" - the second time in college history that students were confined to the residence halls. The first "lockdown" occurred in late August of 1999 when Hurricane Bonnie hit Fredericksburg.

"Shelter In Place" began at 3 p.m. on Wednesday, which meant any student living in a residence hall had to either be signed out or remain in the building until further notice. There were waivers students could sign relieving the college of any liability if they chose to leave during "Shelter in Place."

Lovelace said she was very pleased at how well the students behaved throughout "Shelter In Place," but she was concerned about how many students came and went during the storm. She said Residence Life is now working with the Attorney General to see how far they can go with the restrictions in future disasters.

"It was just too much to worry about," Lovelace said. "Too many people were coming and going and we didn't know who was in or who was out. If something happened, such as a tornado, we wouldn't be able to get an accurate count of who was missing."

Susan Knick, director of Conference Management for the college, also served with the EOP staff throughout the storm.

"We had everything we needed in [the] room," she said. "The EOP has procedures for everything, from a dog bite to massive natural disasters."

Knick said the EOP staff had a color coded map of the campus which had the total number of residents present in each building and marked the marshalling points for each section of campus in case students had to evacuate because of a tornado.

She also said radios were present in each residence hall so that even if the power went out, everyone could remain in contact with the EOP headquarters.

The electricity went out across campus around 9 p.m. Thursday night. Power to half of the campus was back by late Friday morning. The MWC Apartments, which suffered the most damage, didn't get power until Saturday morning.

Hot water and cable were the last of the utilities to be turned back on after the storm. Many students were forced to shower with cold water until Sunday. Cable returned late Monday afternoon, to the relief of several students who were afraid they would miss the first episode of the final "Friends" season.

The main damage to the college occurred because of downed trees, several of which landed on student cars across campus.

"I almost cried because I thought my car was smashed," junior Tenezah Bishop said. "Someone

told me that a bunch of cars had been smashed by trees, right in the middle of the storm, and I was so worried that one of them was mine. I worried about it the rest of the night."

Although Bishop was lucky, at least four students were not. Trees lining Sunken road fell into the north Sunken lot, bringing the metal chain link fence and a light pole with them.

Sophomore Nam Duong's car, which had been parked in the Randolph lot, was damaged in the storm.

"A tree fell on my car," Duong said. "I found out Friday morning when I looked out the window. Then a guy from Facility Services came to me that morning because he had seen the damage and wanted to move the car out of the way. He said they would tow it free of charge."

Duong's 1992 Acura Legend remains at Facility Services and the cost of damage has not been determined.

"It's just bad luck," he said. "It's unfortunate, really."

Lovelace said she was glad the campus sustained only minimal damage.

"We got lucky," she said. "Areas around us got hit a lot harder than we did. It could have been much worse."

Both Lovelace and Knick were agreed with the overall turnout of help and support across campus. They both felt the Wood Company did an exceptional job keeping students and staff fed before, during and after the storm.

Seacobeck dining hall and the Eagles Nest provided take-away meals to students on Thursday, including dinner for Thursday evening and breakfast for Friday morning.

The Eagles Nest remained closed until Saturday. However, Seacobeck ran a normal schedule on Friday, despite being without power for most of the day.

"I'm absolutely amazed with the cooperation, dedication, hard work and effort that went into the preparation and follow through of the people involved: students, staff, you name it," Lovelace said. "We couldn't have done this alone."

In a statement released by the President's office, Bill Anderson said he too was very pleased with the cooperation shown during the hurricane.

"The college's EOP staff did a wonderful job in preparing and implementing our emergency plan," he said. "I want to especially thank the people in Facility Services and the police department for keeping our campus safe during the power outage and throughout the entire hurricane. This proves, yet again, that we are lucky to have a very capable, excellent staff. It was a job well done by everyone including the students."