

**FINAL MOBILE HOME REMOVAL PROJECT REPORT:
A SUMMARY OF ACTIVITIES, OUTCOMES, CHALLENGES AND
LESSONS LEARNED**



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Our Neighbors in Mobile Homes: Substantially Impacted by Tropical Storm Irene

Mobile homes comprise around 7% of Vermont’s housing stock and provide an affordable option to many Vermonters. It became evident soon after Tropical Storm Irene passed that our neighbors in mobile home parks were disproportionately impacted by the storm. Many of the communities impacted were located in low-lying flood hazard areas and mobile homes sustained substantial flood damage rendering many homes uninhabitable. A 2011 survey of mobile home park residents conducted by the University of Vermont, Department of Community Development and Applied Economics and the Champlain Valley Office of Economic Opportunity Mobile Home Program found that reported household median income in parks was \$30,000 as compared to the state median income of \$51,841 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Average park residency was 11 years. Irene left a lasting mark on many of our long-term community members with limited financial resources to rebound from her impact.



Patterson’s Mobile Home Park, November 2011

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Determining Critical Housing Needs Post-Irene

One critical need that mobile home residents faced in the aftermath of Tropical Storm Irene was finding a way to remove flood-damaged mobile homes without using already limited financial resources. With support from the Vermont Workers' Center, residents quickly organized themselves, meeting with disaster assistance officials from FEMA and the State of Vermont, connecting with advocacy organizations and the Vermont Community Foundation.

In the wake of the storm, many partners including Lt. Governor Phil Scott, Vermont Secretary of Commerce Lawrence Miller, Champlain Valley Office of Economic Opportunity Mobile Home Program, the Association of General Contractors, Vermont Longer Term Disaster Recovery Group collaborated to launch a statewide effort to assist homeowners with removing and demolishing flood-destroyed mobile homes.

Phase One: Collective demolition of mobile homes

The first phase of the home removal program involved the collective demolition of flood-destroyed homes in six of the most affected parks which included: Weston's Mobile Home Park, Berlin; Patterson's, Duxbury; Whalley's, Waterbury; Glen Park, Brattleboro; Riverside, Woodstock; and Green's in Sharon. The CVOEO Mobile Home Program identified households in need, collected homeowner intake information and provided overall coordination of the program. The Association of General Contractors carried out the site logistics and demolition operations. During the first phase of home removals, 68 homes were demolished and removed at a total cost of \$227,592 an average of \$3,347 per home. All of the homes were tested for asbestos and twelve of the sixty-eight homes required asbestos abatement.

Many mobile home owners were unable to utilize the early home removal program for a variety of reasons. Some homeowners had already paid the costs to demolish their mobile homes out-of-pocket while others were required to keep their homes standing and intact while determining their eligibility for FEMA individual assistance. Other unique and specific site conditions applied in certain circumstances that delayed the removal of flood affected homes. To address the unique circumstances faced by a variety of homeowners, two additional methods were used to assist households with the expense of removing their mobile home.

Phase Two: Mini-grants to reimburse demolition expenses

For those homeowners that incurred substantial out-of-pocket expenses paying for the cost of home removal, a mini-grant program was utilized to reimburse qualified

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homeowners for up to \$1,500 of their home demolition costs. A total of 21 grants totaling \$29,782 were awarded to homeowners in five parks and one homeowner on privately owned land.

Challenging Circumstances that Shaped Home Removal Strategy

In order to be considered for federal individual assistance awards mobile home units were required to remain intact for site inspections. Many homeowners were found ineligible for federal individual assistance or eligible for only minimal federal assistance largely due to the fact that no local jurisdiction or entity had the authority to condemn mobile home units that were uninhabitable because of mold.

Many partners including the Department of Housing and Community Development, Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), State fire safety inspectors, case managers from Central Vermont Community Action Council, Southeast Vermont Community Action and CVOEO Mobile Home Program as well as the Vermont Disaster Relief Fund had a role in facilitating a process whereby the Governor issued letters of condemnation. Condemnation letters enabled some mobile home owners with uninhabitable homes to then have their homes deemed destroyed by FEMA, thus qualifying households for maximum federal financial individual assistance. The Department of Housing and Community Development contacted a total of 363 flood-affected mobile home owners identified by FEMA and completed 50 intakes for households that might qualify for additional federal assistance. Before this condemnation process 16 households were eligible for maximum replacement grants and after the condemnation process a total of 82 households were found eligible.

The lengthy appeal and condemnation processes required many homeowners to keep their flood-damaged homes standing for anywhere between 10 and 14 months after Tropical Storm Irene. Many homeowners who went through the “condemn to be destroyed” process found themselves with an uninhabitable home and a long delay before determined eligible for financial assistance that could be utilized for replacement housing.

Despite some of the health and safety hazards caused by flood damage, some homeowners continued to live in their damaged mobile homes until they were able to find new, suitable housing. Other homeowners used their flood-damaged homes for storing belongings until they were able to rebuild or find new housing and thus were unable to remove their homes in the very early stages following Tropical Storm Irene. Some home site locations and terrain conditions required careful assessment so as not to disrupt infrastructure below ground, while other homes were located on parcels being considered for buyouts which required existing structures to remain on-site for assessments.

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Phase Three: Complex cases requiring individual home removal contracts

The CVOEO Mobile Home Program provided individual home demolition case management services and contractor coordination for seventeen homeowners: nine on privately owned land and eight located in parks. When the Mobile Home Program had committed nearly all Vermont Community Foundation Funds to assist households with home removal, The Mobile Home Program sought alternative routes to cover demolition expenses. Through close collaboration with the disaster recovery case management teams of central and southeast Vermont, the Long Term Disaster Recovery Group, and United Way an additional \$15,500 was leveraged to cover asbestos sampling, asbestos abatement and home demolition expenses. The Mobile Home Program served as a pass-thru for disaster relief monies from the United Way of Windham County and the Long Term Disaster Recovery Group to meet these needs. Additional disaster recovery funds were utilized for asbestos sampling and demolition expenses independent of the Mobile Home Program. In all, a total of \$55,895 from a mix of sources was utilized for the removal of these 17 mobile homes. Because some individual home removals were managed by a partnership of agencies and home removal expenses paid from several funding sources, complete cost data for asbestos sampling through demolition are not available. Complete home removal cost data is available for 11 of the 17 homes removed in this third project phase. \$3,866.72 was the average cost of demolition including asbestos sampling and asbestos abatement, if required.

Mobile Home Flood Recovery Home Demolition and Removal Activities

Recovery Activities	In park	On privately owned land	Total homes
Phase 1: Collective home demolition and removal	68	0	68
Phase 2: Mini-grants to homeowners to defray home removal costs	20	1	21
Phase 3: Individual home removal contracts	9	8	17
Total	97	9	106

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Mobile Home Parks Served		
Park	Town	No. Households Assisted
Greene's MHP	Sharon	5
Northeast Kingdom MHP	Lyndonville	1
Patterson's Park	Duxbury	14
Richard's MHP	Bethel	5
Riverside MHP	Woodstock	5
Tri-Park Cooperative (Glen/Mountain Home)	Brattleboro	13
Weston's MHP	Berlin	43
Whalley MHP	Waterbury	11
Total		97

Individual Homeowners Served	
Town	No. Households Assisted
Chester	1
Cavendish	1
Corinth	1
Hartford	1
Middlesex	1
Stockbridge	1
Whitingham	1
White River Junction	1
Wilmington	1
Total	9

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Mobile Home Removal Lessons Learned:

Managing Hazardous Materials:

- In the early demolition planning stages, we learned the importance of testing for and properly managing hazardous materials. Sixteen of the 71 complete structures deconstructed (23%) tested positive for the presence of asbestos and required abatement. It is critical that any future disaster recovery effort plan and budget for safe management of hazardous materials.

Asbestos Results	
No. of homes tested for asbestos	71
No. of homes tested positive for asbestos	16
% homes containing asbestos materials	22.5%

Asbestos Related Costs	
Average asbestos sampling cost per mobile home	\$368.52
Average abatement cost per mobile home	\$2,771.55
Average total asbestos sampling and abatement costs per mobile home	\$3,140.07

Record Keeping:

Tracking Data on Debris & Costs:

- During the bulk home removal phase of the program, the University of Vermont's Department of Community Development and Applied Economics utilized a portion of their disaster resilience research grant to hire an on-site data collection manager who kept records of the waste, weights, location and labor hours required to complete deconstruction work. Amidst the confusion of the recovery aftermath, this organized data collection has proved valuable for communicating the impact and costs associated with specifically home deconstruction in the context of disaster recovery. These data will be beneficial for planning for future weather events.

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Collecting Detailed Site Information:

- In the case of the phase three individual home demolitions, remotely deploying contractors to assess home conditions and carry out deconstruction services required obtaining both clear directions to the site as well as detailed information about the home and surrounding site conditions. Keeping records of site details was tremendously valuable in communicating homeowner needs and expectations as well as providing contractors with an accurate scope of work.

Collaboration:

Disaster Recovery Case Management

- Collaboration and communication with disaster recovery case management teams made for more effective problem solving in both identifying households in need and coordinating the appropriate timing and delivery of home removal. Having a local advocate to communicate with and coordinate related supporting documentation was a tremendous asset and helped CVOEO communicate with households that were otherwise challenging to reach. It took the Mobile Home Program some time to identify disaster recovery case managers and build partnerships with case management teams. In the future, we recommend making early contact with any case management provider network in place to as to better coordinate funding recovery activities and to have a fuller picture of all funding options available to homeowners for recovery.

In-Park Volunteer Coordinators

- One park had a volunteer resident representative that served as a communications liaison for elderly homeowners. Having an on-site volunteer recovery coordinator helped to facilitate the transfer of information and ensured that the elderly had access to the resources available in a timely fashion.

Rapport with Contractors

- Building a rapport with independent contractors and utilizing the services of the same contractor for multiple homes located in the same region allowed us to negotiate price and cluster the removal of independent homes outside of the large collective deconstruction effort.

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In-house Coordination

- While the Mobile Home Program relied on many external networks for support, referrals and technical expertise to distribute resources for this project, we also relied on our small internal staff for adapting to changes, and creating a program strategy that reflected on-the-ground needs. The small size of our staff permitted direct communication, quick problem solving and mobilization of resources as new needs and challenges were identified.

Leveraging Additional Resources:

The donations made to the Vermont Community Foundation Mobile Home Removal Project leveraged a number of other funding sources which were utilized to carry out various activities related to project administration as well as monies used to directly assist flood victims.

- CVOEO's Mobile Home Program First Stop Funding and Community Service Block Grant funding supplemented CVOEO project management expenses.
- The University of Vermont, Department of Community Development and Applied Economics, United States Department of Agriculture NIFA Disaster Resilience for Rural Communities Program funding enabled the tracking of waste management data and costs.
- Vermont Long Term Disaster Recovery and United Ways of Vermont Disaster Relief funds were also utilized to cover demolition expenses supplementing project donations.
- In-kind donation of services from All Metals Recycling and other contractors.

Project Summary:

Duration of Program: September 2011-December 2013 or 2 years and 3 months

Total Homeowners Assisted: 106

Mobile Home Parks Served: 9

Number of Towns Impacted: 17

Total Expenditures on Services for Mobile Home Owners: \$313,269.37

Total Program Expenditures: \$328,269.37

Program Expenditures Utilized for Direct Relief Service: 95%

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