



STATE OF NEW YORK DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

Corning Tower

The Governor Nelson A. Rockefeller Empire State Plaza

Albany, New York 12237

Antonia C. Novello, M.D., M.P.H., Dr.P.H.
Commissioner

Dennis P. Whalen
Executive Deputy Commissioner

August 21, 2003

Dear Administrator:

On behalf of the New York State Department of Health, I would like to extend our congratulations and appreciation to all hospital and nursing home staff in the State for their response to the blackout conditions on August 14 and 15, 2003. You and your medical, nursing and support staff took extraordinary efforts to protect the safety and well-being of your patients and residents while providing critical health care in a time of need.

While acknowledging the capability and resources of our health care system in New York State to respond to an event of this magnitude, we also recognize that there are lessons to be learned and opportunities to improve our preparedness for future occurrences. The main issues that a number of health care facilities reported to us were inadequacies in emergency power systems and insufficient fuel and food supplies. Although not all facilities experienced such problems, all hospitals and nursing homes should use this experience as an opportunity to evaluate their current emergency power systems, as well as the adequacy of their fuel and food supplies. Your internal evaluation of the emergency power system should emphasize the following factors or components:

- All hospitals and nursing homes are required to have two independent sources of electrical power: a normal source (such as a public utility) which routinely supplies the facility's electrical system and at least one alternate source (such as an emergency generator) for use when the normal source is interrupted. Technical requirements for these systems, specific to both hospitals and nursing homes, are found in NYCRR Title 10 Subchapter C State Hospital Code and the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) standards referenced therein.
- Per NFPA 99 *Standard for Health Care Facilities*, emergency generators must be tested under load at least monthly. Additionally, facilities must have routine maintenance procedures in place to ensure that the emergency generator system is always available for use and capable of supplying service within ten-seconds of an interruption of normal service.

- All emergency electrical systems should be reviewed for capacity. Due to advances in medical care and equipment, there is an increasing reliance upon electrical power for all aspects of patient safety, care and treatment. As the number and complexity of medical-related equipment increases, so must the capacity of the required emergency electrical service.
- To ensure continuity in the provision of health care services, the emergency electrical service must operate dependably for the duration of the interruption of normal service. Each facility with on-site fuel storage must ensure that the fuel source is adequately sized and configured for continuous operation, consistent with routine and emergency plans with vendors for re-supply.
- Information Technology Systems (ITS) have become an invaluable aspect of communication and planning between facilities, the Department, and other agencies involved with disaster planning. Accordingly, every facility must ensure that all ITS components necessary for disaster planning are supported by the emergency electrical system. For hospitals, it is critical that the emergency power system provide for the uninterrupted operation of the Hospital Emergency Response Data System (HERDS).

In addition to your internal evaluation, the Department will be convening a workgroup of hospital and nursing home representatives to review current preparedness plans, including the emergency generator situation, and to develop recommendations for improving our response capability if situations of this magnitude arise in the future.

I am confident that if all of the above elements are integral components of your facility's emergency planning, we will be better prepared to respond to future emergencies.

If you have any questions, please contact Thomas Jung, Director, Bureau of Architectural and Engineering Facility Planning at (518) 402-0904.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Antonia C. Novello M.D. M.P.H. Dr.P.H." The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline.

Antonia C. Novello, M.D., M.P.H., Dr.P.H.
Commissioner of Health