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FLOOD 2007

Region recovers from flooding

By **RICHARD LIEBSON**, ROB RYSER AND **REKA BALA**
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Out came the sun and dried up all the rain.

Well, some of it, anyway.

A driving overnight storm drenched the region with up to 4 inches of rain, flooding roads and basements, forcing evacuations and delays, and causing general havoc before finally giving way to sun and blue sky yesterday afternoon.

"It's beautiful right now," said Marissa Belfonte of White Plains, who was walking down Mamaroneck Avenue shortly after 1 p.m., carrying a wet, but folded umbrella, her raincoat slung over her shoulder. "I couldn't believe how hard it was raining this morning."

Neither could many in communities along Long Island Sound, where residents at many homes in Rye, Port Chester, Rye Brook and Mamaroneck had to be rescued by boats, ladders and even front-end loaders.

An evacuation center staffed by Red Cross volunteers was set up at St. Thomas Church in Mamaroneck, where hot meals were being offered. Although few had taken advantage of the center by late in the afternoon, a Red Cross volunteer, Jackie Jones of Mount Kisco, hoped more would come later in the evening. Four

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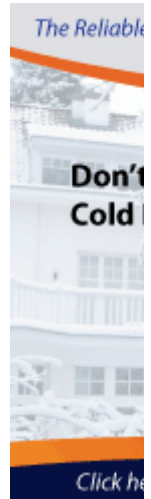
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people had shown up as of 9 p.m. In the meantime, volunteers were taking their trucks out to flooded areas and serving meals to residents, she said.

Jones said cots were available at the center in case people needed to sleep there.

"We've got whatever we need, and if we don't have it, we'll get it," she said.

The storm and its flash-flood aftermath forced emergency workers to shut down portions of most parkways in the area. Many of them could remain closed through this morning, said Westchester County police Lt. Henry Cetina.

Police in many communities reported minor accidents and temporary street closings. Metro-North trains on the Hudson Line were delayed by a mudslide at the Glenwood station in Yonkers. The county's Bee-Line buses were running on all routes, but about half an hour behind schedule. Flight delays and some cancellations were also reported at the Westchester County Airport.

A combination of driving rain, frozen ground and melting snow played a large role in the flooding.

"It's the end of winter, and the ground is hard and doesn't soak up the rain as well," said Jeff Berardelli, a WCBS-TV meteorologist. "And the heaviest rain was in southern Westchester, which is a more urban area with more run-off."

AccuWeather.com meteorologist Frank Strait said exactly 3.3 inches of rain dropped on White Plains, adding that it was not typical to see that much precipitation so early in the month.

March averages about 4.73 inches of rain, he said.

In Bronxville, where schools were closed early due to flooding, the county Health Department and Hazardous Materials Team scrambled to contain an oil spill into the Bronx River that was apparently flood-related. Deputy County Public Safety Commissioner Monte Long said the river, which runs next to the Bronx River Parkway, breached its banks and entered the fuel oil vent pipes of several buildings along nearby Paxton Avenue, forcing oil out of the tanks and into the river.

Northeast Environment, a contractor, was skimming oil from the water's surface while the Hazmat team, assisted by Eastchester and Greenville firefighters, placed booms and pads to contain and absorb the spill.

Throughout the region, police and firefighters spent the day dealing with a surge of emergency 911 calls.

New Rochelle Fire Commissioner Ray "Doc" Kiernan said the department received more than

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200 calls by 9 a.m. from people stuck in their cars and homes and those with flooded basements.

"It's been insane," he said. "We had 4 inches of rain between 4 and 8 a.m. The ground is frozen and the water had nowhere to go."

Kiernan said the worst-hit areas included Devonshire Road and Valley Road.

"There's a very decorative stream that goes through there, and now it's the Colorado River," he said.

After water rushed through her garage and down into her basement, Luce Klein, 84, of 95 Valley Road was left with about 2 feet of standing water and boxes of water-damaged memories.

"I've been here for 51 years," she said. "We never had it this bad. There were three floods this year. This third one is beating the other two."

Wearing wading boots, her daughter, Judith Klein, measured the high-water mark at 25 inches. As they waited for firefighters to arrive with a pump, the water receded to about 17 inches. That didn't stop it from destroying important documents and photographs stored downstairs.

Although the weather improved as the day wore on, flood problems continued to plague some areas.

"The situation is starting to ease up in Rye and some of the other communities, but it's still pretty bad in Mamaroneck," said David Novich, spokesman for the Westchester County Department of Emergency Services.

Novich said Consolidated Edison cut off gas and power to 188 flooded customers in Mamaroneck. Scattered power failures were reported across the region.

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Staff writers Rebecca Baker, Caren Halbfinger, Liz Anderson and Len Maniace contributed to this report.

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