

Buncombe County, NC, to provide food and water as thousands remain cut off

BY JEFF A. CHAMER
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Buncombe County will begin distributing food and water for people Monday afternoon at four sites, and the distribution will continue as long as there are supplies, County Manager Avril Pinder said.

Distribution will be done by drive-through or walk-ups beginning at 2 p.m.:

- William W. Estes Elementary School, 275 Overlook Road, Asheville
- Sand Hill Elementary, 154 Sand Hill School Road, Asheville (Please enter via Action Circle)
- North Windy Ridge Intermediate School, 20 Doan Road, Weaverville
- Fairview Elementary School, 1355 Charlotte Highway, Fairview

Over 100 deputy sheriffs from areas outside Buncombe County have arrived there to help in the devastation after Helene. At least 40 people have been killed in the county because of Helene, and officials are struggling to get food and water to people.

The sheriff said there's been looting and confrontations over the lack of supplies.

Pinder said three tractor trailers of drinking water had arrived and the county was taking steps to get an unlimited supply of drinking water from a private company.

Pinder made her announcement during a 10

a.m. news conference Monday that was streamed on Facebook. Buncombe County officials will hold news conferences every day at 10 a.m. and 4 p.m.

Diapers would be available at the sites, but not baby formula, Pinder said. Additionally, county leaders are trying to figure out how they can deliver food and water, she said.

An unknown number of people are unaccounted for in Buncombe County, the sheriff said.

HOW TO GET WATER IN ASHEVILLE

In addition to the four sites, the city of Asheville Fire Department said water would be distributed to residents at Pack Square Park beginning at 1 p.m. Monday and go until dark or when supply runs out.

Each person must bring their own container to 70 Court Plaza, where they will be provided one gallon of water, with a maximum of five gallons per family.

Buncombe County spokesperson Lillian M. Govus said almost every resident who is on the city's water system is without water. (People with wells and septic tanks have also been impacted because of power outages, she said.)

"Restoring service to this system could potentially take weeks," Assistant City Manager Ben Woody said Monday afternoon. "As repairs progress, we will begin to see service return, but that's going to happen slowly, and it's going to

happen in some areas before others."

A deputy sheriff assisting with storm response died, Miller said.

"Devastation does not even begin to describe how we feel," he said.

The Associated Press reported that at least 107 people have died across six states impacted by Hurricane Helene.

According to Duke Energy, nearly 88,000 customers were still without power in Buncombe County on Monday.

Some homes and roads in the region were completely wiped out by the storm, and the Lake Lure Dam came close to collapsing. North Carolina Emergency Management instructed people to not attempt to travel to western North Carolina.

"It is truly the worst storm we have faced, and not just us, but our friends across the mountains," said Canton Mayor Zeb Smathers. "The word I keep coming back to ... is apocalyptic."

OFFICIALS WARN AGAINST MISINFORMATION

The Buncombe sheriff asked people not to spread misinformation because it delays needed assistance.

Pinder said some people showed up at the Swannanoa Fire Department to say an engineer told them a dam was getting ready to breach Sunday night. The county evacuated hundreds of people, only to learn it was a hoax.

"We had to take time away from searching and rescuing people to go out and investigate if that was true," Pinder said. "The dam is not in imminent failure, there was nothing to that report, other than being malicious."

During the live-streamed press conference Monday, people posted comments on Facebook to ask about friends and family they haven't been able to get in touch with. They said places that are open only accept cash, but not many people have cash on hand, and they asked how much water they would be able to get. Others asked about how to get supplies.

Pinder said a provisional agreement had been made between Asheville and Verizon to install a temporary satellite for cell phone service in the parking lot of 35 Woodfin Street. It will provide cell phone reception for several blocks, Pinder said.

HOW TO VOLUNTEER IN BUNCOMBE

Drew Reisinger, register of deeds, said the county has organized door-knocking efforts to check on people. People can submit a request on a Google Form about loved ones they haven't been able to contact.

People can volunteer to help if interested, he said. The county has received over 11,000 wellness check requests so far.

He also asked that people email the register's office to let them know if

they have made contact with friends or family so they can help speed up wellness checks.

Pinder said that because shelters are getting busy, the county is working on opening a third. Shelters provide overnight lodging, and food and water. The state website ReadyNC.gov lists all shelters open in western North Carolina.

Efforts are also being made to get non-potable water to the county, as well as port-o-johns, Pinder said.

Additionally, county officials announced:

- Signs will be printed to let residents know about the distribution sites.
- The daily press conferences will be translated in Spanish, and the county is working with community partners to reach Spanish-speaking residents.
- Interstate 26 is now fully open.
- Hospitals, nursing facilities, and the detention center all have power from generators and the county is supplying diesel to keep them running.
- Shelters also have consistent power from generators and backup generators.

Donations can be made at helenodonations@buncombecounty.org.

People can reach out about volunteering by emailing helenevolunteers@buncombecounty.org.

To let the register's office know if contact has been made with loved ones, email register@buncombecounty.org.

RESIDENTS SALVAGE FOOD AND WATER

"Is that a lamp? Oh, there's two of them! We'll have light tonight!"

It was a brief personal victory for Amanda Son as

she searched for supplies at a trashed produce store in Swannanoa on Sunday. She said she would bring food, clothes, blankets and shoes to Buncombe Community High School to give away.

People were scrounging together what they could with plans to distribute it.

"With it being an emergency — and this place is destroyed — we're trying to salvage what we can," she said.

She said she had money but there was no one to pay. And some shop owners had unlocked their doors, opening them up to the public to take what they could, she said.

Other county residents discovered a tractor-trailer at the edge of Swannanoa filled with hundreds of cases of water.

Soon, a massive, impromptu line of cars formed. Volunteers carried cases to people's cars.

Members of Black Mountain Presbyterian Church were among those collecting the cases, with plans to give them to the community. "Thank you. More than you know," one woman said as a volunteer handed her cases to bring home.

Police officers later showed up and made people disperse, The Washington Post reported. "You are stealing!" an officer yelled at them.

BABIES BEING BORN, POST-STORM

HCA Healthcare's Mission Hospital in Asheville treated more than 700 patients on Monday, said Greg Lowe, the hospital president. Thirty babies have been delivered since Helene hit, he said.

Observer staff writer Ryan Oehrli contributed to this story.

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How to help people and volunteer in NC in Hurricane Helene aftermath

BY JULIA COIN
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In Western North Carolina, many are dead, missing and cut off from the outside world — and help — in the aftermath of Hurricane Helene.

The Category 4 hurricane made landfall in northern Florida and was still a raging tropical storm when it passed over the Carolinas. The storm flooded North Carolina towns, wiped neighborhoods away and killed at least 11 across the state.

President Joe Biden Saturday approved Gov. Roy Cooper's request for FEMA help in 25 counties,

and federal aid flocked to Asheville and Charlotte Sunday. Crews set up base camps, waiting for some of the 280 closed roads to reopen, as Red Cross planes and helicopters searched for people stranded in the towns near the Appalachian Mountains, said American Red Cross Vice President of Disaster Response Jennifer Pipa Sunday.

Floods severed towns from nearby roads, and emergency services struggled to reach those suffering without using aircraft.

HOW TO HELP PEOPLE AFFECTED BY HELENE

If your organization would like to be added to

this list, please email news@charlotteobserver.com with the subject line "How to Help NC."

"Cash is best," according to FEMA's website. It's the most effective, flexible way to aid organizations.

FEMA recommends do-

nating to verified organizations directing money to on-the-ground groups that know what communities need. A list of organizations can be found on the National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster website. Those same organizations accept volunteers, too.

FEMA cautions people to not self-deploy to affected areas — especially any still-flooded areas.

HOW TO VOLUNTEER TO HELP

You can find more information about volunteer opportunities with VolunteerNC and meal assistance with local food banks.

HURRICANE HELENE GOFUNDME

GoFundMe, a crowdfunding platform that allows individuals to create their own fundraisers, launched a Hurricane Helene Relief page with verified fundraisers Friday. As of Sunday, it had nearly 400 fundraisers on the verified landing page.

In Charlotte, a tree struck down during Helene fell onto a Hoskins home and killed a man inside. That man, according to a GoFundMe page set up by his nephew, was Anthony "Tony" Taylor. His wife and four children

survived, but he did not.

Neighbors said half the tree fell onto another home months before. It should have been cut down already, they said.

"For some time, we had been trying to get the tree removed, but since it wasn't on our property, there was little we could do," wrote Taylor's nephew, Stephen Taylor, in the post.

Also in Charlotte, a group of pilots is asking for money to help air-drop supplies to those in communities surrounded now by water instead of roads.

"We believe that small aircraft can deploy resources faster because we don't need to wait for roads to be cleared. We'll use funds to purchase supplies like nonperishable foods, hygiene items, and baby supplies," wrote Benjamin Spells.

In Swannanoa, host to some of the state's worst flood scenes, a couple and their children — ages 2 and 7 — took refuge in their attic as orange floodwaters moved sludge and debris through their neighborhood. The Zara Family last frantically called family at 11 a.m. Friday, after hours without contact. A neighbor with a kayak rescued them and their home was destroyed.

Jessica Allred, the wife's sister, is asking for funds to help The Zara Family. Hundreds of more families with harrowing stories are listed on GoFundMe.

MORE WAYS TO HELP

We've put together more ways to help and send donations in this story.

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Israeli military starts ground invasion of Lebanon

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JERUSALEM

The Israeli military began a ground invasion of southern Lebanon, targeting what it said early Tuesday was Hezbollah military infrastructure in villages close to the Israel-Lebanon border, the first such incursion by Israel into its northern neighbor's territory in nearly two decades.

Israeli leaders approved the plans late Monday night to send in troops, according to three Israeli officials. And in a statement issued shortly before 2 a.m. Tuesday, the military said Israeli troops had begun crossing the border "a few hours ago" in order to target sites that "pose an immediate threat to Israeli communities in northern Israel."

The officials said the plans involved operating in a narrow strip of land that

lines the northern side of the border. The invasion force would consist of small groups of commandos accompanied by air cover, as well as artillery shells fired from Israel, the officials said. The officials spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive military matters.

The invasion followed intense Israeli strikes across Lebanon over the past two weeks that have killed hundreds of people. Israel is attempting to force a conclusion to a war that began last October, when Hezbollah started firing toward Israeli positions in solidarity with its ally Hamas.

Though the Israeli military announced its troops had "begun limited, localized and targeted raids against Hezbollah" targets, the plan could still evolve into a larger invasion.

Thousands of additional troops have been deployed in northern Israel in recent days, leading to speculation about a broader and

more prolonged operation. U.S. officials said earlier Monday that they believed the invasion would be a limited one. Israeli officials had assured their U.S. counterparts that they did not intend to follow up the incursion with a bigger operation by conventional forces or by occupying

parts of southern Lebanon. U.S. officials said they believed the commandos would quickly pull back after the operation was finished.

The plan was approved as the Israeli military declared a closed military zone in three villages at the northern tip of Israel that

have been badly damaged through nearly a year of shelling and rocket fire from Lebanon.

Earlier Monday, a reporter for The New York Times saw at least two dozen military Humvees heading toward the same area carrying troops in full combat gear, including



AVISHAG SHAAR-YASHUV NYT

Israeli military vehicles gather in a staging area near Kiryat Shmona, Israel, near the border with Lebanon, on Tuesday morning as Israeli forces launched a rare ground operation into southern Lebanon.

night-vision goggles. Dozens of logistical trucks, some armored, were also heading north. Intense explosions could be heard near the border late Monday, according to two of the few residents who have not evacuated the area.

The invasion plan followed days of smaller and briefer cross-border reconnaissance missions in which Israeli commandos prepared for the larger incursion.

Hezbollah said Monday that its forces would confront Israeli troops if they carried out a full invasion. "We will confront any possibility, and we are ready if the Israelis decide to enter by land," Sheikh Naim Kassem, deputy to Hezbollah's slain leader, Hassan Nasrallah, said in a televised statement. "The forces of the resistance are ready for a ground engagement."

The group denied that its fighting power or arsenal had been significantly damaged in recent weeks by Israel's bombardments, which have killed hundreds of people, including civilians.