

THE REAL DEAL

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Well-prepared, NY buildings fare storm with little damage

By Jane C. Timm



From left: Stonehenge Partners COO Andrew Hoffman, Jeffrey Levine, principal of Douglaston Development, Michael Gubbins, vice president at the Albanese Organization and Joseph Sbiroli, principal of Ventura Land

After a major evacuation, extensive preparations and a two-day mass transit shutdown, New Yorkers have emerged [after Hurricane Irene](#) to find their city mostly unscathed.

"It was a remarkable non-event," said Andrew Hoffman, COO of Stonehenge Partners.

Stonehenge, which manages approximately 2,500 apartments in 20 buildings, avoided the evacuation orders with buildings like Midtown's Ritz Plaza and [10 Downing](#)

Hoffman said they geared up for the storm by supplying each building with plywood, water pumps, water vacuums, flashlights, batteries and thousands of glow sticks. The preparations cost approximately \$10,000. Stonehenge Partners had all hands on deck for the storm -- contractors and staffers were put up overnight in vacant apartments because the transportation system wasn't running. But, Hoffman added: "You cannot be over-prepared for a situation like this."

It could have been a lot worse, he noted.

"If my building was in Brattleboro, Vt. I don't think any amount of preparation could [have helped] me."

The city did a great job in preparing for potential disaster and notifying New Yorkers, he said.

But, according to [Jeffrey Levine](#), the principal of Douglaston Development, which developed several buildings in the evacuation zones, many residents chose not to leave.

Levine estimated that 50 percent of his residents in buildings like the Edge in Williamsburg and [555 West 23rd Street](#) in Chelsea -- both of which were in evacuation zones due to their proximity to the East River and the Hudson River, respectively -- chose not to evacuate. Levine said their building staff stayed behind in these buildings to help residents who decided to stay home.

The workers "really deserve to be commended," Levine said, for working "around the clock" before and during the storm.

Levine said that to prepare for the storm, they secured or moved anything that could become a projectile in the storm and cleared and double-checked all roof drains.

"The last thing you want is a clogged roof drain in six inches of rain," he said.

[The Edge](#), whose approximately 260 occupied units were given evacuation notification, from this past Saturday morning to Monday, saw a few recently-planted trees damaged in the storm. Aside from those trees and a few leaks, his buildings and construction sites had "no damages of consequence."

In Battery Park City, with buildings below sea level, the evacuation orders weren't taken so lightly.

Michael Gubbins, a vice president and director of residential management for the Albanese Organization, was on vacation in Ireland last week. He flew back last Friday help orchestrate evacuations and prepare for the hurricane for [three Battery Park City buildings](#) with approximately 300 apartments each -- the Solaire, the Verdesian and the Visionaire.

The preparations -- which cost Albanese about \$2,000 per building -- included sandbagging and securing entranceways with plywood reinforcements in case of surge flooding and backing up computer databases offsite. They also had to provide food and other necessities for staff who stayed behind after the evacuations to monitor the buildings for damages.

For the evacuations of the three buildings' 900 apartments that house mostly families, Gubbins commissioned private buses -- which cost another \$2,000 -- to help move residents to higher ground. For the resident's many pets, they helped find boarding locations in safer areas. Gubbins said that they were aided by the fact that each building that Albanese manages already has an emergency disaster plan, which cost around \$25,000 to prepare and implement, and trains residents and building staff on a variety of disaster plans. Gubbins said there were no damages to their three residential buildings in the storm and he was able to join his family in Ireland this week for the rest of his vacation.

Not all buildings fared so well, though.

Joseph Sbiroli, the principal of Ventura Land, said that despite careful preparations, including removing a few trees from building courtyards and insulating and waterproofing basements, one of his Chelsea apartment buildings that was undergoing renovations at the time was hit with

major water damage, impacting 15 apartments.

"It's going to be [a big insurance claim](#)," he said. Ventura owns and manages 1,000 apartments in 20 buildings mostly in Manhattan and Queens.

Sbiroli noted that the large rainstorm 10 days earlier had helped Ventura prepare for Irene.

"It exposed a lot of our soft underbelly," he said. Most leaks reported were on high floors, which seem to be more susceptible than Ventura's basements. "We have basement apartments, too" he added with a laugh, "but many of our supers live in the basement, though, so we're always quick to know about leaks there."

Despite the damage his building in Chelsea did face, Sbiroli echoed a common sentiment: "It could have been a lot worse."

Levine agreed.

"It could have been a lot worse," he said. "nobody has a crystal ball for predicting these things."