

Sea Grant Projects Aim to Improve Storm Hazard Warnings for Coastal Residents

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Photo by: Ryan Morrill

A snow storm moves over Surf City

New Jersey Sea Grant, Connecticut Sea Grant and New York Sea Grant have awarded funds totaling \$1.4 million to support 10 social science research projects to improve community understanding and response to coastal storm hazard information, part of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Sea Grant's Coastal Storm Awareness Program.

"Despite the unparalleled accuracy of the forecast for Post Tropical Cyclone Sandy, too many coastal residents either failed to fully understand the severity of the storm

and the dangerous conditions it would produce, or chose not to evacuate in spite of the serious risks of staying in their homes," said NJSGC Director of Communications Kim Kosko.

The awarded projects, Kosko added, will study community response to disasters by closely examining the coastal storm warning systems, the information conveyed – what to expect, when to expect it, and what do – and the factors that affect whether recipients of this information decide to act on it.

"The results of this research will improve the communication of coastal hazards to both the general community and to community leaders," she noted.

According to Peyton Robertson, NOAA's chair of the Sandy Assessment Team, "This work should lead to an improved response from coastal residents in the face of impending storms. A better understanding of the true implications of extreme weather threats like Sandy is a step forward in building a weather-ready nation."

As Kosko explained, "The national competition drew on decades of experience within NOAA and Sea Grant, as well as the well-earned reputation for credibility and trust of the Sea Grant outreach communities in New York, New Jersey and Connecticut. By combining Sea Grant's established relationship within local communities with current social science research, this effort will be able to maximize awareness and understanding of the true severity of coastal hazards – even amongst hard-to-reach, isolated groups within communities."

A few of the projects funded by the Coastal Storm Awareness Project include: "Best Practices in Coastal Storm Risk Communication," with Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, as the lead university; "Adolescent and Family Decision Making In Time of Disaster," led by investigators at Columbia University; "They Had the Facts, Why Didn't They Act?: Understanding and Improving Public Response to NWS Coastal Flooding Forecasts," led by the Nurture/Nature Center; Cornell University's "Measuring Public Responses to a Surge of Information: How Individuals Understand, React, and Respond to Storm Surge Media Messages"; and "Understanding Responses to Storm Warnings: Learning from Those Who 'Rode Out' Hurricane Sandy," conducted by a SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry professor.

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Sea Grant's CSAP is a part of the Disaster Relief Appropriations of 2013, commonly referred to as the Sandy Supplemental. DRA provided supplemental appropriations to NOAA to improve and streamline disaster assistance associated with Post-Tropical Cyclone Sandy, and for other purposes. In addition to recovering and rebuilding infrastructure from the devastation of Sandy, NOAA will conduct a coordinated program of activities to improve NOAA information and services for decision makers, communities and the public in preparation for, response to and recovery from other high-impact events. The results of these efforts will contribute to NOAA's vision of resilient ecosystems, communities and economies.

The New Jersey Sea Grant Consortium is an affiliation of colleges, universities and other groups dedicated to advancing knowledge and stewardship of New Jersey's marine and coastal environment. For more information, visit njseagrant.org or [facebook.com/NJSeaGrant](https://www.facebook.com/NJSeaGrant). —J.K.-H.



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