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As Recovery Continues, City's Death Toll Reaches 38

By JOSEPH GOLDSTEIN and CHRISTINE HAUSER

The number of New York City fatalities from Hurricane Sandy jumped to 38 on Thursday, including two young boys who were swept from the arms of their mother on Staten Island and found dead at the swampy end of a street, the police said.

The mother, Glenda Moore, told the police that her sons, Connor, 4, and Brandon, 2, were swept away on Monday shortly after 6 p.m. as the storm arrived. The mother and children had been leaving Staten Island, heading for Brooklyn, as their car was disabled by water, the police said. Ms. Moore, 39, got out of her car with her two sons, near Father Capodanno Boulevard, when a surge of water caused her to lose grip of her children, the police said.

The two children were found at the end of McLaughlin Street, said Paul J. Browne, the chief spokesman for the New York Police Department.

"We just brought the parents into a trailer for the awful duty of identifying their little ones," Mr. Browne wrote in an e-mail.

The grim discovery was made as New York City and areas in more than half a dozen states pressed on with efforts to make a full accounting of the destruction wrought by Hurricane Sandy. The extent of the storm's destructive force was reflected in government briefings that addressed a sweeping range of loss that included the human toll, power failures, homes sucked into the ocean, ruined businesses, and broken infrastructure and housing that put millions of people out of work and shelter.

The storm was blamed for more than 80 deaths in the United States, including the 38 in New York City that was announced on Thursday, updating the toll of 24 given on Wednesday. In the region, there were at least 8 in New Jersey and 4 in Connecticut, and numbers are expected to climb as rescue crews uncover the full scale of the damage to buildings and infrastructure. In New York City, the police said 19 victims were from Staten Island, 9 from Queens, 7 from Brooklyn and 3 in Manhattan.

Three days after the storm hit New York, it is becoming clear how most victims died. "The majority of them drowned," said Ellen Borakove, a spokeswoman for the medical examiner's office.

Previously reported deaths included a woman electrocuted as she walked in Queens and numerous people killed by falling trees. But as rescue crews searched the eastern edge of Staten Island on Thursday, particularly in and around the Midland Beach neighborhood, they discovered numerous drowning victims.

On Thursday, an elderly couple were found dead in their car on Staten Island.

In a briefing on Thursday, Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg announced that parks and playgrounds would reopen on Saturday, and public schools on Monday. He said the city would distribute meals and water around the city, including at sites in the Rockaways, Coney Island and parts of Staten Island, on Thursday.

"New York is starting to build again," he said.

People still coped with the loss of everyday essentials — elevators, lights, cellphone service, Wi-Fi, refrigeration, hot showers.

But the return of some transportation services was cautiously welcomed, even as commuters and residents still had to negotiate crawling traffic, half-mile lines at suburban gas stations and city buses stuffed beyond capacity.

Subway service resumed on more than half of the city's 23 lines, but several — the No. 3 and 7 trains and the B, C, E, G and Q trains — remained dark. Many trains will have large gaps in their routes, including the No. 4 train, which will have no service between 42nd Street in Manhattan and Borough Hall in Brooklyn because of flooding in its tunnel beneath the East River and power problems. Subways and buses will be free for the rest of the week.

Shuttle buses are linking the boroughs from the transportation hub at the Barclays Center and from Hewes Street on the border of Williamsburg and Bedford-Stuyvesant in Brooklyn. Vehicle traffic on city streets was exceptionally heavy as drivers tried to make it into Manhattan before 6 a.m., when the city required at least three people in cars entering Manhattan over the Robert F. Kennedy, Manhattan, Brooklyn and Williamsburg Bridges, but not the George Washington Bridge.

While traffic had cleared up in some areas, much of the region's arterial system remained a parking lot well past the typical morning commute.

Police checkpoints set up in many places to enforce the high-occupancy-vehicle rule were so rigorous that they seemed to have the unintended effect of clogging up traffic flow even more, with lines of cars stretching from the Brooklyn Bridge to Staten Island.

But it could be easier to get a view from 30,000 feet on Thursday as air travel eased. La Guardia Airport, which had been shut down because of flooding, reopened. Some flights resumed on Wednesday at Kennedy International and Newark Liberty International Airports.

Some service was also restored on the AirTrain to Kennedy Airport, which connects the subway and train complex in Jamaica, Queens, to the airport. Metro-North Railroad and Long Island Rail Road had limited service to New York's northern and eastern suburbs.

Still, navigating transportation on the streets seemed to require the most diplomacy and luck as commuters adjusted to new rhythms of supply and demand.

The mayor had lifted the three-occupant limit for taxis and livery cars coming into Manhattan around 8:15 a.m. But even before that, some commuters attempted cab sharing, the delicate art of piling into a yellow taxi with strangers, which some cabdrivers declined to accommodate. A popular mode of transportation in Lower Manhattan — still dark from the loss of power — appeared to be bicycles.

There was limited ferry service in the East River, and the Staten Island Ferry should start plying the waterways within the next day or so, with a full schedule expected on Saturday.

Attesting to the scale of the recovery, more than 3.75 million people were hit by power failures from the storm, which made landfall on Monday night but was preceded by punishing winds, storm surges and torrential rain.

Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo said in a Twitter message that as of 9 a.m. Thursday, more than 1.58 million New Yorkers were without electricity, including more than 600,000 in the New York City area and more than 700,000 on Long Island. Consolidated Edison said Thursday that it had restored power to more than 225,000 customers since the storm ended.

There was also more bad news for residents who receive electricity through overhead lines: Con Ed did not expect to restore power to all those customers until the end of next week. The utility has said that power for customers whose lines are underground will be restored sooner, and within the next few days in the case of Lower Manhattan, according to Mr. Bloomberg.

Gov. Chris Christie of New Jersey said Tuesday that he expected PATH trains to be unavailable for at least 7 to 10 days.

Work on the seven flooded tunnels beneath the East River caused delays. The Brooklyn-Battery, Queens-Midtown and Holland Tunnels remain closed.

Reporting was contributed by James Barron, Matt Flegenheimer, Michael M. Grynbaum, John Leland, Robert Mackey, Andy Newman, Nate Schweber and Stacey Stowe.