

Super Storm Sandy

JOHN DAVIS: Heavy rain, high winds, and surging waters pummeled the eastern seaboard in November of 2012 as hurricane Sandy chewed up the east coast leaving in its wake a swath of loss and destruction. In advance of this "storm of the century" the demand for gasoline spiked as thousands were forced to evacuate and many others stocked up on their fuel for their portable generators. After the storm passed, power outages and a crippled delivery infrastructure led to gas shortages that lasted for weeks hindering cleanup efforts and paralyzing entire cities.

Atlantic City, NJ took a heavy toll in physical damage with numerous homes and boardwalk attractions damaged beyond repair. But, thanks to a program that began in 2009 the city's recovery began more quickly than most. Atlantic City's main form of public transportation for nearly 100 years has been a fleet of owner-operator mini-buses called Jitneys. With help from the U.S. Department of Energy through the Recovery Act Atlantic City's Jitney bus operators were able to replace their aging fleet of 190 minibuses with new models running on clean compressed natural gas (CNG) fuel. As hurricane Sandy approached these vehicles were pressed into action for the evacuation. And because of their dedicated CNG fuel, the Jitneys were just about the only vehicle during and after the storm.

FRANK BECHTEL: Bay-front properties got wacked real bad. But, the boardwalk that was damaged, right over there, actually came up through the force of the storm and relocated itself several blocks some of it inside my garage. It was all over the news up in New York and Staten Island, people were fighting over gasoline. We didn't have price gouging. We didn't have fuel shortages. We never had an issue where the fuel supply went out. We never had an issue where a bus couldn't perform an emergency service or a convenience service because we weren't able to get fuel. It was a completely uninterrupted compressed natural gas supply.

JOHN DAVIS: In similar fashion, hurricane Sandy showed other cities the unexpected benefit of switching their vehicle fleet to CNG fuel. The Long Island town Oyster Bay, for instance, was able to keep its CNG-fueled refuse and dump trucks running throughout the storm - a critical factor in its clean-up efforts. As a result, more community planners and federal and state emergency management agencies are now taking a fresh look at alternative fuels as a key part of their energy assurance and disaster-preparedness strategy. CNG fuel stations are typically fed by an underground pipeline and so are not dependent on road-bound trucks for their fuel supply. On top of that, CNG has a significant cost advantage over gasoline and diesel.

TOM WOODRUFF: The Jitney Association used 540,000 gallons of fuel per year. In terms of dollars and cents comparing the price of gasoline to that of CNG we save about \$1,000,000 a year.

JOHN DAVIS: In Atlantic City, at least, CNG has allowed this community to come together and continue a tradition of looking out for one another.

FRANK BECHTEL: We're not government employees. We're not a big company. We're independent, individual owner-operators and we're part of the community. Throughout our history, for a hundred years, whenever there was a fire or building collapse or any type of situation the Jitney's were always the ones who evacuated the people, moved them to a Red Cross shelter. Or any situation where people needed to be moved in an emergency situation, the city and the county called on the Jitney's to move them.