

## **DAMAGE ASSESSMENT PROCESS IMPORTANT AFTER MAJOR DISASTERS**

The threat of natural disasters such as storms and hurricanes often loom large every year at this time in the Caribbean, and there may be some major man-made disasters which could also catch us by surprise. Whatever the occurrence, Barbadians should be aware that they need to get the resulting information on the damage caused to the decision-makers as quickly as possible.

Government currently has in place a damage assessment process under the aegis of the Department of Emergency Management (formerly CERO) geared towards helping persons to “pick up the pieces” after a disaster.

Director of the Barbados Statistical Service (BSS) and Chairman of the Damage Assessment and Statistics Committee, Angela Hunte, explained that the damage assessment process was designed to facilitate national response and rehabilitation.

“In order to determine the needs of victims and the kind of strategies to assist in restoring some semblance of normalcy in the shortest possible time, statistical information would be required. These statistics would assist the Emergency Operating Centre (EOC) in determining the extent of damage and where it has occurred, to identify the resources for immediate response, and to identify the needs of those persons who have been affected. So, based on the damage statistics, the EOC would make recommendations to government regarding the course of action to be undertaken.”

There are three phases in the damage assessment process. These are: the Rapid Situation Overview, the Initial Assessment, and the Detailed Sectoral Assessment. However, not all of these phases may be necessary. An important element of the process is the work undertaken by the damage assessment officers who are all volunteers.

Assigned to work in specific areas or enumeration districts, these officers will set about collecting data after an all clear has been given following any major disaster. Trained to systematically canvas impacted areas, they collect reliable data on any damage that has occurred.

There is certain information which these officers would require from householders or affected persons to ascertain their immediate or pressing needs. Basic information required would include the name, address, age, and contact number of the head of household, whether the house is owned or rented, whether it is insured, the number of adults in the house and the number of children (under the age of 18) in the household. Information on whether there are any disabled persons in the household and the number of persons, the type of assistance required by the household, and details on damage sustained by houses

will also be gathered.

Although residents may be traumatised or severely affected after any major disaster, Mrs. Hunte has advised that householders should have their identification cards to hand “so that those may be noted during the interview sessions with the damage assessment officers”.

Stressing that the interviewing process per household would be brief, she said: “The duration of the entire damage assessment process would depend very much on the severity of the impact. Our aim is to complete the exercise in the shortest possible time, since the information would be needed by the Emergency Operating Centre and we would wish to supply the data quite promptly.”

The assistance of everyone is needed in the exercise and as pointed out by Mrs. Hunte, “those impacted may include anyone of us or members of our family”. So, in the unlikely event that there is a major impact from a disaster, Barbadians are urged to cooperate in the damage assessment process, should the need arise.