

EAST COAST

HOME

+ DESIGN



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In The Field

KATIE KEATING

An Ounce Of Prevention

Builders Round Table 2011

2011 found a great many East Coast readers, especially in the New England States, ill prepared to weather what turned out to be a year jam packed with natural disasters like the earthquake that resonated throughout the Mid-Atlantic and points north, and Hurricane Irene, who was less discriminating in the path she took. Though not as recent as these two, many homeowners cannot forget and in some cases are still repairing damages sustained by last winter's ice dams. Conditions seldom seen in these parts brought

many of our lives to a screeching halt as we waited for power to be restored, basements to be pumped out and fallen trees to be removed from power lines, roof lines and the many streets they blocked. In Connecticut alone, the state's two major power companies reported a staggering 754,000 customers without power. A week later, there were still 100,000 customers in the dark, despite efforts by utility workers from as far off as British Columbia and the Mid-West. In some coastal Connecticut towns, homes were ripped from their foundations

and swept into the angry waters of what's usually a peaceful Long Island Sound. At least ten deaths were reported in Connecticut alone with many more in the surrounding states. All in all, monetary damages for those affected by Hurricane Irene have been estimated at \$7 billion dollars or more.

In reaction to this year's unwelcome meteorological events, Matt Kolk sat down with some of the area's premier building professionals at a recent roundtable discussion to see what advice they would give homeowners to better prepare themselves



LEFT to RIGHT
Chris Wright, Jim Higgins

TOP to BOTTOM

Ross Tiefenthaler,
Joseph Piccolo,
Chris Wright

in the future against these unwanted and costly natural intruders. Overwhelmingly, the group pointed to being proactive and making sure your home is well equipped and prepared to sustain extended periods of weather related issues. On the table for discussion were topics ranging from whether or not to purchase a generator, and what type to purchase, to keeping your basement free of water and designing a landscape plan that not only beautifies your property but keeps it free of damaging natural debris and water runoff.

When looking at basement water problems, all agreed that proper grading and outside drainage systems were a key element in preventing flooding to the home. “Designing proper site and foundation drainage systems are critical” according to Scott Hobbs of Hobbs Inc. in New Canaan, Connecticut. He went on to say that “keeping drains and gutters clear and running” help prevent this type of problem as does “great foundation waterproofing”. A “dual pump system” is an additional layer of protection should water get in.

Another element to take into account is how your landscape plan affects the condition of your home. Joseph Piccolo, Project Manager for Wadia Construction, recommended that landscape lighting and controls be “placed above grade” preventing water from flowing back to the house. Ross Tiefenthaler, of Norwalk based Tiefenthaler Fine Home Building added that homeowners should make sure that their landscape design does not cover drainage pipes, thus ensuring proper drainage away from the home. Tree placement around the property is also important in preventing damage from falling limbs and clogged gutters as well as preventing mold growth from low hanging canopies.



In The Field



RESOURCES

Wright Brothers Builders
wrightbuild.com

Wadia Associates
wadiaassociates.com

Tiefenthaler Construction
tiefenthaler.com

TR Building and Remodeling
trbuilt.com

Hobbs Incorporated
hobbsinc.com

AP Savino LLC
apsavinollc.com

Unlike other areas of the country, wind damage to homes in our area was not seen as big issue with the exception of falling branches from closely situated trees. That said, Scott Hobbs stated that “homes in our area should still be rated for hurricane force winds even though hurricanes are extremely rare here”. All agreed that making sure these trees are healthy and well manicured on a regular basis help prevent some of damage seen during this summer’s storm.

Poor insulation in homes could have accounted for damage from ice dams like we saw this past winter. Todd Drury of TR Building and Remodeling stated “that by maintaining adequate airflow from soffit vent to ridge vent and minimizing heat loss from the heated portion of the home to the roof is really the key to minimizing ice dams”. Unlike other areas of the country, homes built in the Northeast should have both sophisticated heating and cool system. Snow lodges up in this area of the country, while not “extreme ones”, can still become an issue from time to time. A proper HVAC system will also help “deal with humidification migrating from both

the inside out and the outside in,” Hobbs added.

After this recent hurricane and extended power outages, many homeowners wondered whether purchasing a generator was the right thing to do. Some builders, like Mr. Drury, feel that the “need for a generator has never been more apparent” as it is today. Many on our panel agreed that the size needed for one’s home depended on the homeowner’s “expectations”. Are they in a flood area and reliant on pumps to keep their basements dry? Is it necessary to maintain the home’s heat during a winter blackout? Are they using it to maintain building systems or merely powering home entertainment systems? These are priorities they need to establish in choosing a right generator for their needs. Tony Savino of AP Savino, LLC stated that “the size of the generator depends on your budget and whether it’s new construction or an existing house”. He went on to say that “buying a generator encompasses not only the generator, but the transfer switch, the sub panel and the fuel lines which are usually propane or natural gas.” Most systems they put in are 10KW or 20KW, which will

power most of the essential loads. A small portable generator can also be wired which will enable you to power basement pumps and refrigeration.” In all cases, homeowners should research brands and search out reputable firms who will help them evaluate the best model for their lifestyle. Jim Higgins, of Coastal Point Construction in Greenwich, stated that; “you get what you pay for and you should follow the recommendations” made by a trusted contractor. As with other household mechanical equipment, generators should be properly serviced and maintained so that they be in top working order should problems like these arise.

The overwhelming sentiment of the group was that we should always be prepared for the worst case scenario. As Chris Wright of Wright Brothers Builders in Westport reminded us, “we had plenty of advance notice for this last storm and still many homeowners were not prepared”. ■

Katie Keating is an interior designer and freelance writer and can be reached at 203.339.5820 or katiekdesign@yahoo.com.