



Flood Clean Up: Columbus, IN

Generosity from neighboring communities help Columbus repair the damage done

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by Jenna Dahlmann

Columbus, Indiana fell victim to the damaging floods that affected so much of Central and Southern Indiana in June, 2008.

Households were forced to empty its entire contents and place damaged belongings on the curb to be carried off to landfills. "It was like driving through a tunnel when we started cleaning up" said Jeff Whittington, Columbus Sanitation Supervisor. The streets of Columbus were lined with everything from stoves, sofas, rolls of carpets, and mattresses to personal belongings such as family photos, children's toys, and clothing. Bryan Burton, Columbus Street and Recy-

cling Supervisor, said, "We didn't have the manpower or the equipment for this kind of clean up. But who would?" The damage was undoubtedly immense. "It was horrible to take everything that people owned to a landfill," said Greg Howard, a Columbus Driver.

Despite the huge amounts of wreckage, the community kept its spirit high and helped where they could. On streets where every home had gutted

out its contents, families set up tables with food, drinks, and supplies for people in need. Soon, donations were being made from everywhere. An abundance of donations allowed the community to stay strong and get through a very difficult time. Bryan Burton noticed "how people come together

like you wouldn't believe." Volunteers came from all over the community of Columbus, pulling together in a time of extreme destruction.



Picking up material at a stop in a residential area in Columbus, Indiana. The Petersen collected a stove and various pieces of furniture.



Reinforcement was on the way. Help came from various volunteers, local communities, donations from private contractors, and the Indiana Department of Transportation.

The massive amount of materials that residences hauled to the curbside for pick up.

One of Two of Muncie's Petersen at Work picking up a stove removed from a home

City of Columbus' Petersen Lightning Loader at work picking up bulk waste



The Indiana Department of Transportation also help with the clean up for two weeks after the devastation. INDOT initially came in with two to four trucks per day. Progressively, the fleet grew to an average of forty to fifty trucks per day at the end of the two weeks. Trucks lined the streets ready to haul off the massive amounts of materials. As one truck headed off to the landfill to empty out, another empty truck was ready in its place.

Various private contractors from around the area chipped in, too. To Columbus' surprise, after these contractors had hauled numerous loads of material with their equipment, Columbus was not asked to pay the bill. Trucks, labor, and port-a-potties, were donated as part of an effort the get Columbus back on its feet.

Richard Macy, Columbus Street Foreman, and his department of twenty men did the majority of the clean up, spending long days cleaning up the streets.

Local communities pitched in, as well. Mitchell, Greensburg, Bartholomew County, Bartholomew Solid Waste District, and Muncie were some of the communities that donated equipment and labor to the city.

Bobby Smith, Muncie Sanitary District Director, was contacted and asked to help. Muncie came down to Columbus for two weeks to help with the clean up. Two men and two Petersen Lightning Loaders from Muncie made an average of fifty stops per day picking up oversized trash items. The Muncie crew helped to carry an average of five truckload of materials to the landfill per day. Muncie will be refunded by FEMA for its time and equipment usage.

FEMA took note of how efficiently the Petersen performs in cleaning up after natural disasters. Muncie has been contacted by FEMA to discuss potentially extending this type of assistance to a nationwide scale.

"A month ago, you wouldn't think you could get this cleared up, but with everyone's help, here we are," Bryan states after most the streets have been cleared and volunteers have returned home. There is still a lot of work to do, but the majority of the streets have been cleared.

Over the course of four weeks since the flood on June 8th 2008, 567 truckloads of material were taken to the landfill, which amounts to around 7,454 tons. What would have ordinarily been a \$205,000 expense for the City of Columbus in dumping fees alone, ended up costing nothing after the Bartholomew County Landfill graciously waived the fee until FEMA reimbursement is available.

Other communities around the area are also looking to be refunded by FEMA for their time and equipment.

No one was injured during clean up.