



## Transport Workers Union Local 100

# IN THE NEWS

As Seen In **DAILY NEWS**

## Dozens of MTA workers, stranded in Coney Avenue terminal, faced death as Hurricane Sandy waters rushed in

*Workers describe scenes of pure chaos — and incredible bravery — after Coney Island Creek overflowed and caused chest-high flooding*

**BY PETE DONOHUE**

Transit workers stationed in Coney Island during Hurricane Sandy say they could have drowned in the deluge — including two so sure they were goners that they started saying their Hail Marys on the top of a truck.

Coney Island may have been a mandatory evacuation zone, but dozens of transit workers were called to the seaside post as Hurricane Sandy approached so they could help protect against the storm, then restore service as quickly as possible.

Workers describe scenes of pure chaos — and incredible bravery — that unfolded after the Coney Island Creek suddenly overflowed and caused chest-high flooding at the Stillwell Ave. subway terminal the night of Monday, Oct. 29.

Three workers, trapped in a truck on Stillwell Avenue rapidly filling with



Carpenter John Goings (front right) rescued three MTA workers who were stranded atop a truck on Stillwell Avenue during Hurricane Sandy.

water, scrambled to the roof of the car, where they were battered by powerful gusts of wind for more than two bone-chilling hours.

“I took my glasses off, made the sign of the cross, looked up to the sky and said, ‘God. It’s in your hands now,’” said

Joseph Frascilla, a plumber with the NYC Transit division.

Meanwhile, more than a dozen workers climbed from a ground-floor crew room of the station onto the roof, then hoisted a ladder and squeezed through the elevated railroad tracks to

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## Dozens of MTA workers, stranded in Coney Avenue terminal, faced death as Hurricane Sandy waters rushed in (cont'd)

safety.

“It was gross mismanagement and it could have resulted in someone losing their life,” said Transport Workers Union Local 100 President John Samuelsen. He argued that it wasn’t necessary for such a large contingent of carpenters, plumbers and other tradesmen to risk their lives that night by camping out at the complex.

“There was no reason why these workers needed to be in the evacuation zone during that storm,” said Samuelsen.

Carmen Bianco, senior vice president in charge of subways, said workers stationed at Stillwell were instructed to use seven heavy-duty vehicles to evacuate. But he said managers said those vehicles were blocked by transit workers’ personal vehicles.

Bianco added that any worker had the option of leaving at any time for a designated evacuation site a short distance inland.

“We’re not going to demand they stay there,” Bianco said.

Still, Bianco said, “We’re going to look at everything and make adjustments where we need to go forward.”

The matter is still under review.

The crew trapped inside the Stillwell Avenue station included a contingent who did storm preparation as the MTA was shutting down the system Sunday, and slept in the facility that night. They were on standby Monday, awaiting further instructions, as the storm approached.

As the hunkered down, they could hear announcements from emergency vehicles rolling by, ordering all residents to evacuate.

As the day wore on, some workers inside the crew room were growing increasingly concerned, structure maintainer Joe Landro said. He walked over to talk to his supervisor, who he over-



Dozens of MTA workers were trapped in the hurricane deluge at the Stillwell Avenue maintenance yard in Coney Island. John Goings (front) is flanked by TWU President John Samuelsen (blue jacket).

heard talking to his boss on speaker phone.

“The water’s getting high. We have to start getting out of here,” the supervisor said.

Landro, 51, said he was stunned to hear the response.

“Stay there,” the higher-up instructed. “Hold your post and secure your area.”

Other workers, like signal maintainers and train operators, already had cleared out of the complex, said Landro. “We were the only morons there.”

At about 8 p.m., the sea surge into the canal inundated Coney Island.

“It was chaotic. Guys were trying to get into the cars. The water went from ankle height to chest height outside in about 10 minutes. Everyone had to abandon their cars,” said Landro.

While some workers managed to escape, more than a dozen climbed to the roof, then through the train tracks.

Fraschilla, 51, and two coworkers had been out evacuating trapped families, and were driving back to the Stillwell terminal when the canal erupted.

Within minutes, water had reached the top of the door.

They climbed to the roof of the car and prayed — one recited the Hail Mary aloud — as they awaited rescue for two hours.

“I thought I was a dead man,” Frascilla said.

They were rescued by two other transit workers navigating the waters in a raft.

“They were my lifesavers,” Frascilla said.

“The water was so high the bottom of the raft was scrapping the tops of cars,” said the raft’s captain, Johnny Goings. “We turned into first responders.”

When they reached the Stillwell terminal, nearly all of the workers had evacuated to the roof, except a handful unable to make the climb or fit through the railroad ties, said Goings.

So Frascilla and Goings led the group back into the chest-high water and piled into an MTA dump truck.

“This truck was a monster and it managed to pull through,” Frascilla said.