



# After Action Report and Improvement Plan

**April 19, 2017**

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Jason T. Garnar  
County Executive

Michael A. Ponticiello  
Director, Office of  
Emergency Services

## Winter Storm 2017 Broome County, New York

Prepared by:  
Broome County  
Office of Emergency Services

**Broome County**  
**Winter Storm 2017**  
After Action Report and Improvement Plan

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# **Broome County Winter Storm 2017 After Action Report and Improvement Plan**

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**Jason T. Garnar, County Executive  
Broome County, New York**

Report Edited By:  
Michael A. Ponticiello, Director  
Broome County Office of Emergency Services

Report Prepared By:  
Neal J. Haight, Deputy Director  
Broome County Office of Emergency Services

Contributors:

Broome County Office of Emergency Services  
Michael J. Ballard, Communications Supervisor  
Raymond M. Serowik, EMS Coordinator  
Thomas J. Vroman, Fire Coordinator

Broome County Executive's Office  
Kevin M. McManus, Deputy County Executive  
Benjamin C. Lainhart, Chief of Staff

NOAA-National Weather Service Binghamton NY  
David J. Nicosia, Warning Coordination Meteorologist

Special thanks to all those who participated in the Broome County After Action Review and Improvement Planning process.

## Handling Instructions

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Questions or concerns related to this After Action Report and Improvement Plan (AAR/IP) should be directed to:

Broome County Law Department  
PO Box 1766  
Binghamton, New York 13902  
607-778-2117

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## Executive Summary

On March 14 and 15, 2017, Broome County experienced a snowfall event that broke records and left much of the County under 30 inches or more of snow. This event would test all facets of disaster preparedness including coordination of information to the public, media and municipalities, response capabilities during the snowfall event and dealing with human services needs after the event. This event once again showed the great resiliency and community wide support of Broome County residents.

Strong collaboration with all entities involved started days before the storm and allowed for planning and coordination to take place between New York State, Broome County and local municipalities to prepare and respond to the storm.

This storm was the first major incident for the County Executive staff, occurring within the first 100 days of Executive Staff taking office. County Executive Jason Garnar, Deputy County Executive Kevin McManus and Chief of Staff Benjamin Lainhart were actively involved in the decision making process and were extremely supportive of all operations throughout the process. All three spent countless hours in the EOC and visiting field operations.

This document seeks to paint an accurate picture of the County's response to this storm. It discusses several strengths and reviews the lessons learned during the event. It also suggests ways to improve upon these lessons in responding to future emergency and disaster situations.

## Introduction

The mission of the Broome County Office of Emergency Services is: “to provide planning, training, resources, response, warning, coordination and information through communications to the public, elected officials, and public safety agencies to assist them in preparing for, responding to and mitigating emergencies and disasters which affect the residents of Broome County.”<sup>1</sup>

This After Action Report and Improvement Plan (AAR/IP) seeks to capture the county’s response to Winter Storm Stella. It also seeks to accurately portray the successes in the county’s response and show areas where improvement can be made.

## Background

Between March 14 and 15, 2017, Broome County was inundated with snowfall. This snowfall broke a 24 hour snowfall record that dated back to February of 1961, dropping 31.3 inches at the Broome County Airport between 0300 on March 14 and 0100 March 15.<sup>2</sup> Endwell received a record amount of snowfall, measuring 36.2 inches by the time was storm done. At one point, snow was falling at more than 4 inches an hour, taxing the ability to successfully remove snow and necessitating a complete travel ban, including Interstates, within Broome County. A listing of snowfall totals can be found as Appendix B at the end of this document.

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<sup>1</sup> Broome County Government. (2012, August). Emergency Services. Retrieved from <http://www.gobroomecounty.com/e911>

<sup>2</sup> National Weather Service. Retrieved from <http://w2.weather.gov/climate/index.php?wfo=bgm>

### *Time Line of Events*

This timeline is a re-creation done after the event.

Saturday, March 11

1639	NWS briefing indicating possibility of large Winter Storm
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Sunday, March 12

1509	Brief scheduled for Monday, Mar 13 at 1000
1619	NWS Weather briefing indicating 14-15" of snow around Broome County. Potential 2-5" up to 21-25"
1624	Winter Storm Warning issued. Storm totals 10-15" indicated, possibly 18", 1 inch an hour.
1640	Director Ponticiello notifies Deputy County Executive of storm potential.

Monday, March 13

1000	NWS Weather Webinar
1030	OES/County Executive staff briefing – recommended Open EOC at 0600 3/14 at Level 1 Conduct municipal conference call Press conference with OES, Sheriff, County Executive Travel advisory be issued
1230	Conference call with Municipalities
1402	Director email to Municipalities advising EOC open 0600 3/14, with other info
1415	Press Conference conducted – County Executive, Sheriff, OES Director
1438	Travel Advisory issued by Sheriff Harder, effective 3/14 at 0600
1500	NWS Webinar Briefing with OES, BCSO, NYSP, BC Highway, BC Executive
1735	Governor Cuomo issues State of Emergency across NYS – in effect 0000 3/14
1928	Broome County Government closed for Tuesday 3/14
2020	SUNY Broome closes Tuesday 3/14
2046	Binghamton University closes, essential employees report
2139	City of Binghamton closes non-critical City Government

Tuesday, March 14

0000	NYS State of Emergency in effect
0000	NYSDOT Region 9 Regional Operations Center opens
0448	NWS Briefing – accumulations upped to 18-24"
0600	Broome EOC opens – OES, BCSO, NYSP, NYSDOT, BC Highway, Executive Already receiving requests from municipalities
0600	NYSDOT, BC Highway indicate to OES Director they will not be able to keep up at these snowfall rates
0630	OES Director updates County Executive, recommends State of Emergency



	and road closure. County Executive verbally agrees.
0635	NWS advises snow shifted over Broome and is going to be worse than predicted
0700	OES Director notifies C/Binghamton Mayor of road closure OES Director notified by State OEM RD to hold off on State of Emergency until language can be coordinated with NYS and also close Interstates
0800	Broome County State of Emergency declared “due to near blizzard conditions and poor road conditions.” Broome County issues Emergency Order ordering “all roads closed in Broome County and a complete travel ban for all non-essential personnel”.
0800	V/Windsor enact State of Emergency
0845	V/Deposit enacts State of Emergency
0900	NWS Briefing
0900	Governor Cuomo issues temporary tractor trailer ban I81/84/86/88/90, Route 17 Also issues full travel ban for Broome County
0930	Binghamton Regional Airport closed
0950	211 is staffed with 7 people
1000	Transportation requests for essential employees begin coming into the EOC
1000	County Executive receives phone calls from Governor’s Office/staff
1020	Red Cross requested to EOC (1315 rep enroute) (1330 rep arrives)
1100	Conference call with Municipalities
1210	NYS OFPC advises EOC they sent 1 high axle vehicle, 2 tracked vehicles Brian Stimak notified for use of Soil & Water building for staging
1230	Village of Johnson City request assistance – request filled by EOC
1430	Village of Johnson City issues State of Emergency and travel ban
1430	Concern for the Arena roof from concerned citizen – Engineering contacted. There is a plan in place to snowblower over 24”. Events cancelled for 2 days. No staff in building.
1500	NWS Weather briefing
1530	Request for National Guard Humvees – Can fit 2 people, need helmets for riders.
1630	Conference call with schools/BOCES, decision on 3/15 after 1800 briefing
1635	T/Kirkwood request assistance – Request filled by EOC
1800	EOC transitions to night shift
1925	Binghamton University no classes 3/15, staff report
2111	SUNY Broome closed 3/15
2125	C/Binghamton requests 4 large plow trucks for 3/15 (0350 3/15 order reconfirmed with Kevin Normile C/Bing DPW) Request filled by EOC
2142	NYS Courts closed 3/15
2223	C/Binghamton Mayor requests coordinate with him before NYS resources deployed

Wednesday, March 15

0500	Conference call with night shift EOC staff, Executive staff, OES – status Decision to keep travel ban and reevaluate at 1100
0510	C/Binghamton Mayor advised of the travel ban. He advises he is lifting the C/Binghamton travel ban.
0516	Broome County Government closed 3/15
0600	EOC transitions to day shift
0640	Email to Municipalities advising the County-wide road closure and travel ban remain in place
0805	SUNY Broome request assistance – tasked to BC Corrections (inmates)
1000	Conference call with Municipalities
1110	V/Endicott request assistance – Request filled by EOC
1115	Town of Union requests NYSDOT - Request Filled by EOC
1125	V/Johnson City request assistance for 0000 3/16 – Request filled by EOC
1140	C/Binghamton requests 2 motor graders, 6 front end loaders All snow emergency routes and most primary and secondary routes cleared. Side streets and dead ends are problems. – Request filled by EOC
1200	Broome County travel ban lifted
1200	Director notified by EOC that human needs requests were becoming an issue. EOC opens Human Services Branch – EOC to call in DSS, 211, COAD
1300	EOC develops human services screening form for 211 COAD will be tasked with shoveling National Guard tasked with life safety shoveling
1300	Village of Johnson City State of Emergency lifted
1330	Press Conference – outlining now a Community recovery effort
1650	Tractor Trailer ban lifted
1730	Director advised by V/Deposit Mayor that they are having trouble coordinating resources OES Director responded to V/Deposit and assisted with resource coordination. Director also assisted V/Whitney Point with resource coordination while there.
1830	Tri-Cities Airport request assistance with snow removal. Request approved by EOC.

Thursday, March 16

0300	Broome EOC closes for night
0800	Broome EOC reopens (until 1700)
0900	Conference call with Municipalities
0943	C/Bing requests <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 5 Single-Axle Plow Trucks (Suitable for maneuvering our tight City streets)</li> <li>• 8 Front-End Loaders to open up these unplowed streets</li> <li>• 8 Larger Backhoes for intersection cleanup at the entrances to each unplowed street and to provide assistance with each loader as they</li> </ul>

	open the streets.
1112	Guidance received from NYS DEC on snow disposal – disseminated to municipalities

Friday, March 17

0800	Village of Windsor lifts State of Emergency
0800	Broome EOC opens (until 1700)
1700	NYSDOT ROC closes
1800	Broome County rescinds State of Emergency

Saturday, March 18

1730	Director received request for plowing of UE Middle School. On-call Emergency Manager tasked. Contact made with School District-they have resources. Request denied.
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Sunday, March 19

1100	Village of Endicott request assistance with snow removal. Request fulfilled by EOC – NYR ticket entered
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## Strengths and Lessons Learned

### *Strengths*

1. National Weather Service updates and communication before and during storm – Indications on the severity of this storm started on Saturday, March 11. Updated briefings continued throughout the event and contained updated information.
2. Emergency Operations Center operating with all agency presence and cooperation – Agencies involved in the EOC operation included Broome County Office of Emergency Services, Broome County Executive Office, Broome County Sheriff's Office, New York State Police, New York State Department of Transportation and American Red Cross. All agencies worked together and across disciplines to achieve the common mission.
3. Separation of Policy Group and Operation levels within the Emergency Operations Center. – In past events, the Policy Group and the Operations group were housed very close together within the EOC, sometimes at the same table. This often made operation level decisions difficult, as policy makers often became involved in these decisions. For this event, the Policy Group was separated from the Operations level, and this worked very well for both groups, as they were able to clearly communicate what was going on yet make independent decisions within their respective roles.
4. Increased road patrols by New York State Police and Broome County Sheriff's Office allowed for better coverage and transport capabilities – New York State Police patrols were increased and they were able to saturate the highways with extra patrols. NYSP also created new "mini zones" for the incident which allowed better resource allocation. These decisions allowed the Broome County Sheriff's Office to place their increased road patrol staffing on the County and Town roads instead of the highways. These decisions allowed for broader coverage of all roadways in Broome County. It also allowed both agencies the ability to assist with transport of essential personnel.
5. Communications between Broome County with New York State, municipalities, residents and media with regular updates before and during storm –

- a. Communication with municipalities - Broome County began communicating with municipalities very early on in this event. The first conference call with municipalities was held on Monday, March 13 at 1230, shortly after the first National Weather Service briefing of the day occurred. Several conference calls were held with municipalities for the next few days, with the final call being held on Thursday, March 16 at 0900. This allowed all municipalities within the County to receive the same information from the County at the same time and allowed all municipalities to begin planning based on the most current and updated information. It also allowed municipalities to relay any concerns they had back to the County.
  - b. Communication with the public and media – Once the potential magnitude of the storm became clear, Broome County began formulating a plan to disseminate information to the public. A press conference was held on Monday, March 13 at 1430 to let residents know about the storm and also to put a travel advisory into place starting Tuesday the 14<sup>th</sup>. This allowed news media outlets to get a common message to the public early on and allowed the public enough notice to properly prepare for the storm.
  - c. Communication between 911 Center and the EOC – Communication between the 911 Center and the EOC is always a needed but often overlooked point in these circumstances. It was noted that during this incident, the communication from the EOC to the 911 Center and the 911 Center to the EOC was good, with timely, updated information that could then be disseminated to the public.
6. NY Responds requests were all processed and filled. – The NY Responds system was used to process requests for assistance. This system proved easy to use and allowed quicker vetting of requests through State agencies, often without having to wait through an extensive approval process.
  7. NYSDOT, County Highway, and many municipalities worked together to clear roads quickly and efficiently – Highway departments from local municipalities, Broome County and New York State DOT worked together to clear roadways

during the storm. Agencies assisted with plowing and snow removal on roadways that are not typically within their jurisdiction, allowing for more timely clearing of sometime critical roadways. Additionally, Broome County and NYSDOT provided extra snow removal assistance to several municipalities throughout the event.

8. The transition from a snow event to human services event and the relationship between Broome County, 211 and COAD. – This event quickly transitioned from a snowstorm event to a human services event, like residents needing to be shoveled out or residents needing medication/food. The EOC staff quickly recognized this need and formulated a plan to deal with the requests. Staff from 211, Broome County DSS and the EOC came together and created a plan for 211 to screen these calls (211 fielded 500-600 requests). COAD was then engaged to bring resources together to assist with fulfilling the missions (about 160), which included shoveling out of residents or simply making contact with homebound residents who were looking for someone to talk to.

### *Lessons Learned*

1. New York State Police wanted more 4-wheel drive vehicles on road during storm – Although the New York State police had many “all-wheel drive” vehicles available, it quickly became apparent that this storm would require “four wheel drive” vehicles, which were available locally only in limited quantities.
2. Organizations with essential workers not prepared to transport workers during weather extenuating circumstances – There were several organizations that had limited or no plans to get “essential” personnel to and from work during a storm event. These organizations included hospitals, health care facilities and group homes. Although the EOC was able to coordinate the transportation of some essential employees, they were not able to provide transportation to everyone, nor were they able to provide transportation home due to the number of requests. This caused some facilities to house off-shift employees in nearby hotels.
3. Resource request from Binghamton University received twice and caused confusion – There were requests for resources for Binghamton University that were received twice through different methods. This created confusion in the actual requests and required extra time and effort to clarify.
4. Better education of public about who is considered “essential” – There was initial and ongoing confusion as to whom is considered “essential” personnel during a travel ban. This includes both the private sector and the public sector.
5. City of Binghamton lifted their local travel ban while the County’s remained in effect (which included the City of Binghamton) causing major public confusion – Although the County travel ban was effect until Noon on March 15, the City of Binghamton lifted their local travel ban for the City at 0600 on March 15. This created confusion and sent mixed messages to the public as to whether they should be on the roads or not.
6. Road Closures – This event included the County-wide closure of roadways. It is noted, however, that if this was not the case and only select roads were closed, there is no real method to track road closures within the EOC. It is noted that “511” monitors and tracks state road closures, but not local level road closures.

7. EOC space constraints – As has been noted in past events, space within the EOC is an issue. Luckily, this incident did not necessitate as large an EOC operation as in the past, but space was still at a premium. Weather briefings were held in the room that would have been utilized by the Planning Section. This room also doubled as the break room/cafeteria for the event.
8. EOC paperwork and record-keeping – The County is still using paper methods for its EOC record keeping and paperwork. In these technological times, there are far more efficient means to handle these processes, such as software/web based products specifically made for EOC use. A system that would tie directly into the NY Responds system would make the operation that much more efficient.



## Improvement Plan

This section will analyze the “Lessons Learned” identified above and present an improvement plan.

1. New York State Police want more 4-wheel drive vehicles on road during storm – Agencies should identify where and how resources with certain capabilities can be obtained. This should include how long it will take the resources to arrive, as this will assist in the planning process. Agencies, especially when spread across large areas, should have assets mapped out and this mapping should be easily accessible for agency logistics personnel to access during time of disaster.

### ***FEMA Core Capability: On –Scene Security, Protection and Law Enforcement***

2. Organizations with essential workers not prepared to transport workers during weather extenuating circumstances – Organizations with “essential” personnel, such as Government, hospitals and health care facilities should create a plan for both the transportation and housing for employees during times of disaster. There should be no reliance on Emergency Services organizations or resources for these duties, as they will not always be available during time of disaster.

### ***FEMA Core Capability: Critical Transportation***

3. Resource request for Binghamton University assets requested twice and caused confusion – All resource requests from municipalities as well as other entities should be made from a single point of contact, whether that is a single person within an entity or a single point of contact at an Emergency Operation Center. This will ensure consistency in requests and minimize unneeded redundancy and waste in resource utilization.

### ***FEMA Core Capability: Operational Coordination***

4. Better education of public about who is considered “essential” – Governmental entities as well as private organizations should firmly spell out who is considered “essential” personnel within their agency. These are people who would be

expected to report for duty during events in which the general public is told not to be out.

***FEMA Core Capability: Planning***

5. Municipality attempted to lift travel ban before the county causing major public confusion – Re-education of municipal leaders should be undertaken underscoring the importance of coordination of public messages with all entities involved.

***FEMA Core Capability: Public Information and Warning***

6. Road Closures – Broome County should work with NYS DOT to expand the use of the statewide 511 Traffic, Travel and Transit Information system. This is an existing state-wide system that provides state road closures to the public. By partnering with NYS, and expanding the system to include local roads, Broome County can refer both first responders and the public from the dispatch center to 511 for this information. Collaboration with Broome County GIS should also be explored for these events, but these maps will take time and manpower to produce, on top of other maps that are produced for these events.

***FEMA Core Capability: Public Information and Warning***

7. EOC space constraints – An additional use study for EOC space is needed. A long term permanent solution is needed to build additional EOC space. This space must be large enough to support a fully activated EOC. Space for a fully functional backup EOC should be identified as well.

***FEMA Core Capability: Operational Coordination***

8. EOC paperwork and record-keeping – Broome County should look into acquiring an EOC based software/web based product for its documentation processes. This would help streamline paperwork processes. Also, acquiring a package that interfaces into the NY Responds system would allow EOC personnel to only have to enter resource requests once, saving valuable time and maximizing efficiency.

***FEMA Core Capability: Operational Coordination***

## Review of After Action Feedback

This section will broadly list the strengths of the incident as reported through the After Action review conducted on March 31, 2017. This is a comprehensive list not edited for applicability.

### ***National Weather Service:***

- NWS relationship with locals is great. NWS display of information, including outliers was extremely helpful.
- Strategizing beforehand with NWS
- NWS likes feedback from what agencies need for information. NWS uses feedback to improve
- NWS “Chat” to communicate is helpful.
- Early info of 20 inches was enough to put some things into motion.
- NWS slide of 40” potential validated the need for preparation
- Early consideration for travel ban based on early NWS info.

### ***Law Enforcement***

- NYSP Increased road & Supervisor patrols.
  - Placed people on notice they might be needed
- NYSP created new, different posts on Interstate
  - Saturated Interstates with patrol
- BCSO/NYSP coordinating critical transports of nursing/hospital staff
- BCSO able to focus on municipalities and not on Interstates
- BCSO added people as well
- Law presence in EOC is good resource

### ***EOC Operations***

- EOC cooperation – all disciplines work very well together here.
- Knowing people in advance from training, LEPC, incidents helps
- Separating Policy folks from Operations in EOC helped
- Information flow from 911 center was good
- 57 NYResponds requests processed and fulfilled pretty easily
  - No waiting for Albany approval
- Tom McCartney and Albany were easily reachable when NY Responds issues arose

- Recognizing that the human services needs were going to magnify quickly, exceeding the National Guard capabilities

### ***Highway Departments/DOT***

- NYSDOT helped smaller towns – everyone kept “their plows down”
  - A declared emergency definitely helps
- NYSDOT new climate “help each other out” helped
- NYSDOT Regional Operation Center staffed pre-storm and worked with EOC.

### ***Executive Level***

- EOC calling municipalities avoids “were in this alone” thoughts
- Broome County EOC process
  - Briefings
  - Executive briefings
  - Calls to municipalities
  - Conference calls with municipalities
- Support from Executive Office was great
- Chief of Staff created text group for Director, Chief of Staff, Executive, Deputy Executive
- People sustained 24/7 operations Tues/Wed/Thurs (Depth of staff)
- Using COOG to determine who’s essential

### ***Collaborating Agencies***

- 211 assistance with human needs
  - Fielded 400-500 calls/requests
  - Screening tool was developed to filter calls (BCOEM,211,BC Social Services)
- 211 staff expanded hours
- 211 staff is well trained in their questioning
- Excellent collaboration between 211& EOC
- Positive feedback to agencies from Seniors
- COAD – 160 calls
  - Available as a contact for homebound people
  - BU/CAP/churches able to help shovel out
  - MAPS from GIS showing churches/requests were extremely helpful
  - Good relationship with BU Center for Civic Engagement
  - Council of churches fronted money for shovels
    - This money was in reserve for emergency purchases
- Red Cross on notice for shelters and represented in the EOC

### Appendix A: Improvement Plan Matrix

Core Capability	Issues	Recommendations	Responsibility
Public Information and Warning	Municipalities sending mixed messages	Re-educate municipal leaders on importance of coordinated messages	Broome County OES and local municipalities
	Unable to track road closures	Develop and exercise a plan to identify closed roadways using 511 and Broome GIS	Broome County OES, DPW, and NYS DOT
Operational Coordinator	Multiple requests were made for the same resources through different channels	Re-educate EOC staff to ensure that requests for resources are only being made once	Broome County OES
	EOC paperwork and recordkeeping process is antiquated and done on paper.	Evaluate and acquire EOC based software to streamline processes and maximize efficiency of EOC.	Broome County OES
	Space constraints at the EOC were noted event with revised use plan.	Need to identify expanded EOC space and develop new use plan.	Broome County
On –Scene Security, Protection and Law Enforcement	New York State Police needed more 4 wheel drive units	A map of assets available to each agency should be developed and available during time of disaster.	New York State Police, other applicable entities
Critical Transportation	Organizations relied on emergency services resources for transport of “essential” personnel	All entities (Government and private) with “essential” personnel should develop a plan to transport and house these employees during time of crisis/disaster.	All Governmental/private entities with “essential” personnel
Planning	Confusion within entities on what personnel was considered “essential”	Government and private entities should spell out exactly who is considered “essential” and educate employees as such.	All Governmental/private entities with “essential” personnel

## Appendix B: Snowfall Totals

PUBLIC INFORMATION STATEMENT  
SPOTTER REPORTS  
NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE BINGHAMTON NY  
1122 PM EDT WED MAR 15 2017

THE FOLLOWING ARE OFFICIAL AND UNOFFICIAL OBSERVATIONS TAKEN DURING  
THE PAST 20 HOURS. APPRECIATION IS EXTENDED TO HIGHWAY DEPARTMENTS...  
COOPERATIVE OBSERVERS...SKYWARN SPOTTERS AND MEDIA FOR THESE REPORTS.  
THIS SUMMARY IS ALSO AVAILABLE ON OUR HOME PAGE AT [WEATHER.GOV/BGM](http://WEATHER.GOV/BGM).

\*\*\*\*\*STORM TOTAL SNOWFALL\*\*\*\*\*

LOCATION	STORM TOTAL SNOWFALL /INCHES/	TIME/DATE OF MEASUREMENT	COMMENTS
NEW YORK			
...BROOME COUNTY...			
ENDWELL	36.2	715 AM 3/15	TRAINED SPOTTER
WEST CORNERS	35.0	815 AM 3/15	AMATEUR RADIO
BINGHAMTON REG ARPT	34.9	800 PM 3/15	NWS OFFICE
2 SSE WHITNEY POINT	32.4	816 AM 3/15	STORM TOTAL
1 S BINGHAMTON	31.0	730 AM 3/15	NEAR ROSS PARK ZOO
BROOKVALE	29.2	836 AM 3/15	STORM TOTAL
NW JOHNSON CITY	28.3	948 AM 3/15	TRAINED SPOTTER