



**Managing Special Needs Populations in Disasters: MN
Skyline Fire**

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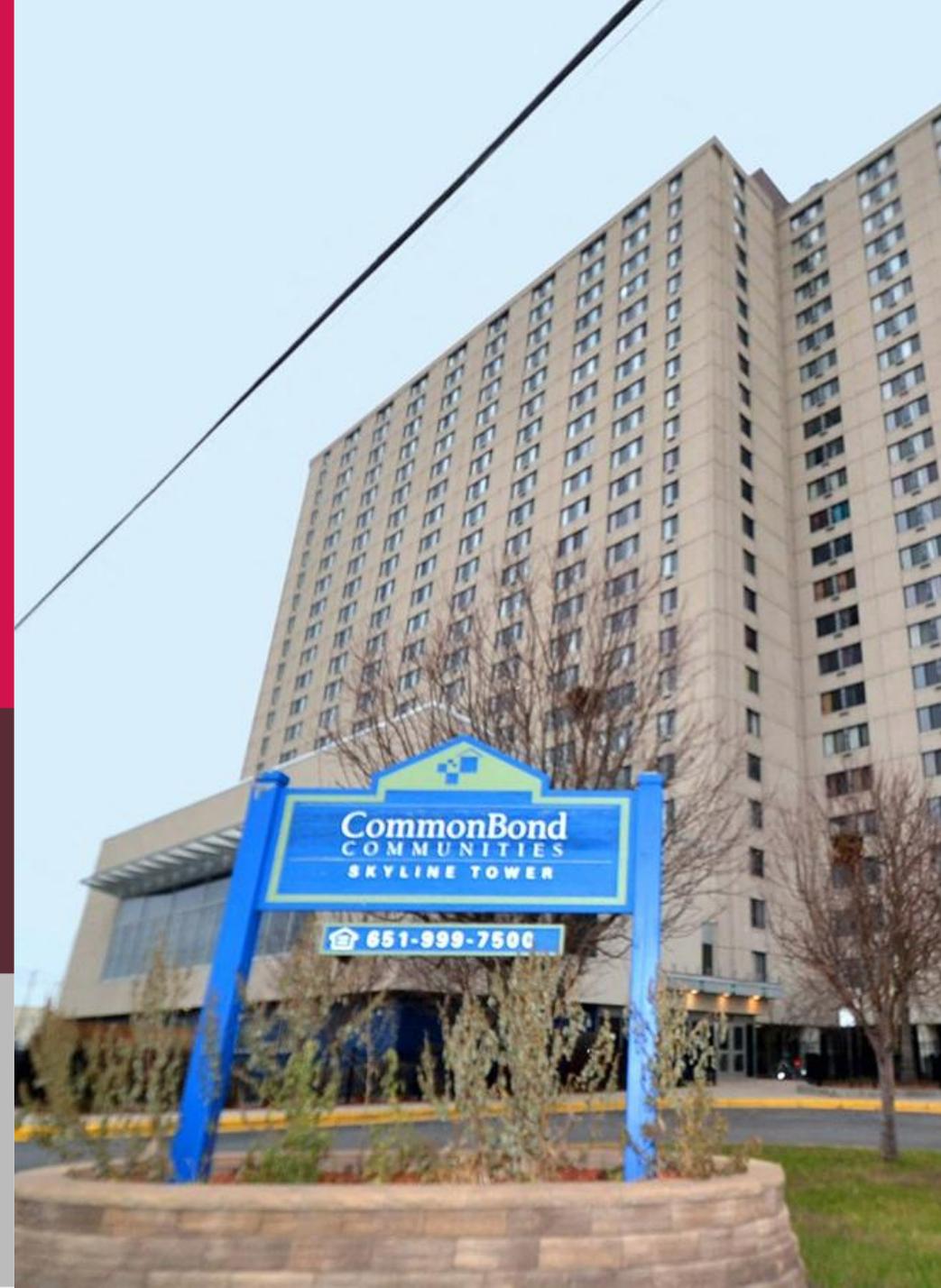
02/23/2026

Agenda

- Introduction
- Overview of Incident
- Partners & Roles
- Evacuation Timeline
- Initial coordination for evacuation
- Wrap around services (county navigation and support)
- Communication (to residents, Red Cross, County, schools)
- What worked
- Areas of Improvement

Skyline Towers

In the early morning hours of Sunday, October 26, 2025, a fire occurred at Skyline Tower, located at 1247 St. Anthony Avenue in St. Paul, Minnesota. This presentation will examine Ramsey County's coordinated, multi-department response to the Skyline fire, including the efforts of Public Health, Financial Assistance Services, and Policy and Administrative Strategy, in partnership with the Twin Cities Chapter of the Red Cross and CommonBond.



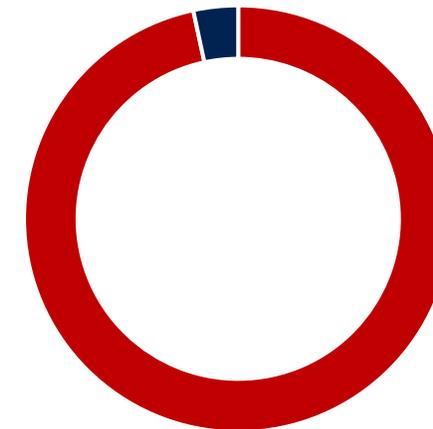
Overview of Incident

- Skyline Tower is the largest single-building subsidized housing complex west of Chicago
- Small electrical fire triggered the sprinkler system
- No significant fire damage— majority of the damage was water related
- Damage to power equipment resulted in loss of power throughout the entire building
- Apartment complex deemed uninhabitable due to lack of water and power, thus resulting in a mass evacuation

Scale of Impact

- Total of 504 units with 487 occupied at the time
- Nearly 1,000 people were affected
- 14 out of 24 floors damaged

Total Units



■ Occupied ■ Unoccupied

Partners & Roles

County, city and nonprofit partners worked together to relocate residents and delivery immediate supports.



County coordination

Ramsey County

- Internal coordination between Ramsey County Public Health, Financial Assistance Services and Policy & Administrative Strategy to assess areas of need for provide wraparound services.



Non-profit housing and service provider

CommonBond

- Evacuated Skyline residents with the help of City of St. Paul and St. Paul Police.
- Secured housing and managed resident placement for 400+ displaced residents.
- Maintained resident hotline, on-site hotel staffing and meetings.

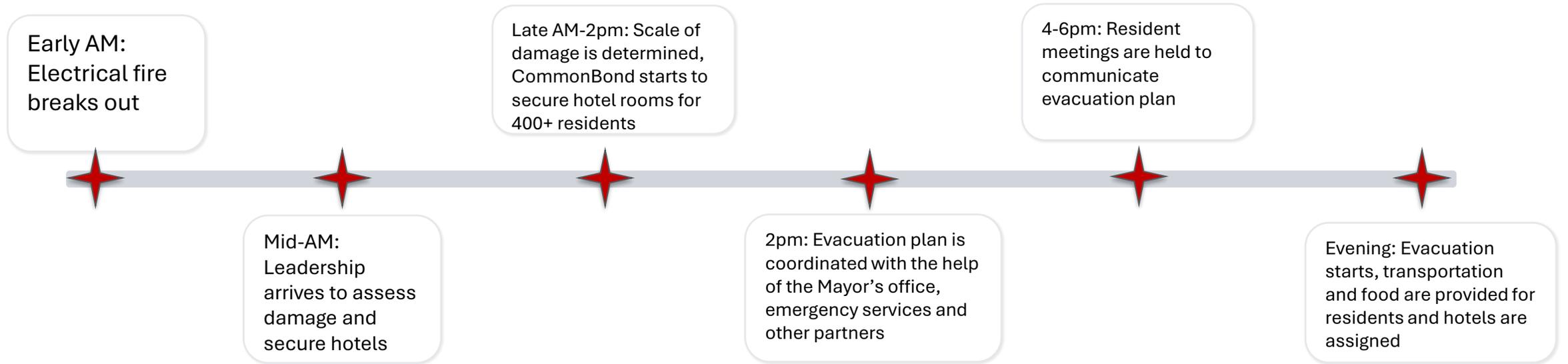


Disaster Cycle Services – including Feeding

Red Cross

- Provided Feeding Services , as well as Disaster Supplies – groceries and Comfort kits to displaced residents.
- Partnered with local restaurants once a need for culturally relevant meals were identified
- Provided Disaster Health Services to residents that required care (medications, diabetic supplies, etc)

Evacuation Timeline



- **Key Public Partners:** Ramsey County, City of St. Paul, St. Paul Police, Fire department, Metro Transit and Metro Mobility
- Evacuation started on the 24th floor by CommonBond staff and St. Paul Police. Each floor was cleared to ensure the building was completely evacuated.
- Residents were directed to one of 2 exits – 1 exit to the parking lot for those with had their own transportation and the other exit for those residents who need transportation using Metro Transit buses.

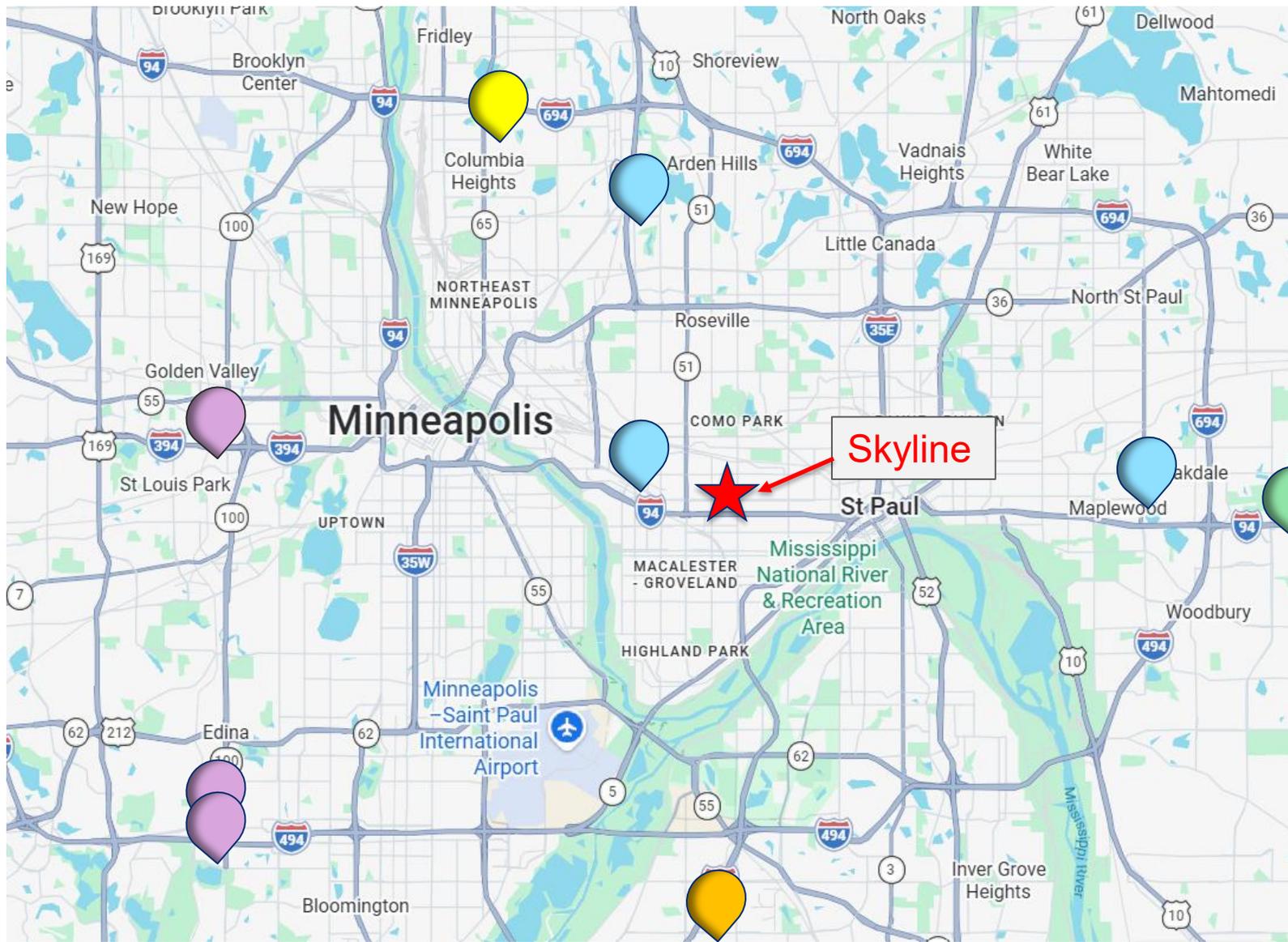
Initial Coordination of Incident

- Evacuation is a joint effort between CommonBond Asset Management, Advantage Services and Property Operations
- City of Saint Paul is assisting CommonBond with Department of Safety and Inspections, Public Works/Traffic, St Paul PD/Fire/EMS and Department of Emergency Management. Metro Transit and Metro Mobility also assisting with evacuees
- Twin Cities Red Cross Disaster Assistance Team response is activated
- Ramsey County notified



Hotels

- Residents re-located to hotels across Metro
- By November, ~380 residents remaining in hotels
 - West tower retains the most damage, has the longest timeline for return
 - Gradual further consolidation of hotels



Hotel Geography

- Wide dispersal
 - 3 hotels in Ramsey County
 - 3 in Hennepin
 - 1 in Washington
 - 1 in Anoka
 - 1 in Dakota

What Worked Well

- Hundreds of residents were relocated quickly to hotels with capacity around the metro.
- CommonBond was responsive when residents asked to be moved from one hotel to another for transit accessibility, kitchenette preference, etc.

What Could be Improved

- Understanding and urgency associated with such as large response (largest evacuation of people in Twin Cities in decades)
- Residents left without transportation
 - Separated from usual bus lines
 - Many without cars
 - Increased resident spending on rideshare
- Most hotels without kitchenettes, so residents were dependent on delivered RedCross meals and/or takeout
- Loss of community for many residents. Residents would often rely on their neighbors for meals, transportation and socialization

Twin Cities Chapter – American Red Cross

Disaster Services Delivery

Red Cross Disaster Health Services – initial response is challenged

- Determined to not be needed after 2nd week (sustainment of effort was difficult)

Hot meal delivery

- Lunch and dinner were delivered to hotels daily by Red Cross Feeding Team volunteers (*Prepared by Salvation Army*)
- Hotels with kitchenettes were provided with dry groceries and produce (referred to as “Disaster Supplies”)

Disaster Current Operations Report

Client Shelters 0 ✓ SDP: (Blank) (+NaN%)	Shelter Overnight Stays 0 ✓ SDP: (Blank) (+NaN%)	
New Shelter Registrations 0	Staff Shelters 0	Staff in Staff Shelters 0

Kitchens 0	Snacks Served 14,262
Meals Served 7,091	Shelf Stable Meals Served 0
Total Meals Served 7,091! SDP: (Blank) (-Infinity%)	

Clean-up Kits Distributed 0	Other DES Items Distributed 892
DES Households Served 231	

Welfare Info Requests Received 0
Welfare Info Requests Completed 0

Calls Received 0

EOC Supported by Red Cross 0

Cases w/ Financial Assistance 0	IA Cases 0 ✓ SDP: (Blank) (+NaN%)	Cases Opened 0
Cases Closed 0	Clients Served in Cases 0	

MDA Assignments 27! SDP: (Blank) (-Infinity%)	M&T Assignments 19	Total All Assignments 115! SDP: (Blank) (-Infinity%)
Non-T&M Assignments 69	Agency Hires Assignments 0	TDE Assignments 0

ERVs 3	Passenger Rental Vehicles 1
Non Passenger Rental Vehicles 1	

Total DA 9	DA No Visible Damage 2
DA Minor/Affected 7! SDP: (Blank) (-Infinity%)	DA Destroyed/Major 0 ✓ SDP: (Blank) (+NaN%)

What Worked Well

- Food was halal from the beginning
- Flexibility of providing produce and dry groceries to kitchenette hotels – Feeding operation and teams were incredible (preparation, pick-up, distro)

What Could be Improved

- Food initially did not align with cultural norms and individual preferences
- Limited options for foods suitable and comfortable for elderly residents
- Difficulties in coordinating the delivery of produce and dry goods with both residents and hotel staff
- Unclaimed produce remained in the lobby, resulting in spoilage
- Red Cross Disaster Health Services team working without the assistance of interpreters and “isolated” clients

Wrap-Around Services

- Ramsey County Recovery Corps (Policy & Administrative Strategy)
 - Triaging which residents had imminent renewals
 - On-the-ground liaisons with residents at hotels
 - Doubling in Financial Assistance Role
- Ramsey County Navigators (Financial Assistance Services)
 - Renewing Medical Assistance (MA), MinnesotaCare
 - Application and renewal for SNAP, GA, etc.
- Ramsey County Public Health Responders (Public Health)
- Red Cross Disaster Health Services and other Disaster Cycle Services

What Worked Well

- Navigators were able to triage overdue and imminent renewals by looking up case statuses on MMIS, MAXIS, and METS
 - Allowed for targeted follow-ups
- Somali-speaking staff were able to more effectively respond
 - 2 Somali-speaking Ramsey County staff

What Could be Improved

- Limited resident uptake on services like benefit renewal, mental health assessment, etc. unless directly contacted
 - Resident concern was on basic needs
- More consistent coordination between CommonBond and Ramsey County on resident whereabouts for targeted follow-ups

Communication

- Mass text platform was utilized by City of St. Paul to coordinate communication.
- Daily messages was provided by CommonBond to the City of St. Paul to send out to resident
- Resident hotline was created for residents calling needing assistance
- CommonBond staffed hotels
- In person residents' meetings were held to answer questions and explain current timeline
- Coordination with Ramey County, High Ground Charter, and St. Paul Public Schools

What Worked Well

- Strong relationship within the Skyline community allowed residents to stay informed, as residents would check-in with each other and pass information along
- Use of mass text system
- Coordination with school systems
- Staffing schedule for each hotel

What Could be Improved

- Connecting key stakeholder earlier to move services along
 - Direct connection between Ramsey County and CommonBond to better identify the location of residents for outreach purposes
 - Connection within St. Paul Public Schools to coordinate student transportation was delayed until the Mayor's office stepped in
- Language and cultural barriers
 - Vast majority of residents speak Somali
 - Language line can be an option, but residents may not initiate
- Responding agencies should have community partnerships in place to bridge language and cultural barriers



Questions?

