

courthouse building had been toppled, and the city and county were without communications.

Hanafan and Wade immediately ran across the street, getting soaked — in Wade's case, soaked for a second time, and opened the Emergency Operations Center in the basement of the courthouse. By that time, police, who had been ordered off the streets as the storm approached, had resumed patrol and were attempting to radio in damage reports.

The Emergency Operations Center was to become Hanafan's office for the next 28 hours as the magnitude of the storm and the amount of damage it had caused began to unfold.

Police Chief Mark Moline was immediately appointed operations chief for the duration of the disaster. Within five minutes, the group of city and county officials who had gathered in the Emergency Operations Center had made the decision to call in all available city and county employees.

The sheriff's department mobile communication van was moved to the southwest corner of the courthouse building to re-establish communications with law enforcement officers on the street.

Hanafan then returned to City Hall where he began assigning tasks to city employees from supervisors on down. The initial order was simple: mobilize every available piece of city equipment and push downed trees aside to open all streets to at least a single lane of traffic.

Well in advance of sunset on that first night, Hanafan had declared the situation, by proclamation, a disaster, an action that put him officially in charge of all operations. For the next several days, the rulebook essentially went out the window as the city was operated by mayoral proclamation.

With as much as 90 percent of the city without electricity and light, Hanafan ordered a curfew



Called in to prevent looting and to help with cleanup after the storm, members of the Iowa National Guard patrol the streets of Council Bluffs Friday evening.—Photo by Dan Koenig.

beginning at 10 p.m.

Calls for assistance went out to the leaders of several nearby communities and to Iowa Gov. Terry Branstad. Branstad responded immediately, and by midnight a contingent of 100 Iowa National Guard troops and 50 Iowa Highway Patrolmen were in Council Bluffs or on their way.

Another of the mayor's initial directives established hourly briefings in the Emergency Operations Center to determine where the city was in terms of the cleanup effort. The priorities were simple: locate anyone who had been injured by the storm and clear routes for emergency vehicles.

City crews were called off at midnight that first night with orders to return Saturday morning at 7 to begin a week of 12-hour round-the-clock shifts. A second command post had been established in the northwest part of the city, the area hardest hit by the storm.

About 3:30 a.m. Saturday, Hanafan and Moline toured the hardest-hit areas of the city.

"We wanted to make sure what we were doing was right," Hanafan said of that first trip through the devastated area.

The desire to do things right has not diminished in the weeks following the storm. City and county officials have begun a

slow, methodical review of the steps that were taken immediately following the storm, an effort to ensure the city's response to future disasters — should they occur — will be even better than that of July 15 and the days that followed.

"We learned that we can operate in a disaster situation," Hanafan said a week after the storm. "The fundamental system worked, but we're going to re-evaluate everything — examine our response to the disaster and see what we can do to improve any future responses."

While Hanafan, as the head of the city government, received the lion's share of publicity in the wake of the storm, he has — from the beginning — been lavish in his praise for city employees and the people of Council Bluffs.

"City employees, from supervisors on down, handled the situation with a degree of professionalism and caring that I'm extremely proud of," Hanafan said. "During those first hours after the storm, they had a tremendous amount of responsibility thrown on them. People were scared and emergency crews couldn't get through the streets. I have the greatest respect for all those people. I made decisions, but it was the employees who carried them out and made them work."