

# Christchurch residents denounce lack of basic services

Our correspondents  
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While New Zealand Prime Minister John Key continues to insist that “everything that can be done is being done” to help victims of the devastating February 22 earthquake in Christchurch, thousands of people have received hardly any assistance. The *World Socialist Web Site* spoke to residents from the severely damaged eastern suburbs, where hundreds of homes remain without water, sewage or water.

**Brian Dooley**, a self-employed web technician from Dallington, said his street had been given just two portable toilets. “Nobody in this area has water or sewage,” he said, “and the council says it’s going to take months to restore [the services].”

Although Dooley’s home appeared to have suffered relatively minor damage, he said it had only been given “a cursory structural inspection” by officials—who were simply examining the outside of damaged buildings. “I’m in a lucky situation,” he said, but “there’s massive destruction in the adjacent block.” Dooley felt that “the city is doing the best that can be done under the circumstances, but the further east you go the more people feel that they’ve been ignored”.

On Sunday Dooley attended one of several community information forums held by Civil Defence—the first local meetings since the quake hit. “About 100 to 200 people attended. People had a lot of bottled up anger,” he said. “They were concerned about [the lack of] basic services. One person mentioned the servicing problems with portaloos, with 40 people using the same portaloos.”

Dooley explained that he and several others had left the meeting in frustration because “no one from the EQC, [the Earthquake Commission, the state-owned

insurer] was there to answer questions about when properties would be inspected and repaired”.

**Magnus Koldau** said that although power had been restored to his Dallington home six days after the earthquake, his family was still living without sewage and water.

“There was lots of chaos over the distribution of portable toilets,” he said. “Some roads have portaloos that are not being used but other streets don’t have any. We have dug a hole in the back yard.”

Koldau explained that his home seemed to be weatherproof. “We privately organised an engineer to look at the house, but nobody has been here from the EQC or Civil Defence,” he said. “The first insurance assessment [following last September’s earthquake] said the house would have to be demolished,” he added, but more than five months since that disaster the family had still not received a follow-up inspection.

**Chrystal Perelini** runs a free food shop in Dallington, which she established soon after the quake hit. Her shop, one of several that eastern suburbs residents spontaneously established following the quake, had just relocated to a nearby Trade Aid store after operating from her front lawn.

“Dallington is not one of the worst-off suburbs,” she said, “but it’s chaos all day because so many people are coming through, desperate for help. Many people who come in have lost their jobs and their houses. For these people, things are very bad.” Almost everyone is in “great need,” she added, emphasising that the elderly had been “hit particularly hard”.

Perelini decided to open the food store because of the desperate lack of facilities in the neighbourhood. “Two weeks after the quake, there are no banks and the main shopping malls have all been closed. There are only two supermarkets still running in the entire eastern suburbs. Anyone without a car cannot access shops or services,” she said. There were only two other food banks in the vicinity.

While Perelini was reluctant to directly criticise the inadequate government response, she was angry about the situation facing ordinary people.

“There has been no recovery from the two earthquakes in September and December. It is our third run,” she said. “After the September quake, there were just two badly-hit suburbs without power and water 10 days afterwards. Two weeks after this quake, very few people in eastern Christchurch have power, water or toilet facilities.”

Perelini added: “Nothing was sorted out regarding housing, insurance and EQC payments [after the September quake].” Perelini’s mother had lost her home in that disaster and had been left in limbo ever since. “Six months later, I am still waiting for EQC payments to arrive, and have just been told everything will be reassessed in another six months,” Perelini said.

Houses had been “left unliveable after the first quake,” she commented. “People have just been hanging on since the September quake, and I can see many who just won’t be able to hang on any more after this.”

**Steve Hill**, a plumber from Bexley, one of the hardest-hit suburbs, said the whole neighbourhood had been ruined by flooding and liquefaction. While Hill’s home had been extensively damaged in September and then repaired, it was now unliveable and likely to be demolished. He voiced his immense frustration over the “lack of information and direction” provided to survivors.

“No one out there is making decisions,” Hill said. “No one knows where we are going. This has been

going on since the September quake.” He explained that “basic services are still missing from whole areas. Half of Avonside is still using portable toilets.” His street had finally received portaloos three days before he spoke to the WSWS.

“The biggest problem is the land slump [that has occurred], which means there are no drains, sewage or power,” he explained. This had made it almost impossible for him to do his job as a plumber effectively. “The water table sits just centimetres below the land surface. Every time I dig into it, a new spurt of water immediately surfaces,” he said.

Hill said ordinary people, “particularly the road workers and the Orion [power lines] guys are doing a fantastic job,” attempting to restore normal life. He was scathing, however, about the government response. “They could learn from the communities,” he said. “We are looking after ourselves, but we need resolution about where we are going. We are just not getting it.”

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