OPINION

Sandy’s wrath

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As people in New York and New Jersey begin cleaning up Hurricane Sandy’s devastation, at least one autism research lab is reeling from a major loss. Thousands of laboratory rodents in a basement facility at New York University (NYU) drowned during the flooding that swept through large parts of lower Manhattan.

According to a **report** in *The New York Times*, researchers worked through the night on Monday and were able to save many lab animals. But they were unable to reach one facility.

“The combined tide and wind resulted in extensive flooding in the building, and unfortunately, my mouse colonies were wiped out,” **Gordon J. Fishell,** associate director of the NYU Neuroscience Institute, told the *Times*. “These animals were the culmination of ten years of work, and it will take time to replace them.”

Fishell’s lab, which studies how autism-linked genes influence **brain organization**, lost 2,500 mice, and researchers in other labs lost a combined 7,500 rodents. The collection included 40 genetic variants. But fortunately, most of these strains are also housed elsewhere, which will help researchers rebuild their resources.

Researchers at other universities in Manhattan have not yet reported major damage. But they are reaching out to NYU, sending dry ice and offering freezer space for any tissue samples that might need to be transferred.

According to the *Times* report, scientists at the University of Pennsylvania and Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory on Long Island said they will donate animals to restock some of the lost colonies. Though scientists are often competitive, even reluctant to **share their mice**, tragedies like this one bring out the sense of community.

The NYU loss follows a major blow to autism research in May, when **a freezer malfunction** at Harvard University destroyed a large number of brain tissue samples, many of them irreplaceable.

At SFARI.org we are looking further into the impact of the storm on autism-related research, and how affected scientists plan to rebuild. Please let us know if you have your own storm stories, or can help scientists who have lost animals or other research.