



**Public Safety Newsletter**  
**September/October 2011**

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It is my pleasure to once again address the Emergency Management community, friends, and Erie County residents. This is my 10<sup>th</sup> written message for the newsletter since taking office 22 months ago and this newsletter was a commitment I made during my first two months in office. Each day, I learn more about the intricacies of Public Safety and the Emergency Management community. Public Safety is one of the administration's top priorities, as I've stated both prior to my election and throughout my tenure, and we will continue to strive for mutual collaboration and understanding of our Public Safety mission.

Mr. Geers, our director of Public Safety, continues to work on short and long range planning with his extremely capable team, including Dale Robinson, Emergency Management Coordinator, John Grappy, 911 Coordinator, and Abdul Osman, Chief Information Officer. We continue to have scheduled meetings with Mr. Geers in my office on a bi-weekly basis to review both day to day operations and any issues that may need immediate attention from my office.



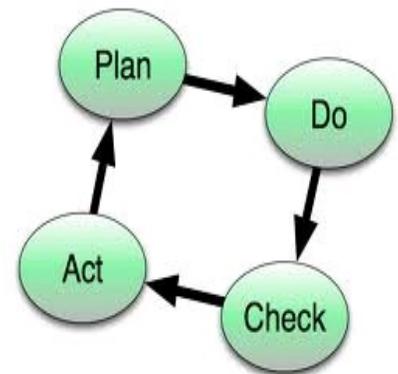
Barry Grossman  
Erie County Executive

I would like to send kudos out to the shift supervisors at the Public Safety building, as well as all the call takers and dispatchers for the fine work and commitment they show on a daily basis.

If we keep working together, we can continue to ensure the safety of the 280,000 residents of Erie County, whose well-being we are charged with maintaining. I would like to thank all of you for a job well done and anticipate more synergy through the remainder of this year and the years to come.

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In the late 1950s, an American statistician named Dr. W. Edwards Deming taught statistical control methods to Japanese manufacturers. As you know, the quality level of Japanese products soon eclipsed American products, and American manufacturers scrambled to implement quality programs. The basic tenet of Deming's approach to quality control is a four-step cycle called Plan, Do, Check, Act. On a modified scale, Public Safety employs this principle as we work toward improving our operations. For example, the Radio Procedures Manuals that were implemented this summer are now in the Check phase of the PDCA Cycle.



Over the past 12 months, as commented on in this newsletter, Public Safety has stabilized numerous operational and technical processes; that activity would constitute the Plan and Do phases. As we move forward, though, those same processes will undergo scrutiny in the Check



Todd R. Geers,  
Director, Public  
Safety  
Photo courtesy  
of Jack Hanrahan,  
Erie Times News

and Act phases as we endeavor to improve upon the aforementioned stable processes. In other words, quality improvement is a never ending cycle of reviewing and tweaking.

Over the next several months, major initiatives to be undertaken include commencing the narrowband process for VHF and UHF radios, starting the 800 MHz Mobile Data Terminal system build-out, implementing the first-ever comprehensive list of law enforcement type codes into CAD, and, of course, the consolidation of user agencies in western Erie County. And, yes, we will PDCA all these processes!

## Public Safety Appreciation Day 2011



The 5<sup>th</sup> annual Public Safety Appreciation Day was held at Sparrow Pond Family Camp Ground in Waterford, PA on August 20<sup>th</sup>, 2011. Pennsylvania State Police members provided a Child ID program for all children and a bicycle safety program. The State Police Helicopter, Trooper Six landed for educational tours.

During the program, multiple agency members presented educational programs and displays from their place of employment or where they volunteer.

The 911 Center educated young people on how to make an emergency call to 911. Erie County Emergency Management Agency and the Erie County CERT team were present. PENNDOT displayed one of its snow plow trucks giving people an up close look at what keeps our roads clear during long winter months.

Safe Net members were also present. Waterford's Stancliff Hose Company displayed equipment explaining the importance of proper training. Our Armed Forces were present and each of the Services was excited to be part of this event and talk to attendees about their service to this Great Nation we live in.

The United States Coast Guard, based at Presque Isle attended. United States Marine Corps and the Marine Corps Reserve brought an 8 ton vehicle where people could climb in the bed of the truck, getting a birds-eye view of what a Marine sees in combat. United States Navy, United States Army and the Army National Guard, United States Air Force and the Air Force Reserve, our local Border Patrol and Customs agents were on hand.

Crime Victim Center, Safe Kids Worldwide, and Hamot Shock Trauma fitted and gave bicycle helmets to all of the kids in need of one. The Anna Shelter educated people on the need for people to be willing to adopt animals and be responsible for them. Kids were delighted to see the mascots from the Erie Sea Wolves baseball team, and Clutch the Bay Hawk.

Plans are already being made for the 6<sup>th</sup> annual Public Safety Appreciation Day. The date is August 11<sup>th</sup>, 2012, from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p. m. Mark your calendars and plan to attend rain or shine.

Trooper Robert Brown  
Pennsylvania State Police



## CERT - Where Did We Come From and Where Are We Going?



In February, 1985 a group of Los Angeles City officials went to Japan to study its extensive earthquake preparedness plans. They found that Japan had taken extreme steps to train entire neighborhoods in one aspect of alleviating the potential devastation that would follow a major earthquake. These single-function neighborhood teams were trained in fire suppression, light search and rescue operations, first aid or evacuation. Also, in September of 1985, a Los Angeles City investigation team was sent to Mexico City following the magnitude 8.1 quake that killed more than 10,000 people and injured more than 30,000. Mexico City had no training program for citizens prior to the disaster. Untrained volunteers rescued many people but through lack of training, many of the volunteers “injured” themselves, and some even “died”.

In 1986 the Los Angeles Fire Department developed a pilot program to train citizens in various basic disaster preparedness skills. In 1987 the Whittier Narrows earthquake spurred the City of Los Angeles to take an aggressive role in protecting its citizens. The Los Angeles Fire Department created the Disaster Preparedness division.

Born out of these major disasters, the concept of widespread local volunteer emergency responders was implemented and by 1993 the Federal Emergency Management Agency had made the program available nationwide. In January 2002, CERT became part of the Citizen Corps. By 2004, 50 states, three territories and six foreign countries were using the CERT training program. In July 2010, the Canadian Internet Registration Authority recommended to the Government of Canada to enhance its ability to respond to emergencies by developing a Community Emergency Response Team (CERT).



The CERT program educates people to prepare for hazards in their area by training them in basic disaster response skills such as fire safety, light search and rescue, team organization and disaster medical operations. With the training learned in the classroom and during exercises, CERT members can assist others in their neighborhood or workplace following an event when professional responders are not immediately available to help.

When events happen, whether caused by nature or man-made, learned lifesaving skills should be an essential part of the civilian sector for not only taking care of themselves, their families and neighbors, but to support first responders.

The recognition of CERT in the public and professional community is growing at a fast pace. Blending together with trained professionals, a dedicated CERT member can opt to go to higher skill levels of training after the 20 hour basic training program. Together, the professional and a well-trained CERT member can make a difference when a disaster occurs. So, CERT has only one place to go and that’s reaching up and out to their community.

Janet Damico  
Erie County CERT Coordinator

# WHAT WOULD YOU DO IF YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD WAS STRUCK BY A FLOOD, EARTHQUAKE, CHEMICAL SPILL, ICE STORM, TORNADO OR OTHER DISASTER?

Would you know what to do to protect yourself and your family?  
Would you have the essentials equipment & supplies on hand to handle the situation?  
What would you do if emergency responders could not get to your neighborhood?

Find out how to be better prepared for disasters and how you can help your family and community when disaster strikes by attending

## FREE Community Emergency Response Team training: 2880 Flower Road (Public Safety Building), Erie, PA

The most recent CERT Training was held on Friday, November 18, 2011 through Sunday, November 20, 2011. At that time, 7 people graduated with certification for Emergency Response. We would like to congratulate those seven candidates for giving of their time and taking the initiative to become prepared in the event a disaster strikes. They are as follows:

Pamella Straight	Mary Blakeslee
Alan Whitmore	Alvento Chandler
Stephen O'Neill	William Heald
Edisa Berberkic	

The next Community Emergency Response Team training will be held in the Spring, 2012. Look for the announcement in upcoming newsletters. In the meantime, to get signed up early for this training, or to obtain more information, please contact Mary Richards, via email at [mrichards@ecdops.org](mailto:mrichards@ecdops.org) or via phone at #451-7921.



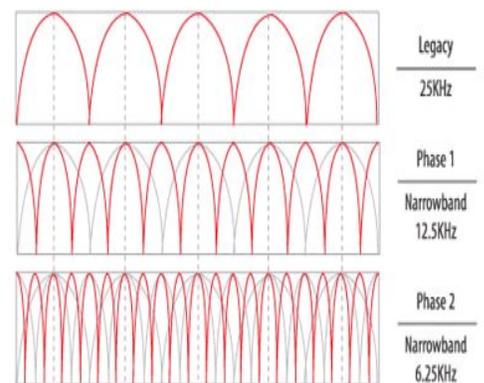
## FCC NARROWBANDING MANDATE



On January 1, 2013, all public safety land mobile radio systems operating in the 150-512 MHz radio bands (VHF hi-band and UHF) must cease operating using 25 kHz efficiency technology, and begin operating using at least 12.5 kHz efficiency technology.

Migration to 12.5 kHz efficiency technology will allow the creation of additional channel capacity within the same radio spectrum and support more users. Today, these bands are highly congested and there often is not enough spectrum available for licensees to expand their existing systems or implement new systems.

Ultimately the FCC anticipates migrating to bandwidths of 6.25 kHz to allow even more users to operate. After January 1, 2013, licensees not operating at 12.5 KHz efficiency will be in violation of the Commission's rules and could be subject to FCC enforcement action, which may include admonishment, monetary fines, or loss of license.



On behalf of our user agencies currently using VHF hi-band and UHF frequencies, the Erie County Department of Public Safety will coordinate the narrowband migration. The first step toward narrowbanding will be to survey the mobile and portable radios in use by the agencies. With a complete and accurate survey in hand, Public Safety will work closely with each agency and their radio vendor to develop a strategy to seamlessly transition frequencies with minimal to no loss of communications. Our goal is to narrowband all agencies by the fall of 2012.



Two EmergencyCare employees were recently honored at the fifth Annual PA EMS 911 Event: A Tribute to our Past and Present EMS Heroes. The event was hosted by the Pennsylvania EMS Provider Foundation and held on Thursday, October 13, 2011, at the Hershey Lodge and Convention Center in Hershey.

The Foundation hosts this event annually to honor outstanding EMS heroes, both past and present. Ten years later, it is still important to honor the emergency responders who gave their lives on Sept. 11, 2001, the emergency medical services (EMS) personnel who responded to the Flight 93 disaster in Somerset, and all other Pennsylvania EMS providers for their continued effort and commitment. The importance of the services these heroes provide cannot be overstated.

Part of the festivities included recognition of eighteen Stars of Life from EMS providers across the state of Pennsylvania. Shalan Anderson, Communications Supervisor, and David Leicht, Fleet Manager, were both recognized for their commitment to EMS with the Star of Life Award.

George Thomas, Communications Manager, nominated Shalan for this recognition, "Shalan Anderson has an uncanny ability to keep all of our organization's activities fresh in her mind. She is able to envision the future transport requests and formulate a plan to provide service to all of our customers. She has a great relationship with the staff and maintains a pleasant work environment."

Anderson has been a wheelchair transporter, ambulance EMT and communications specialist at EmergencyCare.

Todd Steele nominated David Leicht for the prestigious Star of Life distinction because, "Dave's department is responsible for maintaining a fleet of 68 vehicles and ensuring these vehicles are capable of performing our life saving mission. With the increasing demand on the EMS system, this becomes a very difficult task. His department does an outstanding job of ensuring these vehicles are mission ready."

Leicht is a Life member of the Albion Fire Department since 1970; an EMT since 1973; and from 1979 to 1983, he was a Paramedic with Erie Ambulance. From 1983 through today, he has been Fleet Maintenance Supervisor, a flight Paramedic for ten years, and an Operations Supervisor for six years. He is an original EmergencyCare employee with 28 years of service to the communities and employees we serve.

In other news, EmergencyCare is wrapping up its annual Membership drive. Memberships provide community members with an excellent way to avoid additional medical expenses. Each year nearly 20,000 households across northwestern PA take advantage of this affordable way to protect their family from out-of-pocket expenses for emergency ambulance service. Information can be obtained by calling 814-870-9999 or online at [EmergencyCare.org](http://EmergencyCare.org).

Jennifer A. Farrar - EmergencyCare

## WEST COUNTY CONSOLIDATION

The Department of Public Safety is excited to welcome aboard agencies currently served by West County Communications Center. Public Safety will dispatch for the following police and fire departments: Albion PD, Albion VFD, Central Erie County Paramedics Association, Cranesville VFD, Franklin VFD, Girard PD, Girard VFD, Platea VFD, Springfield VFD, and West County Paramedics Association.



Since May 2011, Public Safety has worked with these agencies to ensure a seamless transition. Critically important elements of operational necessity were reviewed and implemented, to include verification of response zones and plans, training of personnel on radio procedures, execution of memorandums of understanding, and establishing Internet links to Public Safety systems via a product called WebCAD. The final step, and arguably the most important, is to ensure reliable radio connectivity between the agencies and Public Safety.

Testing of radio propagation in West County will be performed using two different antenna towers to determine which tower offers the best radiation pattern for radio and pager use. A neat benefit of the radio test is that data produced can be plotted onto our dispatch mapping system, visually indicating to our dispatchers which antenna tower provides the best radiation pattern. Looking at the sample map below, if a call-for-service were located within the green shaded area, our dispatcher could select the corresponding tower which offers the best radiation pattern for that specific area. We plan to continue this concept county-wide.



## UNDERSTANDING 9-1-1

### **“9-1-1, Where is your emergency?”**

Over 127,000 times a year, that question is asked by Erie County 9-1-1 call-takers to initiate the interrogation of emergency calls-for-service, triggering a complex, interconnected sequence of events involving technology, procedures, and personnel. The calling-citizen in need of a police, fire, or medical response simply wants help as soon as possible, and we want the same thing. Yet, why does it take so long to send help? Why ask all those annoying questions? Why are calls not answered quickly?

Determining the location of the caller or the incident is the most important question. We have advanced technology which assists in locating callers; however, we must verify the location by asking, hence the first question when we answer the phone. Next, we need a call-back telephone number, in case the call is disconnected for some reason. That happens often and our policy is to call the number back.

Our user agencies—police, fire, medical—determine how they will respond within their jurisdictions for certain incidents. Those response plans are loaded in our dispatching computers and when such an incident comes in, we dispatch apparatus based on those pre-plans. For example, a commercial fire at a certain location warrants X number of specific apparatus, say a tanker, an engine, and a ladder truck. Call-taker questioning generates, via computer, the pre-determined response plan specified by the user agency. Therefore, the questions asked ensure we send the appropriate response.

At any one time, the dispatch center is manned with eight telecommunicators: two call-takers and six dispatchers. If both call-takers are busy interrogating 9-1-1 calls, the third caller will go into the waiting queue. Changes have been effected recently increasing our call-taker end-strength without increasing the number of employees – our telecommunicators now multi-task, handling both call-taking and dispatching duties. Effectively, we now have eight call-takers on duty. Please be mindful, on certain incidents, such as a motor vehicle accident, numerous callers report the accident simultaneously. In such a situation, if you are the ninth caller, you will go into the call waiting queue.

## “9-1-1, Where is your emergency?”

In a converse context, this question suggests problems within the 9-1-1 center. Public perception of the efficacy of the county 9-1-1 center may be skewed by misinformation or misunderstanding of the call-taking and dispatch process. Knowing the call-taking and dispatching processes are so interconnected, tweaking one minor process may produce results (decrease in dispatch times; more accurately locating a caller) or it may create a ripple effect that interferes with a related or subsequent step in the process. Therefore, effecting improvements requires careful analysis of all steps and processes within the system. So far, we have reduced our dispatch times by 10%. Daily we examine ways to reduce that time further, but we do so carefully, ever mindful of the ripple effect.



During the past twelve months, numerous changes have been implemented to improve our operations. Referring back to the call-taking scenario, reducing the time-to-dispatch involves improvements in training, technology updates and maintenance, operational procedures, personnel management, and agency interactions. For training, we revamped the new-hire Basic Academy and instituted a comprehensive Supervisor Checklist of required knowledge. For technology, we proudly maintain all our systems with in-house technical staff. For the first time, the county has a standardized radio dispatch model for police and fire agencies. Personnel management involves treating our staff with respect and holding them accountable, firmly and fairly. Lastly, on-going committees populated with user agency representatives ensure an avenue for agency input.

9-1-1 call-taking and dispatch operations are stable. Yet we continue to look for opportunities to improve and provide the best possible service to our customers: Erie County citizens and user agencies. Our staff has a passion for public safety. We truly want to help.

### Employee Spotlight



Sue Kraft – Admin. Financial Officer

Susan Kraft—29-year county employee with previous service as the executive assistant to the County Executive, County Council Clerk, and with the Health Department—is currently the Administrative Financial Officer for the Department of Public Safety. Susan is the quintessential professional! Charged with managing the department’s multi-million dollar budget, Susan’s diligence and attention to detail is unsurpassed and paramount to our effective and sustained operations. Erie County is blessed to have such a dedicated and competent employee. Thank you, Susan!