



COUNTY OF ERIE
OFFICE OF COUNTY EXECUTIVE

Barry Grossman
COUNTY EXECUTIVE

Public Safety Newsletter
October 2010



I am very proud to put forth this administration's 4th Public Safety Newsletter. The 911/ Public Safety Center demonstrates just how valuable they are to Erie County with 112,632 calls entered into the CAD (Computer Aided Dispatch) system last year. The services they provide are fundamental to the Erie area and to strengthening the community and I thank them for their continued dedication and commitment.

Barry Grossman
County Executive

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Jerry Mifsud
Director of Administration

Todd Geers
Director of Public Safety

Dale Robinson
Emergency Management Coordinator

John Grappy
911 Coordinator

Abdul Osman
Chief Information Officer

Erie County Well Represented At Annual PEMA Conference



The annual Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency (PEMA) conference was held September 11-15 in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. The PEMA Annual Conference is held each September, during National Preparedness Month to discuss various issues in the

field of emergency management. September 11 and 12 included tracks for city, township and borough emergency management coordinators, representatives from Local Emergency Planning Committees (LEPC), county Auxiliary Communications Services (ACS), and amateur radio groups. Mr. Dave Wellman, WX3E, Erie County ACS Coordinator, and Mr. Frank Henry, KB3NAT, Assistant County Narrow Band Emergency Messaging System (NBEMS) coordinator, attended conference sessions on case studies, planning, statewide credentialing and National Incident Management System (NIMS) in relation to communications. There were also sessions for city, township and borough emergency management coordinators covering topics such as terrorism, regionalization of local EMA programs, lessons learned, damage assessment updates, and legal issues concerning EMA programs. The local EMA coordinators also participated in a functional exercise where each participant was assigned an Emergency Operations Center (EOC) position. Local EMA coordinators Terry Thompson (North East Borough and Township), and Bill Heald, (West County Regional EMA), attended from Erie County.

The main conference was attended by Bill Heald, Terry Thompson, and Erie County Emergency Management Coordinator Dale Robinson. Sessions in the main conference included: Terrorism, Children in Disaster, and Strategic Foresight, as well as various sessions on the use of new technologies, case studies, Marcellus Shale issues, and updates on planning for various EMA functions.

Erie resident John Sushereba of the Keystone Crisis Intervention Team also served as a speaker at the Emergency Behavioral Health session.

During the awards dinner, Platea Borough and Girard Township were recognized for their efforts to regionalize their emergency management programs into the very successful West County Emergency Management Agency. Mrs. Lindy Platz (Girard Township) and Mr. Bill Heald accepted the award on behalf of the Borough and Township. County EMA Coordinator Dale Robinson was also presented with his PEMA Advanced Certification.

Platea Borough and Girard Township Regionalize EMA Program



Pennsylvania's emergency management code, Title 35, mandates that each county, city, borough and township have an emergency management program that includes an emergency management coordinator, an emergency operations plan, and emergency operations center complete with staff and equipment. This mandate often proves difficult in an era where volunteers are hard to find and keep. The terrorist attacks of 9-11 and Hurricane Katrina have increased the amount of planning and training for emergency management at all levels and has, in effect, made what was once a volunteer position a paid position.

Reacting to change is never easy, but the elected officials of both Platea Borough and Girard Township set forth to improve their programs by entering into an intergovernmental cooperation agreement. This was no easy task and took approximately three years of work and review by both municipalities' solicitors. One of the most significant outcomes of the intergovernmental cooperation agreement is that both municipalities now have a paid emergency management coordinator who can keep local plans up to date and keep abreast of the seemingly never ending changes in emergency management.

Shortly after hiring their EMA coordinator, Mr. William Heald, a Navy veteran and former FEMA employee, both Franklin and Washington Townships joined the agreement. Other municipalities are seeing the benefits of this locally driven regionalization and are contemplating joining the West County Emergency Management Agency.

Erie County Emergency Management Coordinator Receives Advanced Certification

Erie County's Emergency Management Coordinator, Dale Robinson, was awarded Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency's Advanced Certification. All emergency management coordinators in Pennsylvania are required under PA Title 35, Emergency Management Services Code, to complete Basic and Advance Certifications.



Advanced certification requires the completion of six courses including courses on effective media relations, emergency planning, exercise design, unified command, etc. Candidates must also have 75% attendance at PEMA quarterly training, a comprehensive program review by PEMA staff and endorsement by the PEMA Area Director. The comprehensive program review entails answering 53 pages of questions regarding various aspects of the county's emergency management program.

Understanding the Role of Emergency Management



We all can envision and comprehend what firefighters, police officers and emergency medical technicians do, but many people do not have the same level of understanding when we talk about personnel from emergency management.

Emergency Management evolved out of the old Civil Defense programs which dealt with planning for the protection of the civilian population during a nuclear war. In 1979 the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) was formed to centralize the federal government's disaster activities.

Besides creating a new agency, FEMA adopted an "All-Hazards" scope, meaning that natural, technological and man-caused disasters would be included in the purview of FEMA, not just civil preparedness for nuclear war. FEMA has adopted the principals of "Comprehensive Emergency Management." Comprehensive Emergency Management considers and takes into account all hazards, all phases, all stakeholders and all impacts relevant to disasters.

In Pennsylvania, Title 35 of the Health and Safety Code, provides the legal mandates for emergency management. Title 35 mandates each county, township; borough and city have an emergency management program. Each program must have an Emergency Management Coordinator (EMC), an Emergency Operations Plan (EOP), and an Emergency Operations Center (EOC) that is equipped with communications, other equipment, supplies and staff.

The city, township and borough emergency management programs are the first line of defense during a disaster. Each jurisdiction should be working on the "**Four Phases of Emergency Management**" that include mitigation, preparedness, and response and recovery.



The "**Mitigation Phase**" looks at steps that can be taken to lessen the impact of disaster and can include such steps as flood plain management, implementing local building codes, and zoning that lessens the impacts of disaster.



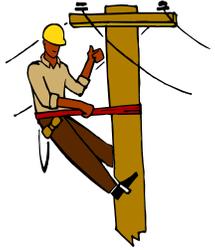
The "**Preparedness Phase**" includes developing plans, training, and developing and participating in exercises and drills. Emergency managers should also be cultivating good relationships with community partners such as the Red Cross. This phase is also the time to build and maintain equipment and supply caches that are ready when disaster strikes as it may take up to three days for federal assistance to arrive. The time, effort and money expended during the preparedness phase will have a significant impact on how a community responds to a disaster. How successful will a community be in

responding to a disaster that expends little or no dollars in the preparedness phase?

The "**Response Phase**" is what occurs when a disaster is imminent or actually happens. In this phase of emergency management, Emergency Operations Centers (EOC) open. The Emergency Operations Centers determine priorities and policy. These decisions should be discussed and determined by the jurisdiction's EOC staff, but ultimately the municipality's elected officials have the final say. EOC's also collect, verify, analyze, synthesize and disseminate information concerning damages, casualties, evacuations, etc.



The EOC is also responsible for resource management. Locally, resources are allocated based on priorities and policy. When the townships, boroughs or cities do not have the resources they turn to the county for assistance in finding the resources. The requesting jurisdiction is responsible for paying for any resources they request.



The final phase in emergency management is the “**Recovery Phase**”. Recovery is broken down into short term recovery and long term recovery. Short term recovery, for example, could be disposing of flood debris, or restoring utilities depending upon the size and severity of the disaster. Long term recovery would be fixing damaged or destroyed bridges or roads, etc. Recovery efforts often become emotionally charged since reconstruction of homes and businesses often raise issues with building codes, zoning, land use and other permitting issues.

Effective disaster response is dependent upon the level of involvement that the community has in the preparedness phase. Community involvement includes participation of governments, the private sector, non-profits and citizens themselves. How involved are you and your organization?

How to Prepare Yourself and Your Family for a Disaster

According to the Department of Homeland Security’s National Response Framework “Individuals, families, and caregivers to those with special needs should enhance their awareness of risk and threats, develop household emergency plans that include care for pets and service animals, and prepare emergency supply kits.” The National Response Framework outlines **five steps** individuals should take to prepare.



Step 1: Individuals should look at ways to mitigate the risks in and around their home and property. Do you have smoke and carbon monoxide detectors properly placed throughout your home? Look at your insurance policy to see if any changes are needed. Do you have a location to seek shelter during a tornado warning? Does your policy cover you for your risk, specifically flooding? Flood insurance is only available through the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP). How do you know your flood risk? Go to www.floodsmart.gov to determine your risk from flooding, but remember 23% of flooding occurs outside of a flood prone area. Contrary to popular belief, you do not have to live inside the flood plain to be eligible for flood insurance.



Step 2: Individuals and families should prepare an emergency supply kit and develop a household emergency plan that includes a communication plan and meeting locations. It could be several days before outside assistance becomes available. Remember the photographs from the Superdome after Hurricane Katrina? So what should go into your kit and plan? Go to www.ready.gov. Worried about your family budget? Don't have time? Go to <http://www.napo-sfba.org/DisasterPreparednessCalendar.pdf> for a calendar that provides a shopping list and tasks for 26 weeks to help keep within your family budget and make preparing more organized. Don't forget your pet either.

Step 3: Monitor for and listen carefully for emergency communications. Ask yourself, how would you and your family know if you were in danger of a tornado at 2 a.m.? A NOAA weather radio with tone alert and battery back-up is highly suggested. For more information on NOAA weather radios go to <http://www.nws.noaa.gov/nwr/allhazard.htm>.



Research indicates that people often wait after receiving a warning to take action. If you receive a warning, immediately follow the pre-cautionary actions included, such as evacuating or seeking shelter in a basement or other safe place.

Besides NOAA weather radios, there are other methods to receive warning information such as e-mail, text messages and pagers. There are a number of free services including Alert PA that is sponsored by the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency. Go to <https://alert.pa.gov/> to sign up for this free service that will send alerts and warnings to your e-mail, cell phone via SMS, pager or smart phone or PDA.

Step 4: Volunteer with an established organization or agency that has a disaster response or recovery role. Spontaneous volunteers after a disaster are often not used because of the inability to quickly verify their skills or professional certifications. Volunteers with established organizations are much easier to coordinate and utilizing their skills is streamlined since background checks and verification of any professional certifications/licenses for those like nurses, electricians, or CDL truck drivers is done prior to a disaster.



Step 5: Enroll in emergency response training courses. This can be as simple as taking a first aid and CPR course or enrolling in Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) training. Many disaster response organizations offer this training for free to those interested. We should learn what steps our children's schools, employers, places of worship and our local governments have taken to be better prepared for disaster.

Erie County CERT



The Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) concept was developed and implemented by the City of Los Angeles Fire Department in 1985. The severe earthquake threat necessitated the need for training civilians to meet immediate needs after a disaster since the city's first responders may be unable to reach or assist everyone.

The CERT concept was adopted by FEMA as a best practice. In Erie County, the CERT team assists Erie County Emergency Management in a number of areas including assisting with logistical support during a disaster, assisting in the Emergency Operations Center, and assisting the County Animal Response Team (CART) and the County HazMat Team with logistics.

Those who want to join CERT complete an application, have a background check completed and then receive 20 hours of basic CERT training. After completing the basic CERT training, CERT members regularly attend other training throughout the year. Basic CERT training includes topics such as basic disaster preparedness, first aid, fire extinguisher use, light search and rescue, terrorism awareness and more. CERT team members assisted in the June flooding of 2009 and most recently they assisted the County Animal Response Team during the full scale Red Cross Exercise in the City of Erie.

Today Erie County CERT has 14 active members. Mr. Jerry Damico is the CERT Team Leader. The next 20 hour basic training course for CERT starts in February 2011. For an application, please contact Mary Richards at mrichards@ecdops.org.

Have a Safe and Happy Halloween!