



PENNSYLVANIA REGION 13
EMERGENCY TASK FORCE
AND
UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH
INSTITUTE OF POLITICS

public officials
**emergency
resource
guide**

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The Pennsylvania Region 13 Emergency Task Force is responsible for coordinating emergency preparedness and response in Southwestern Pennsylvania. Its membership includes the Emergency Management Coordinators of 13 counties and the City of Pittsburgh plus representation from the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency and the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

The Institute of Politics and Region 13 plan to make updates to this guide as warranted by new developments. If you would like to be placed on a list to receive notification of these updates, contact the Institute at **412-624-1837** or **iopadmin@pitt.edu**.

Electronic versions of this guide can be found at **www.iop.pitt.edu** and will be updated with any changes.

You may also receive additional copies of this guide at no charge (while supplies last) by contacting the Institute.



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INTRODUCTION

This *Public Officials Emergency Resource Guide* was originally published in 2006 by the Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Policy Committee of the University of Pittsburgh Institute of Politics in conjunction with the Pennsylvania Region 13 Emergency Task Force. As the incoming cochairs of this committee, we would like to commend the outgoing cochairs, State Senator John Pippy and Pennsylvania Securities Commissioner Tom Michlovic, for their leadership in the creation of this guide.

We intend to revise the guide every three years. As a result, we are providing local governments throughout Southwestern Pennsylvania with copies of the revised pages. If you are receiving the revised pages but do not have a full hard copy of the 2006 guide and wish to obtain one, please contact the Institute of Politics at 412-624-1837 or iopadmin@pitt.edu.

Municipal and county elected officials have several important responsibilities related to emergency preparedness and response. They are required to:

- Receive training in the National Incident Management System (NIMS). Elected officials may tend to think that this level of detail can be left to the professionals, but it is essential that officials understand communications and know what actions will be taken in an actual emergency.
- Appoint an Emergency Management Coordinator (EMC).
- Designate an Emergency Operations Center (EOC) and equip it for use in an emergency situation.
- Ensure that their governments have an Emergency Operations Plan (EOP) in place and that their EMCs are receiving appropriate training.
- Ratify a declaration of a local disaster emergency.

In addition, public officials are encouraged to remain constantly in readiness for emergencies through such actions as participating in disaster simulation exercises, reviewing emergency response procedures, and keeping key personnel's contact information at their fingertips.

The purpose of this *Public Officials Emergency Resource Guide* is to acquaint public officials briefly with their roles and responsibilities in emergency management. It covers key issues in emergency preparedness and response and discusses actions that may need to be taken during an emergency incident or in the immediate aftermath of a disaster. This handbook is not intended to supersede or serve as an Emergency Operations Plan; it is not an all-inclusive guide to emergency operations. Rather, it seeks to assist public officials in ensuring that effective emergency preparedness procedures are in place and in responding effectively should an actual emergency occur. In addition, this handbook contains a pocket-size pamphlet with essential "first steps" information for public officials should an emergency occur.

In a disaster or emergency situation, you may be held responsible for the decisions you and your appointed professionals make, as well as for how thoroughly your community was prepared. Citizens will call on you for guidance, assurance, and leadership. Few of them worry about emergencies during normal times, but if an emergency occurs, they will expect you to be ready. It is our hope that this guide will help you to make sure that you and your emergency management staff are well prepared.



Timothy Solobay
Member
Pennsylvania House of Representatives



Randy Vulakovich
Member
Pennsylvania House of Representatives

Cochairs, Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Policy Committee, Institute of Politics

“The Institute of Politics and the Region 13 Emergency Task Force have created an outstanding resource to help all public officials become familiar with their responsibilities in times of emergency. The entire guide is thorough, reader-friendly, and practical. From assessment and disaster checklists to information about up-to-date legislation, this guide provides many of the tools necessary to plan for and respond to an emergency. Every public official should consult it in order to ensure that his or her community is prepared.”

Tim Rogers

Manager, Shaler Township

PREPAREDNESS

EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT COORDINATOR

Each Pennsylvania county and municipality must select an Emergency Management Coordinator (EMC) to oversee planning, training, and preparation during non-disaster time, and to act as coordinator of the Emergency Operations Center during a time of disaster. At the county level, the EMC is usually a full-time employee; however, in most local municipalities (i.e., cities, boroughs, and townships), the EMC is either a volunteer, a full-time employee doing one or more jobs, or a part-time employee. The EMC is the primary agent for elected officials in emergency preparedness and response, so it is crucial that the right person be selected for the job. The EMC's failure to respond effectively in an emergency situation could lead to significant loss of life and property, as well as to significant lawsuits filed against the community and its officials.

To be effective in the position, an EMC must be a skilled leader, must have the respect of the various emergency response groups (police, fire, emergency medical) in the community, and must be capable of rallying the total resources of the community in a coordinated, concerted effort to bring about an effective response to an emergency.

The EMC must have effective planning and training abilities. He or she must be able to coordinate the development or revision of an Emergency Operations Plan and to coordinate the training necessary to prepare the principal players to carry out the plan when needed. Finally, the EMC must possess administrative abilities to handle training arrangements, plan implementation, response coordination, and damage assessment.

One possible option is to select the police or fire chief as the local EMC, as these professionals should have the necessary knowledge and skills. This choice is not ideal, though, because in an emergency, the chiefs may be too involved with their own departments to be effective performing double duty as the EMC. However, especially in smaller communities, there may be no other qualified person available. In such circumstances, there must be several other persons available to run the fire or police program if the chief is on duty as the EMC.

The Pennsylvania Emergency Management Services Code stipulates that the governor appoint coordinators at all levels of government. EMCs are selected by, and are responsible to, the elected officials of the county or municipality. Accordingly, elected officials must take appropriate action, working through the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency (PEMA), to have the governor formally appoint their selected person as EMC.

In fulfilling its legislated responsibility to support in-service training of county and municipal EMCs, PEMA has developed a series of certifications. There are basic, advanced, and professional certifications for coordinators and staff members at the municipal and county level. Commonwealth law requires all coordinators to complete basic certification within one year of their nomination and advanced certification within three years. Basic and advanced certifications are voluntary for emergency management staff members; professional certification is voluntary for everyone. The criteria differ slightly for county coordinators as opposed to municipal coordinators, so as to take into account the fact that most municipal coordinators are volunteers whereas most county coordinators are full-time employees and able to attend training during weekdays.

The EMC is the direct representative of elected officials. In an emergency, the EMC must take action on behalf of elected officials until and unless those officials deem it necessary to assume direction of the response effort.

An EMC must be available at all times, so elected officials and their EMC should designate a certified person to fulfill this role in the event that the EMC is absent or incapacitated.

While an effective EMC is very important, an effective emergency preparedness program requires a team effort. The EMC does not have the authority to call on department heads and other staff to cooperate; public officials do. Thus it becomes your responsibility to ensure that all key players do their parts.

EMERGENCY OPERATIONS PLAN

The primary tool enabling a municipality to address an emergency situation in a preplanned, organized, predictable, and professional manner is its Emergency Operations Plan (EOP). To be effective, the plan must be thorough, coordinated, practiced, and frequently reviewed.

Elected officials will not be writing their municipality's EOP, but they can ensure that it identifies:

- all types of possible hazards;
- the priority hazards most likely to affect the specific community;
- the resources available to respond to an emergency—including nonprofit organizations, volunteer groups, possible shelters, transportation resources, equipment, and supplies—and a means of ensuring that adequate resources will be available to do the job; and
- how and by whom various functions will be carried out in an emergency. These functions might include communications and warning, evacuation, shelter and mass care, public information, health and medical services, emergency medical services, law enforcement services, search and rescue, and radiological survey.

In addition, an effective emergency management program includes approaches to educating citizens in advance as to how they can protect themselves in various emergency situations.

The EOP must be practiced. (Training activities related to the EOP are discussed later in this handbook.) Lessons learned from training exercises—or from actual emergencies—should be used to improve and update the EOP.

The EOP must include a promulgation statement, which elected officials sign to indicate their acceptance of the plan as adequate for their municipality.

The EOP must be reviewed periodically, at least once every two years. A plan should be re-promulgated whenever a majority of the governing body signatories has changed since the previous promulgation approval.

PEMA's area offices and its Bureau of Plans can assist counties and municipalities in the preparation and maintenance of EOPs. Additionally, PEMA's Bureau of Training and Education offers an emergency planning course at least once a year for coordinators who wish to sharpen their planning skills.

Elected officials wishing to verify the adequacy of their municipality's EOP can obtain a generic, sample EOP from PEMA for comparison purposes.

Emergency preparedness is an extremely complex and thorny topic. Previous studies by the Institute of Politics at the University of Pittsburgh have shown a significant lack of clarity in a number of areas, such as where the expertise to respond to a large-scale health or bioterrorism emergency would come from and who has the authority to quarantine citizens in the interest of public health. Interaction, practice, and analysis are all-important to bring these issues to the forefront and, insofar as possible, resolve them in advance of an unforeseen incident.

EMERGENCY OPERATIONS PLAN CHECKLIST

The following excerpt from the Salt Lake County (Utah) Fire Department's emergency planning guide provides a useful list of questions that public officials may wish to use when reviewing their EOP and their community's level of emergency preparedness.

Planning:

- What kinds of disasters and emergencies could occur in your community?
- Do you have a current hazard analysis?
- What mitigation procedures, such as zoning or building codes, have been implemented to prevent or reduce the effects of disasters in your community?
- Are hazardous or radiological materials stored in or transported through your community?
- How recently has your community's Emergency Operations Plan (EOP) been updated?
- How often are exercises conducted to test the plan?
- Does your Emergency Operations Plan reflect population shifts and account for new industries and land uses?
- Are members of your emergency management team getting the training and support they need?
- Are you aware of the training opportunities offered by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and your state emergency preparedness agency?
- What plans do you have for working with the media in an emergency?
- What plans are there for protecting and communicating with schools in your jurisdiction in an emergency?
- What about plans for the hospitalized, handicapped, and prisoners?

Systems:

- What kinds of warning and emergency communication capabilities does your community have? Does it have Emergency Alert System linkages?
- Are local emergency responders trained to operate according to the incident command system?
- Is your Emergency Operations Center (EOC) properly equipped and maintained in working order?
- Does your emergency management team have the necessary equipment to do the job?
- Do you have enough shelters and a shelter management staff for people who must be relocated in an emergency? Can they handle stranded tourists or motorists?

Information you must have:

- Do you know your legal responsibilities in planning for emergencies?
- Do you know your authority and limitations in directing an emergency response?
- How have you prepared to deal with the liability issues involved in emergency response?
- Do you know what resources and funding the federal and state government can provide for emergency management? Do you know how to apply for them?
- Do you know what you are required to do during a disaster to qualify for federal and state relief funds?

Community relations:

- How effectively is emergency planning information getting to all of your constituents?
- Have you involved local news media in cooperative planning efforts?
- Do you have a public education program to inform citizens of ways they can prepare themselves and their families for potential emergencies?
- Does your emergency management program involve volunteer agencies, religious groups, and social or civic organizations?
- Does your program include volunteers and plans for using them during an emergency?
- Do you involve local businesses and industries in your preparedness planning?

EMERGENCY OPERATIONS CENTER

During an emergency, effective communication among all responding parties is essential. For this reason, the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Services Code requires each municipality to have an Emergency Operations Center (EOC). The EOC is a physical location where representatives of the major decision-making and response organizations in the community will come together. The EOC is charged with sustaining community confidence in a disaster situation. It does not necessarily exercise direct control over response agencies, but it obtains a comprehensive view of events, coordinates emergency response, and allocates resources.

The county or municipal planning process determines which agencies should have representation in the EOC. Some types of actual emergencies may not require every EOC staff member to be present; others may require calling in outside experts to assist for the duration of the emergency. Of course, to effectively use expertise and decision-making capabilities, those at the EOC must receive accurate and complete information about the emergency and about the available resources not already at the scene. Within the EOC there must be a means of obtaining and disseminating this information and of allowing the EOC staff to keep abreast of a rapidly changing situation.

The complexity of the EOC will vary according to the needs of the community and its assets. In some counties, elaborate, state-of-the-art computer equipment located in underground complexes is manned 24 hours a day; in smaller municipalities, the EOC may be a designated room in the municipal building or a community center where a map and a copy of the Emergency Operations Plan are stored.

Components of a good, suitably equipped EOC site include (1) proximity or accessibility to the seat of government; (2) adequate space and ventilation; (3) communication capacity with the disaster scene, with EOCs in other communities, and with higher-level governing bodies (i.e., county or state); (4) emergency lighting and electric power; (5) visual displays, maps, and status boards; (6) sanitary facilities, food, and water to accommodate relatively long-term stays; and (7) protection from possible hazards (e.g., not located in a floodplain). Examples of locations used by municipalities across Pennsylvania include conference rooms in the government center, training or bingo rooms in the fire hall, and recreation rooms in the community center.

Equipping the EOC need not be a major task. The most important tools are communication devices, including an ample supply of two-way radios and telephones. The primary furniture will be a conference table and chairs. There should be room for wall charts and maps, which may be rolled up and stored in a drawer during non-disaster time.

EOC planning should also include the development of an alternate site to provide for effective response and continuity of essential operations should a disaster directly affect the primary EOC site.

EOC staffs may range in size from four to more than a dozen members and may be divided into groups that handle different functions. Frequently a policy group actually makes the decisions related to emergency response. This group usually includes elected and appointed officials, the Emergency Management Coordinator, police and fire representatives, the public works/road supervisor, and the public information officer. Other specialties that may be included are health and medical care, environmental protection, evacuation and relocation, mass care and sheltering, and radiological protection.

A coordination/operations group often supports the policy group and ensures that its decisions are implemented. (This group includes communications and dispatch, volunteer organization representatives, logistics and procurement, and perhaps assistants to the members of the policy group.) Additionally, when recruiting members, you must consider a possible need for 24-hour operations, which will require a complete second shift. To cover the full range of possible response needs, members must be able to fulfill more than one of the policy or coordination/operations roles listed.

Once the EOC staff members are selected, they should be trained, mainly through a series of self-paced tabletop exercises that will familiarize members with their responsibilities and with methods for communicating within and outside the center. Initial and ongoing participation in such exercises is essential to emergency preparedness. Public officials may wish to monitor their staffs' completion of tabletop exercises or even participate personally in some of them.

Large, elaborate, expensive EOCs are not necessarily more effective. The more complex an EOC is, the more investment and training are needed to maintain it. You can expect, in any case, that a well-planned investment in developing and maintaining your EOC will be more than repaid by the quality and efficiency of response should an emergency occur.

EMERGENCY RESPONSE ORGANIZATIONS

Effective emergency management requires the coordination and training of a wide range of people, both paid and volunteer. A thorough planning process should allow for discussion of the expectations and responsibilities of all groups involved. This exchange can provide the foundation for contractual agreements and standard operating procedures (SOPs) that define how local governments and other organizations will provide for public safety in emergency situations.

Following are some of the public and private entities that should be involved in this planning, along with the roles they may be called upon to play.

Public officials: directing government activities, community leadership

Fire department: fire services, rescue, limited hazardous materials response, radiological monitoring, decontamination

Police/sheriff's department: law enforcement, traffic control, search and rescue, warning, evacuation, emergency highway traffic regulation

Emergency medical services: medical care and transportation of injured

Hazardous materials team: hazardous materials response

Public transit: emergency transportation

Public works: engineering services, heavy rescue, emergency traffic regulation

Public schools: sheltering students, public communication

Utility companies: utility management or recovery

Health department: emergency health and sanitation, risk assessment, immunization

Hospitals: medical care, immunization, infection control

Other health care providers: medical care in mass casualty situations

Public information officer: coordination of public communications

Media: public communications

American Red Cross or the Salvation Army: emergency food, shelter, counseling

Food banks: food coordination and distribution

Other community organizations: shelter, social services

Coroner: identification of bodies, mortuary services

Emergency response planning should build on existing relationships among these organizations to develop clear understandings as to the authority and responsibilities each entity will carry in an actual emergency.

In addition, municipal leaders should be familiar with the county's emergency response personnel and capacities, and county leadership in turn should be integrated with the commonwealth's homeland security structure.

MUTUAL AID AGREEMENTS

Many emergencies will overburden the response capacity of the municipality in which they occur or may call for specialized response capability not available in that municipality. For these reasons, local jurisdictions are encouraged to enter into mutual aid agreements so as to enhance their response and recovery capabilities. As suggested in the previous section, mutual aid is not limited to agreements between jurisdictions; it also may include agreements with private entities, such as the American Red Cross, so as to facilitate the timely delivery of needed assistance when an incident occurs.

At a minimum, mutual aid agreements should include definitions of key terms used in the agreement; roles and responsibilities of each party; recognition of each party's qualifications, certifications, and resources; procedures for requesting and providing assistance; procedures for payment, reimbursement, and allocation of costs; notification procedures; protocols for interoperable communications; relationship to other mutual aid agreements in which each party participates; and treatment of liability, immunity, and workers' compensation issues.

In 2007, State Senator John Pippy (R-Allegheny, Washington) and State Representative Paul Costa (D-Allegheny), with the assistance of the Institute of Politics, Region 13, and PEMA, drafted legislation clarifying issues that arise when a local government facing an emerging situation calls for aid from neighboring governments. On October 8, 2008, this bill was approved by Governor Edward G. Rendell, becoming known as Act No. 93.

This bill establishes a clearly defined system of statewide mutual aid in which local governments are automatically part of the mutual aid system unless they vote to opt out of it. In the event that an emergency overstrains the response capacity of a municipality in which it occurs, this bill provides guidelines for how to provide/receive assistance and share resources among participating political subdivisions.

The terms of this bill include the creation of a mutual aid committee, made up of state, regional, and local officials as well as emergency responders, to oversee the execution of a statewide mutual aid system. (As of summer 2009, PEMA was in the process of assembling this committee.) The bill also provides a list of responsibilities by which each of the participating political subdivisions must abide. It states that the municipality receiving assistance must reimburse the responding entity in accordance with procedures established by the committee. Finally, the bill defines insurance coverage and workers' compensation issues, stating that a responding political subdivision shall provide appropriate workers' compensation insurance protection for municipal employees and volunteers who provide mutual aid to a neighboring community.

This cooperation will provide more resources for response and recovery in emergency situations, along with much-needed liability protection for responding entities. The Institute of Politics and Region 13 encourage emergency response stakeholders to review Act 93 carefully.

TRAINING

Training at various levels is essential to emergency preparedness. Emergency Management Coordinators and other key response personnel should participate in ongoing professional development. EMCs also should be involved in countywide emergency response meetings and training activities. At least once a year, each local jurisdiction should hold a realistic exercise designed to test various agencies' responses and how the agencies interface with each other. The agencies should also participate in larger, multiple-jurisdiction exercises such as those held periodically in the city of Pittsburgh.

Public officials are expected to receive training in the National Incident Management System (NIMS). They also should ensure that EMCs and other staff are pursuing appropriate course work and staging suitable practice exercises. Whenever possible, public officials should participate in the exercises themselves. NIMS training is crucial in enabling public officials to understand preparedness requirements, terminology, means of communication, and the rules of engagement in emergency situations. Municipalities not in compliance with NIMS standards may compromise their eligibility for federal disaster recovery funds.

PEMA provides certification training and ongoing professional education for emergency management professionals. These training curricula are constantly being updated, and interested officials should contact PEMA directly for more details. Emergency management coordinators are required to participate in PEMA training; public officials are encouraged to do so.

COMMONWEALTH AND FEDERAL LAWS

The main law governing local emergency management in Pennsylvania is the Emergency Management Services Code of 1978. Chapter 75 of the code covers most of the local issues discussed in the preceding sections of this handbook, such as the need for an Emergency Management Coordinator (EMC), certification and training of the EMC, the responsibility to prepare an Emergency Operations Plan and establish an Emergency Operations Center, participation in drills and exercises, and agreements among political subdivisions. It also authorizes municipalities to declare a local disaster emergency. As of this writing (summer 2009), legislative review and amendment of the Emergency Management Services Code was anticipated in fall 2009 or 2010.

Other important commonwealth laws related to emergency management are the Pennsylvania Radiation Protection Act (Act 147 of 1984) and the Pennsylvania Hazardous Material Emergency Planning and Response Act (Act 165 of 1990).

At the national level, the Federal Civil Defense Act, originally designed as war-preparedness legislation, was subsequently amended to support the development and maintenance of an all-hazards approach to emergency management. The Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act provides for federal assistance to state and local governments after a disaster. Title III of the Superfund Amendments and Reauthorization Act (SARA) of 1986 covers emergency planning and right-to-know issues related to hazardous materials.

EMERGENCY COMMUNICATIONS RESOURCES

The 911 telephone system is the front line in emergency communications across Pennsylvania. Calls to this three-digit number reach trained operators who can direct calls to police, fire, or medical dispatchers as appropriate. Although some municipalities maintain separate systems, in most cases 911 systems have been consolidated at the county level.

The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania's statewide radio network, PA-STARNet, is available to assist in communication needs during emergency situations. Specific applications include communications in the field, communications among local and state first responders, and communications between counties that might be operating on different radio systems.

Communications in the Field. During extended emergency situations, county radio systems may be overwhelmed, resulting in communication delays and clogged radio channels. In these cases, the state radio system offers a valuable alternative means of communication. Each county 911 center has a PA-STARNet control station, and all nine Regional Counter-Terrorism Task Forces (RCTTFs) have caches of 800 MHz radios that can operate on the state network. During an emergency, these radios can be used to supplement communications in the field and take the strain off the local radio system for as long as the emergency condition might last.

Communications among Local and State First Responders. The control station in each county's 911 center can be used to coordinate resources between any statewide first responder, such as the Pennsylvania State Police, and local emergency responders. The state police have an interoperability coordinator assigned to work with county 911 centers on how the center can communicate and coordinate with the state police if needed. Currently, this person is Captain Adam Kisthardt, director of the Dispatch Operations Division, Statewide Radio Implementation and Interoperability Office. His e-mail address is akisthardt@state.pa.us and his phone number is 717-214-0073.

Communications between Counties with Disparate Radio Systems. Because every county 911 center has a state radio, this radio can be used to communicate between 911 centers if the county radio systems cannot communicate with one another. Communications can be routed between 911 centers on the state system and then relayed down and up through their respective radio systems to achieve a level of interoperability using the state system as a bridge between two or more 911 centers, which might be sending resources to the same incident.

The ability to handle any emergency, of course, depends on proper planning before the actual emergency occurs. Communications over the state radio network with state first responders must be considered in advance so as to resolve issues such as what talk groups, call signs, and command-and-control protocol will be used. Procedures detailing how communications between 911 centers will occur must be specified, documented, and practiced. Municipal officials and emergency personnel should work through their county 911 centers to participate in the development of plans for state radio system use.

County 911 centers also have access, through the state radio system, to many state resources as well as to more than 200 hospitals across the state. To facilitate these connections in emergency situations, an agreement should be reached with the particular state agency or other entity as to how communications will occur.

The commonwealth has two interoperability coordinators who can assist counties in developing interoperable communication plans and in setting up meetings with appropriate state agencies to facilitate protocols for interoperable communications. For assistance from these coordinators or with any questions, county or municipal staff may contact the Pennsylvania Office of Public Safety Radio Services. Staff contact information is available at www.radio.state.pa.us.

ALWAYS BE PREPARED

Emergencies don't wait for you to be ready before they happen; you need to be ready at all times. For this reason, you should carry a list of the phone numbers (including cell phone numbers) of key emergency contacts at all times. These contacts/numbers should include the EMC, EOC, mayor or county executive, fire department, police department, health department, emergency medical services, communications director, and utilities. Page 17 of this document and the accompanying pocket guide provide space for you to write down these and other key phone numbers for your location.

RESPONSE

In an actual emergency, response decisions will be guided primarily by your municipal or county Emergency Management Coordinator (EMC) and other members of the Emergency Operations Center (EOC). However, as a public official, you must also be prepared. You must know how to express public leadership, how to ensure quality performance by the governmental entities for which you will be held accountable, and when to stay out of the way. The following sections discuss key issues related to public officials' response to emergencies.

REPORTING A DISASTER

If you are among the first persons to become aware of a disaster or emergency event, you should ensure that the following actions are taken:

- Activate local warning systems
- Alert the EMC
- Activate the EOC
- Mobilize emergency response resources

Your first call should probably be to the EMC, who may ask for your assistance with other communications.

GOING TO THE DISASTER SCENE

In most cases, the best thing a public official can do is to stay away from the disaster site, at least until the emergency has passed. However, it is understandable that public officials may want to express their government's concern for affected citizens as urgently and quickly as possible. If you do go to an emergency scene:

- Tell your immediate family members where you are going and how to contact you.
- Consider taking food, water, medications, clothes, and toiletries with you, in case you are detained longer than anticipated.
- Park your car at a safe distance from the incident and at a location where it will not obstruct traffic or emergency access.
- Do not attempt to enter areas where fire, police, or emergency response staff have restricted entry.
- Go to a location upwind and uphill from the incident if possible.
- Report to the incident command post (see next section) before entering the immediate area of the emergency. You may need special protective clothing or equipment before proceeding further.
- Watch where you walk. Be sure to avoid creating any risk of spreading infection or contamination.

INCIDENT COMMAND POST

Public officials responding to an emergency should be familiar with the normal practice of establishing an incident command post at or near the site. This post will include representatives of the various response agencies, will be in communication with the EOC, and will provide for a coordinated response to the emergency. Its location should be readily identifiable by a previously agreed-upon signal, such as a colored sign or light. The incident command concept is central to the coordination of emergency response, and public officials must not bypass it in their eagerness to assist. Rather, they should consult with incident command representatives and follow any instructions they receive from the command post.

ASSURING THE PUBLIC

Whether you are at the emergency scene or not, you will likely receive calls from your constituents. The following steps are recommended:

- Maintain a calm, assuring tone.
- Collect any useful information that the constituent may have. You may be able to direct helpful information to the right agency or emergency responder.
- Assure callers that the appropriate authorities are responding to the situation, that government is still operating, and that trained professionals are working to get things back to normal as quickly as possible.
- Do not offer assessments or make promises that go beyond what you know with absolute certainty about the situation.

RECORD KEEPING AND DOCUMENTATION

You can contribute to the response and recovery processes by keeping records of what you observe. Begin a personal log immediately upon becoming aware of the emergency. Carry your log book with you. Remind the EMC and other staff to maintain activity logs and financial records. Make note of any problems, resource shortages, or weaknesses in response. These actions may not only assist the immediate response, but may also protect against legal liability, provide necessary documentation for post-emergency reimbursement, and improve preparedness before the next emergency.

MEDIA RELATIONS

In an emergency, it is extremely important to disseminate accurate and consistent information. For this reason, all media requests should initially be referred to a designated public information officer.

The Emergency Operations Plan (EOP) should identify a staff member from the EOC who will serve as the communications contact during an emergency, along with a backup person should the primary contact be unavailable. All local media outlets should be informed in advance of who the public information officer is and how to contact that person in an emergency. The public information officer and backup person should maintain a complete, up-to-date list of media contacts.

Public officials should expect to receive briefings from emergency response staff as the situation unfolds and throughout the recovery period.

DISASTER DECLARATION

The Pennsylvania Emergency Management Services Code authorizes a municipality or county to declare a local disaster emergency if a disaster has occurred or is imminent. The local governing body may delegate this authority to the mayor or other chief executive officer, subject to ratification by the governing body within seven days. The declaration of emergency activates the response and recovery aspects of the EOP and authorizes the furnishing of aid and assistance.

Following is a sample text of a disaster emergency declaration:

WHEREAS, [community] suffered serious damage to roads, bridges, homes, businesses, and other public and private facilities caused by [reason], which occurred on [date]; and

WHEREAS, the cost and magnitude of responding to and recovering from the impact of the ensuing event is far in excess of [community]'s available resources;

Now THEREFORE, be it resolved that the mayor [or appropriate official] of [community] declares [community] to be a disaster area.

Dated this [date] day of [month], [year].

In the event that two or more municipalities within a county are affected by the same disaster, the county emergency management agency will exercise responsibility for coordination and support of emergency services.

COMMONWEALTH ASSISTANCE

PEMA's Western Regional Office should be advised promptly of an emergency situation and should be kept abreast of developments. PEMA can offer technical support at all stages of an emergency response. Declaration of a disaster emergency makes the affected municipality or county eligible to formally request additional resources from PEMA. Your EMC should be equipped to handle these communications.

EVACUATION

Once a local disaster emergency has been declared, county commissioners or executives, mayors, and township supervisors have the authority to order (that is, to command or direct), but not to compel, an evacuation within their jurisdiction. The emergency order, by activating the county or municipal EOP, puts into effect the evacuation measures contained in that EOP so as to safeguard the health and safety of residents.

If a disaster emergency affects only one municipality, the mayor or senior township official would be responsible for directing any evacuation. His or her evacuation order would be communicated through the municipality's emergency management agency (or, if none exists, through the county's emergency management agency), to police and fire officials for implementation, and to the general public. If two or more municipalities within a county are affected, the county commissioners (or county executive), as well as the mayor or senior township official of each municipality, would have the authority to direct an evacuation order. Normally the county commissioners would direct an evacuation only if the appropriate municipal official could not be located or failed to take suitable action.

Local officials may also establish restricted areas or curfews.

Fire or police chiefs would normally implement the evacuation orders of public officials, but they may also order evacuations if the appropriate elected officials are unavailable. Their discretionary authority in such a situation should be stipulated in the EOP. Regardless of the existence of such a statement, the fire or police chief may order an evacuation if he or she believes that an emergency poses an imminent threat to public health or safety.

DISASTER CHECKLIST

The following material, adapted from a brochure prepared by the State of Maine for its local officials, can serve as a handy emergency response checklist.

LOCAL EMERGENCY RESPONSE

First response is critical and must be achieved by local response agencies using resources already in the community, including the activation of existing mutual aid agreements. Elected officials should remember that their role is policy making, not operational. Actions to take include:

- Start and maintain a personal event log. Include date, time, persons reporting, key information, factors weighed, and decisions reached.
- Implement local Emergency Operations Plan.
- Provide public warnings.
- Activate local Emergency Operations Center (EOC).
- Notify county emergency management agency director of EOC activation and status of the emergency.
- Notify town's legal advisor.
- Designate (if not already designated) a single public information officer.
- Remind staff to keep logs of actions, financial transactions, and calls.
- Mobilize community resources.
- Gather situation reports.
- Assess immediate needs for evacuation, shelter, emergency feeding, medical care, law enforcement, security, and traffic clearance.
- Evaluate need for outside assistance.
- Communicate with county emergency management agency director regarding status of the emergency and unmet needs.
- Notify amateur radio groups, American Red Cross, county sheriff, volunteer groups, social service agencies, and hospitals of the emergency.

MAJOR DISASTER ASSISTANCE

Steps that may assist with obtaining state or federal aid in a major disaster include:

- Make a map of the community to show damage sites and types of damage. Take photographs for documentation.
- Estimate damage to public facilities and the cost of public personnel services for repair and cleanup in each of these categories: debris removal; emergency measures; roads, streets, bridges, and culverts; water control facilities; public buildings; private nonprofit facilities; parks and recreation.
- Identify the effects of damage on people and on delivery of essential public services. Determine the number of dead, injured, missing, and homeless; people needing shelter, food, or clothing; number already in shelters; and number evacuated.
- Collect information at the municipal office to determine damages to private residences, businesses, farms, schools, and healthcare facilities.
- Report the information gathered to your county emergency management agency office. Report severe damage as soon as possible, even if you cannot make a good cost estimate. Request state or federal assistance through this office.
- Maintain records of labor, equipment, and materials used in disaster response.

CONTACT INFORMATION

LOCAL	CONTACT PERSON	PHONE
Emergency Management Coordinator (EMC)		
EMC Substitute		
Fire Chief		
Police Chief		
Emergency Medical Services		
Municipal Office		
Municipal Elected Officials		
County Elected Officials		
School Districts		
Public Works		
Hospital(s)		
Health Department		
Public Information Officer		
Electric Provider		
Water Provider		
Gas Provider		

COMMONWEALTH

Office of the Governor

Web site: www.governor.state.pa.us

Phone: 717-787-2500

Pennsylvania Office of Homeland Security

Web site: www.homelandsecurity.state.pa.us

Phone: 717-651-2715

Pennsylvania Department of Health

Web site: www.health.state.pa.us

Phone: 1-877-PA-HEALTH (1-877-724-3258)

Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture

Web site: www.agriculture.state.pa.us

Phone: 717-787-4737

Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection

Web site: www.dep.state.pa.us

Phone: 412-442-4000 (Southwest Regional Office)

Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency

Web site: www.pema.state.pa.us

Phone: 717-651-2007 (Harrisburg); 724-357-2990 (Western Region Office)

Emergencies: 717-651-2001

Pennsylvania State Police

Web site: www.psp.state.pa.us

Phone: 717-508-0033

Pennsylvania Office of the Attorney General

Web site: www.attorneygeneral.gov/

Phone: 717-787-3391

ReadyPA

Web site: www.readypa.org

Phone: 1-888-9-READYPA (1-888-973-2397)

FEDERAL

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Web site: www.hhs.gov

Phone: 1-877-696-6775

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Web site: www.cdc.gov

Phone: 1-800-232-4636

U.S. Department of Homeland Security

Web site: www.dhs.gov/xprepresp (Preparedness, Response & Recovery)

Phone: 202-282-8000

Federal Emergency Management Agency

Web site: www.fema.gov

Phone: 1-800-621-3362

Federal Bureau of Investigation

Web site: www.fbi.gov; pittsburgh.fbi.gov

Phone: 412-432-4000 (Pittsburgh Office)

U.S. Department of Agriculture

Web site: www.usda.gov

Phone: 202-720-3631

U.S. Department of Justice

Web site: www.usdoj.gov

Department of Justice Main Switchboard Phone: 202-514-2000

U.S. Attorney's Office for the Western District of Pennsylvania

Web site: www.usdoj.gov/usao/paw

Phone: 412-644-3500

INTERNATIONAL

World Health Organization

Web site: www.who.int/topics/emergencies/en



DOCUMENTS CONSULTED

Allegheny County Department of Emergency Services. 2004.
Elected officials handbook.

Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations. 2005.
Standing together: An emergency planning guide for America's communities.
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Maine Emergency Management Agency. 2006.
Guidelines for Local Emergency Management Directors
www.maine.gov/tools/whatsnew/attach.php?id=15039&an=1

National Governors Association. 2002.
A governor's guide to emergency management.
www.nga.org/cda/files/GOVSGUIDEHS2.pdf

Prince William County (Va.) Office of Emergency Management. 2008.
Elected officials' guide to emergencies and disasters.
www.vml.org/WNEW/06DisasterGd/06DisasterGuideWeb.pdf

Salt Lake County (Utah) Fire Department Emergency Services Bureau. 2001.
Public officials handbook for emergency management.
www.saltlakefiredistrict.org/pdf/govofficial2.pdf

State of Idaho Bureau of Homeland Security. 2008.
Emergency preparedness guide for elected officials.
www.bhs.idaho.gov/Pages/ElectedOfficials.aspx

Washington State Emergency Management Association. 2003.
Elected officials guide to emergency management.
www.mrsc.org/Subjects/PubSafe/emergency/em101offguide.pdf

TABLE OF ABBREVIATIONS

EMC	Emergency Management Coordinator
EOC	Emergency Operations Center
EOP	Emergency Operations Plan
FEMA	Federal Emergency Management Agency
NIMS	National Incident Management System
PEMA	Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency
SARA	Superfund Amendments and Reauthorization Act

