

**BERKS COUNTY
I-78 TIMELINE OF EVENTS
JANUARY 25 AND 26, 2016**

Good Morning. My name is Michael Rebert, I am the District Executive for PENNDOT's Engineering District 5 based in Allentown, and I am here to testify on behalf of Secretary of Transportation Leslie S. Richards regarding the events of January 26, 2016 along Interstate 78 in Berks County.

A period of freezing drizzle occurred during the morning hours which despite our best efforts caused some slippery conditions along Interstate 78 resulting in three accidents.

I would like to review the events leading up to the accidents and the response by PENNDOT, PA State Police and Local First Responders in order to clear the accident locations and address the slippery conditions along Interstate 78. This timeline will also highlight much of what PennDOT does to prepare for winter storms.

BERKS COUNTY WAS ON SHIFTS THE ENTIRE WEEK OF 1/24/16

January 25, 2016

District 5 personnel received emails from AccuWeather predicting some freezing rain possible late tonight across the central part of the state.

January 26, 2016

District 5 personnel received email from AccuWeather predicting some light freezing rain could occur early Tuesday morning across the central part of the state.

At 5:47am District 5 personnel received email from SkyGuard – there is a 40% chance of freezing rain and freezing drizzle which could create slippery conditions. A trace of ice is expected. For Berks, Lancaster, Lebanon, Schuylkill, and Carbon Counties.

Start Time: 6:00am

Expire Time: 9:30am

Berks County Radio Dispatcher was monitoring the radar and called neighboring counties to the west (Lebanon, Dauphin and Schuylkill) for a weather update in their areas. Those counties would call back once they started receiving precipitation.

Just after 6am Berks County Management staff received calls from Berks County radio dispatcher that ***rain starting in Dauphin County***; immediately after receiving the calls the Assistant Highway Maintenance Manager (AHMM) informed Highway Foreman (HF) under his supervision to have Berks County Department trucks directed to I-78 to spread material.

- Strausstown section: 3 trucks spreading on I-78; 1 truck assigned SR 183; 1 truck assigned SR 501
- Hamburg section: 4 trucks assigned I-78; 1 truck assigned to SR 61

**BERKS COUNTY
I-78 TIMELINE OF EVENTS
JANUARY 25 AND 26, 2016**

As the rain continued to move west our Berks County Manager called the County RPC to ensure I-78 message boards were activated for "Icy Roadways/Winter Weather please Slow Down". The RPC conveyed this request to the District Traffic Management Center (TMC).

The District TMC activated all **8** Message Boards on I-78 and **4** remaining Message Boards throughout Berks County. The remaining 52 Message Boards throughout District 5 were also activated at this time.

Over the next 3 ½ hours Message Boards and Highway Advisory Radio (HAR) throughout the District were changed to convey information regarding closures and detours due to 3 accidents that occurred.

(NOTE THAT EACH ACCIDENT TIMELINE HAS BEEN COLOR CODED.)

**** Please note that the AHMM and the County Manager were the PennDOT managers that participated in the on-site unified command****

Accident MM 36.3 west bound

8:00am - AHMM responded to accident call received at 0800 hrs. West bound MM 36.3 both lanes closed 3 tractor Trailers Jackknifed and one Box Truck between two of the tractor trailers; NO injuries. All needed to be pulled straight all drove away once straightened, Fourth Tanker Truck at MM 36.5 had to be towed, due to front end damage from collision with center median barrier when stopping for collision ahead. Department truck stuck in accident at MM 36.5 approximately 1000' feet from accident.

Cause witnesses stated to State Police that a back Volvo lost control clipped the center median barrier and drove off, causing the chain reaction behind.

Towing company to respond: VG Wood, AHMM was disappointed in their recovering efforts.

11:30am - Roadway reopened.

Accident MM 9 west bound

9:00am - County Manager at approximately 0900 hrs. drove up on accident at MM 9 westbound. Three cars lost control and hit snow embankment right shoulder and came to rest in Left lane, Left lane closed, right lane remained open, incident was almost cleared at this time received call about accident at MM 26.3 eastbound proceeded to accident location.

9:38am - Accident at MM 9 west bound cleared.

Accident MM 26.3 East Bound

9:25am - County Manager responded to accident at MM26.3 East Bound, a HF also responded to accident and was on scene when County Manager arrived. I-78 was closed eastbound at Shartlesville exit MM 24.5 by HF and information was called into office and entered into RCRS. County Manager and HF spoke with VM Towing and State Police to devise plan to clear que and accident scene.

BERKS COUNTY
I-78 TIMELINE OF EVENTS
JANUARY 25 AND 26, 2016

Accident: 3 tractor trailers and one automobile. NO injuries. Automobile was driven away from accident. One tractor trailer traveled off roadway and down embankment was disconnected from trailer, tractor had to be pulled up embankment and trailer straightened into driving lane. Second tractor trailer was against guardrail and had to be pulled away and towed. Third tractor trailer was jackknifed and trailer was split behind fifth wheel, tractor straightened and trailer moved into driving lane. Contents of trailer had to be

identified by EMS personnel prior to being removed safely by Towing company, then towed away.

Two scenarios were devised to clear traffic log: HF was to dispatch one Department truck from Hamburg exit to accident scene traveling westbound in the east bound lanes applying material. State police were to have fire police divert traffic at Shartlesville exit onto Old Route 22.

- **First scenario:** HF was to have two operators with loader and dump truck travel eastbound to scene to open center median gate at MM 25.7. State police were to have fire police to continue to detour traffic at Shartlesville exit onto Old route 22 and would assist in closing I-78 at SR 61 Hamburg exit once gates were ready to be opened to clear traffic que.
- **Second Scenario:** towing company would pull all vehicles into driving lane, PennDOT would cone off area and I-78 eastbound could be opened to one lane at MM 26.3. Second scenario was completed first.

County Manager- V&M Towing, First Responders, Fire Police, Dept. personnel, and State Police worked well at this location, V&M Towing Company was professional and accommodating to State Police and PennDOT personnel requests.

10:00am - Traffic Que started to be relieved at 1000 hours.

11:00am - Traffic opened to one lane at 1100 hours, detour removed.

3:20pm - Removal of all trucks and debris completed and I-78 eastbound completely opened at 1520 hours.

Also note that we typically utilize the gates on I-78 when we expect the traffic event to last over 4 hours.

In addition, these events are typical events that PennDOT experiences during every snowstorm over the winter season.

BERKS COUNTY
I-78 TIMELINE OF EVENTS
JANUARY 25 AND 26, 2016

I would now like to summarize all the significant changes PennDOT has made to our winter services over the past eight years.

- Implementation of NIMS/Incident Command Systems (ICS) and Emergency Traffic Operations (ETO) structure to all PennDOT maintenance staff in Central Office, District Offices, and County Maintenance Offices
- Instructing and certifying County, District and Central Office staff at the FEMA Incident Command Systems 300 level.
- Formation of District and Central Office Incident Command Centers and standardized reporting
- Interstate speed and vehicle restriction protocols developed and routinely implemented (protocol presented at a national FHWA web training as a best management practice)
- Emergency/Incident Management policy manual developed and implemented
- Delegation granted by the Secretary of Transportation to the Area Commander to make PennDOT specific emergency decisions in their absence
- Adverse Weather Conference call with all Districts and winter partners with contract meteorologist pre-weather event to strategize and discuss operational approach to larger storm events
- Situational Awareness reporting and distribution during Incident Command Activations every 2 hours
- Co-Location of PennDOT Area Command operations with PEMA Emergency Operation Center
- Pre-staging of winter equipment to areas forecasted to have greater than routine precipitation
- Establishment of a dedicated Central Office Winter Section
- Contracted Weather Services specific to highway forecasting, on demand meteorologists 24/7, individualized forecasting for all 67 counties
- Winter Leadership meetings held with each district in preparation for winter operations
- Established policy for maintaining minimum quantities of winter materials
- Detailed salt inventory tracking with weekly reporting pre and during winter season
- Development of a State Wide Traffic Management Center and Regional Traffic Management Centers

**BERKS COUNTY
I-78 TIMELINE OF EVENTS
JANUARY 25 AND 26, 2016**

- Increased traffic camera coverage of major road networks
- Expanded use of live traffic speed data to assist with early incident detection
- RCRS used as PennDOT's incident management tool
- Automated Vehicle Location Systems (truck tracking)
- Installation of movable median barriers on I-78

As you can see we have made significant changes.

I would be happy to address any questions.