

During my twenty six year tenure with the Washington County Department of Public Safety, natural disasters have had the greatest impact financially and personally to the residents of Washington County. We have experienced the first and third most significant recorded floods of the Monongahela River and several less noteworthy events. The axis of Hurricane Ivan devastated the northern three quarters of Washington County and surrounding areas in 2005. We have experienced several infrastructure crippling blizzards, with the most recent being February 2010. Droughts have also caused significant economic loss to the agricultural community.

Among the many hazardous materials incidents we have experienced one of the largest tire fires in the nation and a mine fire that forced the evacuation of several hundred County residents for days. Other related mine incidents include abandoned, flooded mine blowouts; subsidence and slips affecting homes; sealed, abandoned vertical mine shafts have opened leaving a fifteen by fifteen foot wide hole hundreds of feet deep; and numerous abandoned slate/gob piles that have caught fire.

Washington County has been included in several Federal Disaster Declarations which has been of great assistance to the municipalities and individual residents. There have also been shortfalls where money was not available to residents, and most recently, Washington County was not included in the Federal Disaster Declaration for the Blizzard of February, 2010. The per capita damage amount needed to be at least \$3.23, and the Washington County per capita amount was \$7.70 the fourth highest of the twenty five counties that applied, yet Washington County was still not included in the Federal Declaration. The other twenty four counties were included. A Statewide disaster fund would have helped ease the tremendous financial burden suffered by the local municipalities and many County residents. There have been other significant snowfalls that did not warrant a Federal Disaster Declaration, but also caused a financial hardship to local municipalities as well as individuals.

Another issue that arose during the blizzard was that of staffing shelters. The Red Cross provides an invaluable service, but we had great difficulty finding trained personnel to manage our Mass Care Shelters. The local Red Cross put out a call to the National Red Cross for manpower to manage our shelters, and it was not available. With volunteerism dying, state level disaster assistance to hire shelter managers would relieve the burden to the County as well as the local municipalities during any type of disaster.

The historic stream flooding caused by the axis of Hurricane Ivan in 2005 did warrant inclusion in Federal Disaster Declaration, but there were still unmet financial and operational needs. This year's change in leadership at PEMA will undoubtedly transform PEMA into the organization it needs to be, and help meet our operational needs in the future; but that still leaves a financial shortfall that needs to be covered.

This past summer Washington County had three significant localized flooding events that clearly did not meet the criteria for a Federal Disaster Declaration, but resulted in small rural municipalities incurring significant unreimbursed expenses. Again, a state disaster fund would have relieved the financial hardship.

The recent flooding in the central and eastern parts of the Commonwealth caused by the remnants of hurricanes Irene and Lee could have just as easily caused similar devastation in western Pennsylvania. After speaking with members of my staff who responded as part of the Region 13 deployment to assist the affected areas, there are several areas in which State level disaster assistance would be beneficial.

Faster, more easily released funding to affected individuals, municipalities, counties, and emergency responders would greatly relieve immediate hardship. If possible, the state coffers could be reimbursed if a Federal disaster were declared.

During disasters where there is not a Federal declaration, State disaster assistance could help with the following:

- Assistance to home owners who sustain uninsured loss to their property.
- Municipalities and Counties who are forced to make significant unplanned repairs to roads, eroded stream banks, bridges, drainage culverts, etc.
- Excessive overtime costs to municipal and county employees.
- Lost wages to volunteers who miss work to help with the relief effort.
- Reimbursement to emergency response organizations for materials and fuel expended during the response as well as any overtime costs.
- Paid staff for Mass Care Centers, as well as reimbursement to those facilities willing to open their doors to evacuees.
- Assistance to farmers who may have lost livestock or crops due to severe weather conditions.
- Help for small business owners who may have sustained damage to their business, lost inventory, or lost revenue.

- Help for individuals who have had their homes damaged or destroyed by isolated events such as slips, slides, sinkholes, etc.
- Abandoned slate dump or gob pile fires.
- Flood or water damage from abandoned mine blowouts.
- Flood or water damage from catastrophic dam failure.

These areas listed as potential unmet needs that could be filled with state disaster assistance are geared primarily towards weather related events, but could just as easily be used for manmade disasters.

One of the greatest short comings in emergency management is filling the unmet needs during a small localized event that is not eligible for Federal assistance. Facing an individual who has just lost their livelihood, or facing a family who has just lost everything they own and having to look them in the eye and tell them that their loss was not significant enough to warrant any kind of assistance is something no one should ever have to do. The loss experienced by that individual, or small group of individuals is just as great a loss to them as it is to those in the throes of a Federally declared disaster who are eligible for assistance. We need state level disaster assistance.

Thank you,

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Washington County
Department of Public Safety