

Thank you for the opportunity to address the Commonwealth Disaster Assistance Committee today.

My name is Eugene J. Dziak and I am the Emergency Management Coordinator for Wyoming County. During my tenure here in Wyoming County we have experienced many natural disasters that have not met the Federal disaster criteria, but have caused extensive damage to our infrastructure, creeks, businesses and homes. Many times these occurrences affect only a specific portion of the county, but do extensive damage. Because of the high poverty level and elderly population that inhabit the county, tax dollars are not readily available to help the neediest recovery. We are thankful to the many volunteer organizations that have come to our rescue when a disaster does occur. Without their help we would not survive – particularly Red Cross, local fire and ambulance departments, dive and rescue teams, local churches, etc.

Wyoming County is located in the Endless Mountain region of northeastern Pennsylvania. The Susquehanna River bisects the county in a southeasterly direction. It enters the county in the northwestern corner and exits the county in the southeastern corner. There is an extensive network of streams and creeks in the river basin area. Flash flooding from severe thunderstorms can and does unbelievable damage to entire communities. Hurricane Irene has made one community inaccessible and made it impossible for people to either leave their homes or return. During Tropical Depression Lee Wyoming County experienced flooding on a greater magnitude than Hurricane Agnes delivered back in June of 1972. Many businesses, in the county seat of Tunkhannock, will not recover from this devastation, along with the hundreds that will be displaced from their homes, because they were either washed away or damaged beyond repair. Damages from these two storms will total well over \$15,000,000. Many people will not benefit from flood insurance because they do not live anywhere near the flood plain, but suffered extensive damage.

Because of the extensive flash flooding that occurred in these two storms, many of the creeks that flow through Wyoming County have been ravaged and made the topography more vulnerable than ever to severe flooding in the future. Many creeks are hundreds of feet out of their banks and now flow in a completely different area.

A disaster assistance program, on a Commonwealth level, would help fill the gaps that exist between local and federal assistance and greatly help out the individuals and municipalities that don't have the finances to recover from disaster. Setting monies aside on a yearly basis in a contingency fund would help small communities deal with the aftermath of a disaster. Hopefully these funds would grow when we have years natural disasters do not occur.

I realize that people have to help themselves survive and it is not the responsibility of the government to provide everything, but in dire cases, a fund such as this would be a blessing and help provide for the recovery of those most affected.

I would fully support the creation of a Commonwealth Disaster Assistance Program that would bridge the gap and help Pennsylvanians recover from natural disasters!!