



**Testimony by:**

**Pennsylvania American Water**

**Utility Response to Hurricane Irene and Tropical Storm Lee**

Before

**Joint Hearing of the Senate Consumer Protection and Professional Licensure and  
Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committees**

**Presented by:**

**Kathy L. Pape**

**President and CEO  
Pennsylvania American Water**

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HR 1, North Office



Good Morning, I'm Kathy Pape, President of Pennsylvania American Water. Thank you Chairman Tomlinson, Chairwoman Boscola, Chairwoman Baker and Chairman Solobay for this opportunity to address your committees.

As you know, the heavy rain and flooding from Hurricane Irene and Tropical Storm Lee created major challenges for residents, businesses, fire and emergency services, and utility companies, including Pennsylvania American Water.

We serve customers in 36 counties across the Commonwealth, and almost all of our systems in central, northeast and southeast Pennsylvania were impacted by the severe weather. This included our facilities along the:

- Susquehanna River (Wilkes-Barre/Scranton, Berwick, Milton, Hallstead, West Shore)
- Swatara Creek (Hershey)
- Delaware River (Yardley)
- Schuylkill River (Norristown, Royersford)

Before the heavy rains arrived, Pennsylvania American Water teams began preparing by reviewing emergency response flood plans, removing critical equipment from low-lying areas, placing sandbags around vulnerable infrastructure, scheduling additional staff, and filling our water storage tanks. The company's managers also launched the first in a series of regular conference calls to coordinate our planning and response,



On September 8, the City of Wilkes-Barre ordered mandatory evacuations due to anticipated flooding of the downtown area, which included Pennsylvania American Water's office and our 24x7 Field Resources Coordination Center. We had only hours to move critical files to a safe location, while the FRCC was relocated to our Watres Water Treatment Plant and continued to dispatch service calls across the state without interruption.

We were dealing with numerous emergencies during the storms, but I'd like to focus on the crisis faced by our Hershey water system during Tropical Storm Lee, which dumped approximately 13 inches of rain and caused historic flooding along the Swatara Creek.

Rising floodwaters shut down two of the three raw water pumps at the intake building of our G.C. Smith Water Treatment Plant, significantly reducing the source of water supply for approximately 18,000 East Shore customers. As a result, we were forced to issue a mandatory conservation notice around 9 a.m. on Thursday, September 8. We communicated this notice to the public via automated phone messages, news media and the company's Web site and social media sites Facebook and Twitter.

We also notified Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection officials and Public Utility Commission staff, plus our team made personal calls to critical customers, including the Penn State-Hershey Medical Center.

Flooding had already cut off access to the intake building, so the only way to restart the pumps was to access the building through the roof. So we contacted PUC officials at the PEMA Emergency Operations Center to request air support. However, no helicopters were available due to the many water rescues occurring across the area.



Local fire crews then arrived to assess whether a swift-water rescue team could reach the building by boat, but they determined that it was not safe.

In the meantime, we contacted Cherokee Helicopter and professional divers from Marion Hill Associates in western Pennsylvania to help us gain access to the intake building, but it would take them nearly four hours to mobilize to Hershey.

Fortunately, Pennsylvania American Water's contacts with South Hanover Township emergency personnel helped secure a Pennsylvania State Police helicopter to assist. At approximately 11 a.m., the State Police chopper with two firefighters arrived on-site.

The firemen, along with two Pennsylvania American Water supervisors, were airlifted to the pump station's roof and gained access. They successfully reset and started the pumps but noticed that the water level was within eight inches of the operating floor. The Swatara Creek was predicted to crest later that evening and bring at least another foot of water, which posed a serious threat to critical electrical equipment -- and could potentially shut down the entire system for an extended period.

At this point, the State Police helicopter had to leave to respond to other emergencies. However, Cherokee Helicopter and Marion Hill crews arrived by mid-afternoon on Thursday to start shuttling personnel, sandbags, pumps and other equipment to the intake station's roof. When the crew entered the building, water was still rising and flowing onto the operating floor. Crews had to work quickly to set up pumps to evacuate water and build a "coffer dam" with sandbags to protect the electrical equipment.



With nighttime approaching, the helicopter could not fly in the dark. So Pennsylvania American Water Field Operations Manager Joe Woodward and Production Superintendent Gary Witmeyer spent the night of September 8, on the roof of the intake building to monitor water levels and maintain pumping operations.

Overnight, we also dispatched leak detection crews after noticing that, when the intake pumps were restarted, the system was not recovering as quickly as expected due to suspected leaks. Our leak detection team discovered several problem spots, including a substantial leak on a private line that was severely affected by flooding. Once the leak was isolated, the water distribution system recovered.

The creek began to recede on Friday, September 9, but our personnel were still not able to access the intake building until early the next morning. Finally, at 9 a.m. on Saturday, September 10, we were able to lift the conservation notice, and we used the same communication channels to notify the public.

I'd like to also point out that because many utilities were experiencing problems across the region, the emergency created a great deal of confusion, rumors and fear among our customers. To enhance our communications, our External Affairs team continually monitored and communicated through Facebook and Twitter. We effectively used social media to address numerous inquiries about boil water advisories, conservation measures and (false) rumors that the water system was being shut down.

Despite the extreme weather, flooding, and electrical outages caused by the hurricane and tropical storm, I'm very pleased to report that the water quality supplied by Pennsylvania American Water was never compromised, no boil water advisories were



necessary, and water service continued uninterrupted to customers in all of our service areas. The credit for this extraordinary accomplishment goes to the hundreds of our employees and managers who literally worked around the clock to monitor, stabilize and protect Pennsylvania American Water's systems.

In addition, we received tremendous support and cooperation from many municipal, emergency and public officials, including the Pennsylvania State Police, Public Utility Commission and Department of Environmental Protection. And a big "thank you" goes to our East Shore customers for abiding by the water conservation notice.

I want to thank the committees again for inviting here today, and I'll be happy to answer any questions.