

John Eline
Director of Emergency Services
County of Adams
Testimony for PA Senate Hearing
Friday, October 25, 2013

“The Challenges of Firefighting Today”
The perspective
of a County Emergency Services Director

Good morning Senators and guests!

I am John Eline, Director of Emergency Services for Adams County. In my position, I am responsible for the County’s 9-1-1 Center, the emergency management agency, hazardous materials response program and emergency operations planning.

Every week our 9-1-1 center receives between 75 and 100 calls for fire services, at least 225 calls for ambulances and medic units and more than 1400 calls for law enforcement assistance. These are only about one-half of the calls for some form of help that come from county citizens, visitors and motorists passing through the County in one week. We are the first point of contact for people in need of assistance.

When we dispatch our first responders, we do so – confident that they will respond and do so quickly and with skills needed to do their job. The callers don’t ask about the training and skills of the people who will respond, they simply want to know that someone is coming and coming quickly.

The caller doesn’t ask if the responder is paid or a volunteer. They have expectations but more importantly they have trust in those that are dispatched to help them.

Long time Adams County residents are familiar with the volunteer nature of our fire fighters. They’ve read the newspapers and have heard local fire officials talk about the declining numbers of volunteers. Some of our citizens, especially those who are more in tune with our local first responders are well aware of the challenges facing our fire departments, emergency medical services and how this somewhat complex system functions. Some are paying attention, but the vast majority, especially newcomers, don’t know that our firefighters volunteer their time to do what they do. We all need to do a better job of telling this story so that our citizens understand.

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I am grateful, and I am very glad that this is how it works in Adams County. Preserving the volunteer fire services in this County is important to me and it should be important to all of our citizens. We have to do what we can to help. We have to hold on to volunteerism as long as we can.

Most of our 9-1-1 dispatchers are fire fighters, EMT's, paramedics or law enforcement officers. I've always said that these people make good dispatchers because they understand the language, the terminology, the culture and the needs of their fellow responders.

From time-to-time, I take the opportunity to talk with our dispatchers about the problems facing their fire companies and agencies. They acknowledge that emergency responders don't always agree on all issues and processes, but they all agree that it's time for our elected officials and time for citizens to become more supportive; to take a keener interest in the future of emergency services in this county and to do so before it's too late.

Thank you for allowing me to speak with all of you today and thank you for coming to Adams County.

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