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# NEWSLETTER FOR MUNICIPAL EMA'S

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Columbia County EMA

April 2010

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## **AUTOMATED TELEPHONE NOTIFICATION SYSTEM**

In an attempt to enhance our alert and notification system, Columbia County EMA has purchased an automated telephone call system. This tool makes it possible to get important information out to every municipality within a couple minutes.

In most cases the Municipal EMC will receive the call. The message is computer generated and will always begin with the following sentence; "This (important) message is from the Columbia County Emergency Management Agency".

Unless otherwise specified in the message it is not necessary to call Columbia County EMA or the 911 Communications Center to verify receipt of the message.

Municipal EMC's and Officials should always keep themselves informed and assess the potential impact of any adverse situation on their municipality. They should make notifications and activate their Emergency Operations Plan to the extent necessary to protect people and property.

## **SEVERE WEATHER WATCHES AND WARNINGS**

A severe weather "Watch" means conditions are favorable that a severe weather situation such as a thunderstorm, tornado or flood could occur. This is the

time to make notifications and ensure your Municipal Emergency Response System is ready to go.

A severe weather "Warning" means the forecasted event has begun or its arrival is imminent. Now is the time to implement public protective actions.

## **FLOODING**

The principle natural hazard in Columbia County is flooding. Creek and stream flooding is possible in every municipality, while the Susquehanna River traverses the center of the county through our most populated areas. Experience has taught us the one predictable thing about floods is their unpredictability.

If you're confident you have them completely figured out you're probably setting yourself up to learn a very hard lesson. Rain uniformity & intensity, snow melt, ice jams, runoff, debris in the stream, dam failure, stream channel breaches, and building in the flood plain are all contributing factors to flooding. The problem is you don't know which factors will play a significant role in the next flood.

The moral of this story is experience, historical data and flood benchmarks are all valuable tools when it comes to flood preparation, planning, response and recovery however always be open to other possibilities.

## **WILD FIRES**

The PA Department of Environmental Protection restricts open burning to one and two family structures. The burning of construction material is never permitted.

When burning brush and vegetation the fire must not extend the original property and piles must be kept small enough to control the fire. The emissions from the fire should not interfere with the reasonable enjoyment of life and property by others.

Typically wildfire season is early spring and late fall, however it can return during prolonged dry periods in the summer. If a fire chief becomes concerned about the large number of wildfires occurring in a Municipality the issue should be taken up with the local Elected Officials

Municipal Elected Officials can issue temporary or permanent ordinances which regulate or prevent open burning in their jurisdiction. They can assign fines for those violating the ordinance and delegate enforcement authority to local police. Before an ordinance is enacted it must first be advertised in the newspaper to alert the public of the pending legislation.

Municipal Elected Officials can search the PA Department of Environmental Protection website at [www.dep.state.pa.us](http://www.dep.state.pa.us) to find more information on the hazards related to open burning and to review a sample Municipal Open Burning Ordinance. This sample ordinance can be altered to meet the needs of your Municipality.

## **ACCIDENTS INVOLVING MILK, FOOD OR ANIMALS**

County EMA must be notified by the Incident Commander (IC) through the 911 dispatcher, when a vehicle transporting food or milk is involved in an accident and

the cargo may have been contaminated, damaged or has spilled from the trailer. This would include accidents where trailer seals are broken or refrigerator units are not operating properly.

County EMA will notify the PA Department of Agriculture through PEMA. Emergency responders should also prevent milk from entering any waterways because of the negative impact it will have on water quality and aquatic life.

If an accident involves animals that are loose or need to be transferred to another vehicle the IC can request assistance from the County Animal Response Team (CART). Before CART is dispatched approval must first be obtained from the owner of the vehicle as well as County EMA.

## **PETROLEUM SPILLS**

The most common hazardous materials incident occurring in Columbia County involves spilled or leaking petroleum products. The response to these incidents is regulated by State Law and PEMA Directives

Fire Companies with the assistance of Municipal Public Works / Road Crews should have the equipment and materials necessary to clean and dispose up to 50 gallons of spilled petroleum products. They should also be able to initiate defensive maneuvers to prevent oil from entering soil or a waterway. Unfortunately there are Municipalities in Columbia County that don't have this very basic capability.

Fuel contaminated clean-up products are considered residual waste and can be packaged and disposed of in a landfill. Local governments should consider enacting an ordinance so the responsible party of a petroleum spill can be billed for emergency response and disposal costs.