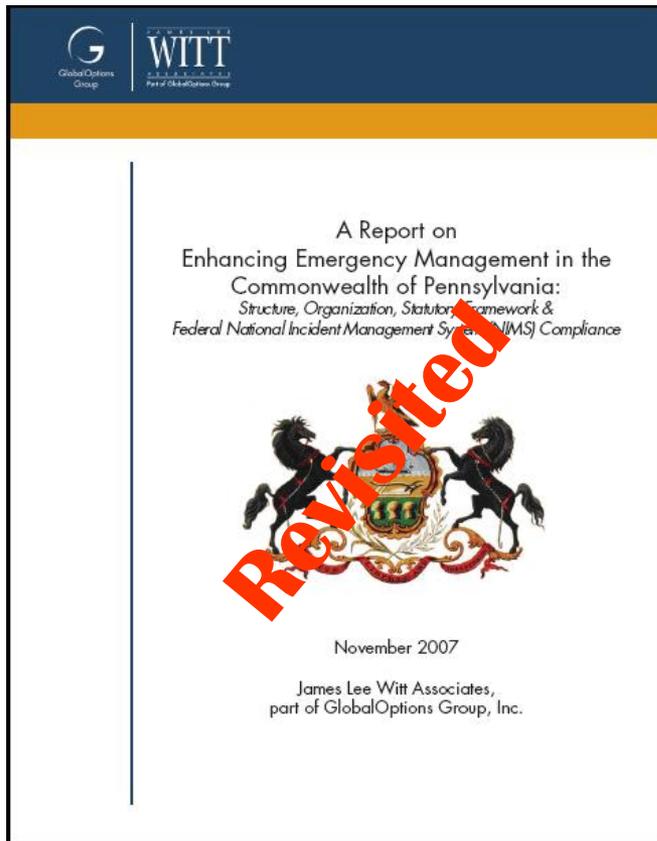


St. Valentine's Day Storm – A Year Later: Pennsylvania's Emergency Preparedness



Senator Lisa Baker, Chair, Veterans Affairs & Emergency Preparedness
February 14, 2008

Background

“A major winter storm hit the Northeast United States on February 13 to 14, 2007.

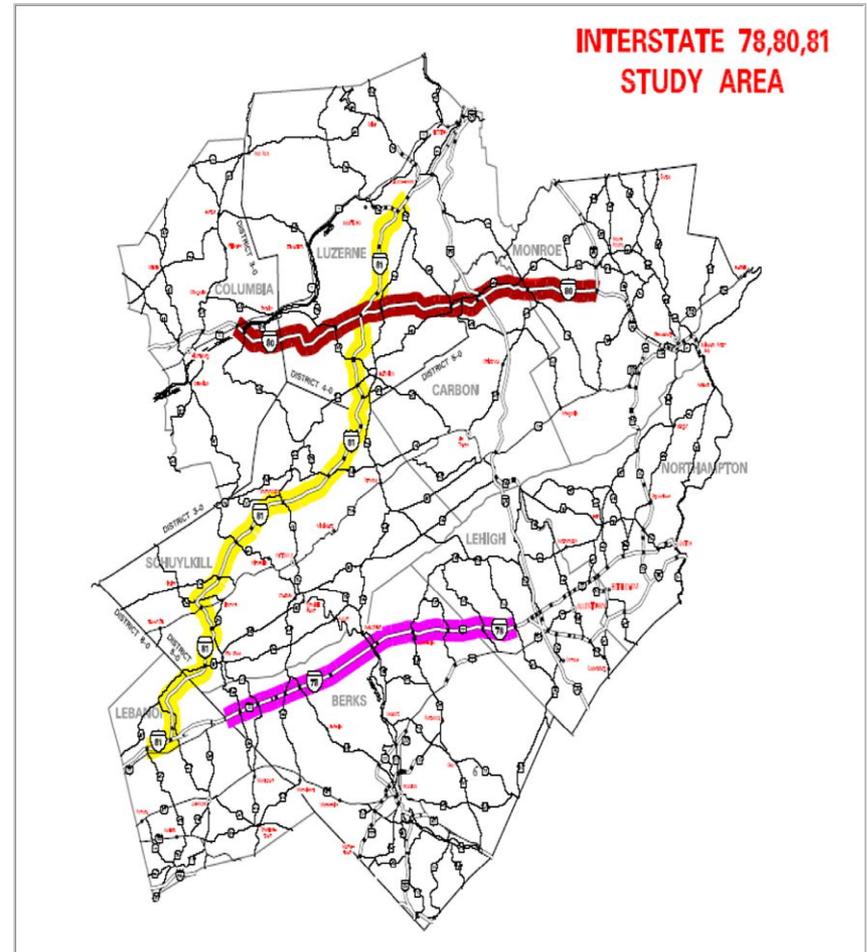
Snow and ice built up on primary and secondary roads and tractor-trailers jackknifed blocking the Interstates. Drivers and passengers in cars and trucks, including some public safety personnel, were stuck in the resulting backups. In some cases, traffic crawled as little as one mile an hour. For others stranded on the road, traffic stood still all night.

In total, approximately 150 miles of Interstate was blocked. Although the exact vehicle and passenger counts are not available, at least hundreds of motorists were stranded on the Interstates for extensive periods of time, some for more than 20 hours. The situation and road conditions were so bad that PennDOT officially closed parts of Interstates 78, 80 and 81 on February 15, impairing travel and commerce. Once the ice and abandoned vehicles were removed, the roads were reopened on February 17.

On Friday, February 16, in the midst of the recovery process to reopen the three major interstates, the Governor held a press conference and expressed his disappointment in the performance of state government. In what became national news, he apologized, admitted a “total breakdown in communications” and called for an independent investigation by James Lee Witt Associates, a Washington D.C.-based firm specializing in emergency management.”

The following report details actions that have been taken, legislation introduced and policy changes made to improve Pennsylvania’s emergency preparedness system.

Source: Witt Report, Commonwealth of PA, Exec Summary.



Source: Pennsylvania Department of Transportation

St. Valentine's Storm – Legislative Response

General Comments

- Citizens expect state and local emergency and disaster response services to be provided in a timely, expedient, and responsive manner. When they are not, they seek *engaged leadership and accountability*.
- Public input and testimony from the administration raised questions about the timeliness of the state's emergency response, resource deployment, establishment of a command center and communication across core agencies during the storm.
- The administration's initial internal assessment of the response lead Governor Rendell to conclude that the incident represented "an absolute breakdown in communications" between state agencies.
- Based on an assessment of status reports provided by the administration, the State Police, PEMA, and PennDOT have made noteworthy progress toward addressing deficiencies and developing subsequent emergency preparedness and roadway readiness action plans, policies and protocols.
- In total, the agencies completed 32 directives as identified by James Lee Witt & Associates and Governor Rendell.
- Success will not be measured by a public hearing or the number of directives completed. Implementing these initiatives during adverse weather or disaster situations is what matters most.
 - Will the Commonwealth's overall readiness for weather emergencies or man-made disasters be improved?
 - Will our responsiveness to citizens be markedly different?
 - Will we be able to keep Pennsylvania's interstates open and without major incident?

Overall Goals

- Restoring the public's trust in our disaster response and emergency preparedness
- Ensuring accountability from our public leaders
- Positioning Pennsylvania as a leader in emergency management and homeland security
- Re-establishing Pennsylvania as a leader in roadway management
- Proactive oversight during policy and legislative development and implementation
- Improving public outreach and emergency notification
- Implementation of a state-of-the-art 511 Traveler Information System
- Implementation of a mutual aid statute
- Commitment to fully staffing and resourcing our public safety agencies
- Compliance with national emergency management standards
- Implementation of proven roadway management standards
- Use of “intelligent technologies” to improve disaster response readiness

Pennsylvania Emergency Preparedness

LEGISLATIVE ACTION – Senate Bills

#	Action	Description	Status
1	Senate Confirmation of PEMA Director (SB 637 - Baker)	Introduced to secure Senate confirmation for the PEMA Director. The PEMA Director is responsible for: 1) oversight of the state and local government's response to all natural and manmade disasters, and 2) distribution and oversight of federal disaster relief and emergency response funds. The PEMA Director manages a total budget in excess of \$453 million annually and a staff of 166 employees.	Passed by Senate
2	511 Traveler Information System (SB 976 - Baker/Madigan)	Introduced to encourage the adoption of a 511 travel information number to give motorists 24-hour access to road conditions and information needed to make critical decisions about their trips before leaving home and while on the road. 27 states have already implemented a 511 system as part of a nationwide effort to provide consistent and reliable traveler information.	Passed Senate Transportation Committee
3	Mutual Aid Agreements (SB 1225 - Pippy)	Introduced to improve county and local officials' ability to coordinate emergency response efforts. The bill will establish a statewide mutual aid system including terms and conditions for assisting or seeking assistance from another jurisdiction in response to an emergency.	Passed Senate Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee
4	Revision of Title 35/PEMA Statutes	Title 35, enacted well before 9/11, focuses primarily on natural and certain man-made emergencies. Title 35 also does not reference the role or responsibilities of regional task forces or address the role and responsibilities of the Office of Homeland Security.	Pending Introduction Spring 2008

Pennsylvania Emergency Preparedness

LEGISLATIVE ACTION – Oversight Hearings

#	Action	Description	Status
1	Statewide Radio System Hearing	<p>Goal: Assess the status of the Statewide Radio System deployment. (Senate Communications and Technology/Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness committees)</p> <p>Outcome: Gathered testimony regarding Statewide Radio System, which is central to Pennsylvania’s homeland security and emergency preparedness. Communications failures adversely impact public safety and confidence. The system is slated to realize 95% road coverage by the end of 2008.</p>	Oct 3, 2007
2	Nuclear Plant Security Hearing	<p>Goal: Consider regulatory and emergency preparedness issues of Pennsylvania’s nuclear facilities. (Consumer Protection and Professional Licensure/Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness committees)</p> <p>Outcome: Gathered testimony regarding security concerns.</p>	Oct 16, 2007
3	Witt Report Follow Up Hearing	<p>Goal: Assess progress made by the Rendell Administration in addressing deficiencies in emergency response and preparedness following February 2007 storm. (Senate Transportation/Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness committees)</p> <p>Outcome: Initial hearing identified significant breakdowns in inter-agency communications protocols and emergency response procedures. Officials offered updates on 32 action plans set forth in agency directives issued by Governor Rendell.</p>	Oct 30, 2007

St. Valentine's Storm - Witt Report
Key Findings
Administration/Agency Actions

Summary of Key Interagency Findings

- Insufficient emergency notification
- No consistent reporting or documentation procedures
- No interagency, central gathering point for public and media information
- No designated backup for the governor's office onsite point of contact
- Lack of understanding of emergency responsibilities
- Inadequate pre-event interagency planning or written agreements for transportation emergencies
- National Incident Management System not fully adopted and implemented
- Lack of communication among state and local authorities
- No written traffic diversion plan or statewide evacuation plan
- Road Condition Reporting System not available to State Emergency Operations Center

Pennsylvania Emergency Preparedness/Witt II Report Follow-up

RENDELL ADMINISTRATION

#	Action	Description	Status
1	Create New Department of Emergency Management and Homeland Security	<p>Goal: Merge PEMA and the Office of Homeland Security to create a cabinet-level agency responsible for coordinating emergency management and response efforts across all state agencies.</p> <p>Outcome: Department of Emergency Management and Homeland Security created. Agency goals and structure established.</p>	Dec 4, 2007
2	Engaged Leadership by the Governor	<p>Goal: Demonstrate engaged leadership by the governor and senior leadership for homeland security and homeland security.</p> <p>Outcome: Convene the Governor's Emergency Management and Homeland Security Council.</p>	In Process
3	Adopt All-Hazard Emergency Preparedness and Response Strategy	<p>Goal: Adopt the All-Hazard Emergency Preparedness and Response Strategy.</p> <p>Outcome: Implemented the Prevention, Protection, Response, Recovery All Hazard Strategy for emergency preparedness as the underlying policy for the Department of Emergency Management and Homeland Security</p>	Dec 2007
4	Develop a Flood Mitigation and Prevention Strategy	<p>Goal: Develop a comprehensive flood mitigation and prevention strategy especially in the high risk areas.</p> <p>Outcome: The governor's proposed budget for FY 2008/09 includes \$100 million through 2010 to make flood-prone communities safe.</p>	In Process

Summary of Key PENNDOT Findings (February 2007)

- Loss of key personnel at PennDOT a month before the winter storm
- Not all districts contracted with transportation-specific weather forecasting services
- 55 of the 74 statewide sensor sites of the Roadway Weather Information System (RWIS) were inoperable at the time of the storm
- Emergency operations not treated as a core mission of PennDOT
- PennDOT provided flawed information to the public in press releases, on highway electronic message boards, and over its telephone information system
- Highway Advisory Radio in District 5-0 was inoperable
- PennDOT's representative at the State Emergency Operations Center did not have access to all information available to PennDOT's Traffic Control Center staff
- No statewide definition for "road closure." Lack of clearly defined terminology system-wide.
- PennDOT allowed districts and counties to modify individual approaches for snow and ice control
- Quantity of chemical additives in PennDOT's stockpiles not governed by policy or procedure
- Staffing guidance not followed, particularly in PennDOT's Berks County, with lack of guidance at the district level
- Measures to improve pavement condition considered as more important than snow and ice control
- Turnpike used a "bare pavement" philosophy to snow and ice control; PennDOT did not

Pennsylvania Emergency Preparedness/Witt Report Follow-up

PENNDOT

#	Action	Description	Status
1	Permanent and Temporary District Staffing	<p>Goal: Address shortage of drivers available to operate snow equipment, especially in specific counties.</p> <p>Outcome: Plan developed. Efforts being made to increase candidate pool and provide procedures for attracting potential candidates.</p>	July 1, 2007
2	Management Continuity Plans	<p>Goal: Utilize Workforce and Succession Management Planning Tool to ensure management continuity within every district and county operation.</p> <p>Outcome: Management continuity plan and experience requirements for all new county maintenance management developed.</p>	Sept 1 2007
3	Roadway Weather Information System	<p>Goal: Repair Roadway Weather Information System (RWIS) and develop an ongoing repair and oversight program.</p> <p>Outcome: Contracts issued for RWIS maintenance and system enhancements.</p>	Sept 1, 2007
4	Customer Information Plan	<p>Goal: Develop a comprehensive communications system to provide motorists with accurate road condition information</p> <p>Outcome: Customer Information Plan developed.</p>	June 15, 2007
5	Weather Forecasting Service Contract	<p>Goal: All districts should contract with specific private weather forecasting services in addition to the national weather forecasting service for weather alerts.</p> <p>Outcome: AccuWeather will provide district-specific forecasts as needed.</p>	May 1, 2007

Pennsylvania Emergency Preparedness/Witt Report Follow-up

PENNDOT

#	Action	Description	Status
6	Establish Data Link - PennDOT's TCC and SEOC	<p>Goal: Create data link to share information between PennDOT's Traffic Communication Center (TCC) and the State Emergency Operation Center (SEOC).</p> <p>Outcome: Data link established between TCC and SEOC.</p>	July 1, 2007
7	Emergency Response Operations for I-78 Corridor	<p>Goal: Identify emergency response needs of the I-78 corridor.</p> <p>Outcome: Safety audit conducted. Recommendations provided to the governor.</p>	Sept 1, 2007
8	Universal Emergency Management Command and Control Policies and Procedures	<p>Goal: Prepare command and control procedures to ensure uniform success in snow removal across the district in inclement weather situations.</p> <p>Outcome: Emergency Transportation Operations (ETO) Manual issued.</p>	Aug 31, 2007
9	Snow and Ice Removal Best Practices	<p>Goal: Identify best practices used by other states and develop revised snow and ice removal policy.</p> <p>Outcome: Revised policy statement issued.</p>	July 1, 2007
10	Road Closure Protocol for PA Interstates and State Highways	<p>Goal: Establish protocol for the closure of Pennsylvania's Interstates and state highways.</p> <p>Outcome: Interstate and highway closure protocol drafted.</p>	In Progress
11	Traffic Diversion Protocol for Primary Interstate and State Highways	<p>Goal: Establish written traffic diversion plans along primary Interstates and state highways.</p> <p>Outcome: Interstate and highway traffic diversion plan completed.</p>	Aug 31, 2007

Summary of Key PEMA Findings (February 2007)

- PEMA did not fully ramp up State Emergency Operations Center operations to Level 2 until 4:00 PM on February 13 and to Level 3 until 7:47 PM on February 14 despite external indicators
- Shortage of PEMA State Emergency Operations Center personnel
- Pennsylvania's Emergency Management statute (Title 35) has not been updated since 1989
- After-Action Review for floods cited numerous areas that required improvement, which again surfaced as major problems in the agency's response to the Winter Storm.

Pennsylvania Emergency Preparedness/Witt Report Follow-up

PA Emergency Management Agency

#	Action	Description	Status
1	State Emergency Operation Plan Update	<p>Goal: Update the State Emergency Operations Plan.</p> <p>Outcome: State Emergency Operation Plan revised.</p>	Oct 31, 2007
2	Emergency Activation Levels	<p>Goal: Revise State Emergency Operations Center Mobilization Plan Standard Operating Procedure.</p> <p>Outcome: State Emergency Operations Center Mobilization Plan Standard Operating Procedure revised.</p>	June 15, 2007
3	National Incident Management System (NIMS) Implementation	<p>Goal: Implement the National Incident Management System (NIMS).</p> <p>Outcome: NIMS assessment report completed and reviewed by Witt and Associates. Recommendations are under review.</p>	In Progress
4	Fill Key Vacancies	<p>Goal: Develop a plan to identify and hire appropriate candidates for key vacancies.</p> <p>Outcome: New agency director and director of the Bureau of Operations and Training hired.</p>	Summer 2007
5	SEOC Training and Staff Rotation Plan	<p>Goal: Properly train and staff the State Emergency Operation Center (SEOC).</p> <p>Outcome: Detailed SEOC training and staff rotational plan, including cross-training for all employees prepared.</p>	May 15, 2007

Pennsylvania Emergency Preparedness/Witt Report Follow-up

PA Emergency Management Agency

#	Action	Description	Status
6	Incident Management List	<p><u>Directive:</u> Identify incident managers who can run SEOC during incidents.</p> <p><u>Outcome:</u> Six additional incident managers from PSP, PEMA, Department of Health, the State Fire Commissioners Office, and DMVA identified. Initial incident management training for new candidates completed.</p>	June 30, 2007
7	Establish Logistics and Resource Management Capability Within PEMA	<p><u>Directive:</u> Establish a logistics and resource management capability to ensure Commonwealth resources are inventoried, tracked, and available for rapid deployment during a disaster or emergency.</p> <p><u>Outcome:</u> Logistics and resource plan developed. Evaluating various technology solutions.</p>	In Process
8	Technology Best Practices	<p><u>Directive:</u> Recommend “best practice” technology upgrades that would enhance the overall preparedness, situational awareness, response, and recovery capabilities at the State Emergency Operations Center</p> <p><u>Outcome:</u> Ongoing review of best practices and emerging technologies.</p>	June 1, 2007

Summary of Key State Police Findings (February 2007)

- State Police commanders did not communicate horizontally to each other
- State Police Commissioner was not fully aware of what was happening in the field until February 14 at 5:08 PM
- No written or verbal Incident Action Plan completed for the Hamburg or Hazleton Command Post

Pennsylvania Emergency Preparedness/Witt Report Follow-up

PA State Police

#	Action	Description	Status
1	Formalize State Police Information Notification Process	<p><u>Directive:</u> Develop and update written protocols to ensure that information is transmitted both horizontally and vertically throughout the organization.</p> <p><u>Outcome:</u> Situational Awareness and Alert Levels policy drafted.</p>	June 29, 2007
2	Revise Notification Process for Emergency Public Liaison Officers	<p><u>Directive:</u> Develop a plan for information dissemination to Emergency Public Liaison Officers during emergency incidents.</p> <p><u>Outcome:</u> Notification process revised.</p>	June 29, 2007