

**Statement for the
Senate Transportation Committee**

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Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency

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Chairman Rafferty, Chairman Wozniak and Members of the Committee, I am Dave Holl, Deputy Director for Operations for the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency (PEMA). Thank you for the opportunity to provide this statement and discussing the emergency response to major vehicle accidents on the state highway system and the Turnpike.

First and foremost, across the Commonwealth, Governor Corbett and PEMA have adopted and implemented the strategy of “leaning forward” with regards to any potential disaster or emergency. In the past, the agency stood back on its heels and waited until the event arrived and then reacted to it. You cannot successfully manage a disaster if you are in a reactive state because incidents develop far too fast and you are then continuously trying to catch up in the event’s coordination. PEMA now leans forward to prepare aggressively preplan for an event instead of waiting and reacting to the situation as it unfolds. One of PEMA’s primary functions is to work with county and local emergency managers to ensure that throughout the Commonwealth there is a state of readiness to respond to any type of emergency or disaster. In emergency management terms – this is known as an “all hazards” approach.

For major state highway and Turnpike accidents, the State Emergency Operation Center (SEOC) at PEMA focuses on three primary responsibilities and objectives: 1) notification, 2) situational awareness, and 3) coordination of unmet needs.

With respect to the first objective, notification, Knowledge Center (KC) is a software product accessible by all the county Emergency management Agencies (EMA's) and 911 Centers to provide information for events occurring such as traffic accidents, fires, or other incidents of public safety and emergency management concern. State agency Emergency Preparedness Liaisons Officers (EPLOs) also have access to the system. The SEOC becomes aware of events through a variety of mechanisms including KC entries by the counties, phone calls from the counties or state agencies such as the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT), the Pennsylvania State Police (PSP) watch desk, and/or the Turnpike command center. Following initial information of an event, the SEOC makes notifications to various stakeholders depending upon the nature of the event. The goal is that all parties having an interest in response or situational awareness have the most up-to-date available information possible to manage or coordinate a response. Depending on the vehicles or cargo involved, these notifications could also include: the Pennsylvania Department of Health, the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection, the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture, the Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission, the United States Department of Transportation (US DOT), US DOT Federal Motor Carrier, and the United States Environmental Protection Agency, Region III, and others.

The second objective, situational awareness, includes the SEOC monitoring and interacting with Knowledge Center where PEMA Watch Officers enter updates to an incident or review updates entered by a county or a state agency involved in the event coordination. PennDOT's Road Condition Reporting System (RCRS), PennDOT's 511 web site, the Turnpike's Trip Alerts, and PSP Watch Notices are also monitored or consulted as are PennDOT's regional traffic management centers through the PennDOT EPLO. This process is ongoing throughout the event and determines additional notifications or coordination calls when necessary.

The third objective, coordination of unmet needs, occurs when a county has maximized its resources responding to an event and requires state agency assistance and/or help coordinating the response. The first level of response, coordination, and management of an event, is always initially at the municipal and county levels as emergency calls to the 911 Centers are dispatched to fire, emergency medical services, and law enforcement. The county can then request additional resources and efforts can be made to locate those resources and assist in providing them to the requestor when located and available. PEMA supports the county Emergency Management Agencies in coordinating those additional resources to meet their unmet needs.

In carrying out the three primary objectives the SEOC uses various policy, procedure, and other documents and processes that provide guidance to SEOC Watch Officers and other stakeholders including Road Closure Incident Guides. These guidelines have been developed through ongoing discussions with PSP, PennDOT and the Turnpike. These procedures include critical

involvements such as the evaluation of any trapped queue, safety checks on the drivers/occupants of vehicles in the queue, whether there is a detour in effect, if so, the effectiveness of the detour, current weather conditions, and the estimated time of reopening and any closed roadway.

In implementing these objectives in response to the accident on the PA Turnpike in Bucks County the PEMA SEOC made notifications to PennDOT and PSP. The PennDOT EPLO was deployed to the Turnpike Command Center and coordinated information exchange back to the SEOC for additional situational awareness. A conference call was also convened with the Bucks County Emergency Management Coordinator for the purposes of sharing information concerning the situation, determining any unmet needs, and assisting with the state agencies involved as needed.

On behalf of Governor Corbett and the more than twelve million Pennsylvanians we serve, I thank you Chairman Rafferty, Chairman Wozniak, and Members of this Committee for your continued support of PEMA and our partners in public safety across the state. I appreciate the opportunity to testify here today and I will try to answer any questions you might have.