

# SUSQUEHANNA COUNTY 911

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## Senate Policy Committee Testimony January 26, 2011

Senator Edwin B. Erickson, Chairman, Senate Majority Policy Committee.

Good afternoon Chairman Erickson, and the members of the Senate Majority Policy Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on the Local Impact of Marcellus Shale Drilling relating to 9-1-1. My name is Art Donato; I am the Susquehanna County 9-1-1 Coordinator. I have worked for the Susquehanna County 9-1-1 center for 23 years, 18 of those years as a dispatcher and the last five years as the coordinator. I am also a member of the Forest Lake Volunteer Fire department for 34 years and had served as a Fire Chief or Assistant Fire Chief for 15 of those years.

Susquehanna County is located in the rural northeastern part of the State and New York State borders us to the north. It is home to nearly 42,000 residents and is 840 square miles. Susquehanna County 9-1-1 operates as its own department with our EMA office operating as its own department also. Throughout the State of Pennsylvania there are different ways in which the organization of the EMA/9-1-1 will vary. If they do not operate as we do then they may have the EMA office over see their 9-1-1 Center, or have a Director of Emergency Services that oversees both the EMA and 9-1-1 operations.

In Susquehanna County, we operate an enhanced 9-1-1 communications center. We operate with two dispatchers on all shifts. The dispatchers will take the 9-1-1 call and dispatch the appropriate emergency service. Susquehanna County started the deployment of our 9-1-1 standard addressing with our first release of addresses in May of 2008 and our last release in June of 2010. Today we still are working to catch some of those that have been missed. This helps the 9-1-1 center to locate and direct emergency responders to find where the emergency is in a much faster manner.

Due to the lack of cell phone service available in our entire county, we found that many of the gas companies were using satellite phones. When you dial 9-1-1 on a satellite phone your call is directed into a national control center for their provider. The satellite phone company would then have to transfer the caller to our 9-1-1 center. Sometimes their calls would go through several agencies before they make the correct contact with us. Once the call was connected to us, the caller, being from out of the area, would have no idea where they were. They would try and give us information that would include coordinates to their location. While we could map their location coordinates it would

show the well site on top of a mountain but we would not know which road to use for access, so we would not know what road to send the emergency responders to. Because of the delay in responses to these calls, we took the initiative to make contact with all the gas companies doing drilling in our County. Currently we are actively working with nine gas companies in our county. We sent each of them a packet of information that contained how to obtain the address for the well pad, recommendations for postings at the well pad, a request for their 24 hour contact number, request for notifications of flare offs, which is the burning off of the gas well at the site for several days and also give them our seven digit phone number so they may contact us directly for emergencies. I know that calling the seven digit number is not an E9-1-1 feature but at least we can assure that they would be connected to our 9-1-1 center more quickly so we may get them help sooner.

While the gas companies are the ones who oversee the extraction of the gas, there are the sub-contractors who prep the site and build the pad, the companies who come in and do the drilling and those who do the fracing. This provides a problem when the pad is not signed properly or this information is not passed along to all the sub contractors.

Dealing with the gas companies is not all bad. When we have had incidents at their sites we have found the gas company personnel were either on the scene or there shortly after the emergency responders arrived. Some of the companies are very eager to cooperate with us and have met with us prior to their gas pad activity. Unfortunately there are the gas companies that are not as proactive or they just don't follow what our requirements are as we have no real recourse to make them. We have found that when there is an issue at the well site, a leak from faulty regulator or a separator fire at the well site the gas company representatives and technicians were either on scene or on scene shortly after the emergency responders.

Susquehanna County has seen an increase in calls to our 9-1-1 center. We have seen an increase in our administrative lines from the gas industry for calling in road closures, flare offs, hydro static testing as well as complaints from citizens for trespassing issues, road condition issues from heavy truck traffic. We have seen an increase in our court related work we do for the county as the Sheriff noted we have seen an increase in warrant service, drug activity, increase in jail population and more. From 2008 to 2010 we have seen an increase of 16% in both our telephone call volume and emergency incidents created. The increase in incidents come from traffic issues, (complaints of speed, using roads they should not be and the increased traffic caused accidents), assaults, drug activity, minor fires (not the big bad incident that many worry about), yes the potential for a serious incident is there, however the increase in the other activities is what creates an increase demand on our 9-1-1 center and our volunteer emergency responders. As you know the emergency responders are diminishing in our state. As we see the volunteers decrease and the call load increase this will only create more of a delay as we in the dispatch center must try to find another service to respond for those who are already out on an incident or are not able to respond due to staffing shortages.

In closing, Susquehanna County is just in the infancy of the gas boom. Since 2008 there have been 462 permits issued with about 200 wells drilled to date. Currently there are plans to add 4 pipelines to help carry the gas from our county to other main pipelines outside our county. With this increased activity building these pipelines and drilling the gas wells that will be used to fill these pipe lines will only continue to increase the demand on our services and those of our responders. We have been able to maintain our current staffing levels but we will need to add staff in the near future, this will continue to put the burdon on the county budget to come up with the funding for our increased needs. I would encourage the Senate to continue to work with the emergency community for creating standards and to continue to look for funding to assist the counties and local responders so that we can ensure the safety of our residents.

Again I would like to thank you for this opportunity to represent the 9-1-1 community with the issues regarding the Marcellus Shale gas drilling.

Thank You  
Art Donato