



BEAVER COUNTY EMERGENCY SERVICES

Year-end, 2025 Newsletter

ARE YOU READY FOR WINTER WEATHER?

Kevin Whipple, Deputy Director

As temperatures drop, it's a good time to make sure you and your family are ready for winter storms. Power outages, icy roads, and extreme cold can happen with little warning, but a few simple steps taken now can make a big difference later.

1. Build or refresh your emergency kit.

Include flashlights, batteries, nonperishable food, water, blankets, and any needed medications. Don't forget supplies for your pets.

2. Stay informed.

Sign up for local emergency alerts and keep a battery-powered radio handy. Weather updates and official messages can guide you during an outage or storm.

3. Prepare your home and vehicle.

Check heating systems, insulate pipes, and stock up on salt or sand for walkways. Keep your gas tank at least half full and carry a small winter kit in your car that includes a blanket, a scraper, and extra clothing.

4. Check on neighbors.

Older adults and those living alone may need help during extreme cold. A quick check-in can make all the difference.

Preparedness is a shared responsibility. When we all take small steps, our entire community becomes more resilient.

Stay safe this winter — and remember, our office is here year-round to help you plan and prepare.

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OPINION: TWO WAY RADIO COMMUNICATIONS - WHAT IS IT? *Ronald D'Alessandro, Radio Technician*

Following last April's proclamation issued by the Beaver County Commissioners for Telecommunicator week, I was given to reflect on my own perspective on communication, and I wanted to share my thoughts.

Communication can be defined as both the process and the means, by which we share information. More importantly, it is a way to create and interpret meaning, and, in so doing, impart a message in a relatable way that can increase understanding and show relevance in order to help people form relationships and achieve goals. In the Emergency Management world of information dissemination, we are tasked with the responsibility of sharing accurate information person to person using every means at our disposal.

We rely on pathways that include machines and devices which provide us with the means to present information both verbally and via text to achieve our goals. Specifically for 911 agencies, none of the methods that we use is more relied upon than the two-way radio systems we employ. A two-way radio network provides us with the means for instantaneous transfer of information across vast distances to prompt quick responses to every catastrophe, dangerous activity, weather related emergency, or life and death medical situation. Notification of these events to the proper responding agencies is our reason for existence as a governmental agency.

The well-trained Telecommunicators in Beaver County are critical elements in our system. The process begins with them. Good radio communicators are taught to listen carefully, speak clearly, and respect each other's need to be heard all while following carefully designed protocols for precise and effective translation and transmission of information that they have received from, often times panicked, sources most often via telephone. Their experience helps them develop the discipline they need to do it consistently under pressure.

None do that better than the people in the Beaver County 911 Dispatch Center. Proud professionals and serious communicators. They stand on the shoulders of their predecessors, some of whom are described below.

A Brief and Incomplete History of WIRELESS:

The early emergency services network was established during World War I through the Civil Defense agency. It was presented as an early warning system for air attacks in a proactive response to the devastating events inflicted on civilian communities in Europe. Eventually evolving into the 'Duck And Cover' reaction to the nuclear attack fears of the 1960's, it continued to evolve into what we presently know as the Emergency Management Services and eventually the Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA). They sought to make information their first line of defense against tragedy, relaying that information through the use of basic communication techniques and devices. An assembly of methods and technologies was interconnected to produce a high-tech solution to what may have conceivably been only the sound of a cow bell on the mayor's front porch or a repurposed ship's bell on the firehouse roof.

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TWO WAY RADIO COMMUNICATIONS, cont

Later technology produced the manually operated and eventually the radio frequency activated electric siren, in other words, a loud SCREAM for attention that was meant to alert the public at large and to notify the volunteers that were available to come together to apply their training to the important task at hand.

The advent of radio communication, with respect to Edison and Marconi, which was pioneered by the curious interest of an unregulated group of hobbyists and semi-professional people, began after the protocols established by the telegraph networks utilizing Morse code were adopted by these curious ones. Amateur radio operators are the godfathers of what would eventually evolve into the Federal Communication Commission under President Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1934. They took the most basic tenets of civil communication and established them as the rules of behavior on the air waves for generations: diligence, discipline, patience, and courtesy.

The onset of amateur radio organizations of the past began when these hobbyists (HAMS) started transmitting a signal that caused the naturally occurring noise (static) to go quiet indicating to their crude receiving devices that there was a signal being sent by someone else, somewhere else. The limits of voice disappeared with radio, providing the means to reach out to someone across miles, through walls or beyond the atmosphere. However, in order to be 'heard' by the receiver, the unmodulated radio 'carrier wave' had to be tuned to the channel being transmitted. Over time, improvements of the various components and the creation of semiconductors produced advances in transmissions that eventually became the vastly ubiquitous wireless communication industry that we know today.

That is some of the HOW we came to do it as an agency in service to the public. Now we might also consider WHY we do it. I think that I should leave the answer to that question to the people who sit at the consoles in front of 6 video monitors and in those station houses for hours each day. Many of them spending years of dedicated service and hours of public service as volunteers, administrators, or responders in ambulances, fire trucks, police cars, and HazMat suits. Dedicated individuals who have their own reasons why they walk on to the scene of an event ready to respond to the call in our communities.

I have been privileged to be around many of these individuals for thirty plus years, and it seems to me that they do it for more than just a paycheck or to be neighborly. I believe that there's something more important but less common that motivates them.

Helping to keep the radios lit,

Ron D'Alessandro

Beaver County Radio Technician

DIRECTOR'S CORNER

Eric Brewer, Emergency Services Director

With the close of another year and our first snow of the season already behind us, we can reflect on the prior months while being reminded of the challenges that winter can bring. As Kevin Whipple outlines in this issue, the first measurable snow of the season is a reminder to be ready for emergencies and that we should try to be good neighbors by checking on the elderly and those who are vulnerable when the weather is inclement.

This past year, the Department of Emergency Services ramped up our drone program by adding another drone to the fleet. We continue to partner with the Beaver County Detectives in drone response and training. Our drones have been deployed to ESU (Emergency Services Unit) calls, hazmat incidents, mass gatherings and missing persons calls, just to name a few. Drones continue to play a large part in public safety, and the use of unmanned aerial systems continues to grow.

The EMA office recently held a VOAD (Volunteer Organizations Active in Disaster) exercise. VOAD groups assist in recovery from disaster incidents, working to fill unmet needs following disasters. Depending on the incident, a VOAD could provide household items, clothing, sheltering or an array of other services. We work closely with municipal Emergency Management Coordinators to access their services.

Emergency Services continues to prepare residents for disasters. Each household should have received the annual Emergency Preparedness mailer. There are cards in each mailer that you should return to our office to identify your needs should a disaster arise. This information is shared with your local emergency management coordinator so they can check on your well being if there is an incident in their municipality. There is also a checklist in the mailer that can be used to prepare you for a disaster. We also encourage residents to sign up for the mass notification alerts on the Beaver County website:

<https://www.beavercountypa.gov/departments/emergency-services>

We are nearing the end of the radio project and hope to have the system online in the first quarter of 2026 when Beaver County will transition to a digital system with encryption on several frequencies. Motorola has been testing and making final adjustments on the new system, and we recently met with the radio vendors approved to program radios on our system: BearCom, Westcom and Louttamus Communications. These 3 vendors are the only ones able to conduct programming on the Beaver County Radio Network. If you have not already done so, please reach out to the listed vendors about changes that will need to be made to any Motorola, Kenwood, and Harris radio in advance of the switch to the digital system, and feel free to reach out to Ron D'Alessandro with any question at rdAlessandro@beavercountypa.gov. While no system has 100% coverage, we have increased radio coverage with the addition of 4 new towers. There still will be "in-building" coverage issues. However, we're hoping municipalities work to start adding Emergency Responder Radio Communication Systems (ERRCS) in their building codes when applicable.

From Beaver County Emergency Services, we wish you a safe holiday season and a prosperous New Year!

HAZMAT PROGRAM UPDATE

Jason Gallagher, Hazmat Planner / Equipment Coordinator

Hazmat Team 700 has been busy since our last newsletter. Here is just some of the recent training activities that our team members were able to participate in: Various Members were able to attend the PA Hazmat Technicians Conference & Ohio Hazmat Team Conference, 2 members attended training with Shell for Railcar Emergencies, and 2 members attended the Isotopes Crossroads Training that was held in August.

Numerous in-house trainings were also held, with topics including Drivers Training, Grounding & Bonding, Sampling / Research /5-gas Meters/Emergency-Kit Review and Air Monitoring. The Team looks to continue to educate themselves to be prepared for that next emergency response.

Recently, an EMS/Fire Operational Essentials Course was held at local fire departments to better prepare the members to operate at a Mass Casualty Event. Those in attendance were able to understand Operational Positions, participate in Hands-On Exercises and Tour the Region 13 MCI Trailer.

The Team has responded to 3 incidents since July: a structure fire assist with chemicals involved in Harmony Township, a scrap yard fire in Darlington Township, and an informational phone call for an unknown chemical in Ohioville.

Expected to arrive in early December is a new Washer - Extractor & Gear Dryer that we were able to acquire through a Safety First grant from Norfolk Southern.

Lastly, we would like to welcome two new volunteers to our Hazardous Materials Response Team: Joshua Brown & Alex Savoia.



RED CROSS SUPPORT FOR VICTIMS OF RESIDENTIAL FIRES

Brian Murray, Deputy Director

The American Red Cross is available to assist residents affected by residential fires and can generally be on scene within 2 hours.

To request Red Cross Assistance, provide the following information to Beaver County 911:

- Number of adults and children affected
- Brief description of needs
- Contact information for the incident commander
- Contact information for the residents

Services Provided

- Immediate financial assistance (for eligible residents)
- Blankets, hygiene kits, and personal comfort supplies
- Toys and comfort items for children
- Replacement of essential medical items (medications, medical equipment, mobility devices)
- Emotional and spiritual support
- Help creating a short-term recovery plan
- Coordination with community partners for additional resources

Residents do not need to be displaced or qualify for financial assistance to receive Red Cross support. Any affected resident can receive help. To find out more: [What To Do After A Home Fire](#) | [American Red Cross](#)

CAD UPDATE

Ben Oaks, CAD Administrator

We are 8 months into the new CAD project, with several updates completed to improve reliability and usage.

To increase cybersecurity, The Joint Beaver/Washington CAD Project has implemented a VPN for connecting to the CAD System. We are currently going through all the departments in the county and installing the VPN. If you do not have the VPN installed yet, please reach out to me at boaks@beavercountypa.gov to set up a time have this done. This install can be done remotely on our end, but you will need to have a user at the computer while this is installed.

We will also be installing VPNs into police cruisers using Windows devices (either computers or tablets) to begin rolling out the MDT (Mobile Data Terminal) option for use. For FIRE and EMS agencies who have Apple and Android devices, we are continuing to work with Hexagon to support those devices.

Beginning in the new year, we will be offering training on how to use the MDT system and what options it has for the end user. Once we have the training set, emails will be sent to the departments on times and locations for the training. Any question or issues with the use of the new Hexagon OnCall system, please email or call me at 724-385-8235 or boaks@beavercountypa.gov.

FROM THE OFFICE OF THE STATE FIRE COMMISSIONER

REF: INCIDENT REPORTING

Brian Murray, Deputy Director

The Software Provided is Changing

Departments can choose the vendor they prefer for fire incident reporting, but we provide a no-cost option that allows fire departments to meet the minimum reporting requirements. We're in the process of switching reporting software from Emergency Reporting to Emergency Networking.

Onboarding Deadline: Early December

If moving to Emergency Networking, please make sure that you are onboarded by early December. Have your account set up and ready to use. Contact us if you have not yet received your onboarding information.

If your fire department is remaining with Emergency Reporting until December 31, you will be responsible for downloading your incidents for the months of October through December and importing them into your Emergency Networking account.

Fire Companies continuing with the National Fire Incident Reporting Standard in Emergency Networking will need to email their incidents to ra-pennfirs@pa.gov by the 15th of the following month so they can be submitted to the database.

National Emergency Response Information System

Starting January 1, 2026, all incidents will need to report to NERIS standards. National Fire Incident Reporting System incidents will be accepted until January 15, but will be decommissioned in February 2026.

The National Emergency Response Information System — NERIS for short — is rolling out by region across the country. All Pennsylvania fire departments must be registered with the system.

Things To Do Right Now

- Set Up Your Account
- Onboarding is ongoing. All fire departments must set up an account. To start, complete the NERIS account setup form.
- Check Your Email. Once you have been invited to join the new system, you'll get an email. Check your spam folder if you don't see it. Sign in with the temporary password you receive and set your new password. After you set your new password, verify your email address. You must verify your account.
- Connect Your Accounts. You will need to associate your NERIS account with whatever reporting vendor you are using.

Visit [Incident Reporting](#) | [Office of the State Fire Commissioner](#) | [Commonwealth of Pennsylvania](#) for more information.

PLANNING AND COMMUNITY OUTREACH ACTIVITIES

Kathryn Schotsch, Emergency Management Specialist

We've had a busy season here at Beaver County Emergency Services! Our team has been working on wrapping up Emergency Offsite Response Plans for the end of 2025. An Emergency Offsite Response Plan (EORP) is a plan that outlines how first responders and local agencies will react if there's an emergency at a facility that stores or uses hazardous chemicals. It includes important details like what chemicals are on-site, potential hazards, who to contact, and the steps to take to keep the surrounding community safe. EORPs ensure that first responders have the most up-to-date information they need for incident response at these facilities.

We also recently completed a Commodity Flow Study (CFS) update for Beaver County. What is a CFS? A Commodity Flow Study is a project that tracks what kinds of hazardous materials move through the county by road, rail, or water. This information gives emergency responders a clearer picture of what they might encounter on transportation related incident response, and helps them plan, train, and prepare for potential incidents involving those materials.

This Fall, we also had the chance to be a part of some Halloween fun. We had a great time at Hopewell Township's Allergy-Free Trick-or-Treat event, pictured below. It was a great opportunity to meet residents, share safety information, and be part of an inclusive community event.



REUNIFICATION AND SCHOOL SAFETY PLANNING

Madyson Knox-Bennett, Emergency Management Planner/Trainer

Tom Shane, Emergency Services Unit Coordinator

Columbine High School, Littleton, Colorado — 13 killed, 21 injured

Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, Virginia — 32 killed, 17 injured

Sandy Hook Elementary School, Newtown, Connecticut — 32 killed

Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, Parkland, Florida — 17 killed, 17 injured

Robb Elementary School, Uvalde, Texas — 21 killed, 17 injured

Oxford High School, Oxford Township, Michigan — 4 killed, 7 injured

Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan — 3 killed, 5 injured

Perry High School, Perry, Iowa — 3 killed, 6 injured

Hopewell High School, Beaver County, Pennsylvania — Hoax

This is only a small portion of the active shooter incidents that have occurred in school districts across the United States, and Beaver County, Pennsylvania is on that list. The only difference between Beaver County and the rest of the country is that the call we received that day was a false report, one where, thankfully, every child returned home safely to their family. If this list feels traumatic or frightening, that's because it is. It's meant to be. These events are terrifying and deeply traumatic for students, parents, and communities alike.

When the active shooter hoax came into Hopewell High School, Hopewell Police responded in under three minutes — just months after conducting an active shooter drill at the very same school. That preparation and coordination ensured that emergency responders acted swiftly and with precision, proving the value of practice and planning.

Across Beaver County, emergency services have been working hand-in-hand with school districts to provide safety assessments, test emergency plans, and conduct active shooter exercises. These efforts not only strengthen each district's ability to protect students and staff but also support schools in securing grant funding for safety upgrades and preparedness initiatives.

Beaver County Emergency Services has maintained a strong partnership with the Beaver County Detectives Office and the Emergency Services Unit. Together, they've worked to enhance school safety and emergency readiness. However, one crucial aspect of crisis response has been missing from our collective planning: **reunification**.

At the end of the day, every parent simply wants their child to come home safely from school — the place they go to learn, grow, and feel secure. To further strengthen that sense of safety, Beaver County Emergency Services and the Beaver County Emergency Services Unit are partnering once again with local school officials to develop a **county-wide reunification plan**. This plan will outline procedures to reunite children with their families should the unthinkable ever occur.

Many questions guide this effort, and by no means is this the comprehensive list:

- Where should parents go to pick up their children?
- How will students be transported to the reunification site?
- Who will fill the key roles required to run a reunification operation?
- How can first responders and emergency management best support this process?

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REUNIFICATION AND SCHOOL SAFETY PLANNING, cont.

These are the questions we must answer now, before a crisis, as part of truly comprehensive active shooter preparedness.

Beaver County Emergency Management and the Emergency Services Unit have teamed up with **Beaver County Behavioral Health** to bring the “I Love U Guys” Foundation’s Standard Reunification Method training to Beaver County. This program provides school officials with the tools and strategies to design reunification plans tailored to their specific districts. These plans will be exercised and updated annually to ensure continued readiness.

The dates and times of this training will be announced and sent out to all school officials in the near future, along with additional details about participation and preparation. We hope to see everyone invited in attendance — working together toward safer, more resilient schools. Should you have questions about this process, please feel free to reach out to either myself, or Tom Shane with Beaver County ESU. Beaver County is already prepared to respond to an active assailant. Now, we are preparing to recover from one as well.

BEAVER COUNTY EMERGENCY OPERATIONS PLAN - RADIOLOGICAL EMERGENCY RESPONSE ANNEX REVIEW

Jason Chappell, Radiological Emergency Preparedness Planner/Trainer

Beaver County Emergency Services is completing the yearly review of the Radiological Emergency Response Annex. This annex outlines our coordinated procedures for responding to radiological incidents involving the Beaver Valley Nuclear Power Station (BVPS), and it plays a critical role in ensuring that our county remains prepared, organized, and compliant with state and federal requirements.

Throughout the review process, our team always takes into consideration the municipal emergency coordinators, fire departments, EMS agencies, law enforcement partners, and representatives involved in the Beaver Valley emergency planning zone. Your insights, operational experience, and feedback have helped refine this year’s updates to ensure the annex remains practical and actionable for all responding agencies.

The 2025 updates focus on clarifying protective action recommendations, strengthening communication pathways between the County EOC and field operations, and integrating lessons learned from recent REP exercises and training activities. The annex also reflects updates to monitoring and decontamination procedures, traffic and access control considerations, and public information coordination during a radiological event at BVPS.

Once finalized, the updated annex will be distributed to municipalities.

Thank you to all who contributed time, information, and expertise to this year’s review. Your continued partnership ensures that Beaver County remains fully prepared to respond effectively to any radiological incident at BVPS.

If you have questions or would like additional training related to radiological response operations, please contact the Beaver County Emergency Services Radiological Emergency Preparedness Planners/Trainers.

A SAFETY MESSAGE FROM DUQUESNE LIGHT COMPANY

Brian Murray, Deputy Director

Firefighters, police and EMTs are typically first on the scene in an emergency and face the greatest risk from electrical hazards. Understanding the potential dangers and learning how to deal with them correctly makes your crew and the public safer.

Here are some safety tips to remember:

- It is not possible to determine if a downed power line is energized.
- Never touch or attempt to move a downed power line or a person who is in contact with a power line.
- Never touch anything that a power line is in contact with, including phone or cable lines, utility poles, vehicles, and guard rails.
- Don't drive over downed power lines.
- Notify Duquesne Light through dispatch and stay clear until DLC arrives.
- Be sure to specifically advise dispatch if a person is trapped by, or in contact with live wires. These calls are escalated to the highest priority.
- Do not use voltage detectors. The system may kick on and off in an attempt to clear a fault.
- Establish a safer area at least 30ft around areas where power lines may have fallen.
- Never cut locks, scale fences, enter a substation, or begin to fight within a substation. These areas have high voltage equipment and may only be accessed by authorized individuals. Unauthorized entry could lead to severe or fatal injuries.
- When an energized object, such as a downed power line, contacts the ground, electric current will flow into the ground. At high enough voltages, the electricity spreads out in concentric circles from the point of contact. This is referred to as a voltage gradient because the voltage is highest at the point of contact and decreases with distance outward. If you step across a voltage gradient, you could be electrocuted.

Stay clear, and notify Duquesne Light.

For inquiries regarding training, or for more information on the Duquesne Light equipment in your community, please contact:





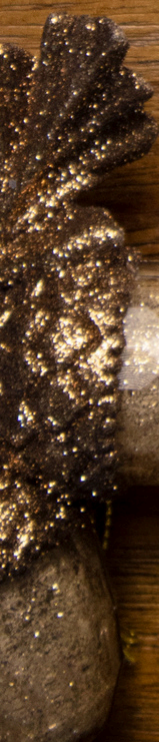

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WISHING YOU
A HAPPY
& SAFE
HOLIDAY
SEASON!

*FROM ERIC BREWER
& THE STAFF OF
BEAVER COUNTY
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The Beaver County Emergency Services Newsletter
is created and published by the Beaver County
Emergency Services center.

Beaver County Emergency Services is a division of Beaver County government, under the authority of the Beaver County Board of Commissioners. Emergency Services manages the county's 9-1-1 dispatch operations center and also serves as the county's Emergency Management office, working under the direction of the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency (PEMA) on emergency preparedness, planning, mitigation, response, and recovery.

The Emergency Services center is also the home of the county's Hazardous Materials Response Team, the Local Emergency Planning Commission (LEPC) and is the contact point for many other public safety organizations, including EMS, Fire, Police, and Municipal EMA services. Emergency Services works in conjunction with a number of county and offsite agencies to provide comprehensive public safety guidance and emergency support to Beaver County.

Want to contribute?
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