

Bruce Henry
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Chairman Vulakovich, Chairman Costa, and distinguished members of the Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee, my name is Bruce Henry and I am the Director of the Monroe County Office of Emergency Management. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify today regarding the impacts that the 2014 Manhunt had on my County.

During the 43 days that the search operations focused on five municipalities within Monroe County, particularly Barrett and Price Township, my office witnessed two very different responses to the one incident. We saw an already tightknit community of residents, local responders and businesses, come even closer together to ensure that, as a whole community, Monroe County would move through this incident unified. We also saw the breakdown in the nationally expected and promoted Incident Command and Incident Management Systems, resulting in miscommunication of information, disorganization and disconnect of state and local response efforts, and failure to utilize available local resources.

Today, I am here to discuss these two responses, both to praise the strengths and look for ways to correct and overcome the shortcomings of this incident.

What were the strengths?

One of the longest active incidents in Monroe County history, the 2014 manhunt warranted the usage of teams and equipment from the local, county and regional levels. Many of these teams and equipment, extensively trained and exercised, had never seen or been activated to an incident of this length previously. These resources included the Pocono Medical Health System Field Hospital, the Barrett Township Volunteer Fire Company and the National Weather Service – Mt. Holly.

Coordination with Support Agencies

In the initial days of the incident, field medicine was required to treat injuries including tick bites, foot and ankle injuries, eye injuries and upper respiratory infections, as well as other ailments. Pocono Health System “came together and fielded teams to provide direct medical support to the

search teams, helping preserve the Operations Readiness of the task force and prevent the sniper from causing any further casualties.

The PHS field medical team included staff from both Pocono Medical Center and several outpatient practices working together seamlessly. Staff from Pediatrics, OB/GYN, Internal Medicine, as well as the Emergency Department,”¹ and multiple nursing units participated in maintaining an onsite field medical support facility. In support of the services established by PHS, other regional hospitals such as Lehigh Valley Hospital Network, relieved PHS and continued to provide medical services to all law enforcement assets responding to the manhunt.

Another example of a regional resource that is not often used in this type of incident, which made a positive impact was the National Weather Service – Mt. Holly. Upon receiving the request from my office, forecasters at Mt. Holly assisted in disseminating the Shelter-In-Place message through the Emergency Alerts System, which quickly was received and redistributed by all weather services, mobile applications and social media.

Community Involvement and Support

The Barrett Township residents, Fire Company and municipal government arose to the occasion and embraced what it means to be prepared as a whole community. Within days of the beginning of the incident, businesses from around the county began donating food, hygiene and comfort necessities to the responders. These items were deposited at the Barrett Township Fire Company and quickly required extensive organization and coordination for proper sorting and distribution. Initially, the Auxiliary members of the Fire Company coordinated this distribution at the Barrett Township Fire House, and then at the Barret Elementary Center, prior to PSP requesting the Red Cross support.

As the incident progressed, local businesses, neighboring fire companies and members of the community assisted Barrett Township in the donations management, organization and distribution. From early mornings to late evenings, these community partnerships, some pre-established as other were forged through this incident, ensured that all of the Troopers, Police Officers and others involved in the incident were cared for prior to and after their daily missions were complete. These partnerships with the community, local agencies and local businesses, which have been carefully

¹ Pocono Health Systems provided this quote from their after action report.

developed over the years, are one of the strongest assets that my office and Monroe County can bring to any incident.

What were the areas needing improvement?

In any emergency incident, there are always areas that can be improved upon for future incidents. Unfortunately, from the vantage point of Monroe County, these areas of needed improvement outweighed the strengths in this incident. These improvement areas resulted in incident confusion among volunteers and the community during a time where increased stress and confusion was not needed.

Operations

My office has prided itself on the relationships that have been developed over the years with the local law enforcement agencies, including the four PSP barracks that cover my County. Through various trainings, exercises, planned events and emergency incidents, the local law enforcement and emergency management have responded using the Incident Command System structure that is nationally accepted. However, as the manhunt grew to require increased law enforcement presence from outside Monroe and Pike Counties, the statement that “This is a law enforcement issue, and emergency management is not involved” was often directed at my office.

Failure to include Local and County Assets into ICS Structure.

As you are aware, the ICS structure is a holistic, scalable approach to an incident. The use of this structure is intended to give a clear operating picture of the Operations, Logistics, Planning, Intelligence and Financial branches of an incident to all involved. Although the manhunt was initially a law enforcement centric incident, it quickly grew to an incident that impacted and required support from more than just law enforcement. The statement that “This is a law enforcement issue, and emergency management is not involved” flies directly in the face of why the ICS structure was created. ICS is not intended for any one discipline to have jurisdiction or control over any other (i.e. - Emergency Management controlling a large scale incident). It is intended to bring the qualified agencies together, allowing each agency to operate to its strengths, while supporting needs of the other agencies and disciplines involved.

This theory breakdown in the manhunt cannot be better described than in the example of my Deputy Director and I being escorted out of the auditorium in the Barrett School Command Post prior to an incident briefing by PSP. In an effort to gain situational awareness many days into the incident, we drove to the Command Post after being informed that PEMA Eastern Area had been asked by PSP to have a liaison present to assist in resource requests. This in itself was concerning, as Title 35 indicates that an incident spanning multiple municipalities should first involve the County. After sitting with the PEMA Liaison for a time, we were approached by a high ranking officer of PSP who explained that Lt. Col. Bevin's had arrived for the daily briefing and we were to stand out in the hall. When I asked why PEMA was permitted to stay, I was told that I was not authorized to receive the information. Upon further questioning, specifically noting that they were in my County, my Deputy Director and I were escorted out to the hall by the PSP officer, and monitored until the briefing was completed.

I realize that there is some information that should remain classified, which my office does not have any need for. However, on multiple occasions, search areas and areas impacted by the Shelter-In-Place order quickly shifted, resulting in school busses heading for the area being searched unknowingly or may already have busses in these areas, creating the potential for children to be placed in a dangerous situation. Had my office been permitted a briefing as the PEMA Liaisons and IMT were, we would have been able to share quickly evolving information to the School Districts, removing the risk of having children in the active search area.

Misguidance of Media.

The media can be a great asset to any incident, especially one that extends for long periods of time and impacts large communities of people, as this one did. My office, as well as the municipal resources within my county, have a strong working relationship with the local media outlets. This relationship was jeopardized during the manhunt, however, due to the appearance of the incident command attempting to "manage" the media. The day after the Shelter-In-Place order was given, one of the local barracks contacted me requesting the large room in our Public Safety Center. During previous large scale law enforcement incidents, this room had been used as a media center and PSP was looking to bring the media closer to where the manhunt was occurring. I agreed and had my staff start to set up the room for that evening. While setting the room up, I was contacted

by Pocono Mountain School District, who was also contacted by PSP to use their Swiftwater Campus as a media center with the first news conference to start at 2300 hrs. They too agreed to host it on campus and called their staff in to set up an appropriate area to receive the media until PSP could arrive. Moments before the scheduled news conference, PSP had sent notification that they were postponing until 0800. Again moments before the rescheduled media conference, PSP once again sent word that the conference had been moved back to Blooming Grove, while most of the media had camped out at Pocono Mountain School District the night before.

Procedures like this not only look poorly on PSP's media relations, however, also on the media relations of my office and Pocono Mountain School District. As both locations had been given as potential media centers, both agencies were fielding questions about our locations and basic information of the area, especially to regional and national media outlets. It also encourages the media to go to the scene, in this case the shelter-in-place boarders, or elsewhere looking for related stories to the incident. In an ever-evolving scene size and location, this had the potential of placing media representatives in harm's way.

Failure of Resource Request Process

The resource request process quickly deteriorated early on, as stated earlier, it is often required for a resource request to come through the county office of emergency management prior to be sent to PEMA for fulfillment. This process is to ensure that all local resources have been tapped prior to requesting assistance from other counties or states. During this incident, very few resource requests were ever sent to the county, and when they were, it was as an afterthought.

One instance was when the Barrett Elementary Center was being converted to the Command Post. A representative from the Pike County Command Post called my office to request 70 long tables to be set up in the school. My office coordinated with all nineteen fire companies in Monroe County to help meet this request. The companies had arranged transportation of the tables, and were given a time to deliver them to the school. At the last minute, we were advised by PSP that the tables were no longer needed, only to receive a request a day later from the PA Volunteer Organizations Activated in Disaster (VOAD) that there were 70 tables needed to set up the Barrett Township Command Post.

This was not the only case of a failure of the resource request process, however. There were many cases where my office was informed of equipment being requested from the western part of the Commonwealth, which could have been fulfilled in a shorter amount of time from sources that were local. This was the case when a shower trailer was requested by PSP from the State EOC, which at the time was at the PEMA Annual Conference held at the Seven Springs resort. Had the resource request been processed through the County, we would have been able to coordinate with businesses that had been reaching out to us asking what they could do to help, that had equipment like this available to them quickly.

Towards the end of the incident and during the investigation period, we finally began to receive resource requests from PSP. One such event was the request of generator powered balloon lights, which were a regional asset purchased by the Northeast Pa Counter Terrorism Taskforce, to illuminate the hanger in which they apprehended Eric Frier. When we delivered the lights and generators to the scene, I was questioned by a local Trooper as to why we had not made this available sooner. I explained that we could have provided this and much more, if a request had been made to our office. I was told that that was not a local decision, resource requests were made from the Pike County Command Post, which was staffed by command staff from Harrisburg.

Conclusion

Incidents of the magnitude and extensive length such as the manhunt are bound to have areas of improvement. That is one reason why we have after action meetings, such as this. It is through these meetings, however, that we gain the practical experience for future incidents and gain understating of how we can interact with one another. I have highlighted the fact that there were communication issues during this incident, of which the proper implementation of the Incident Command System may have resolved many of these.

I want once again thank the committee for allowing me the opportunity to discuss some of the issues that developed with this incident. By having meetings such as this, we may be able to resolve future operational disconnections that are certain to develop.