

COUNTY OF



ALLEGHENY

RICH FITZGERALD
COUNTY EXECUTIVE

Senate Veterans Affairs & Emergency Preparedness Committee

Hearing on Flooding, Landslides and Senate Bill 1131

Testimony of Director Stephen Shanley, PE, Allegheny County Public Works

Senator Vulakovich and members, I also thank you for inviting me to testify today about flooding and landslides, particularly as it relates to Allegheny County. I thank County Executive Fitzgerald for his trust in me and Chief Brown in co-chairing the Allegheny County Landslide and Flooding Task Force and am hopeful that our efforts can have a real impact on our county.

As Director of Public Works, I can tell you that our municipalities are stretched financially or have completely exhausted their available budgets related to storm, rain and flooding damages, as well as landslide response. At the county, we have been proactive in budgeting funds for each year for slide and hillside remediation. Even so, the number of roads that have needed attention in this year alone are staggering. In the past few months alone, our employees are addressing slides in Jefferson Hills, Pine, Tarentum, Carnegie and Penn Hills. The impact to basic transportation has been severe as road closures, partial road closures, and detour continue to plague the entire county.

As Chief Brown mentioned, we've made progress in compiling GIS maps that we can share among the members of the task force. We're using that information to determine if it's helpful to us in determining where to dedicate resources in our mitigation efforts. If we see successes, our next step will be to share that information more broadly.

We know that there are a number of signs that can indicate that a landslide may be imminent: changes in the landscape, patterns of storm-water drainage changes, land moves, small slides, water flows change or are seen, trees are progressively leaning, water breaks through the ground in new locations, bulging ground at the base of a slope, fences-retaining walls-utility poles or trees tilt or move, unusual sounds, and collapsed pavement-mud-fallen rocks-debris flow are just a few of those. Public Works employees in our communities can be of particular help in identifying these signs, and so we want to work on providing training to those employees. They can then report back to their municipality, providing needed, important information that can allow us to address a slope or other danger in the hopes that we can prevent a future landslide.

We have found in our conversations with some of the members in our committee that employees who work for the utilities also have information to share as they respond to inquiries for service or other needs and can also share and provide information on changes that they themselves are seeing while in the field. By working collaboratively, we can put together a reporting mechanism to share information

on those observations and provide detail that can also be used by Public Works staff throughout the county, no matter the level of government, to respond proactively to the threats.

Long-term, we also hope to be able to provide public education/training to residents to help them recognize potential slides so that they can assist us and themselves in slide monitoring. Residents can help us by planting ground cover and building walls to direct flow around buildings. There are also warning signs that only homeowners may see and can report – like doors or windows that stick or jam for the first time; seeing new cracks in plaster, tile, brick or foundations; seeing outside walls, walks or stairs pulling away from the building; and unusual sounds such as trees cracking or boulders knocking together.

Even in cases where we cannot stop or mitigate the landslide, we can be proactive in preventing damage or loss of life. In the case of the Route 30 landslide that happened earlier this year, it was the sound of trees cracking that moved a quick-thinking responder to evacuate the residents of the apartments below. Those actions likely resulted in the saving of multiple lives.

We know that there is much to be learned from the members of this task force. We have been given a great opportunity by County Executive Fitzgerald to continue to learn and explore the information and data that is out there that can help us work collectively to address this issue. He has also given us the flexibility to adjust its membership as appropriate and to make recommendations that we believe will make a difference in our ability to prevent landslides. I'm confident in the work that we're doing and hopeful that we'll be able to do more for this region when it comes to protecting all of us from damaging landslides.

Thank you for allowing me to testify. I also welcome any questions that you may have for me in regards to this issue, or the county's response to the landslides and flooding so far this year.