



BEAVER COUNTY EMERGENCY SERVICES

Mid-year, 2024 Newsletter

2024 BEAVER VALLEY POWER STATION DRILL

Madyson Knox-Bennett

The first half of the year was busy for Beaver County Emergency Services and all of our partners. Every two years, the Beaver Valley Power Station and Beaver County Emergency Management train both internally and externally in preparation for the federally evaluated nuclear drill. U.S. DHS (United States Department of Homeland Security) FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) evaluators come from various locations across the country to evaluate and observe the total preparedness of many agencies who participate in this exercise. Multiple states (Pennsylvania, Ohio, West Virginia), multiple counties (Beaver County, Columbiana County, Hancock County), state government agencies, local government agencies, municipal government, hospitals, transportation companies, fire departments, law enforcement, emergency medical services, surrounding counties, schools, and many other actors all take part in training and exercising their readiness should there ever be a nuclear emergency.

As if training did not keep us busy enough, there was also new technology installed in Beaver County's Emergency Operations Center (EOC) this spring. As part of a federal grant secured with the help of Senator Casey's office, Beaver County's EOC is now fully equipped with a video wall (23' W x 7' H) where capabilities include accessing local news, the internet, weather forecasts, and computer presentations all on the same screen. This upgrade in technology also came equipped with multiple new televisions, cameras and microphone systems for video conferencing in other conference rooms and offices. These updates were used for the first time in this year's 2024 exercise on June 11th.

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BVPS DRILL, cont.

The 2024 full participation Plume Exposure Pathway (affected municipalities of a potential radiological release) exercise involved no/minimal release of radioactive materials. Out of Sequence demonstrations were conducted in May to demonstrate the ability of the Offsite Response Organizations of State and local governments to protect the health and safety of the public. Following in June was the exercise at Beaver County Emergency Operations Center where multiple agencies participated to demonstrate their ability to execute their duties to protect the health and safety of the public. Following the completion of all exercises and evaluations, Beaver County's drill preparation had paid off with success. We could not have done it without our dedicated volunteers, partners and agencies who show up not only every two years for this exercise but every day for the public.

Looking forward, the annual siren test scheduled to happen later this year is on September 12 at 11am EST. We also have training for multiple agencies including but not limited to hospitals, fire services, and transportation services that will happen in the coming months leading up to the 2026 Drill Exercise. The 2026 Drill Exercise is tentatively scheduled for the week of June 8, 2026.

Scenes from the 2024 Exercise at right from top to bottom:

Monitoring and decontamination operations were demonstrated at Crescent Fire Department's Emergency Worker Decontamination Station, Emergency Management and elected officials convened for decision making, County EOC staff reviewed and exercised their position checklists, State Police and EMA staff discussed exercise responses.



DIRECTOR'S CORNER

Eric Brewer, Emergency Services Director



Exercises & events

The first half of 2024 has been another productive year for the Department of Emergency Services with many exercise and real world events keeping our staff busy. As Madyson detailed in the previous article, our office worked closely with PEMA, FEMA, Municipal Emergency Operations Centers and many other partners during the first 6 months as we prepared for the Federally Evaluated Radiological Exercise in June. Additionally, we continue to work with Motorola and Bearcom on the county wide radio project, which Kevin Whipple provides updates on later in this newsletter. Severe weather events have also provided challenges this spring and summer as we've seen the most amount of earth slips and slides that we have ever encountered in Beaver County. Unfortunately, these events did not meet the threshold for federal assistance, leaving the property owners or local governments to bear the cost of remediation. Also weather related have been the record-breaking heat waves experienced in the last month. Prolonged heat puts a strain on our physical health as well as mental health and is a leading killer. All of this, and we continue to be involved with different aspects of the East Palestine Train Derailment response and recovery. One of my main goals is to focus on the health of those who responded to the derailment. If you responded that night or stood by the days after the incident, you should be enrolled in the health survey that was sent out to responders.

Staffing changes

Our department saw two long time employees from the Emergency Management Division retire from their planner/trainer positions during the first six months of 2024. We recently hired two new employees as well as promoted two existing employees to fill these openings.

Madyson Knox-Bennett, "Mady", was promoted to a planner/trainer position that was left open after a retirement. She has been with the department for two years as an Emergency Management Specialist. In her new role, her primary function will be working with the Radiological Emergency Preparedness Program (REPP).

Jason Chappell was hired in early June to fill another planner/trainer position. He and Mady will be working closely together in the REP Program. Jason comes to us from Allegheny County Emergency Services. Prior to that, he was one of the disaster coordinators for the Heritage Valley Health System. Jason also worked as an EMT with EMS services around the area. He is certified through PEMA as a Local Emergency Management Coordinator and has several hazardous materials certifications.

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DIRECTOR'S CORNER, cont.

Kathryn Schotsch is the newest hire and will be filling the open Emergency Management Specialist position, which works with the LEPC, SARA plans, pipelines, Marcellus sites, EMCs, and other EMA related duties. "Kat" worked full-time at Medic Rescue as an EMT prior to joining our team and recently graduated with an associates degree in fire science. She also has several certifications in search and rescue and is a SAR K-9 handler.

Ben Oaks was hired as the Computer Aided Dispatch Administrator in the 9-1-1 Division. Ben had been working unofficially in this position, but as of April, it was made official. Ben has been with our department for 18 years in the 9-1-1 dispatch center working as a crew chief and trainer. Reach out to Ben for CAD questions, run cards, updates and anything CAD related.

We have also welcomed the following trainees to the dispatch floor in the last six months: Kelsey Cade, Emily Fattore, Grady Gill, Bethann Landman and Samuel Lane.



From left to right, Randy Dawson, Brenda Morris, Anthony Trevino, Jeff McKay, Gene Miketa, Eric Brewer, Ben Oaks and Justin Magnifico at Jeff McKay's retirement lunch.



Meet our newest employees, Kathryn Schotsch and Jason Chappell

RADIO PROJECT UPDATE

Kevin Whipple

All police, fire and EMS agencies should have received their radios and had them installed. A few base installations still remain due to construction at their stations. We are working on a training video to refer to on the use of the radios. If you experience any problems with your equipment, you can contact Bearcom directly by calling 1-800-999-3723.

We are currently working on upgrading all of our existing tower sites plus adding four additional. The new sites are located in Darlington Township, Economy Borough, Independence Township and North Sewickley Township. Darlington, Economy and Independence will all be transmit/receive sites, and North Sewickley will be a receive only site.

We expect to transition over to the digital system by the end of the year.

NORFOLK SOUTHERN TRAINING & GRANT

Jason Gallagher



The week of May 20th, Norfolk Southern held its Safety Train Training in Conway, PA for local first responders. On May 22nd, they invited Beaver County's Hazmat Team 700 to train, with 18 members in attendance.

The training session started off with a walk-around on the train reviewing safety controls & shut-off valves. The team then learned how to use various devices to shutoff control valves in an emergency. Some devices used to control valves on a tank car were the Midland Kit, Emergency Response Kit (ERK) & a Chlorine Kit. Hazmat Team members also worked on plugging & patching a fuel tank employing the use of Magna-Seals, various sizes of wood and plastic components, the FlowStop Football Kit & a handful of miscellaneous objects to be able to get the product to stop leaking and minimize the hazardous condition. The team then split into 2 groups and worked on additional exercises enabling members to work together at different levels and be better prepared to respond to an emergency involving a Locomotive, Railcar or Tankcar.



After being able to review and train with different types of response equipment, Emergency Services applied for the Norfolk Southern Safety Grant and recently received funding to purchase our own ERK Kit & Magna-Seals for hazardous materials training and response.

We would like to thank Norfolk Southern for this training opportunity & look forward to continuing to work with them in the future.

911 PROGRAM UPDATES

Brian Murray

Telecommunicator Appreciation Week

911 Dispatchers across the country were honored during National Public Safety Telecommunicators week from April 14-20, 2024. The Beaver County Commissioners Office issued a County Proclamation recognizing the important work done every day by our dispatch staff, who were also treated to meals and appreciation gifts from the county and local partner agencies.

Pictured at right, the Beaver County Board of Commissioners welcomed Emergency Services and 911 management staff and Telecommunicators to the courthouse in April to present the proclamation to the group.



Attention Fire Departments:

In an effort to keep you better informed, the 911 Center has begun forwarding road closure information in your town to your department via text message. The current practice of leaving information sit at the 911 center with the hopes of passing it along during an emergency is not reliable.

Please note this may generate a report for those departments who have Active 911 or I Am Responding linked to your NFIRS reporting software. You will need to reach out to Active 911, I Am Responding, or your software vendor if you wish to have these calls filtered out. They will appear with the event type of F-ADMIN.

Let your members know they'll begin to see these messages, which are informational only and don't require a response.

Beaver County 911 provides text messaging as a courtesy to emergency responders and should not be considered as the primary method of dispatching emergency services

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ROAD
CLOSED

911 PROGRAM UPDATES, cont.

Text-to-911, from PEMA.gov:

Text-to-911 is a service that allows the public to send a text message to 911. Just as in a voice call, the 911 telecommunicator will continue to ask more questions about your emergency – confirming your location, name, and any details that are important to responders. Typing questions and answers back and forth with a 911 telecommunicator takes a considerable amount of time, so please be patient and be as clear and concise as possible with your answers. For this reason, a voice call is preferred.

Text-to-911 may be most helpful in these emergency situations:

- By individuals who have speech or hearing impairments, or who are having a medical emergency that renders them incapable of speech.
- Instances when making noise may endanger the caller, such as a home invasion/robbery, or instances of domestic violence or an abduction.

How to Send A Message:

Step 1: Create a new text message or conversation.

Step 2: Type 911 in the "To" or "Recipient" field.

Step 3: Describe your location: Include the address and municipality (township or borough).

Step 4: Describe the situation: Include what type of emergency help is needed.

Step 5: Send the text message.

Important Notes

Text-to-911 is an important tool to enhance communications with the public in an emergency, but it has many limitations. It's important to keep these things in mind:

- A text or data plan is required to place a text to 911.
- Text-to-911 conversations cannot include more than one person. Do not send your emergency text to anyone other than 911.
- Do not use abbreviations or emojis.
- Voice calls are real-time communication and Text-to-911 is not. As with all text messages, text messages to 911 may take longer to receive, may get out of order, or may not be received at all.
- 911 call takers will not be able to hear any background noise that could help with assisting during the emergency.
- Location information will be limited to the cell tower that your cell phone is communicating through. A 911 telecommunicator won't automatically know where you are.

NEED 9-1-1?
Call if you can, Text if you can't.

WHEN TO USE TEXT TO 9-1-1:



You're deaf, hard of hearing or have a speech disability.



You're in a situation where it's not safe to call 9-1-1 for help.



You're having a medical emergency and cannot speak on the phone.



EMERGENCY SERVICES

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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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