

# COMMUNITY FACILITIES AND SERVICES

## PUBLIC SAFETY

## **County Coordination**

The provision and coordination of public safety in Centre County requires constant monitoring by County and municipal officials. Continuing population growth and the development of new highways increases the demands on police, fire, and ambulance services. With limited financial, equipment, and volunteer resources there will be even greater limits on the ability to provide emergency services to the County residents.

## **Emergency 911**



In Centre County, emergency management coordination and response are handled by the Centre County Department of Public Safety's Emergency Communications Center. All 911 emergency calls

for response are received and then directed to the appropriate local/ municipal police, fire, and ambulance service.

In 1994, the County Emergency Communications Center located in the Willowbank Building, consolidated service and began the 911 emergency call services to all of Centre County with the exception of the people that live within the 684 phone exchange (Tyrone area).

By 1998, an "enhanced" 911 service was implemented. This "enhanced" system utilizes a computerized geographic database system and information from the phone company that matches the caller with a name and exact location. A Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) system is also used that displays all of the information on a computer screen and allows for faster and more efficient dispatching of emergency systems. An added feature of this newer computer system for 911 service is the networked links to state and federal law enforcement/ public safety agencies.

## **Emergency Services**

During times of natural/ man-made disasters and declared emergencies, the County's Emergency Management Agency and Plan are activated and directed from within the County

Department of Public Safety. All emergency response and relief activities are coordinated with each of the local municipally appointed emergency management coordinators, police, fire, and ambulance services. In addition, this County Department handles all disaster mitigation/ preparedness, civil defense, planning, and emergency response activities with the PEMA (Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency) and FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency).

Along with the County Department of Public Safety, each of public safety providers such as police, fire, and ambulance have regular County-wide meetings with their respective chiefs and/ or organization leaders. These round-table discussions allow for the exchange of information and ideas that ultimately improve the provision of public safety services.

## **Public Safety Providers**

Emergency service providers in Centre County are divided into three (3) main categories, Police Departments, Fire Departments, and Emergency Medical Services (EMS).

## **Police Departments**

Law enforcement and security in Centre County is provided by nine (9) departments. These police departments are authorized to enforce the laws of the Federal Government, Commonwealth, Centre County, and the local municipalities. Public safety coverage is provided to all areas of the County on a constant basis, 24 hours a day seven (7) days a week.

### **Local/ municipal Police Departments:**

- *Bellefonte Borough Police*
- *Ferguson Township Police*
- *Philipsburg Borough Police*
- *Patton Township Police*
- *Penn State University Police*
- *Spring Township Police*
- *State College Borough Police*

The seven (7) local/ municipal police departments are responsible for an area that covers approximately 20% (220 square miles) of Centre County. However, the population base served by these local departments includes over 70% of the

County's total population (95,000 people). These police departments are responsible for patrols, traffic safety, conducting investigations, and community relations within their respective jurisdictions.



<sup>1</sup>State College Borough Police Department is the only local municipal police department that provides services outside its municipal boundaries.

Through yearly agreements, College and Harris Townships purchase police services for their residents. Halfmoon Township, which is currently served by the Pennsylvania State Police (PSP) has discussed purchasing limited police services from their neighbor municipality Patton Township. This request would not replace the services of the Pennsylvania State Police.

#### County Law Enforcement:

##### *Centre County Sheriff's Office*

The Centre County Sheriff's Office provides security to the courts and all County agencies/offices. The Sheriff and Deputies also provide transportation for prisoners to court, serve papers, and conduct investigations and provide assistance to County agencies and offices.

#### State Law Enforcement:

##### *Pennsylvania State Police*

In Centre County, the Pennsylvania State Police (PSP) has station offices in Philipsburg and Wingate (Milesburg). These are two (2) of the eight (8) stations that are part of Troop G which is headquartered in Hollidaysburg. Troop G and covers a seven (7) county area from Centre County in the north to the Maryland state border with Bedford and Fulton Counties to the south. Troop G is one of the 15 Pennsylvania State Police Troops located across the Commonwealth.

The PSP utilizes patrol zones that cover 28 of the 36 Centre County municipalities (approximately 900 square miles). In addition,

these patrol zones include a wide-spread population base of about 45,000 Centre County residents.

#### Mutual Aid Agreements

All of the law enforcement departments have formal mutual aid agreements with their neighboring police departments except Philipsburg Borough. Informal mutual aid agreements exist between Philipsburg, Clearfield County police departments and the PA State Police. With the capabilities of the enhanced 911 service, mutual aid is available and coordinated at the County level with the Emergency 911 dispatchers.

#### Fire Departments

Fire protection in Centre County is provided in its entirety by dedicated volunteer firefighters. With 19 fire stations located throughout the County, and with the addition of the enhanced Emergency 911 dispatching system, response times to incidents have improved. These fire stations and their service areas are agreed upon by the respective Fire Companies and approved by the local elected municipal officials and are based mostly on municipal boundaries. An additional four (4) Fire Companies from outside Centre County have service areas and provide mutual aid to the 19 Centre County Fire Companies.



With the exception of Alpha Fire Station 5, which has facilities in State College Borough and Patton Township, the volunteer fire stations in Centre County are not staffed on a 24 hour/ seven (7) days a week basis.



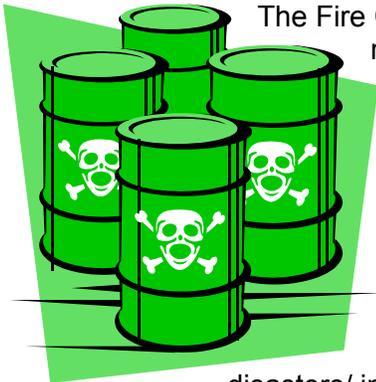
<sup>1</sup> Source: Borough of State College Website



**Figure 1:** Alpha Fire Station, Patton Township  
(Source: Alpha Fire Company Website)

Firefighter response to incidents is handled through the Centre County 911 system to the Fire Stations and then to the firefighters with pagers, scanners, etc. Should additional aid be required, the Centre County 911 system will dispatch additional Fire Company through the mutual aid system. The number of additional Fire Companies notified and timing of the requests depends on the extent of the incident and equipment needs.

Cooperation and information exchange among the various Fire Companies has improved over the years. A major reason for this is the establishment of the Centre County Fire Chiefs Association. This association consists of the current Fire Chiefs that are appointed from each respective Company and the meetings are held several times per year. The meetings address issues and concerns that involve training, mutual aid, funding, equipment, and cooperative efforts.



The Fire Companies respond to a variety of emergencies that include structure fires, forest fires, and accidents involving all modes of transport, natural disasters/ incidents such as severe storms and flooding. Although the majority of the companies are equipped and

trained to handle most incidents, hazardous materials spills require the assistance of the Penn State Hazmat Team which was created in 1985. This 22 member team consists of representatives from various University Departments. In order to commit to a response call, at least nine (9) members of the team must respond. The Hazmat Team utilizes one specialized truck (HazMat 20) respond to hazardous materials spills. Eagle Towing & Recovery located in Wingate also performs hazardous materials clean-up focusing mainly on accidents along I-80 and Route 220 in the northern portion of Centre County.

Maintaining adequate membership within the volunteer ranks of the Fire Companies is always been a concern. The Fire Companies are always looking to expand their ranks in order to meet the increasing demands of incident response due to growth within the County. However, with limited financial and equipment resources, these Companies have managed to maintain adequate ranks and still provide excellent public safety service to the County residents.

Training is also an integral part of the membership within the Fire Companies. In recent years, Centre County has been without a Fire Training Facility due to soil and possible groundwater contamination that was identified at the former training facility on the Penn State campus. With the closing of that facility, Centre County, Centre Region Council of Governments, and the Fire Chiefs Association have been working cooperatively to locate and develop a new training facility.

The proposed training facility will be located on Route 150 near the I-99 interchange on a 14.7 acre site on former SCI at Rockview lands in Benner Township. This facility will be owned by Centre County and developed with funding provided by the County and the Centre Region Council of Governments. The administration and programming of the facility will be handled through the Centre County Department of Public Safety and the Centre County Fire Chiefs Training Facility Committee.

The new training facility will be utilized by all of the County Fire Companies with possible access from the outside Fire Companies that provide serve and mutual aid within Centre County. Specific training at the site will be provided in ten

areas that include a burn building/ tower, automobile extraction and burn areas, hazmat and gas leak simulation, confined training maze, SCBA training area, and a roof simulator. In addition, there will be classrooms and shower facilities. This location will provide excellent access next to the I-99/ Route 150 interchange.

As Centre County's population grows and development continues to expand into the rural areas where utilities (water service) are limited, the demands on the Fire Companies will increase. Cooperation between the Fire Companies, municipalities, and Centre County is required if issues such as training, equipment, response time, fire access, water supply, and satellite facilities are to be addressed

### **Ambulance/ Emergency Medical Services**

The provision of ambulance and emergency medical services has evolved significantly in recent years. Ambulance service was once an integral part of the fire fighting services and was housed with the fire fighting apparatus at the Fire Company locations.

Due to numerous issues related to funding, training, and limited space, the physical separation of fire and EMS services continues. Ambulance/ EMS providers respond to a variety of requests that include medical emergencies, vehicle accidents, injured citizens, and fire standbys.

Centre County currently has 14 EMS Stations that provide ALS (advanced life support), BLS (basic life support), and QRS (quick response service). The level of support and service depends on the training of the personnel and equipment available to each station. The majority of the ambulance/ EMS stations have a combination of paid EMT's (Emergency Management Technicians) and volunteers.



<sup>2</sup>The provision of emergency medical services and response to incidents is coordinated with the police departments and fire companies by Centre County Emergency 911 dispatching. In addition, the ambulance/ EMS stations also provide transport and care of patients between medical facilities.

Within Centre County, three (3) of the Ambulance/ EMS providers have ALS (advanced life support) trained Paramedics and equipment. ALS includes cardiac care, drug administration, and advanced/ surgical airway maintenance prior to and during transport to emergency medical facilities.

In Centre County, ALS is provided by Alpha Ambulance, Centre Community Hospital ALS, and Philipsburg EMS. Strategically located, the ALS units serve the largest population area of Centre County (approx. 80%).<sup>3</sup>



These ALS providers also extend beyond their normal service areas to provide this higher level of emergency medical service. The first responding units to incidents in the outlying areas of the County and Emergency 911 determine the need for the ALS providers. The BLS (basic life support) and QRS (quick response service) providers in Centre County are appropriately located to provide fast response times to requests as dispatched by Emergency 911. With the formal mutual aid agreements and support coverage into adjacent service areas, residents in need of assistance will receive excellent care and transport to emergency medical facilities within minutes.

The County Ambulance/EMS providers also provide training to local citizens and civic groups. This training helps to increase public awareness and encourages potential ambulance/ EMS volunteerism.



<sup>2</sup> Source: Bellefonte EMS Website

<sup>3</sup> Source: Alpha Ambulance Website

### **Community Facilities and Services Goal**

Promote the appropriate location and maintenance of existing and proposed community facilities, utilities, and services for the citizens of Centre County

### **Public Safety Recommendations**

Police, Fire, and Ambulance/ EMS service areas and mutual aid agreements should be coordinated and regularly updated between the providers, municipalities, and Centre County Department of Public Safety due to increased growth and development.

Public safety providers and municipalities should coordinate efforts based on the established Centre County Planning Regions in order to improve state funding opportunities.

The Centre County Fire Chiefs Association, Centre County Department of Public Safety, and the Centre County Planning Office should develop a County Fire Protection Report to improve service and access to communities throughout the County.