



pennsylvania
EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY

Testimony for the Senate Democratic Policy Committee

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Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency

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Senator Muth, Senator Fontana, Senator Williams, members of the Senate Democratic Policy Committee, and all others gathered here this afternoon.

It is my pleasure to join you today, as Director of the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency (PEMA), to discuss our agency's involvement with rail safety in the commonwealth.

Pursuant to Emergency Management Services Code (Title 35), one of PEMA's primary functions is to work with county and local emergency managers to ensure that throughout the Commonwealth there is a state of readiness to respond to any type of emergency or disaster, including those associated with rail transportation incidents and hazardous materials releases.

PEMA accomplishes this task through a number of methods, such as working with state agencies and other stakeholders to regularly exercise and update the Commonwealth Emergency Operations Plan (CEOP) and its associated annexes. The agency maintains the plan and coordinates activities as necessary to ensure the Commonwealth's ability to prepare for, respond to, and recover from disasters of any kind. Associated activities include conducting workshops, providing training, and coordinating both discussion and operations-based exercises for Commonwealth agencies tasked with emergency support functions under the plan. In addition, the agency is responsible for a Commonwealth-wide training and exercise program for appointed emergency management personnel at the county and local levels to ensure they meet current standards and are adequately prepared to effectively manage emergencies at their level given that all incidents begin and end locally no matter the size, scope, or complexity.

While federal laws are in place to address rail safety with a set of nationally established standards, enforced by the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), PEMA is focused on working with our partners at the county and local levels to ensure that first responders have the tools they need to prepare, respond, and recover from incidents that occur in their communities.

Over the last 30 years, PEMA has been recognized as a national leader in helping to prepare our local first responders in the event of an incident involving hazardous materials. With the help of the General Assembly, PEMA has developed a statewide network of state certified teams trained and equipped to respond to incidents in the workplace, as well as on the highways and rail lines in accordance with the provisions in Pennsylvania Act 165. Under Act 165, the Hazardous Materials Safety Program includes provisions that governs the 67 local emergency planning committees (LEPC), more than 3,700 chemical planning facilities, and the Hazardous Materials Response Team Certification Program.

The primary way that we assist communities is through the provision of funding through a number of federal and state grants to regional task forces and counties to support training, planning, exercises and the purchase of equipment and supplies needed to respond to emergencies that are likely to occur in their respective jurisdictions. These funds are used to fill identified gaps in plans and capabilities needed at the local and county levels to effectively respond to incidents and protect lives and property. Utilization of these funds is guided by county hazard mitigation plans that identify the most prevalent hazards likely to impact communities, and Threat and Hazard Identification and Risk Assessments that identify the capabilities needed to respond to emergencies and identified capability gaps.

PEMA also receives grant funding from the US Department of Transportation through the Hazardous Material Emergency Preparedness (HMEP) Grant Program. This program is specifically aimed at planning and training for transportation incidents involving hazardous materials

In 2015, the commonwealth commissioned a report focused on the safety of Pennsylvanians to protect people from the potential of Bakken crude oil train derailments. As the Keystone state, we see a high volume of rail traffic moving goods to end points in Pennsylvania and the east coast. The report included 27 recommendations for rail industry, four (4) of which were directed at PEMA:

1. *Actively work with railroads to roll out information sharing technology tools and make these tools available to all emergency responders.*
2. *Coordinate full scale emergency response exercises involving emergency responders from communities along the key oil train routes.*
3. *PEMA work with and ensure that all communities along the CBR routes have appropriate emergency response plans.*
4. *PEMA work with NS and CSX to obtain an inventory of emergency response resources along routes over which Crude Oil Trains operate to include locations for the staging of emergency response equipment.*

PEMA has acted on all of these recommendations and continues to work with our county and local partners to ensure that first responders have the training and tools necessary to respond. One of those tools is the AskRail app, which was developed by the American Association of Railroads and is supported by all major rail carriers. This app provides County and Municipal Emergency Management Coordinators, first responders, 911 Centers, and PEMA's Commonwealth Watch and Warning Center (CWWC) access to information regarding the type of materials being transported on each train that may be involved in a derailment as well as individual railcar contents along with a number of emergency response guides and tools. Recently, PEMA has taken steps to assess the distribution and use of the AskRail app among first responders, developed a specific training program for first responders to increase their knowledge of how to use the app, distributed the information to the counties and through the Office of the State Fire Commissioner, and conducted various training sessions on use of the app.

While the information contained above outlines PEMA's role in preparedness and response as it relates to rail incidents, one of the most often overlooked emergency management functions is that of mitigation, which strives to identify hazards and reduce the future risks and impacts of those hazards before incidents occur. This follows the old adage that "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of

cure” and is leveraged regularly in the Commonwealth to reduce the impacts of future flooding disasters with great success. In order to properly develop mitigation strategies to lessen the impacts of future rail incidents, we collectively need to understand the causative factors that lead to these incidents, develop the appropriate risk mitigation strategies, and apply them effectively to prevent future incidents and impact to lives and the environment. While much of this lies outside of PEMA’s purview we wholeheartedly support this approach and stand ready to assist where possible. Additionally, we will continue work with all stakeholders to ensure that responders have the training and tools they need to effectively respond to rail incidents to protect themselves and their communities.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before the committee today and I stand ready to answer any questions you may have regarding PEMA’s role in support of rail safety and response to rail incidents.