

9/10/20 Municipal & First Responder Call Notes

I. **Welcome and Introduction:** Director Erica Bornemann

- Welcome participants on the call.
 - This is the every-other-week call for first responders, EMDs, RPCs, and municipal officials. The next call will be on Thursday, September 24th at 2PM. The invitation will go out on Monday, September 21st.
 - The meeting invitations include a link to a survey we use to guide our talking points. The survey will only capture one question per response. To ask multiple questions, fill out the survey multiple times. The survey link will not change week to week.
 - On today's call we will hear from DEPRIP Director Dan Batsie and Vermont Fire Academy Chief Pete Lynch. In addition, we have Karen Horn from the Vermont League of Cities and Towns and Capt. Mike Manley from the Vermont State Police available to answer questions. We will be providing you all an overview of the State's response to COVID-19 and we will have time for additional questions at the end of the call.
 - FAQs will be updated as needed and can be found at: <https://vem.vermont.gov/coronavirus>
 - From this site you can also click on the "[Call Notes](#)" section on the left-hand side where we will post notes from this call. It will be added to the list of First Responder Notes.
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II. **COVID-19 Overview/Vermont Department of Health (VDH) Comments:** HOC Incident Commander and DEPRIP Director Dan Batsie

- Overall update on COVID-19 in Vermont
 - The COVID-19 pandemic in Vermont is stable, without spikes in the infection rate nor any new deaths in the last 30 days.
 - In terms of outbreaks and clusters, VDH is currently tracking 19 situations, one of which has 17 associated cases, one of which has 11 associated cases, and the rest of which have only a couple of associated cases each.
 - VDH is keeping a close eye on the impact of reopening schools, colleges, and universities on COVID-19 spread. VDH is staffing up, preparing for a potential surge of cases by increasing contact tracing capacity, call center capacity, and testing capacity. VDH will aggressively identify and trace any outbreaks or situations. VDH's Epidemiological Team is working with schools, colleges, and universities to develop response plans to cases of COVID-19. Guidance on such plans, developed in partnership with the Agency of Education, is forthcoming.
- Testing/tracing updates
 - In addition to the state- and hospital-run sites, Kinney Drugs will begin offering COVID-19 testing at 11 Vermont locations. Some locations are already up and running, and others will come online in the next few weeks. The Walgreens in Essex Junction also offers testing. These testing partners allow the state to increase testing capacity and preserve testing in the healthcare setting for symptomatic patients.
 - Testing specifics and locations can be found on the [Department of Health's testing page](#).
- COVID-19 vaccine planning update
 - There is not yet a vaccine for COVID-19, nor a timeline for when one will be available. However, there has been enough promising research that VDH anticipates such a vaccine within the next year.
 - VDH stood up a vaccine planning branch to start building infrastructure for vaccine distribution and administration. VDH is doing everything it can to be ready when a vaccine becomes available.
 - Plans include working with municipalities to set up mass vaccine points of distribution. How these sites will work is not yet decided, but VDH will be sure to coordinate with Emergency Management Directors and other local officials.

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- Flu vaccine planning update
 - The upcoming flu season is a greater challenge because of COVID-19. For instance, flu and coronavirus symptoms are similar, increasing the number of people needing COVID-19 testing.
 - VDH wants to assure that the flu vaccine is dispersed and administered widely. VDH is planning for vaccine distribution and is sponsoring the purchase of vaccines. This effort, performed in partnership with local healthcare clinics, is part of VDH's normal non-COVID-19 workload.
 - Given the combined risk of COVID-19 and the flu, VDH is working to improve and enhance flu vaccine capability beyond that of a typical year. For instance, the Department is looking at allowing EMS providers to administer the flu vaccine. The plan isn't for EMS agencies to host their own vaccine clinics, but rather to partner with organizations already slated to receive and distribute the vaccine (e.g., hospitals and healthcare clinics). The EMS providers would bolster staffing at these sites to extend their capability, while still working within the state's pre-existing flu vaccination plan.
 - EMS updates
 - VDH is starting the process of hiring a new state EMS Chief. The position will be announced by early next week, with interviews occurring as soon as possible afterward. The Office of EMS Training Administrator position will also be reposted. VDH is aggressively seeking candidates for both positions.
 - [EMS tuition vouchers](#) are still available. Students enrolling in a Vermont-approved EMS course (EMR, EMT, AEMT, Paramedic) before December 31 who are actively affiliated with a Vermont EMS agency are eligible for a tuition voucher. The paramedic vouchers are pretty well used up, with 38 students receiving vouchers for medic courses. However, the Office of EMS is struggling to distribute its vouchers for EMR, EMT, and AEMT courses. Roughly 40 students are signed up for the state's new hybrid EMT course, which is about average for a fall EMT course, but we'd like to see more seats filled. Please spread the word of this program – we want to reach as many folks as possible. If there is anything the Office of EMS can do to market training opportunities or stand up more classes, let us know.
 - The Office of EMS is also working on EMS Stabilization Grants. The Office has \$2.1 million to disburse to EMS agencies to offset financial losses due to decreased call volume during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Office of EMS is conducting a series of meetings with stakeholders to develop a process for distributing these grants. More information will be forthcoming.
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III. SEOC Overview/VEM Comments: Director Erica Bornemann

- **SEOC status:** The SEOC remains activated every weekday from 0800 until 1600. On the weekends, the SEOC is in monitoring status, meaning the watch officer is the point of contact for any resource needs that arise. The SEOC is entirely virtual.
- I will now go over recent policy updates. Last week, the Agency of Commerce and Community Development released [updated guidance on organized sports](#), including reiteration of the need for masks / facial coverings, provisions for games against out-of-state teams, and sport-specific guidance.
- On Tuesday, the [Buy Local Vermont Program](#) launched, giving \$30 coupons to Vermonters to use at local restaurants, retail stores, entertainment and performing arts venues, and lodging and tourism-related businesses impacted by COVID-19. By Wednesday, all available funds had been distributed.

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- **SEOC active missions that have been progressing this week:**
 - All deliveries of cloth face coverings for cities and towns are complete, so if your municipality ordered coverings and did not receive them, please email Vermont Emergency Management's Eric Forand at eric.forand@vermont.gov.
 - There are still additional cloth face coverings available for towns or cities that have not yet submitted a request.
 - The Rutland Medical Surge Site is being demobilized. There will still be one Medical Surge Site in Chittenden County in standby mode.
 - The SEOC, VDH, and Vermont's hospitals continue to assess surge capacity within hospitals, and whether and where there should be out-of-hospital surge sites.
- Registration is now open for our annual Emergency Management Conference on September 29th and 30th. To register for this virtual conference, and for additional information, please visit <https://vem.vermont.gov/conference>. Great line up, great learning opportunity
- FEMA recently released new Public Assistance eligibility guidance (in a document titled "[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) Pandemic: Work Eligible for Public Assistance \(Interim\)](#)") that will come into effect on September 15th (the new rules will not apply retroactively). Vermont Emergency Management will be sending out a consolidated version to guide Vermont applicants.
- Requests for \$77 million in Public Assistance costs through June 30th have been scoped and obligated across Vermont under the state's COVID-19 disaster declaration.
 - As a point of comparison, Hurricane Irene resulted in \$250 million in eligible Public Assistance costs, while the costliest disaster since, the Halloween Storm of 2019, resulted in \$10 million of eligible costs.
 - Vermont has over 230 applicants for FEMA Public Assistance so far. Vermont Emergency Management plans to provide support to all these applicants throughout the process.
 - Thank you to all the applicants who adhered to the September 1st deadline for submitting costs incurred through June 30th. The prompt submissions allow the State to outline the overall scope of financial need and inform the state legislature's budgetary work.
 - We anticipate sending out additional benchmarks and timelines for submitting next quarter's costs (i.e., July 1 through September 15) soon.

IV. Division of Fire Safety (DFS): Vermont Fire Academy Chief Pete Lynch

- In recognition and observance of National Suicide Prevention Awareness Week, DFS [compiled a list](#) of resources and ways to make a difference, which will be emailed out to fire departments later today.

V. Questions from Call Participants

- Erica Bornemann and Dan Batsie acknowledged that not all lodging establishments are adhering to the State's guidelines and thanked those which are. Lodging establishment proprietors are well within their rights to refuse service to customers who do not adhere to [Vermont's cross-state travel policy](#). Updated guidance for lodging establishments is expected soon.
- While flying commercially cancels out the benefits of quarantining prior to entering Vermont, flying in a personally owned plane does not.