

## 10/22/20 Municipal & First Responder Notes

### I. **Welcome and Introduction:** DPS Deputy Commissioner Chris Herrick

- This is the every-other-week call for first responders, EMDs, RPCs, and municipal officials. The next call will be on Thursday, November 5<sup>th</sup> at 2PM. The invitation will go out on Monday, November 2<sup>nd</sup>.
  - 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 League of Cities and Towns Public Policy and Advocacy Director Karen Horn. In addition, we have Capt. Mike Manley from the Vermont State Police and Chief Peter Lynch from the Vermont Fire Academy 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.
- 

### II. **COVID-19 Overview/VDH Comments:** HOC Incident Commander and DEPRIP Director Dan Batsie

- Overall update on COVID-19 in Vermont
  - There has been an uptick in COVID-19 infections in Vermont in the past month, including 83 new cases in the last week. However, viral transmission in Vermont continues to be very low in comparison to other states.
  - Most cases of COVID-19 in Vermont are associated with outbreaks or clusters, as opposed to isolated cases resulting from community transmission.
- Update on outbreaks, clusters, and situations
  - There are currently 7 outbreaks and 33 situations.
  - The largest outbreaks include one at a healthcare facility with 3 associated infections, an outbreak at a private event in Bennington with 9 associated infections, an outbreak at a farm with 28 associated infections, and an outbreak at a hockey rink with 39 associated infections.
  - Situations, in contrast, have a very low number of patients each. For instance, there are 10 situations associated with schools, most of which have 1 infection each and none with more than 6 infections. There are 5 situations at colleges, none of which have more than 2 patients. There are also situations associated with healthcare facilities and worksites.
  - So far, the outbreaks and situations in Vermont have been well contained.
- Testing/tracing updates
  - Maintaining contract tracing and testing capability is the Department of Health's biggest priority. The Department has 7-day-a-week coverage for outbreak response and local testing, including an increased testing tempo in the Barre / Montpelier area and other outbreak locations.
- Vaccination planning updates
  - The Department of Health is preparing for COVID-19 vaccinations. There are rumors that a vaccine will be ready late this year or early next year, but there is no definite timeline.
  - The Department of Health is working with the SEOC to ensure adequate staffing, PPE, and cold storage.
  - More information will be available soon.
- EMS updates

## 10/22/20 Municipal & First Responder Notes

- Interviews are ongoing for the EMS Chief position, and there will be interviews for the Training Administrator position in the next couple of weeks. Hopefully, both those positions will be filled soon.
- The [EMS tuition voucher](#) program funding is almost used up. The program provides tuition vouchers to students actively affiliated with a Vermont EMS agency enrolling in a Vermont-approved EMS course (EMR, EMT, AEMT, paramedic) before December 31. So far, 287 students received funding, and 100 more are likely to be added. Given that in a normal year, 600 Vermonters go through EMS training, 400 in two months is unbelievable. The success of this program demonstrates both the importance of reducing the cost of EMS training courses and the resilient willingness of Vermonters to help their neighbors.
  - For those still looking to apply, there is currently a waitlist for paramedic training and the lower level classes are almost full as well. The Office of EMS is still working with the organizations teaching the courses to match students to courses, so it is still worthwhile for interested individuals to apply, the sooner the better.
- The Office of EMS is working with the Agency of Human Services on two upcoming grant programs:
  - The EMS Stabilization Grant Program will provide funding to EMS agencies with reduced call volume during the height of the pandemic. This program is being finalized, and is awaiting final approval. We suspect that details will be available very soon.
  - A workforce stabilization grant will provide funding to individual providers in recognition of their efforts. Negotiations on this grant program are ongoing.
- On Thursday, October 29<sup>th</sup> at 2pm, the Office of EMS is hosting a discussion on dispatching fees and developing a dispatch system. Invitations went out to EMS agencies – reach out to Dan Batsie if you did not receive one.
- On Friday, October 30<sup>th</sup> at 1pm, the Office of EMS, Scott Moore from the American Ambulance Association, and Brett LaRose of Vermont Emergency Management will host a webinar on COVID-19-related financial resources for EMS agencies. The webinar will include information on the certified public accountancy firm under contract with the Office of EMS to help Vermont EMS agencies navigate COVID-19 grants and funding. Invitations went out to EMS agencies – reach out to Dan Batsie if you did not receive one.
- We received a question relayed from teachers concerned that the contactless thermometers used for temperature checks at schools get abnormally low readings. The manufacturer's instructions require that the person whose temperature is being taken to be in the same ambient temperature as the thermometer for at least 30 minutes, which is not possible as students walk into the school and is likely the cause of the clearly inaccurate readings.
  - The Department of Health is aware of the challenges associated with contactless thermometers and how manufacturers' recommendations are often at odds with operational needs. This topic will be covered in updated school guidance that will likely be released early next week. This guidance will include scientific and detailed guidance on the use of thermometers.

---

### III. SEOC Overview/VEM Comments: DPS Deputy Commissioner Chris Herrick

- **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.
- **Recent policy updates:**

## 10/22/20 Municipal & First Responder Notes

- On October 15<sup>th</sup>, Governor Scott [extended Executive Order 01-20 and the State of Emergency](#) for another month, until November 15<sup>th</sup>.
- On October 16<sup>th</sup>, Governor Scott issued an [executive order addendum](#) prohibiting Vermont's skating rinks from accepting new reservation for use of their facilities through October 30<sup>th</sup>.
  - This action was in response to outbreaks of COVID-19 among hockey teams in New Hampshire and that state's closure of its skating rinks for two weeks. The directive is intended to prevent an influx of new users from high-risk areas into Vermont's ice rinks.
  - Rinks may allow their currently scheduled operations over this two-week period, provided all other existing health and safety guidance is fully implemented.
- On October 20<sup>th</sup>, Governor Scott announced a new round of [economic recovery grants](#) for Vermont businesses, using \$76 million of CARES Act funding on top of the \$152 million in economic relief already delivered to Vermont businesses.
  - Vermont businesses and nonprofits, including sole proprietors, that have seen a decline in total sales between March and September of 2020, compared to the same period in 2019, and who can demonstrate unmet need, may be eligible to receive an Expanded Economic Recovery Grant. Qualifying businesses may now receive up to \$300,000 in total economic recovery grants.
  - Unlike previous grant programs, the expanded grant program will not be first come, first served. Instead, grants will be distributed in late November after the total unmet need of all qualifying businesses is assessed.
  - These new grants will be administered by the Agency of Commerce and Community Development (ACCD), with assistance from the Department of Taxes.
- **SEOC active missions that have been progressing this week:**
  - The Farmers-to-Families food box program, now run by the Vermont Foodbank, is ongoing until the end of October. Food boxes are available at distribution sites throughout the state each weekday from 10am to 2pm.
    - Reservations are required to keep wait times to a minimum, at <https://humanresources.vermont.gov/food-help>.
    - Each recipient will be given 1 box with about 30 pounds of food, including fresh produce, dairy products, and meat.
- We received a question about what to tell people who question [Vermont's travel quarantine policy](#) because there's counties in Vermont (currently Chittenden, Washington, and Bennington) with higher rates of COVID-19 than "yellow" counties in other states impacted by travel quarantine restrictions.
  - The reason for this discrepancy is that Vermont has a much better handle on our COVID-19 infection rates, where those positives are coming from and how they are being traced, tested, and boxed in than we do our neighboring states. Due to that level of detail and information we have for Vermont, the travel restriction methodology doesn't apply within the state.
  - If any given outbreak or cluster were to create a situation where travel around Vermont would be impacted, the state could quickly mobilize. We just don't have that level of detail, information, or ability to be both instantly proactive and/or reactive when it comes to other states.
- We received another question on what cities and towns should be doing to prepare for a surge in COVID-19 cases, such as contingency planning or stockpiling supplies.

## 10/22/20 Municipal & First Responder Notes

- There are not specific additional actions that municipalities should take. However, please review your plans and state guidance.
  - It may also be helpful to conduct reviews of your town's initial COVID-19 actions, to capture lessons learned for further outbreaks.
- Lastly, a reminder that FEMA Public Assistance applications covering expenses through September 14th are due October 31<sup>st</sup>.
- 

### IV. Vermont League of Cities and Towns: Karen Horn

- There is still \$2.6 million in unobligated funds from the Local Government Expense Reimbursement (LGER) grant program. VLCT is looking into whether this money could be applied to water treatment system costs given the high number of delinquencies.
    - The LGER application deadline was October 15<sup>th</sup>. In total, the state legislature appropriated \$13 million for the program, of which \$2.6 million remains.
    - [Act 92](#), passed in March, prohibits municipalities disconnecting water/sewer services from residents unable to pay as long as the current state of emergency is in effect.
    - The VLCT will reach out to towns with any further information.
- 

### V. Questions from Call Participants

- Karen Horn said that assistance is likely already available for municipal electric utilities, not related to the Local Government Expense Reimbursement grant program. She will double check.