

9/24/20 Municipal & First Responder Call Notes

I. **Welcome and Introduction:** 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, October 8th at 2PM. The invitation will go out on Monday, October 5th.
 - 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, VLCT Public Policy and Advocacy Director Karen Horn, and Office of Economic Opportunity Director Sarah Phillips. In addition, we have Chief Pete Lynch from the Vermont Fire Academy and Lt. Tara Thomas 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/VDH Comments:** HOC Incident Commander and DEPRIP Director Dan Batsie

- There have been no deaths associated with COVID-19 since July 25th, and hospitalizations and ICU admissions have also been very low.
- Update on outbreaks and clusters
 - There are 17 active situations in Vermont.
 - The largest is a private event with 18 associated cases, demonstrating how easy it is to slip and have one event where guidance isn't followed end up spreading a lot of disease. The good news is that there are no new cases associated with this event.
 - There are a handful of situations related to school and childcare, none of which have more than 2 cases. We will inevitably have more COVID-19 cases in schools, because schools bring a lot of people into close proximity. The Department of Health is working well with school districts and municipalities, and there is robust capacity for contact tracing.
 - There are a handful of situations related to colleges and universities, the largest of which has 5 cases.
 - The other situations are mostly associated with businesses, and a couple are associated with healthcare organizations and long-term care facilities.
- Testing/tracing updates
 - The Department of Health's Epidemiology Branch contact tracing team is working aggressively, and the Department is conducting pop-up testing where meaningful.
 - The Department of Health will continue conducting asymptomatic testing sites; the October dates will be posted soon. The Department will hold additional pop-up testing sites as warranted.
 - The Department of Health is actively recruiting partners from the private sector to increase COVID-19 testing capacity across the state.
- EMS updates
 - The Vermont Office of EMS is hiring. The [EMS Chief position](#) was posted on Monday, and will be up for the next week and a half. The intention is to fill the position as soon as possible. The Training Administrator position will be posted next week.

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- The [EMS tuition voucher](#) system is underway. 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 \$500,000 of paramedic vouchers is almost completely allocated, as have \$350,000 out of the \$400,000 in vouchers for the other certification levels. These vouchers will hopefully yield many new providers for Vermont's EMS system. Please spread the word about the remaining funds – this is a unique opportunity for free training.
 - Work continues on developing an EMS stabilization grant program. The state legislature allocated \$2.1 million to cover financial losses incurred by transport EMS agencies due to a reduced call volume early in the COVID-19 pandemic. The grants will be available to both municipal and private transport EMS agencies. More information on how to apply for the grants will be available next week. \$100,000 of this money will go to a public accounting firm to assist EMS agencies in applying for the array of COVID-19 relief grants, for instance helping with paperwork and documentation. More information, including a virtual training session, will be available in the next couple of weeks on the Office of EMS website.
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III. SEOC Overview/VEM Comments: 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.
- I will now go over recent policy updates. On September 11, Governor Scott [extended the state of emergency for another month](#), until October 15th. The Governor said he expects further extensions, as the pandemic response continues to require statewide policy changes.
- On Friday, the Governor announced a loosening of restrictions on lodging establishments in Vermont. Lodging restrictions now allow multi-room lodging operations to book 100 percent of their rooms. In addition, bar seating may now open if a physical barrier, such as a piece of plexiglass, separates the patrons from bartenders and a distance of 6 feet is maintained between parties.
- On Tuesday, Secretary of Education Dan French announced that all Vermont schools will be placed in Step III of the [State's school guidance](#). This will give schools additional flexibility, including increased use of common areas and the resumption of inter-school sporting events. Decisions regarding in-person versus remote learning will continue to be made at the local level.
- **SEOC active missions that have been progressing this week:**
 - The Rutland Medical Surge Site has been demobilized, with its constituent parts in trailers ready to be re-deployed. There is still one Medical Surge Site in Chittenden County in standby mode.
 - There is ongoing planning regarding surge capacity within hospitals.
 - The State continues to assess the need for out-of-hospital surge sites.
 - Though the SEOC will no longer be directly involved, food distribution sites, run by the Vermont Foodbank, will resume soon. After an unexpected delay, the USDA awarded the contracts for the next round of food distributions to two out-of-state companies. The Vermont Foodbank is working with these companies to develop distribution plans.

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- Registration for our annual Emergency Management Conference closes this Saturday. So reserve your place soon for this virtual conference on September 29th and 30th. To register, and for additional information, please visit <https://vem.vermont.gov/conference>.
- Todd Cosgrove, chief of the Vermont Hazardous Materials Team, is retiring on Friday. Cosgrove has been a volunteer firefighter for 48 years, a member of the HazMat Team since its inception, and chief of the team since 2015. We wish him the best.

IV. Vermont League of Cities and Towns: Public Policy and Advocacy Director Karen Horn

- The [Local Government Expense Reimbursement \(LGER\) grant](#) deadline was extended by the Department of Taxes to October 1st.
 - As a reminder, hazard pay for municipal frontline workers is an eligible expense for this grant.
 - The pending state budget, which is expected to be passed tomorrow, includes a settled item extending the deadline even further, to October 15th.
 - Despite these deadline extensions, eligible expenses must still be incurred by December 30th.
- VLCT's annual conference, [the Town Fair](#), is from September 28th through October 2nd. Registration is required.

V. Agency of Human Services: Office of Economic Opportunity Director Sarah Phillips

- Winter sheltering
 - The Agency of Human Services meets emergency housing needs through different means. Community projects, including emergency shelters and seasonal warming shelters, are one component. When those projects are full, eligible folks can apply for emergency housing through General Assistance and get a housing voucher. Eligibility for such vouchers are currently expanded.
 - The Agency of Human Services is committed to ensuring adequate sheltering capacity this winter. Vermont has about 10 shelters normally, but some will not open this year because of COVID-19 concerns (either there isn't sufficient space for social distancing or volunteers are unavailable). There are 3 shelters that will open in November, December, and January, respectively. Others are in the process of finalizing new locations and may open as well. Regardless, there will be reduced sheltering capacity this winter. The expanded eligibility for General Assistance emergency housing vouchers will fill this gap in capacity.
 - Calling 211 is a convenient way to start the housing voucher process.
- Re-Housing Recovery Program
 - The Agency of Human Services wants to help people find longer term housing than emergency shelters. There are a [number of initiatives](#) to help people access housing and related financial assistance.
 - One project worth highlighting is the Re-Housing Recovery Program, which gives grants to landlords to improve rental units and bring them up to code. The goal is to turn currently dilapidated housing into places where otherwise homeless people could live. Landlords and property owners that have vacant, unused rental properties may be eligible to receive up to a \$30,000 grant per rental unit to get them ready for use again.
 - Landlords and property owners should contact their local NeighborWorks Alliance of Vermont Home Ownership Center to determine eligibility (certain affordable housing conditions apply) and to enroll in the program (act fast, as funding deadlines apply):

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- [Champlain Housing Trust](#) (Chittenden, Franklin & Grand Isle Counties)
 - [Downstreet Housing](#) (Lamoille, Orange, & Washington Counties)
 - [NeighborWorks of Western Vermont](#) (Addison, Bennington, & Rutland Counties)
 - [Rural Edge](#) (Caledonia, Essex, & Orleans Counties)
 - [Windham & Windsor Housing Trust](#) (Windham & Windsor Counties)
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VI. Questions from Call Participants

- The [Local Government Expense Reimbursement \(LGER\) grant](#) deadline will be likely be updated on the Department of Taxes website tomorrow.