

8/27/20 Municipal & First Responder Call Notes

I. **Welcome and Introduction:** VEM Deputy Director Chip Deasy

- This is the every-other-week call for first responders, EMDs, RPCs, and municipal officials. The next call will be on Thursday, September 10th at 2PM. The invitation will go out on Tuesday, September 8th.
 - 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 Recovery and Mitigation Section Chief Ben Rose. In addition, we have Karen Horn from the Vermont League of Cities and Towns, Lt. Tara Thomas from the Vermont State Police, and Chief Pete 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.
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II. **COVID-19 Overview/VDH Comments:** HOC Incident Commander and DEPRIP Director Dan Batsie

- Overall update on COVID-19 in Vermont
 - There have been 171 cases of COVID-19 in the last 30 days, which is much less than in neighboring and comparable states. The "curve" in the graph of case growth is relatively flat, with no more than 20 new cases on any given day since May, and 1 death related to COVID-19 in the past month.
 - The Department of Health is currently tracking 15 clusters/outbreaks of COVID-19.
 - Most of these incidents have only 1 or 2 associated cases, but still might be of great concern depending on the context (for example, a single case of COVID-19 in a long-term care facility warrants an aggressive response).
 - The largest cluster currently being tracked has 4 associated cases.
 - Three of these incidents are at colleges, each with one associated case. This minimal spread, paired with the large amount of testing being conducted on college campuses, is evidence that higher education in Vermont is doing what's necessary to mitigate COVID-19.
 - EMS updates
 - 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 paramedic vouchers are almost used up, but there's still plenty of funds for the other courses. Please spread the word of this program – we want to reach as many folks as possible.
 - The Office of EMS is working with a CPA firm to assist EMS agencies with grant applications. In a related effort, the Office plans on putting together a webinar with the American Ambulance Association on identifying and navigating grant programs.
 - There will also be emergency COVID-19 relief funding available through the Agency of Human Services, but details are not available yet.
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III. **SEOC Overview/VEM Comments:** Deputy Director Chip Deasy

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- **SEOC status:** The SEOC remains activated every weekday from 0800 until 1600. On the weekends and the upcoming Labor Day holiday, 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.
- On the 18th, Governor Scott signed an [executive order addendum](#) allowing home-based childcare providers to offer full-day care when local schools are conducting remote learning. The addendum also delegates authority to the Secretary of the Agency of Human Services to undertake further measures to expand the state's childcare capacity.
- Last week, the Agency of Commerce and Community Development and the Department of Taxes announced an increase to the maximum grant award for [Economic Recovery Grants for Vermont businesses](#) negatively impacted by COVID-19. Eligible businesses with continued capacity constraints can receive up to an additional \$100,000 in grant funding, for a total of \$150,000 from the program.
- On the 14th, Governor Scott [extended the executive order](#) for a 6th month (until September 15). The addendum also provides cities and towns with two additional tools to curb infection, with an eye toward returning college students: 1) the ability to set limits on gathering sizes lower than state guidance and 2) the option to limit hours for the sale of alcohol (i.e., a curfew for bars and clubs).
- **SEOC active missions that have been progressing this week:**
 - The Cloth Face Coverings for Everyone Initiative is well underway. As of Tuesday, 232,785 cloth face coverings have been distributed; including 144,750 to towns and 7,500 to local EMS agencies.
 - 205 towns are participating in this initiative and are distributing free cloth face coverings to their residents.
 - 30,000 cloth face coverings will be sent to the Vermont Foodbank to be made available at food distribution sites in September and October.
 - If your town requested cloth face coverings but has yet to receive them, please reach out to VEM's [Eric Forand](#). We do not have enough coverings to provide more than the allocation of 25% of the town's population.
 - State direct food distributions to augment the charitable food system will end with two sites on Friday in Barre and Morristown.
 - State food distribution began with issuing MREs in late April, continued with box meals in May, then perishable foods over the summer through rounds 1 and 2 of the USDA Farmers-to-Families food box program.
 - We expect that the USDA will extend a round 3 of the Farmers to Families program into September and October, with the Vermont Foodbank and the Abbey Group providing staff for the distributions – however, that is not yet certain.
 - The final schedule depends on the details of any USDA program extension, but will begin as soon as possible with people still able to make appointments on the same website, <https://humanresources.vermont.gov/food-help>.
- We received a question asking whether there are plans or guidance regarding warming shelters and emergency housing vouchers this winter, in light of the need for non-congregate sheltering.
 - This winter, the Agency of Human Services (AHS) is **not** planning on using the "Emergency Cold Weather Protocol" from years past.

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- Last winter there were 10 seasonal warming shelters. The community organizations that operate these shelters make the decision on whether to open this year. AHS provided significant support to these organizations, but in some cases, their operational model cannot be adapted enough to meet the public health guidelines for COVID-19 and they have decided to close, while some are still looking for a new location. The bottom line is that AHS expects that there will only be a few seasonal shelters open this winter.
- AHS is committed to addressing this shortfall and ensuring that folks have access to emergency housing during cold weather months – whether through the General Assistance Emergency Housing program or through community-based emergency shelters. As such, the Agency is currently reviewing its policy for General Assistance Emergency Housing, and will hopefully be ready to share details in the coming weeks.

IV. Recovery Planning – Recovery and Mitigation Section Chief Ben Rose

- Grant application deadlines are looming for municipalities, hospitals, schools, and state agencies, driven by the terms of the CARES Act.
- Towns should apply for FEMA Public Assistance if they are eligible to do so. If not, they should apply for a Local Government Expense Reimbursement (LGER) Grant.
- Most municipalities are already set up in the FEMA Public Assistance Portal because they applied following earlier disasters. For those municipalities not set up, it is only a 15-to 20-minute process.
- A reminder about [Local Government Expense Reimbursement Grants](#):
 - Applications for these grants are due on September 4th.
 - LGER Grant funds will reimburse expenses that are not covered by insurance or other funding sources, including funding provided by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). Therefore, it is imperative that your unit of local government apply for FEMA funding for those expenses which are eligible through the FEMA Public Assistance program *before* submitting your application for the LGER Grant. Federal funding is available to cover up to 100% of FEMA-eligible expenses. To apply for FEMA funding, visit the Vermont Emergency Management website.
 - Supporting documentation must be submitted on or before December 15, 2020. Eligible expenses must be incurred by December 30, 2020.
- Also, for FEMA-eligible expenses, Public Assistance applications are due **September 1**. Contact Kim.Canarecci@vermont.gov if you need assistance with submitting via the FEMA Grants Portal. You need a minimum of \$3,300 in FEMA-eligible emergency response costs (e.g., PPE and overtime) to qualify.
- [Land Record Digitization Grant](#) applications are also due **September 1**.

V. Division of Fire Safety: Vermont Fire Academy Chief Pete Lynch

- Updated [Guidance on Fire and EMS Department Non-Emergency Activities](#)
 - This guidance was first released in May, then updated in June, and was updated again this week.
 - As a reminder, this guidance does **not** apply to emergency responses.
 - This week's update raises the limit on the number of people who can participate in indoor (75 people) and outdoor (150 people) events, provided social distancing and other public health guidelines are followed. The update also allows more than 2 individuals to be in a vehicle, as long as everyone is wearing a mask or cloth face covering.

VI. Questions from Call Participants

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- Towns with questions about the permitted size of mass gatherings should refer to this guidance from the [Agency of Commerce and Community Development](#): “organizations may allow 50 percent of fire occupancy or 1 person per 100 square feet, with a maximum of 75 people indoors and 150 people outdoors.”
- Karen Horn said some towns are splitting shifts to limit how many people are in town buildings at one time. Horn was hesitant about letting employees make their own hours, as it would complicate health screenings.