

Environmental Emergency Services, Inc.

Chemung & Steuben Counties, NY



Robert Gardner, Flood Warning Service Operations Director

2003 Annual Report

DEDICATION

THE 2003 ANNUAL REPORT OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL EMERGENCY SERVICES IS HEREBY DEDICATED TO ROBERT (BOB) W. GARDNER, OPERATIONS DIRECTOR FOR THE GUSTINA EMERGENCY OPERATION CENTER.

Bob has helped define the role of the Flood Warning Operations Group within Environmental Emergency Services. He has developed the policies and procedures that the Center operates with to this day. Bob has devoted countless hours to the training and coaching of his fellow volunteers to ensure that the best possible information is available to the Emergency Management Offices of Chemung and Steuben Counties. Bob epitomizes the volunteers of our organization that will give of their time and energy to perform a service that can make a difference in our communities.

The Board of Directors wishes to thank Bob Gardner for his many years of service to Environmental Emergency Services, and hereby recognize the contributions he has made to the support of this organization. Our thanks would not be complete if we did not also extend such wishes to those who enable our volunteers to devote the time to our organization. The Board of Directors therefore also extends its thanks to Carol Gardner for her support of Bob in his role as volunteer.

ENVIRONMENTAL EMERGENCY SERVICES, INC.

2003 ANNUAL REPORT

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TO OUR FRIENDS AND SUPPORTERS

The year 2003 was a very good reminder of the vulnerability this area has to flooding. We once again demonstrated the risks we face when storm patterns set up to bring quick, heavy rains. Our steep topography and numerous small watersheds are prime territory for flash flooding. Critical in this scenario is the need for early detection and rapid warning dissemination. We must continue to strive toward this goal.

2003 gave us another warning sign that was not recognized and given the attention it was due. Hurricane Isabel made a run for this area on a well-publicized track through the Atlantic and on shore over the Cape Hatteras area. Initial projections had it coming inland with significant winds and heavy rainfall all the way into New York State. Numerous statements and conference calls between emergency management and National Weather Service staff allowed for advanced planning all through this area well in advance of the storm's arrival. Early indications were that this could be a storm for the record books. As the storm moved northward through North Carolina and into Virginia, the true strength of the storm became known and the wind effects were downgraded. However, the rainfall amounts predicted as late as 24 hours before the storm arrived, aimed directly at the Chemung Basin, would have exceeded any reasonable amount. This was due, in large part, to the successive flash flooding the basin had endured during the previous 6 weeks. A good share of the streams all through the area had been plugged with debris and gravel deposition, as well as serious streambank erosion. The forecast 3-6 inches of rain would have been more than sufficient to plunge the area into the first long term flooding event since the 1970's. Fortunately, Isabel passed just west of the area and accelerated, giving only a glancing blow as it went by.

Hurricane Isabel was not recognized as the wake up call I think it should have been. This storm demonstrates how vulnerable we are, given the right conditions, to a storm of her magnitude. She showed us that we can be directly impacted by these storms with minimal time to react. Even in today's technological world, we will have less than 5 days to prepare and less time to know what the magnitude of the storm will be. We must keep up our vigilance. If we do not maintain the systems, plans, and programs that were developed after the floods of the 70's, then there may be inadequate time to recognize the true impact that a storm of this level is capable of. Even worse, there have been indications that Isabel may have added to a certain complacency that has developed over the past 20+ years by appearing to hit the area with no major effect. Statements that the construction of the dams in Pennsylvania and other improvements to the river systems have made us immune from the effects of these big storms will only result in a "Bigger" surprise when one of these storms eventually zeros in on the Chemung Basin.

On a more positive note, the arrival of Isabel demonstrated how far we have come over the past 30 years in our preparedness efforts. The National Weather Service is to be commended on their efforts to integrate technology into everyday operations. We all have heard and seen the new levels of technology they have developed, such as Doppler Radar, new Advanced Forecasting Tools, and other products that provide information to the emergency management community, as well as the public. Isabel was a good test of how they have used those tools to interpret the information and bring it to "Us" on a meaningful level. Dave Nicosia, Warning Coordination

Meteorologist (WCM) at the NWS Office in Binghamton, gave the emergency managers the first detailed information regarding this storm a full week before it arrived. He provided initial planning information and developed a plan for conference calls with daily briefings from 5 days out until the day of the event. Information was provided via Internet for graphic web based products that allowed “Us” to evaluate the storm potential and customize our response plans accordingly. This is a shining example of what we can expect in the future when similar storms approach and is comforting to know that we will be part of a larger “TEAM” preparing for such an event.

Environmental Emergency Services continues to be fueled by the volunteers that support it. The reports in this Annual Report highlight some of the activities that have occurred during the last year. The key elements in these activities are the volunteers that make things happen. Bob Gardner, our Operations Director, has decided to move back into the ranks and retire from the Director position. Bob has spent many years in this position, both officially and unofficially, developing procedures and training the volunteers of the operations group. We as an organization and as a community are very fortunate to have the services of such an individual. Bob epitomizes the type of individual that volunteers for our organization. As such, we dedicate this year’s annual report to Bob Gardner, and to all the volunteers that have made and continue to make this organization so unique. My personal thanks to all those who have made this operation so successful.

Thanks to All,

Michael A. Sprague
President – EES

FLOOD WARNING SERVICE

In 2003, Mother Nature did the expected, as well as the unexpected. Another severe flash flooding problem developed during the afternoon/evening of July 22. The unexpected factor, to me, was that it occurred in the Meads Creek watershed, being the third such event in the past 8 years (1/96 and 11/96). Significant flooding took place along the Creek and Victory Highway area near the Exit 43 intersection, causing the closure of a section of I-86. The Flood Warning Service (FWS) Gustina Emergency Operations Center (GEOC) was activated during the evening of the 22nd. FWS volunteers Janet Thigpen, Bob Boell and Terry Borden, Jr. helped supply Meads Creek crest information, using the new Meads Creek and Taft Road stage sensors, to Mike Sprague at the Steuben County EOC. During this event, Murphy was a factor with both the Howard and Urbana precipitation gauges being out of service. This limited the ability of the GEOC to clearly define the affected region. The Cameron gauge recorded a total 2-day precipitation amount of 5.52 inches. Other creeks in Steuben County also experienced heavy rainfall and serious damage. Mother Nature continues to demonstrate the ability to do the unexpected, and to avoid in-situ gauging systems.

As in past years, there were several ‘near misses’ (3/20; 9/2; 9/15), during which, if rainfall patterns had been “different,” localized flash flooding could/would have occurred. However, several intense, local storms did occur, such as the August 9 event, which impacted parts of Chemung County. Fortunately, Hurricane ISABEL (September 15-17) did not affect the Chemung River Basin.

A new, homegrown database, BOBCAT, joined GATOR as the primary data processing systems in the GEOC. The two are being linked together, which will permit simultaneous data evaluation, greatly increasing the capability and capacity of the FWS personnel to collect/evaluate/supply information during an event. The GEOC had 3 database computers in operation at the end of the year: GAGER, GATOR, and BOBCAT.

The demise of the ALERT computer, which was the original, commercial data handling system in the GEOC, currently leaves the FWS/GEOC without a sensor alarm detection capacity, which is not a desirable situation. Subroutines for the GATOR/BOBCAT are being developed to resolve this gap in FWS sensor capability.

There were also changes in the TelMark (TM) sensor list available to the GEOC. The Campbell and Chemung TM’s are now under the control of the USGS. The Elmira TM has ongoing “problem(s)”, and has been sporadically on-line over the past several years. The Elmira TM is presently down. Also, the Tioga Junction TM has been disconnected, apparently permanently, which reduces Tioga River coverage. The Corps of Engineers dam operators were not happy about losing that checkpoint.

FWS sensor maintenance continues to provide the GEOC with **greater** than 90% sensor on-line availability. This is a tribute to the quality of instrumentation being acquired and installed, **and** to continuing, diligent care being provided by Tom Shugars and Sue McLaughlin.

The monthly information/training meetings continue to provide a forum for information transfer from two of our primary customers, Steuben EMS and Region 8 Flood Control, as well as ongoing system training and procedures improvements. Unfortunately, the GEOC volunteer staffing situation did not improve during the year. The current GEOC volunteer staff, though too small, can provide necessary support, as demonstrated in the July 22 Steuben County event.

Robert W. Gardner
Volunteer Operations Director – FWS

CHEMICAL HAZARD INFORMATION TEAM

The year of 2003 continued the trend of "quiet" years for the Chemical Hazard Information Team (CHIT). There were a few minor hazardous material incidents in Steuben County, which prompted phone contact of CHIT members, but activation to the operation centers was not required.

Training opportunities offered and taken advantage of included the Annual Hazardous Materials Seminar at the Academy of Fire Sciences in Montour Falls. The Seminar, held February 21-23, 2003, included classes on Chemical Protective Clothing; Rail Car Damage Assessment; Computer Aided Management of Emergency Operations (CAMEO); and Clandestine Drug Labs. CHIT also funded attendance at USEPA's 2003 Emergency Preparedness and Prevention Conference held in November. James Orme, Fire Chief and Safety Officer for Bath VA, attended a 2 ½ day *Smart Street Chemistry* program presented by Dupont. CHIT later purchased five (5) copies of the *Street Smart Chemistry* reference book for its Operations Centers.

Other CHIT activities included a May 7 dinner at Sorge's Restaurant, where members were updated about Steuben County's plans for a hazardous materials response team and the status of the still-to-be received Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) trailer and equipment. Thanks go to Mike Sprague, Director of Steuben County's Office of Emergency Services, for that presentation. CHIT also owes thanks to the City of Elmira Fire Department and Fire Chief Don Harrison for arranging a 5-day session with the Dupont Chemical Company rail car training unit. The June 16-20 training provided valuable insight on dealing with chemical spills from railroad tank cars, including hands-on sessions in repairing leaking valves and dome units.

To conclude, the CHIT organization continued to maintain "readiness" for a major hazardous material incident through: training; updating and improvement of reference materials; and ongoing involvement with emergency response organizations. Thanks are owed to the CHIT volunteers for their ongoing commitment and time expenditures. On a personal note, the end of 2003 offered this writer new opportunities in his career and within the EES organization. A thanks and deep debt of gratitude are owed to all the CHIT volunteers and associated member agencies, as well as the entire EES organization, for the cooperation, assistance, and support given during my tenure as CHIT Chairman.

Scott Rodabaugh
Chairman – CHIT

PUBLIC INFORMATION/EDUCATION

Committee Members:

Lee Hanle Younge
Dix McDonald
Steve Monroe
Tim Marshall
Rita McCarthy

The year 2003 was a busy one for the Public Information/Education (PIE) Committee. We hired a web master to update the EES web page. After working with her for many months, it is now more user friendly and easier to update for future changes. Check it out: www.highwater.org.

The committee also researched the need for emergency radios. EES would like to provide NOAA weather radios to special populations in the Chemung/Steuben County area. These radios will give an early warning of an impending environmental emergency so that the organization has as much time to respond as possible. The PIE committee canvassed the two counties and found that over 5,000 people live in the floodplain. We determined that the cost of each radio would be around \$25 and if we tried to give each of the 5,000 people a radio the cost would be prohibitive. So we scaled down our project to include only "at-risk agencies". Examples include: hospitals, nursing homes, day care facilities, group homes, and senior centers. The committee then wrote a request to State Senator John Kuhl for a \$7,500 legislative initiative grant.

The PIE Committee meets bi-monthly or on an "as-needed" basis.

Lee Hanle Younge
Chairman – PIE

2003 FINANCIAL SUMMARY

FUNDING:

Cash on Hand January 1, 2003	\$ 13,354
Chemung & Steuben Counties	15,400
Local Government	10,800
Photocopying Service	288
Interest Income	<u>537</u>
Sub-Total:	\$ 40,379
PSCIM	287
NOAA/IFLOWS Grant	<u>145,325</u>
TOTAL	\$185,991

EXPENDITURES:

Operating Expenses	
Communications	\$ 3,116
Accounting Fees & Tax Reporting	850
Bank Charges, Contingencies and Miscellaneous	1,316
Flood Warning Service Equipment Maintenance, Repair, and Rental	7,448
Flood Warning Service Education and Meetings	430
Equipment	6,521
CHIT Training and Reference Materials	1,819
Public Information & Education (PIE)	<u>206</u>
Sub-Total:	\$ 21,706
PSCIM	814
NOAA/IFLOWS Grant	<u>69,962</u>
TOTAL:	\$ 92,482

CASH ON HAND JANUARY 1, 2004	\$ 93,509
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2003 FINANCIAL SUMMARY (continued)

2004 FORECAST

ESTIMATED FUNDING:

Cash on Hand January 1, 2004	\$ 18,044
Chemung & Steuben Counties	14,400
Municipalities for Flood Warning	10,800
Photocopying Service	400
Interest Income	<u>500</u>
Sub-Total	\$ 44,144
PSCIM	473
NOAA/IFLOWS Grant	<u>75,000</u>
TOTAL:	\$ 119,617

ESTIMATED EXPENDITURES:

Operating Costs for Flood Warning Service	\$ 19,000
Equipment Reserve Fund	15,000
Training Fund	
Flood Warning Service (FWS)	4,000
Chemical Hazard Information Team (CHIT)	4,000
Public Information/Education (PIE)	<u>1,500</u>
Sub-Total	\$ 43,500
PSCIM Expenses	473
NOAA/IFLOWS Grant	<u>75,000</u>
TOTAL:	\$ 118,973

FORECASTED SURPLUS: **\$ 644**

Joy Brewer
Treasurer – EES

MISSION STATEMENT

Mission Statement – Environmental Emergency Services (EES)

To advise and inform the populace of Chemung and Steuben Counties in an effort to reduce the adverse effects of severe flooding, drought and hazardous material incidents which contribute to environmental emergencies.

EES Responsibilities

1. Provide local emergency response agencies with early warning information.
 2. Maintain communication and coordination among agencies, through its Board of Directors, who share concern for environmental issues.
 3. During emergencies maintain communication with local, state and federal partners.
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Mission Statement – Flood Warning Service (FWS)

To collect pertinent rainfall, climate and river data and to use this information to assist Emergency Management Offices (EMO) in determining areas of concern for potential high water or drought problems in Chemung and Steuben Counties.

FWS Responsibilities

1. Provide the EMO in each county with accurate and updated severe weather information during flooding emergencies, whenever possible.
 2. Develop fail-safe communication links with the EMO in each county, with the National Weather Service, US Army Corps of Engineers and with the Region 8 NYS Department of Environmental Conservation.
 3. Organize, train and maintain a volunteer corps of rain gauge readers and a volunteer operational staff for the Gustina Emergency Operation Center.
 4. Maintain and service those sensors for rainfall, climate and river levels, which are under Flood Warning Service control.
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Mission Statement – Chemical Hazard Information Team (CHIT)

To provide chemical and safety information and guidance to local emergency responders in the event of hazardous material incidents.

CHIT Responsibilities

1. Maintain a cadre of local specialists in related disciplines to assist emergency responders.
2. Provide funding and training opportunities for CHIT members and local emergency responders.
3. Supply specialized materials such as: software, equipment and a reference library.

November 12, 2002

**ENVIRONMENTAL EMERGENCY SERVICES, INC.
CHEMUNG & STEUBEN COUNTIES**

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