

# **Environmental Emergency Services, Inc.**

## **Chemung & Steuben Counties, NY**



View of the Canisteo River from the Cameron precipitation gauge and repeater site

## **2005 Annual Report**

# **ENVIRONMENTAL EMERGENCY SERVICES, INC.**

## **2005 ANNUAL REPORT**

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# 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

## TO OUR FRIENDS AND SUPPORTERS

2005 was a memorable year in the record books for Hurricanes and Flood Events. It was a record setting hurricane season both for number of storms and for significant Category 3 or higher storms. We witnessed flooding of an unprecedented scale to a highly urbanized area and the chaos the resulted.

But was this an “Unprecedented Event?” There certainly have been severe hurricanes and devastation before. Hurricane Camille is, and has been, one of the benchmarks on the Gulf Coast. But our recorded history is very short—about 100 years or so. There have been predictions for Category 4 or 5 storms impacting New Orleans for years. The problem is that this scenario has been narrowly avoided numerous times before. Couple that with development and higher populations, as well a belief that the Government can fix all. Notice I didn’t specify which level of government. Each has a role, and if that role is not performed, then the system of response and recovery falls apart. In some cases local government did an excellent job of responding to an event of giant magnitude; however, in other areas local government relied on state and federal assistance. The states were relying on the locals and on the federal government; and the federal government was attempting to respond as a dual entity of FEMA and Homeland Security. Missed under the radar were other federal agencies, such as the National Weather Service and the US Army Corp. of Engineers. Each did an exemplary job in their roles, but at times went unnoticed.

So what does all this have to do with us? We are currently going into a period of more tropical activity. This we know. We also know that many of our flooding events have been, and will continue to be, determined by the activity in the tropics. We are currently in the first 10 years of a 30-year cycle. In the second 10 years, tropical storms should start to move farther up the East Coast. We too have a history of big storms, but for us that means flooding. We too have seen an increase in development and population. We can learn from the issues of the 2005 and not let our guard down. We have seen and continue to see how vulnerable this area is to flooding. Our local governments—the towns, villages and cities—must continue to prepare for the storms that will be coming. When? This year? Next year? Five years? None of us have the ability to see the future, but the probability is high that an event will come. And we must be prepared. It is a given that state and federal assistance will take 72 to 96 hours to effectively arrive. So the local response must be able to handle whatever comes our way during this time frame. The longer we go without a “Big” flood, the harder it is to keep this thought in everyone’s mind. However, watching New Orleans in 2005 should be a wake up call for everyone.

A special thanks needs to go out to the backbone of our organization—the volunteers. Without them there would have been no Flood Warning Service and no EES. Thanks to the Operations team, who continue to adapt and prepare for the inevitable flooding situation. Thanks to the Maintenance Group of Tom Sugars and Sue McLaughlin, who continue to keep the system operating at 99% capacity. Thanks to the CHIT Group, who keep us prepared for the large Haz Mat incident. I also want to extend my thanks to the Board of Directors, both present and past, for their leadership and time commitment. And lastly, the

officers of the organization, Vice-President Scott Rodabough, Secretary Janet Thigpen, and Treasurer Joy Brewer. These are the individuals who really keep this operation running on an every day basis.

Once again, many thanks to all,

Michael A. Sprague  
President – EES

## TO OUR FRIENDS AND PARTNERS

In 2005, the areas in and around Steuben and Chemung Counties enjoyed, in large part, a quiet year with respect to flooding problems. There were some “interesting” moments, notably around the 1<sup>st</sup> of April, when predicted rainfalls, combined with snowmelt, threatened serious flooding in communities throughout the region. However, the higher rainfall intensities shifted to our east, and we escaped with only minor effects. The Delaware and Upper Susquehanna River Basins, however, experienced record flood events in many locations, and suffered extensive damages in low-lying communities not protected by flood control projects.

Nationally, and as predicted by the “experts,” the hurricane activity was high. In fact, as all are probably aware, it was a record high, with the Greek alphabet coming into play for the first time. There were several devastating storm events, with Hurricane Katrina wreaking unprecedented damage to the Gulf Coast, and notably, New Orleans. The cost in life and property is still being added up, more than five months after the event. And unfortunately, the same “experts” predict the trend of high-activity will continue for the next decade or more.

From a local perspective, looking at the events surrounding Katrina underscores the importance of an organization such as Environmental Emergency Services (EES). Throughout the days leading up to the Katrina disaster, and for weeks afterward, there often appeared to be more finger-pointing (with intent to spread the blame) than cooperation in evaluating and coordinating a proper response to first a threat, and then the disaster. Decisions that needed to be made were delayed and/or flawed due to poor planning, poor communication, and certainly lack of cooperation among the agencies involved (local, state, and federal). One of EES’s core responsibilities is to help maintain communication and coordination among its umbrella of agencies, both in planning for and responding to an emergency. That ongoing cooperative venture, along with the timely provision and sharing of critical data, provides assurance that the local interests of Chemung and Steuben County residents are best served in an environmental emergency.

In closing, thanks are owed to the participating communities for their continued interest in and support of the EES organization. And the same to our dedicated volunteers and members who keep the organization running smoothly and efficiently.

Scott Rodabaugh  
Vice President - EES

## **FLOOD WARNING SERVICE (FWS)**

Overall 2005 has been a very busy and successful year for the Flood Warning Service. We have continued to make progress on updating and enhancing our system, with nearly seventy percent of our system receiving new radios or equipment. Tom Shugars, Sue McLaughlin, and company again this year have worked feverishly to make sure our system is providing the most accurate and up to date data that is possible. The system has been upgraded to narrow-band radios to comply with new FCC standards and new repeaters are being installed at Mt. Washington and at Cameron. We also purchased a spare repeater that can be programmed and placed in the system wherever we may need it in the event of a repeater failure. These are store and forward repeaters, which are able to filter out a lot of noise that used to plague the system with “bad data.”

This year we were also able to continue installation of additional solid-state shaft encoders to replace the old float versions put into operation when our system was built more than twenty years ago. This upgrade has pretty much doubled our accuracy and made our system very reliable. Under the previous system the readings would occasionally drift causing our data to differ from USGS, specifically during times of steady rises. However, with the accuracy of these new solid-state units, our system has much better correlation with the USGS gauges as well as between our own systems. Sue has continued to work on software adjustments this year. A major adjustment has been made to the new rain data screen, which shows rainfall over the last twelve-hour period. Sue has also successfully added the Keuka Lake station and a new climate station in Urbana to the system.

Yet with all these successes we continue to struggle in some areas. We have tried to identify new volunteers to become part of the active list of those who would be available to us during an event. We currently have only a handful of dedicated volunteers, which may limit us in a long-term event. Much of the problem is that many of them live some distance from the operations center and might have difficulty getting in during an event. We are trying to update our operations procedures to make it easier for these individuals to assist during events, which may help attract additional volunteers. Our system is just becoming too large for one person to operate during an event. We need a cadre of volunteers who can work in shifts rather than placing one person there for an extended period of time. If you consider that in 1994 there were only eleven precipitation gauges and four river gauges, we have come a long way! Today we are monitoring eighty different sensors! This is a lot of information for our dedicated volunteers to collect, monitor and interpret. I would like to thank all our current volunteers for standing by our side and being available if Mother Nature calls.

Another area of concern in the system is the loss, a couple of years ago, of the “Alert” system. It is our hope for the future to get an alarm system back in place so we can be “Alerted” to excessive rainfall or stream flow rises. We have also struggled with some radio path issues over the past couple of years. When the system was installed twenty years ago, the trees in some areas were not very big. However, over time those trees have grown and their foliage now interferes with our ability to receive gauge data 100% of the time. If radio

reception continues to be problematic, some of the gauges might have to be relocated to improve reliability.

In closing, 2006 will bring yet more additional sensors on-line, and a hope that there will be more volunteers to monitor them. We intend to conduct more joint training with the National Weather Service and the Mid-Atlantic River Forecast Center. It is great to have these two organizations identify us as a viable partner and help provide some additional resources to our volunteers. Again, I would like to personally thank the volunteers, first off: Don Whitehead, Fred Marvin and Mike Sprague for helping Tom during his time of need. Also, Bob Gardner, Tom, Sue, Janet, Bill, Bob Russo, Ed, Fred, John, Ronnie, as well as those who have indicated that they would be willing to help out during an event. I would also like to thank the rain gauge readers for calling in reports. Although you may think it is a very simple thing, this helps us to substantiate our gauge readings and enhance our decision-making. Keep up the good work! Here is to a successful 2006 for all!

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Timothy D. Marshall".

Timothy D. Marshall  
FWS Coordinator

## **CHEMICAL HAZARD INFORMATION TEAM (CHIT)**

"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." The mission statement for Environmental Emergency Services (EES) provides a quick introduction for those unfamiliar with this organization, and a good reminder to those who have, and continue to support the organization's purpose and goals.

The mission statement for the Chemical Hazard Information Team (CHIT) is, "To provide chemical and safety information and guidance to local emergency responders in the event of hazardous material incidents." Easily read and simply written, this is also vitally important to local emergency responders whose health and safety are often dependent on having good factual information and advice.

During 2005, the Board of Directors reconvened the CHIT Steering Committee to look for a new chairman for the CHIT group. As part of this process, the steering committee revisited the archives, looking for direction from the original steering committee that was tasked with developing the Chemical Hazard Information Team in 1989. The committee wanted to be sure the mission of CHIT is well understood and clarify the direction in which the team should be moving. There have been many changes in personnel and operations over the years. The goal was to give the new chairperson a clear understanding of CHIT's mission. The group will work closely with the new person to set a positive path for the future of CHIT.

Late in 2005, Howard Phillips came forward as the candidate for the CHIT Chairperson. Howard has a tremendous background in hazardous materials safety and currently operates his own consulting business in hazardous waste management. We are very fortunate to have an individual of Howard's expertise who is willing to step forward and help us manage this team. Howard came to us with many new ideas. I have no doubt that the Chemical Hazard Information Team will be making great strides during 2006. I personally want to thank all of them for volunteering their time and expertise to this organization.

Michael Sprague  
President – EES

## **PUBLIC INFORMATION AND EDUCATION (PIE)**

The Public Information and Education (PIE) Committee of EES had a busy year in 2005.

Our first project was to order and deliver the NOAA Weather Radios that were purchased with a grant from former State Senator Randy Kuhl and Assemblyman James Bacalles. EES received seventy five thousand dollars to purchase NOAA weather radios for “at risk” populations in Steuben and Chemung Counties. A kickoff ceremony was held on March 23, 2005, which was very well attended by many of the radio recipients and local government representatives. In all, two hundred thirty desktop radios and thirty handheld radios were distributed to daycare centers, schools, senior housing, residential adult care facilities, and group homes for the disabled. EES would like to once again thank Congressman Kuhl and Assemblyman Bacalles for their assistance with this important project.

One of the next projects on our list was to coordinate with Corning Fire Department to conduct a swift water rescue course in May of 2005. As the scheduled date approached, unseasonably low rainfall led to concerns about whether there would be “swift water” for the training. EES contacted the authorities in charge of the Tioga-Hammond and Cowanesque Dams to request a controlled release of water to raise the river level for the class. The training was a success and now several local responders have invaluable experience. Thanks to all who helped make the class complete.

Over the course of the year, EES members made several educational presentations about EES, the Flood Warning Service operations, and flood preparedness. If your group or organization would like to know more about EES, flooding issues, or chemical hazards, please contact us. PIE also continues to help the Flood Warning Service recruit new volunteers for its operations center. If you or your group is interested in being involved, please ask for information about volunteer opportunities as well.

Finally, the members of the PIE Committee would like to send our heartfelt thanks to former chairperson Lee Hanle-Younger who retired this year. Lee’s dedicated effort to the PIE committee over the years has been admirable. We wish her all the best in her retirement.

Respectfully Submitted,

Kristin A. Card  
PIE Chairman

## 2005 FINANCIAL SUMMARY

<b>FUNDING:</b>	Cash on Hand January 1, 2005	\$ 55,797
	Chemung & Steuben Counties	15,400
	Local Government	11,750
	Interest Income	1,383
	State Initiative (NOAA Weather Radios)	<u>7,445</u>
	<b>Sub-Total</b>	\$ 91,775
	PSCIM	473
	NOAA/IFLOWS Grant	<u>116,459</u>
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$ 208,707</b>

### EXPENDITURES:

	Operating Expenses	
	Communications	\$ 2,620
	Accounting Fees & Tax Reporting	900
	Bank Charges, Contingencies and Miscellaneous	313
	Flood Warning Service Equipment Maintenance, Repair, and Rental	1,883
	Flood Warning Service Education and Meetings	3,668
	Equipment	0
	CHIT Training and Reference Materials	75
	Public Information & Education (PIE) - includes NOAA Weather Radios	<u>8,295</u>
	<b>Sub-Total</b>	\$ 17,754
	PSCIM	0
	NOAA/IFLOWS Grant	<u>60,464</u>
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$ 78,218</b>

<b>CASH ON HAND JANUARY 1, 2006</b>		<b>\$130,489</b>
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## 2005 FINANCIAL SUMMARY (continued)

### FORECAST 2006

#### ESTIMATED FUNDING:

Cash on Hand January 1, 2006	\$ 74,021
Chemung & Steuben Counties	15,400
Municipalities for Flood Warning	11,750
Interest Income	<u>1,400</u>
<b>Sub-Total</b>	\$ 102,571
PSCIM	473
NOAA/IFLOWS Grant	<u>55,995</u>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$ 159,039</b>

#### ESTIMATED EXPENDITURES:

Operating Costs for FWS	\$ 24,000
Equipment Reserve Fund	52,000
Training Fund	
FWS -	10,000
CHIT -	4,000
Public Information/Education (PIE)	<u>12,000</u>
<b>Sub-Total</b>	\$ 102,000
PSCIM Expenses	473
NOAA/IFLOWS Grant	<u>55,995</u>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$158,468</b>

**FORECASTED SURPLUS:** \$ 571

Joy Brewer  
Treasurer

## 2005 CONTRIBUTORS

The Board of Directors is grateful to the following local governments for their financial contributions to operating expenses of EES:

Chemung County

Steuben County

(T) Ashland

(V) Bath

(T) Big Flats

(T) Corning

(C) Elmira

(T) Elmira

(T) Erwin

(T) Horseheads

(T) Lindley

(T) Southport

(T) West Union

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CHEMUNG & STEUBEN COUNTIES**

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