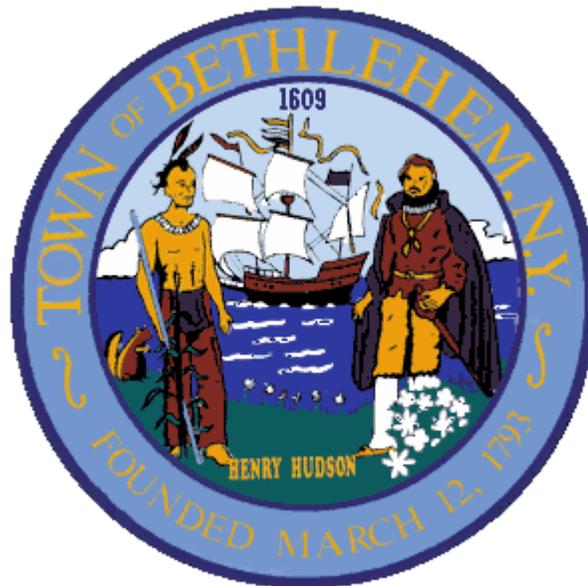


ANNEX 13

TOWN OF BETHLEHEM

EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT



INFORMATION PHONE LINE POLICIES & PROCEDURES

**EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT OFFICE
445 Delaware Ave., Delmar, New York 12054
518-439-4955
Fax 518-439-1699**

**David VanLuven
Supervisor**

**John E. Brennan
Director**

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Introduction:

Information is the lifeblood of good decisions. During normal time's erroneous information, or the lack of information, in general, can cause, create or exacerbate a simple problem and turn it into a major issue. During times of stress or where life or property safety issues are prevalent; timely, accurate and correct information is critical, and conversely, lack of information can escalate matters unnecessarily. Therefore, the Town of Bethlehem has undertaken an effort to insure that the flow of useful and relevant information is available to the public. This is necessary to allow the public full knowledge of the problem or situations at hand and the ability to make educated decisions, based on the most up to date and reliable information available.

History:

Over the years, the Town of Bethlehem has endeavored to keep its residents up-to-date as to issues of importance as they relate to the safety and well-being of the public. During times of public emergencies such as snow storms, power outages and other natural or manmade emergencies or disasters, the Town, and specifically the 911 Dispatch Center, has worked to answer these calls and the resulting questions, as to the situation at hand. While this may have worked on small or incidents of a short duration, it has not, nor will it work as is required, during events of a very serious or long term nature. This has proven to be the case during the last two seasonal storm events of 2007 and 2008. The problems of closed roads, power outages and other related issues during these two weather related events created an unacceptable situation for both the Town residents and Town government. The public was not getting the timely information they deserved and the emergency communications system was becoming critically overloaded. Discussions with the public pointed to a need for better and timelier information through a new source.

Expectation:

The distribution of critical information to the public during emergency situations must be accomplished in a manner that will allow reliable and timely information to reach the public without encumbering the emergency communications network. The method of transmitting this information must be fiscally responsible and manageable from both a personnel and process standpoint. The process itself must fall within the parameters of the system currently in place and it must be simply operated and managed. In addition, there should be no, or a minor, fiscal impact to the Town.

Activation/Deactivation:

The activation of the **Information Phone Line** will be at the discretion of the Supervisor, or designee. The Information Phone Line should be activated during times of emergency when information of the events at hand is required by the public for matters of their safety and wellbeing. The activation of the Information Phone Line and the level of implementation, as well as the deactivation of the system to the normal mode, will also be at the discretion of the Supervisor.

Execution:

The Town of Bethlehem **Information Phone Line** will be available to residents on a 24 hour per day, 365 days a year timeframe. The method and type of answering and/or response to a call will depend on the situation, event or emergency taking place at that time. The **Information Phone**

Line will be a dedicated extension (1999) which can be accessed by calling the main number of Town Hall, (518-439-4955).

Non-emergency, normal situations (working hours or after hours):

- The caller will be prompted to dial 1999 for the Information Phone Line or can dial 1999 directly.
- A recorded message will advise the caller that there is no information available at that time.

Emergency situations, non-critical time period, determined to not need in-person answering, (working hours or after hours):

- The caller will be prompted to dial 1999 for the Information Phone Line or can dial 1999 directly.
- The caller will hear a recorded, dated and timed message that will inform them of the most recent information and details of the event.

Emergency situations, critical time period, determined to need in-person answering, (working hours or after hours):

- The caller will be prompted to dial 1999 for the Information Phone Line, or can dial 1999 directly.
- The call will be answered by on-duty personnel who will advise of the most relevant information available at that time.
- Should the phone line be engaged, the caller will be prompted to hold and will be put into a queue for the next available answering station.

Implementation:

The process of implementing the Information Phone Line, when needed, will be twofold; the mechanics of the activation of the system including the hardware, software and steps taken to bring the system on line and; secondly, the personnel involvement and duties by staff to answer the residents questions.

Pre-Activation:

In normal non-emergency circumstances and prior to activation of the Information Phone Line, callers to Town Hall will not receive a prompt for the Information Phone Line or Extension **1999**. They can access Extension 1999 and will get a recording stating there is no information at this time.

System Activation/Deactivation:

When a situation, by reason of an emergency occurrence or a special need as deemed by the Supervisor, requires the activation of the **Information Phone Line** the following steps will be undertaken by the appropriate staff personnel:

- The appropriate announcement or script will be programmed into the phone system by the **Director of Administrative Services or Lead Information Specialist**, based on the day or evening timeframe noted below.
- The phone message or script heard when calling Town Hall will reference the Information Phone Line and prompt the caller to dial Extension 1999. (Vector 100, Announcement 2100-Daytime) or (Vector 100, Announcement 2101-evenings).

- Depending on the emergency situation at hand, the call will be answered by staff personnel (see following) or a pre-recorded message.
- If the situation is acceptable for the use of a pre-recorded message, an appropriate announcement or script will be recorded and loaded into the system by the Director of Administrative Services or Lead Information Specialist, with the latest and most current information and will notate the time of the information update.
- Information updates will be recorded and loaded into the system by the Director of Administrative Services or Lead Information Specialist, as circumstances dictates. This would also include a message or script for the deactivation of the Information Phone Line when appropriate.
- Should the emergency be of a nature that the Information Phone Line calls should be answered directly, phone answering station(s) will be located within Town Hall as required and directed. The location of these phones answering station(s) will be determined by the Supervisor or designee. The Director of Administrative Services, will make the necessary arrangement for the location of these answering stations and the necessary phone sets.

Personnel Processes:

Should the emergency threatening the Town be of such a nature that would necessitate information being transmitted to the public directly, the Supervisor will authorize Town personnel to answer the incoming Information Phone Line calls as required and for a duration and/or frequency as determined by the Supervisor or designee.

- The Town Supervisor, or designee, will approve the number of phone answering station(s) based on the severity of the situation. The Supervisor, or designee, will also advise the location for these answering stations within the building.
- Personnel for the answering stations will be supervised by the **Human Resources Department, Administrative Assistant**. This individual will act in a capacity as the **Lead Information Specialist** and will be responsible for recruitment of additional **Information Specialists** within the roster of employees within Town Hall or outside volunteers, as needed.
- The Lead Information Specialist will be periodically briefed on the emergency at hand by the **Director, BEMO** or designee and will transmit this information to the on-duty Information Specialists as is required.
- The Information Specialists will be provided an **Emergency Information Data Sheet**, which will contain up-to-date information on the emergency, which the Information Specialist can refer to as needed. This Emergency Information Data Sheet will be updated by Director, BEMO or designee as required to keep the relayed information timely and accurate.
- The Lead Information Specialist will maintain the time log of the Information Specialists work durations and will report this information to the Director, BEMO as necessary.
- The Lead Information Specialist and Information Specialists will be knowledgeable of the latest information pertaining to the emergency at hand and will impart this information to the callers in a professional, calm and caring manner.
- The on-duty time span for an Information Specialist will be based on the number of answering stations authorized and number of personnel available. However, care should be maintained that the Information Specialist should be given down-time rest periods as often as possible.

- As the emergency situation deactivates; the Lead Information Specialist will make sure that the Information Phone Line is switched to the recorded message script that is relevant to the time period.

Fiscal Impact:

While the fiscal impact for the response to an emergency or a disaster may be high, this cost must be weighed against the terrible impact of not responding in a manner that is expected by the residents. The costs associated with the response and recovery from an emergency event must be minimized and controlled, if possible. Along with the actual physical work of response, recovery and the continuation of governmental services, the availability and the dissemination of information during an event is critical and the cost of such work is part of the overall expense outlay.

Expected Expenses:

- There should be little to no expense associated with the pre-event planning and system setup.
- The cost of programming and the implementation of a working **Information Phone Line**, including multiple answering locations, message loading and system programming should be minimal.
- Personnel expenses for the Lead Information Specialist and Information Specialists, during working hours, will not be an impact since they will be drawn from regular on-duty employees.
- Personnel expense for the Lead Information Specialist and the Information Specialists, during after-hour timeframes will incur expenses based on the Town reimbursement policy for the repayment of after-hours or overtime remuneration.
- It should be noted while there may be some expected expenses based on personnel remuneration, the probability of instituting the live/direct feature of the **Information Phone Line** is remote.
- Should emergency circumstances require that the **Information Phone Line** be staffed, it should be understood that most probably the Town will have declared that an emergency situation exists and that the probability of FEMA reimbursements would be requested.
- **Based on the above points, the overall cost for activation of the Information Phone Line will be minimal, if at all.**

The need for the public to have accurate and timely information is an important part of the role of government and it becomes even more critical during times of emergencies. The Town of Bethlehem Information Phone Line will fill part of this obligation to inform the public of its “Right To Know.”

06/02/2011
Information Phone Line