

Wise + Burkholder

10 pages

THE ROLE OF COUNTY EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AT THE CAMP HILL
STATE CORRECTIONAL INSTITUTION INCIDENT

Testimony of Cumberland County Office of Emergency Preparedness.

J. Theodore Wise, Executive Director

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GOOD AFTERNOON, MR. CHAIRMAN AND MEMBERS OF THE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE. FOR THE RECORD OF INTRODUCTION MY NAME IS J. THEODORE WISE, I AM THE DIRECTOR OF THE CUMBERLAND COUNT OFFICE OF EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS AND WITH ME TODAY IS BETH A. BURKHOLDER, THE EMS COORDINATOR FROM MY STAFF.

WE HAVE JOINTLY PREPARED THIS TESTIMONY IN AN EFFORT TO BRIEFLY DESCRIBE THE ROLE OF COUNTY EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AT THE CAMP HILL STATE CORRECTIONS INSTITUTION. THE THRUST OF OUR TESTIMONY IS BASED ON THE EXPERIENCES AND OBSERVATIONS WE SHARED DURING OUR CONTINUOUS INVOLVEMENT IN CARRYING OUT THE MISSION AS WE PERCEIVED IT TO BE.

DAY 1: OCTOBER 25, 1989

INITIAL REPORTS OF THE SITUATION AT SCI WERE GENERATED BY CORRECTIONS OFFICIALS TO THE COMMUNICATIONS CENTER OF CUMBERLAND COUNTY. REQUESTING FIRE AND AMBULANCE TO RESPOND TO THE REAR GATE AND STANDBY BECAUSE OF A RIOT SITUATION. AT THAT POINT, THE COMMUNICATION CENTER DISPATCHED THE APPROPRIATE EMERGENCY SERVICES, IN ACCORDANCE WITH ESTABLISHED RESPONSE PLANS ON FILE. NOTIFICATION WAS MADE TO MY OFFICE OF THE EVENT AND THE ACTIONS BEING INITIATED.

THE OFFICE OF EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS' INITIAL EFFORTS WERE TO PROVIDE SUPPORT TO EACH OPERATION BY COORDINATING COMMUNICATIONS COMMAND AND THE ALLOCATION OF RESOURCES FROM THE COMMUNICATIONS CENTER. THIS ACTION REQUIRED INCREASE IN STAFF AT THE COMMUNICATION CENTER AND DEPLOYING PERSONNEL TO THE SCENE.

FROM THIS POINT AND THROUGHOUT THE COURSE OF THE DAY, THE MAJOR PROBLEM ENCOUNTERED WAS THE FRAGMENTATION OF INCIDENT COMMAND. LOCAL AUTHORITIES ASSUMED COMMAND OF ALL FORCES ON THE PRIMARY AND SECONDARY PERIMETERS. DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS AND PENNSYLVANIA STATE POLICE ASSUMED RESPONSIBILITY FOR ALL ACTIONS INSIDE THE FACILITY. BECAUSE OF THIS SEPARATION AND LACK OF UNIFIED INCIDENT COMMAND, DEPLOYMENT OF RESOURCES AND OTHER RESPONSE REQUIREMENTS WERE SUBJECT TO INDEPENDENT AND MANY TIMES CONTRADICTING ASSIGNMENTS.

ORGANIZATION OF LOCAL RESOURCES REQUIRED THE ESTABLISHMENT OF SECTOR COMMANDS, CONSISTING OF POLICE, FIRE, AND EMS OPERATIONS. MANAGEMENT OF THESE CONTROLLED OPERATIONS REMAINED WITH AND WAS PROFESSIONALLY CARRIED OUT BY LOCAL AUTHORITIES. WITH AN INCIDENT COMMAND SYSTEM IN PLACE AND EFFECTIVELY FUNCTIONING, THE EFFORTS OF EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS WERE DIRECTED TOWARD ASSISTING LOCAL TOWNSHIP OFFICIALS IN THE PREPARATION AND RELEASE OF PUBLIC INFORMATION.

ATTEMPTS WERE MADE ON SEVERAL OCCASIONS TO COORDINATE THE RELEASE OF INFORMATION CONCERNING COMMUNITY SAFETY AND THE COMMUNITY RESPONSE TO THE INCIDENT. OUR EFFORTS AND MUTUAL CONCERNS WERE EXPRESSED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS ON BEHALF OF THE LOCAL TOWNSHIP OFFICIALS. OUR ATTEMPTS TO HAVE A JOINT PRESS RELEASE ISSUED WERE UNSUCCESSFUL; THEREFORE, OUR STATEMENT WAS PREPARED AND RELEASED WITHOUT INFORMATION GENERATED BY THE DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS. CONVERSELY, THE INFORMATION RELEASED BY THE DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS DID NOT ADEQUATELY ADDRESS THE CONCERNS OF THE LOCAL ELECTED AND APPOINTED OFFICIALS.

SHORTLY AFTER 2400 HOURS IT WAS REPORTED THAT THE INCIDENT WAS SQUELCHED AND THAT A LOCK DOWN OF INMATES WAS OCCURRING. IN RESPONSE TO THIS INFORMATION, LOCAL AUTHORITIES ORDERED ALL FORCES TO STAND DOWN AND GO IN-SERVICE. THESE ACTIONS WERE ACCOMPLISHED BY 0200 HOURS

OCTOBER 26, 1989.

DAY 2: OCTOBER 26, 1989

SHORTLY AFTER 1900 HOURS I RECEIVED A CALL THAT THE FACILITY WAS AGAIN OUT OF CONTROL, BUT WORSE THAN THE PREVIOUS NIGHT. I RESPONDED BY INSTRUCTING THE COMMUNICATIONS CENTER TO DUPLICATE THE INITIAL ACTIONS IMPLEMENTED THE NIGHT BEFORE. OBVIOUSLY WITH OUR PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE, THE OFFICE OF EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS WAS ABLE TO DEPLOY THE RESOURCES IN A MUCH MORE EXPEDIENT MANNER. THEREFORE, EMS, FIRE, AND POLICE SECTORS WERE QUICKLY OPERATIONAL.

UPON ARRIVAL, I LEARNED THAT CONDITIONS WITHIN THE PRISON WERE OUT OF CONTROL, AND THE INTERIOR OF THE FACILITY WAS IN FACT OVERRUN. AT THIS POINT IT WAS CLEAR THAT ALL COMMAND AND CONTROL WOULD BE EXTERIOR AND THAT THE STATE POLICE HAD ASSUMED ALL AUTHORITY FOR CONTROL OPERATIONS. THE OFFICE OF EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS CONCENTRATED THEIR OPERATIONS ON REINFORCING OUR INITIAL ACTIONS AND DETERMINING THE REQUIREMENTS FOR LONG TERM OPERATIONS.

A CONFERENCE WAS HELD TO PROVIDE A BRIEFING OF ALL PARTICIPANTS TO ESTABLISH THESE LONG TERM OPERATIONS. AS A RESULT OF THIS BRIEFING, IT WAS DETERMINED THAT WE WOULD "STAND DOWN" ALL INTERIOR OPERATIONS AND MAINTAIN OUR PERIMETER LIGHTING ASSIGNMENTS. IN ADDITION, EMS OPERATIONS WOULD REMAIN AT FULL ALERT STATUS. EMS COMMAND PROCEEDED TO ESTABLISH A BILLETING TENT, HEATERS, AND ROTATING SHIFTS TO ENSURE CONTINUOUS OPERATIONS. POLICE AND FIRE COMMAND ASSUMED RESPONSIBILITY TO MAINTAIN PERSONNEL SHIFTS AND LIFE SUPPORT DURING THIS STAND DOWN PORTION OF THE INCIDENT.

COMMENCING AT APPROXIMATELY 0600 HOURS AND THROUGHOUT THE COURSE OF THE INCIDENT SECTOR COMMANDS WERE INVOLVED IN MAINTAINING OPERATIONAL PROCEDURES. THE OFFICE OF EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS' ROLE IN EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES WAS AT THIS POINT MINIMIZED BECAUSE PENNSYLVANIA EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY HAD ARRIVED ON THE SCENE AND ASSUMED LIAISON RESPONSIBILITIES RELATING TO THE INCIDENT. THE OFFICE'S ROLE WAS NOW TO ASSURE SECTOR OPERATIONS AND PROVIDE RESOURCES AS NECESSARY.

THE TESTIMONY PROVIDED THUS FAR VERY BRIEFLY DESCRIBES THE ROLE OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AT THE CAMP HILL STATE CORRECTIONAL INSTITUTION DISTURBANCE.

THE DIFFICULTIES ENCOUNTERED FROM THE INITIAL RESPONSE BEGAN AND CONTINUED THROUGHOUT THE INCIDENT BECAUSE THE ENTIRE SITUATION LACKED A UNIFIED INCIDENT COMMAND SYSTEM.

BEFORE I PROCEED, LET ME EXPLAIN THE TERM UNIFIED INCIDENT COMMAND SYSTEM. INCIDENT COMMAND SYSTEM IS A RECOGNIZED NATIONAL STANDARD OF OPERATIONS THAT PROVIDES A MEANS FOR THE COMBINATION OF FACILITIES, EQUIPMENT, PERSONNEL, PROCEDURES, AND COMMUNICATIONS OPERATING WITHIN A COMMON ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE WITH RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE MANAGEMENT OF ASSIGNED RESOURCES TO EFFECTIVELY ACCOMPLISH STATED OBJECTIVES PERTAINING TO AN INCIDENT.

IN SIMPLE LANGUAGE, THIS MEANS THAT REPRESENTATIVES FROM ALL OPERATING FORCES ARE COLLECTIVELY OPERATING IN A MANNER THAT PERMITS THE EXCHANGE OF INFORMATION FROM THE TOP LEVEL DECISION MAKERS TO THE OPERATING PERSONNEL IN THE FIELD. IT IS A SYSTEM THAT INSURES THAT THE REQUESTS FOR RESOURCES ARE DIRECTED THROUGH AN APPROPRIATE SYSTEM SO THAT DUPLICATION IS AVOIDED AND ACCOUNTABILITY IS MAINTAINED. IT IS A SYSTEM THAT INSURES THAT THOSE AT THE OPERATIONAL LEVEL ARE CONSTANTLY INFORMED OF THE ACTIONS PLANNED, INITIATED AND COMPLETED.

HAD SUCH A SYSTEM BEEN ESTABLISHED AT THIS INCIDENT MUCH OF THE CONFUSION AND FRUSTRATION EXPERIENCED BY THOSE PERSONNEL AT THE OPERATIONAL LEVEL WOULD HAVE BEEN ELIMINATED. THE ADMINISTRATION WOULD HAVE HAD A CLEAR UNDERSTANDING OF THE ACTIONS OCCURRING BY ALL AGENCIES INVOLVED AT THE FACILITY. AND RECOVERY FROM THIS INCIDENT WOULD HAVE BEEN MUCH MORE MANAGEABLE FOR ALL PARTIES INVOLVED.

PERTINENT INFORMATION WAS NOT DISSEMINATED FROM THOSE AUTHORITIES INVOLVED TO THE INCIDENT SECTOR COMMANDERS. CONSEQUENTLY, CRITICAL OPERATIONAL DECISIONS COULD NOT BE EXECUTED IN A TIMELY FASHION.

AS AN EXAMPLE, THE EMS SECTOR WAS ADVISED THAT THERE WERE APPROXIMATELY 200 INJURED WITHIN THE CONFINES OF THE FACILITY. THEREFORE, OPERATIONAL CONSIDERATIONS WERE MADE TO DEAL WITH NUMBERS THAT EXCEEDED ACTUAL CASUALTIES. THIS RESULTED IN EXCESSIVE RESOURCE DEPLOYMENT AND UNDER-UTILIZATION OF ON-SCENE RESOURCES. SECTOR OPERATIONS WERE DISRUPTED ON NUMEROUS OCCASIONS BECAUSE OF REQUEST FOR SERVICES AND MATERIAL WERE NOT COORDINATED FROM INCIDENT COMMAND TO SECTOR AUTHORITY.

THOSE INJURED OR IN NEED OF EMS SERVICES ARE FORTUNATE IN THAT PRIOR TO THIS INCIDENT A MASS CASUALTY INCIDENT PLAN HAD BEEN DEVELOPED. A MASS CASUALTY RESPONSE TEAM HAD BEEN ESTABLISHED, AND THAT THE PLAN, THE MCIRT TEAM AND THE OPERATIONAL PROCEDURES HAD BEEN DISSEMINATED TO THE EMS SYSTEM COMMUNITY.

COORDINATION OF FIRE ACTIVITIES WAS ALSO HANDICAPPED BECAUSE OF THE FRAGMENTED COMMAND AND LACK OF UNIFIED INCIDENT COMMAND STRUCTURE. THE FIRE CHIEF RESPONDED AND OPERATED IN STANDARD PROCEDURE. HOWEVER, WHEN APPARATUS AND OTHER RESOURCES WERE REQUESTED THE DEPLOYMENT OF THOSE RESOURCES WERE REDIRECTED TO OTHER ASSIGNMENTS ONCE THEY ENTERED THE FACILITY. THESE ALTERNATE ACTIONS WERE NOT COORDINATED WITH SECTOR AUTHORITY OR THE SERVICES DIRECTLY. AS A RESULT, BOTH PERSONNEL AND EQUIPMENT WERE NEEDLESSLY EXPOSED TO THE ACTIONS OF THE INMATES.

COORDINATION OF POLICE SERVICES WAS VERY DIFFICULT ON DAY 1 OF THE INCIDENT BECAUSE THOSE IN AUTHORITY WERE INSIDE THE FACILITY AT THE CENTRAL CONTROL. DURING THE REMAINDER OF THE INCIDENT EITHER BY LIAISON OR DIRECT CONTACT WITH THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE POLICE OPERATIONS ROOM THE UTILIZATION OF LOCAL POLICE FORCES WAS COORDINATED BETWEEN THE STATE POLICE, LOCAL POLICE, THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY'S OFFICE AND OTHER STATE AGENCIES.

I COULD ELABORATE MORE EXTENSIVELY ON PERTINENT ACTIONS TAKEN OR NOT TAKEN AS IT RELATES TO THE LACK OF INCIDENT COMMAND DURING THIS SITUATION. I HAVE BEEN VERY BRIEF ONLY BECAUSE THOSE LOCAL AUTHORITIES IN COMMAND OF THEIR RESPECTIVE SECTOR ARE BETTER QUALIFIED TO SPEAK ON THE SPECIFICS OF THEIR INCIDENT.

THE ROLE OF COUNTY EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT IN THESE KINDS OF INCIDENTS IS USUALLY LIMITED TO OVERALL COORDINATION AND SUPPORT OF LOCAL OPERATIONS. WHEN THE PENNSYLVANIA EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY IS ACTIVATED, THE ROLE OF MY OFFICE CHANGES DRASTICALLY. MY ROLE THEN BECOMES OPERATIONAL TO SERVE THE COORDINATION EFFORT OF PEMA.

THE PENNSYLVANIA EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY ARRIVED LATE THURSDAY NIGHT OCTOBER 26, 1989. IT BECAME EVIDENT THAT THEIR INTENT WAS TO BEGIN AN ACTIVE LIAISON WITH THE DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS, STATE POLICE, OTHER STATE AGENCIES AND MY OFFICE. CONSEQUENTLY, I BECAME MORE DISTANT TO THE OVERALL OPERATIONS AT THE FACILITY.

THIS RESULTED IN PROBLEMS THAT STILL LINGER TODAY. IT BECAME MORE DIFFICULT TO OBTAIN ACCESS TO PLANS OR ACTIVITIES SUCH AS THE UTILIZATION OF THE NATIONAL GUARD, THE PROVISION FOR BASIC LIFE SUPPORT SERVICES AND THE COORDINATION OF RESOURCES. THESE PROBLEMS WERE NOT BECAUSE PEMA AND OUR OFFICE WERE NOT IN COMMUNICATIONS. BUT, BECAUSE IT BECAME MORE OF A STATE OPERATION AND RESPONSIBILITY.

THE PROBLEMS THAT STILL LINGER TODAY NOT ONLY AFFECT THE TERMINATION OF OUR INVOLVEMENT AT THE CAMP HILL INSTITUTION, THEY MAY HAVE LONG LASTING IMPACT ON THE REQUIRED PLANNING AND OPERATIONS AT OTHER PRISONS AND STATE OPERATED FACILITIES THROUGHOUT THE COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA.

OUR OFFICE IS STILL INVOLVED IN THE RECOVERY PHASE OF THIS INCIDENT. WE FIND OURSELVES AT A POINT OF CONTROVERSY IN TERMS OF THE RIGHTFUL REIMBURSEMENT OF EXPENSES AND SERVICES PROVIDED BY THE LOCAL EMERGENCY SERVICES.

AS SUCH, I WOULD LIKE TO TAKE THIS OPPORTUNITY TO EXPRESS MY CONCERNS AND MAKE A RECOMMENDATION THAT THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY NOT ONLY INVESTIGATE THE OPERATIONS OF THE RESPONSE AGENCIES TO THE CAMP HILL INSTITUTION. I WOULD RECOMMEND THAT THEY ALSO ADDRESS THE RECOVERY PHASE OF THIS OPERATION WITH CONSIDERATION TOWARDS THE DEVELOPMENT AND PASSAGE OF LEGISLATION THAT WOULD PROVIDE DIRECT AND SPECIFIC STATE DISASTER ASSISTANCE. THIS LEGISLATION SHOULD PROVIDE AID AND FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE TO LOCAL MUNICIPALITIES, EMERGENCY SERVICES, BUSINESSES AND STATE AGENCIES. IT WOULD ESTABLISH REGULATIONS AND REIMBURSEMENT PROCEDURES FOR THE PROCESS OF RECOVERY FROM NATURAL OR MAN-MADE DISASTERS ON A CONTINUOUS BASIS. CURRENTLY, NO PROGRAM EXISTS THAT PROVIDES AID TO THE CITIZENS, THE STATE AGENCIES OR THE LOCAL MUNICIPALITIES AND THEIR EMERGENCY SERVICES UNLESS AN INCIDENT QUALIFIES FOR FEDERAL ASSISTANCE.

AGAIN, ON BEHALF OF MYSELF AND MS. BURKHOLDER, WE WISH TO THANK YOU MR. CHAIRMAN AND MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE FOR THIS OPPORTUNITY TO PROVIDE THIS TESTIMONY. EITHER I OR MS. BURKHOLDER WOULD BE GLAD TO ANSWER ANY QUESTIONS YOU MAY HAVE.