

My name is Michael Minnier. I am the Fire Chief for Loyalsock Volunteer Fire Company #1. I have been a member of the fire company for the past twenty-two years. Additionally, I currently serve as the Fire Chief and have held that position for the past five years. I would like to thank you for the opportunity to discuss an incident that occurred recently in Loyalsock Township and an example of the effects of the change in location of the PA State Police helicopter from the Williamsport Regional Airport to Hazleton has for the local fire company.

On Thursday May 24, 2012 at 9:17 PM the fire company was dispatched by the Lycoming County Communications Center to the Greevy Boat Launch, 2899 Greevy Road Montoursville PA 17754 for a lost kayaker. PSP, boats from other local fire companies and the Fish and Game were dispatched to the incident.

At 9:24 PM I arrived on the scene along with PSP. I established command and met with the reporting source, whom was the mother of the kayaker. I received information from the mother that her 16 year old son had been out on the river for approximately one hour and not been heard from.

At 9:25 PM I requested that the Montoursville Fire Department be dispatched to the boat launch at Mill Street to assist in the search and possible rescue. This launch is about one to two miles downstream from our location and could give us a visual of that area.

I then spoke with one of the PSP Trooper on scene and advised him of what units were dispatched and the information obtained from the mother. PSP advised me that their helicopter was dispatched and responding but was a ways out, about one hour till it would be here. I stated to the Trooper that I would ask the communications center to check the availability of the Geisinger helicopter to see if it was at the Williamsport Regional Airport and see if they would assist in the search. This request was made at 9:31 PM.

At 9:35 PM I was advised that the Geisinger helicopter does not normally do searches but would check with their supervisor. At 9:42 I was advised that they would not respond.

At 9:45 PM I was advised that the kayaker had called his mother and was at the boat launch in Muncy PA and was okay.

This incident had a happy ending. Time is of the essence when we do a search, whether it is on the river or on the ground. The PSP helicopter while stationed at the Williamsport Regional Airport has played a vital role to not only my community but others in this county and surrounding counties. It offers safety to the public due to quick response and the specialized search equipment available to locate lost children and adults in a timely manner. Not only does it assist in searches but it has also been the first reporting source and gives up a size up for forest/wild fires in this county. To me it played a vital role for the fire services while it was stationed at the Williamsport Regional Airport.

I ask that the Commonwealth reconsider and return the PSP helicopter to the Williamsport Regional Airport.

Thank you for allowing me to speak on this vital issue and for your time and consideration of this Public Safety issue.