Series of Winter Storms Impacts Montgomery County

After a nearly snow-less winter of 2019-2020 and a relatively quiet December 2020 and January 2021 (excluding a snow event on Dec. 16-17), a weather pattern developed that brought a seemingly endless sequence of winter storms to Montgomery County throughout the month of February. The month opened with a blockbuster storm that brought winter precipitation for more than 48 hours straight and led to accumulations of over a foot of snow at the Emergency Operations Center in Eagleville (12.5”), as well as in several other locations around the County. Four more significant storms would follow, two of which consistently dropped more than 6” of snow in numerous communities across the area.

The following chart shows the top snowfall totals in Montgomery County for each of the major February 2021 storms, as reported by the National Weather Service:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Jan 31st – Feb 2nd</th>
<th>Feb 7th</th>
<th>Feb 10th – 11th</th>
<th>Feb 17th – 19th</th>
<th>Feb 22nd</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Ambler (15.1”)</td>
<td>Lansdale (9.0”)</td>
<td>Norristown (3.4”)</td>
<td>West Conshohokchen (10.8”)</td>
<td>Skippack (5.5”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Trappe / Upper Dublin [tie] (15.0”)</td>
<td>Valley Forge (8.5”)</td>
<td>Plymouth Meeting (2.6”)</td>
<td>Conshohokchen (10.7”)</td>
<td>Norristown (5.4”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Royersford (8.0”)</td>
<td>King of Prussia / Lansdale / New Hanover / Willow Grove [tie] (7.7”)</td>
<td>Norristown (10.2”)</td>
<td>Plymouth Meeting (4.9”)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Valley Forge (14.7”)</td>
<td>Norristown (7.7”)</td>
<td>Willow Grove / Abington [tie] (2.3”)</td>
<td>Franconia (4.6”)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Skippack (14.5”)</td>
<td>Harleysville (7.5”)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Pennsburg (4.5”)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data provided courtesy of Joe Miketta, Warning Coordination Meteorologist, National Weather Service – Mt. Holly.

This chart does not include the less significant but nonetheless hazardous winter weather events that occurred on Monday, February 8th (light snow), Saturday, February 13th into Sunday, February 14th (freezing rain/ice), and Monday, February 15th into Tuesday, February 16th (freezing rain/ice). In addition, temperatures remained very cold with six Code Blue declarations and extensions covering 413 of the 672 hours in the month (61.5%). If looking only at days on or before February 21st, 81.9% of hours were spent under a Code Blue advisory. Spring cannot come soon enough!
Fire Academy to Offer Water Rescue Refresher Training

Are you trained to the Operations or Technician Level in Water Rescue? Has it been a while since you have actually used or practiced the skills you learned during your initial training? If you answered yes to these questions, the Montgomery County Fire Academy has two upcoming courses that may be of interest to you:

- Water Rescue Operations Level Refresher – Saturday, April 17th
- Water Rescue Technician Level Refresher – Sunday, April 18th

These 8-hour refresher courses build upon the skills learned in the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Water Rescue and Emergency Response and Advanced Line Systems Rescue courses. The programs include a brief dry-land review and plenty of in-water time to perfect skills and learn additional techniques not found in the Fish and Boat curriculum.

Students must bring a wet or dry suit (dry suit required for Technician Level Refresher), Type III or V USCG PFD with whistle and knife, water rescue helmet, river shoes or boots, two locking carabiners, throw bag, and gloves appropriate for water rescue use.

To enroll in either of these courses (or any courses offered by MCFA), fill out this registration form: https://www.montcopa.org/DocumentCenter/View/26146/MCFA-Registration-2020. For more information, contact Rob Carovillano, Rescue Training Coordinator, at rcarovillano@montcopa.org.

Montgomery County Continues Vaccinations for First Responders

As of close of business on Tuesday, February 23rd, the Department of Public Safety, in coordination with the Montgomery County Office of Public Health, had administered 2,328 first doses and 1,809 second doses of the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine to police, fire, and EMS personnel at the Public Safety Training Campus.

Clinics are being announced through Countywide chiefs’ associations and via Everbridge as soon as Department of Public Safety staff are notified of available doses. Any active first responder employed by or volunteering for a Montgomery County law enforcement, fire, or Emergency Medical Services agency who has not yet received the first dose of the vaccine and is interested in doing so should contact Public Affairs Coordinator Todd Stieritz at tstierit@montcopa.org. Your email will be added to a list to be notified when the next clinic becomes available.

Responders will have to complete a pre-screening survey, provide an agency point of contact for verification of active membership or employment, and show an agency ID, badge, or alternate proof of employment or status to gain access to the vaccination clinic. The Department of Public Safety and Office of Public Health ask for continued patience as we strive to vaccinate our critical workforce as quickly as possible.
Department of Public Safety Personnel Changes

Madison Sehn is the new Health and Safety Specialist at the Department of Public Safety. Madi is a recent graduate from Drexel’s Master of Public Health program where she studied community health and preventive medicine. She began volunteering as an EMT at 16 for Whitemarsh Ambulance and continued working as an EMT in South Jersey at Stone Harbor Fire Department. She also has served as an Ocean Rescue Lifeguard and EMT for Cape May Beach Patrol for the past 8 summers. Madi’s public health education along with her experience as an EMT and first responder will allow her to bring a health-centric perspective to emergency management. She will coordinate and collaborate public health initiatives with Montgomery County’s first responder departments in efforts of creating a healthier and safer work environment.

msehn@montcopa.org
(610) 631-6500
Emergency Operations Center

ReadyRadio Spots Available for First Responder Agencies

The Department of Public Safety’s ReadyRadio FM radio station now has spots available for Montgomery County police, fire, EMS, and emergency management agencies that would like to advertise for recruitment or special events or run other public safety or public service content.

ReadyRadio is one of the only countywide FM radio networks in the United States that airs public safety/emergency management information (not scanner traffic) on a 24-hour basis. The main studio is located at the Emergency Operations Center in Eagleville, and airs over four FM frequencies broadcasting from five tower sites:

- WRDY – 106.5 FM (Eagleville)
- WEMA – 105.7 FM (Marlborough)
- WEMZ – 105.7 FM (Plymouth)
- WEMK – 92.9 FM (Upper Gwynedd/Lansdale)
- WEMQ – 92.1 FM (Horsham/Fort Washington)

The broadcast signal reaches an estimated 80 percent of Montgomery County residents in their homes and vehicles. ReadyRadio is also streamed online at https://radio.securenetsystems.net/cirruscontent/MCDPS.

During incidents or disasters, trained Department of Public Safety staff have the ability to broadcast “live” from the Emergency Operations Center with critical information. We will also share news and updates from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, our neighboring cities and counties, and all 62 municipalities within Montgomery County.

If your agency is interested in airing content, contact Roy Land (rland@montcopa.org). For more information about ReadyRadio, visit www.montcopa.org/3281/Ready-Radio.
US&R Team Completes Ice Rescue Training

On Saturday, February 13th, several members of the Montgomery County Urban Search & Rescue (US&R) Team completed their annual ice rescue refresher training on the frozen waters of a pond at Jeffersonville Golf Club in West Norriton Township. The rescue technicians utilized a variety of equipment and techniques to practice rescuing victims from the ice and cold water.

If you are thinking about venturing out to skate or fish on the ice in the coming days, please keep these helpful tips from our partners at the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission in mind:

1) Always wear a lifejacket while on the ice.
2) Never go out on ice alone.
3) Never walk or skate on ice that has formed over moving water such as a river or stream.
4) When arriving at the water's edge, visually survey the ice. Look for newer, stronger ice, which is clear or has a blue tint. Also, watch for cracks, open water areas, and signs of recent changes in water levels. Remember that ice thickness is not consistent across the surface of the lake or pond.
5) If you see someone experiencing an emergency on the ice or in cold water, immediately dial 9-1-1.

Many thanks to the Jeffersonville Golf Club and West Norriton Township for making this valuable training opportunity happen. If you’re interested in learning more about the Montgomery County US&R Team, visit https://www.montcopa.org/3025/Urban-Search-Rescue-Team or contact Assistant Director for Emergency Management Operations Bill Messerschmidt at wmessers@montcopa.org.
February Incidents and Events

On Tuesday, February 2nd at approximately 1:30 PM, Department of Public Safety staff measured 12.5” of snow outside of the Emergency Operations Center. The flakes had started falling around mid-day on Sunday, January 31st and continued for more than 48 hours, leading to totals of more than a foot in 14 measurement locations around Montgomery County.

Many thanks to the Lower Providence Fire Department, Lower Providence Emergency Medical Service, and Lower Providence Township Police Department for responding to investigate a small fire in the garage outside the Emergency Operations Center on Monday, February 8th. The fire was isolated to a heater and caused no further damage.

On Saturday, February 20th, the Department of Public Safety’s Tactical Communications and Emergency Management Teams responded to the 2900 block of Swede Road in East Norriton Township with Field Comm 3 and other support assets to assist with the response to a shooting.

Photo courtesy of the East Norriton Township Police Dept.
Radio System Transition Continues

The Department of Public Safety is preparing to remove the old radio system from mobile and portable radios in the field, while performing some other upgrades to the radios. In the coming weeks, Department staff will be reaching out to individual agencies to schedule this programming. There is no need to reach out to MCDPS regarding this initiative. Once we are ready, we will contact all of the necessary users.

On the day of your re-programming appointment, please ensure that:

- The portable and mobile radios are easily accessible;
- All accessories (speaker mics, cases, etc.) are removed from the radios;
- The side programming/accessory port cover is removed from all portable radios; and,
- All portable radios batteries are charged.

Each portable radio will take approximately five (5) minutes to fully program and each mobile will take approximately 20 minutes. During programming, any favorites stored in the ‘Favorites’ bank of each radio will be cleared out and need to be re-programmed by your agency personnel (an instruction sheet will be provided to assist).

Thank you in advance for your flexibility and willingness to work with us on this project.

Cradlepoint Modem Deployment Continues

The Department of Public Safety has received another batch of modems and antennas for emergency responder vehicles acquired through the Homeland Security Grant Program. Department staff have so far deployed a total of 415 modems to about 40 police departments, approximately 290 of which are already installed and in use. This batch of modems allows the Department to outfit the remainder of police units throughout Montgomery County.

Our goal is to issue new modems and antennas to the remaining police departments who have not yet received new equipment. If your police department has not yet submitted the below information, please do so as soon as possible.

In order to receive the new modems, please email the following information to DPSCADHelp@montcopa.org:

- Agency name
- Agency contact(s) who are authorized to sign for and pick up equipment for the agency
- Vehicle list with car numbers of vehicles currently equipped with Sierra Wireless modems

All responder agencies are required to switch to these new modems as the Sierra Wireless modems are end-of-life and are no longer being repaired by the manufacturer.

The modems and antennas are being provided free of charge in a 1-for-1 swap for the old Sierra Wireless modems. Agencies are responsible for installation charges and carrier data plans. These new modems and antennas provide better speed and
coverage as they capable of accessing all 4G frequencies, many of which had not been deployed by the cell carriers during initial Sierra Wireless deployment.

These new devices, along with upgrades made to our servers, now allow us to be carrier agnostic, meaning if another wireless carrier has better coverage in your response area, you are now able to utilize them. Agencies MUST advise the Department of Public Safety before any carrier changes are made and you MUST have a Cradlepoint installed before doing so. The Sierra Wireless modems are tied to Verizon and cannot be switched.

**Legacy Station Printout System to be Decommissioned**

The Department of Public Safety has been working with Motorola on updates to the Countywide alphanumeric paging system, which will no longer be able to support over-the-air station printing for fire and EMS after March 15, 2021. This change does not affect portable alphanumeric (“alpha”) pagers used for incident notification.

If your agency is still in need of paper printouts, they will, as of March 15th, be delivered exclusively via email. The same information contained in the legacy version of the incident printout will be sent via email and can be printed out locally if needed.

Please contact Fire & EMS Communications Manager Dennis Orangers at doranger@montcopa.org as soon as possible to start the transition process. Agencies making the switch should add mcdps@mcad911.com to their Safe Senders List or contacts list so that the printouts do not end up in Spam or Junk Mail folders.

If your agency already receives email printouts, no action is required. If your agency currently receives legacy printouts sent via alphanumeric paging technology but no longer has a need for incident printouts, no action is required, and your printouts will end on or around March 15th.

Daily and monthly emailed reports are not affected by this change. Any agency interested in these products may contact Dennis Orangers at doranger@montcopa.org for more information.

**Windows 7 End-of-Life for MDCs Announced**

The Department of Public Safety recently completed a Pennsylvania State Police CLEAN (Commonwealth Law Enforcement Assistance Network) Technical Audit. To maintain CLEAN and CJIS (Criminal Justice Information Services) Compliance, as of July 1, 2021, Windows 7 based Mobile Data Computers (MDCs) will no longer be permitted to connect to the Public Safety network for CAD or MPS (Mobile for Public Safety). All MDCs (police, fire and EMS) must be upgraded to Windows 10 Pro prior to this date.

If you are still using Windows 7 after June 30, 2021, your computer will be blocked from the network. If your hardware is aging, now is the time to start planning for replacements.

If your agency needs assistance with hardware specifications or upgrade assistance, please email DPSCADHelp@montcopa.org and Department of Public Safety – Technology Division staff will be happy to assist where possible.
COVID-19 Pandemic: Key Information for First Responders

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

The Department of Public Safety continues to fulfill critical need resource requests for first responder agencies during the COVID-19 crisis. As normal supply chains continue to come back online, please utilize your local procurement procedures prior to submitting resource requests. If you do have a critical PPE need, please submit all resource requests to EOCwatchdesk@montcopa.org.

Exposure Reporting Process

If you are a first responder (law enforcement, fire, EMS, or emergency management) and believe you were exposed to COVID-19 in the course of your duties, follow these steps:

1) Immediately notify your supervisor or agency infection control officer.

2) Avoid contact with others, maintain social distance (at least 6 feet), and self-monitor for symptoms (check temperature twice a day and watch for fever, cough, or shortness of breath). You will receive formal instructions to quarantine, if necessary, from the Montgomery County Office of Public Health.

3) Complete the First Responder Self-Report Form: http://episurvey.mcad911.com/EpiInfoWebSurvey/Home/a85581e8-ef39-478d-ad2c-76bbf1a44b50. This form is used to formally document the impact of COVID-19 on the community as well as document the source of a potential exposure.

4) Register to be tested. You can receive a test at any one of the 6 County-run test sites (https://data-montcopa.opendata.arcgis.com/pages/covid-testing-page), through your Primary Care Physician, or at a commercial lab.

First responders with exposure-related questions may contact EMS Field Specialist Ed Martin, Jr. (emartin@montcopa.org) or Chief Medical Officer and Regional EMS Medical Director Dr. Alvin Wang (awang@montcopa.org). With immediate concerns, call (610) 631-6500.