

CABELL COUNTY EMERGENCY SERVICES
INCIDENT/AFTER ACTION REPORT
CULLODEN CONTAMINATED WATER EVENT

INCIDENT

During the afternoon hours of January 9, 2014 A. Gordon Merry III, Director of Cabell County Emergency Services, began receiving reports, through local media outlets, of a Chemical Spill in the Elk River. Cabell County was not initially included in the affected area. But out of an abundance of caution Gordon Merry contacted Jerry Beckett, Cabell County Emergency Operations Planner, to discuss/make plans in the event the Cabell County became included in the emerging situation.

The information as it was known at that time was given to the Director of Communications for the City of Huntington, Brian Chambers, to place on "Heads Up Huntington".

Sometime later that evening a representative from the WV Governor's Office notified the Cabell County Commission that Cabell County had been included in the "spill event" and suggested that they notify the appropriate people in their county.

RESPONSE

January 9, 2014

The issues regarding affected water customers were restricted to the eastern portion of Cabell County, for that reason the Culloden Volunteer Fire Department was asked for their assistance in being a water distribution site. That evening the Huntington Area Food bank had been notified of the situation and a request made for bottled water. The Food Bank brought all the bottled water and Sports Drinks that they had on hand to the CVFD for distribution.

Cabell County Emergency Services brought a four hundred (400) gallon military "water buffalo" to the CVFD. This provided the ability to fill containers brought in by the public. The Town of Milton and Mayor Tom Canterbury were notified and a request was made for the Town of Milton Water Department to fill the "buffalo". (It should be noted that the Town of Milton Water Department supplied the water to fill this water buffalo as well as the WVANG water buffalo during this situation.)

Gordon Merry notified Sheriff Tom McComas of the developing situation and discussed the potential of problems/panic at the CVFD distribution site. Sheriff McComas immediately dispatched deputies to secure the water distribution site. These deputies remained at the distribution site for security until the site was closed.

Gordon Merry contacted the Cabell County Commission concerning the situation and response to that point. The Commission gave Mr. Merry the authorization to do what needed to be done to ensure the residents of the Culloden area had access to safe water.

The State of WV EOC had been stood up and communications were established between that entity and Cabell County. There was not a firm time line as to the arrival of water from state or FEMA resources.

JANUARY 10, 2014

Due to the lack of available water in Cabell and surrounding counties by private vendors a decision was made to send two Cabell County EMS employees to Louisa, KY to purchase bottled water and hand sanitizer. Since there was no estimated ETA on emergency sources, a Cabell County Sheriff's Department vehicle was loaded with the water and hand sanitizer and routed immediately to Culloden Volunteer Fire Department for distribution.

Gordon Merry and Sheriff McComas went to Eagle Distributing in west Huntington to explore the possibility of a donation of canned water from the Anheuser Busch Brewing Company. Representatives from Eagle were able to secure the contribution and the ETA would be Sunday morning January 12, 2014. Eagle paid for the shipping cost as well as providing staff and equipment to offload the 2200 cases canned water.

Several attempts were made to contact representatives of WV American Water with negative results.

Bottled water and a military "water buffalo" were delivered by the WV Army National Guard to the CVFD. These deliveries continued upon request during the duration of the situation.

JANUARY 11, 2014

Gordon Merry and Sheriff McComas drove two Sheriff's Department 5 ton trucks to Eagle Distributing to pick up the 2200 cases of canned water and delivered it to the CVFD for distribution.

JANUARY 12-18, 2014

CVFD maintained this distribution site passing out bottled water as provided by the State of WV/FEMA and delivered by the WVANG.

This report in no way documents all of the things that were done to ensure that the residence of eastern Cabell County had safe water rather the process by which the distribution site and water was obtained. While it would be impossible to mention all of the people, entities, and resources that assisted in this situation below is a list of some that did assist.

RESOURCES/ENTITIES UTILIZED INCLUDE

- Culloden Volunteer Fire Department and Staff - distribution site operations
- Culloden Elementary Staff - assisting with distributing water
- Huntington Area Food Bank - donation of bottled water/sport drinks
- Cabell County Sheriff's Department - site security and equipment
- Eagle Distributing - donation of canned water
- Hurricane Equipment - loaned a tow motor to off load palliated water
- Tower Grocery Store Culloden - loaned a floor jack to move water
- Cabell County Emergency Services - staff and equipment
- 84 Lumber Milton - off loaded water with their tow motor
- The Town of Milton and Mayor Tom Canterbury - provide water to residence of Culloden and filling of water buffalos. (Approximately 1600 gallons a day)
- WV Army National Guard Unit 1257 - transportation of bottled water

LESSONS LEARNED

The key component of success in any emergency situation is communication.

Attempts to contact representatives of WV American by Cabell County Emergency Services personnel were unsuccessful. Cabell County Emergency officials realize that our citizens were just a small part of this situation, however members of our emergency planning staff had dealt with a similar crisis in 1988 involving a chemical spill in Pittsburgh, PA. These staff members were present when a pipe from the Chessie System, formerly C & O Railroad, was used to supply water from an alternate source to the treatment plant in Huntington from the Guyandotte River. The Cabell County planning team felt that may be information not known to WV American Water and could have been beneficial to their staff.

Notifications of future emergency situations should be made directly to each County Director of Emergency Services.

This incident underscored the need for local governments to prepare to handle the situation for 48 to 72 hours before State and Federal assistance is available.