

# Environmental Emergency Services, Inc.

Chemung, Schuyler & Steuben Counties, NY



Volunteer Bill Dorman, with his daughter, accepted a Certificate of Merit from the New York State Assembly for Bill's volunteer work with EES and the Flood Warning Service.

## 2008 Annual Report

# **ENVIRONMENTAL EMERGENCY SERVICES, INC.**

## **2008 ANNUAL REPORT**

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## **MISSION STATEMENT ENVIRONMENTAL EMERGENCY SERVICES (EES)**

To advise and inform the populace of Chemung, Schuyler and Steuben Counties in an effort to reduce the adverse effects of severe flooding, drought and hazardous material incidents which contribute to environmental emergencies.

### **EES Responsibilities**

1. Provide local emergency response agencies with early warning information.
  2. Maintain communication and coordination among agencies, through its Board of Directors, who share concern for environmental issues.
  3. During emergencies maintain communication with local, state and federal partners.
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### **Mission Statement Flood Warning Service (FWS)**

To collect pertinent rainfall, climate and river data and to use this information to assist Emergency Management Offices (EMO) in determining areas of concern for potential high water or drought problems in Chemung, Schuyler and Steuben Counties.

### **FWS Responsibilities**

1. Provide the EMO in each county with accurate and updated severe weather information during flooding emergencies, whenever possible.
  2. Develop fail-safe communication links with the EMO in each county, with the National Weather Service, US Army Corps of Engineers and with the Region 8 NYS Department of Environmental Conservation.
  3. Organize, train and maintain a volunteer corps of rain gauge readers and a volunteer operational staff for the Gustina Emergency Operation Center.
  4. Maintain and service those sensors for rainfall, climate and river levels, which are under Flood Warning Service control.
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### **Mission Statement Chemical Hazard Information Team (CHIT)**

To provide chemical and safety information and guidance to local emergency responders in the event of hazardous material incidents.

### **CHIT Responsibilities**

1. Maintain a cadre of local specialists in related disciplines to assist emergency responders.
2. Provide funding and training opportunities for CHIT members and local emergency responders.
3. Supply specialized materials such as: software, equipment and a reference library.

January 8, 2008

## **TO OUR FRIENDS AND ASSOCIATES**

While 2008 was quiet from a flooding perspective, it was a year to prove that we should always be vigilant when it comes to flood preparedness and situational planning. Mid-year, an announcement from the US Army Corps of Engineers showed us how vulnerable our flood detection system really is. They announced that, due to funding constraints, they would not be able to support their portion (approximately \$250,000) of the river gauging system in the Chemung Basin. We all take for granted that the gauging network established by the US Geological Survey (USGS) is reliable and as stable as a Swiss watch. They operate the key forecast points throughout the Chemung Basin, as well as the gauges that the US Army Corps of Engineers uses to operate their water control dams throughout the area. The National Weather Service (NWS) uses these key forecast points to generate their flood forecasts and we all derive our travel times of a flood to our population centers from these gauges. A last minute agreement between the “Cooperators” in the Chemung Basin gauging system prevented the loss of these river gauges in 2009. However, the potential is still there to lose these same gauges all over again in 2010.

How can this be? To understand this we need to look at how the current gauging system is funded. The USGS Gauging network is funded as a “Cooperators” system. The USGS, along with the NWS, US Army Corps of Engineers, Susquehanna River Basin Commission (SRBC), and the States of New York and Pennsylvania (and anyone else with money) are all partners in this cooperative gauging program. This type of cooperator-based system appears to spread the funding load across many budgets. However, it also makes the system very vulnerable to cutbacks and pressures from many budgets. The ultimate responsibility for installation, operation, and maintenance of all these gauges lies totally with the USGS. However, the funding level from USGS is only about 25-30%, as opposed to the 50% share that was anticipated. The USGS has never been able to get funding up to that level. Therefore, they rely on other “Cooperators” to provide the majority of the funding necessary to keep the gauging and their own operations “up and running.” Unfortunately, this system leads to a situation in which every time one “Cooperator” has a funding issue, the USGS provides a list of those gauges that will be turned off. These are often the gauges that are most visible and most relied upon for flood forecast and warning. Because each gauge is dependent on this mixture of funding to survive, they are all at risk anytime there is a funding shortfall.

There have been many discussions and meetings to find solutions to this problem. There have been lists of key gauges and priorities in order to determine a hierarchy of need and survivability. New ways of finding and organizing “Cooperators” to support the funding needs of these gauges (and ultimately of USGS) are being discussed. However, the simplest and perhaps the best solution would be for the Federal Government to actually fund the USGS in order to maintain their operations. At least funding the USGS to the originally anticipated 50% share of the gauging would be a step in the right direction. Perhaps what we need is a gauging system “bail out” to support this vital system. In reality, the dollars required to fund the entire nationwide system would be only a minute percentage of the interest on the billions of dollars in bailouts currently proposed in the Federal Government. Everyone must contact their congressional representatives and tell them that we need full funding for the stream and river gauging system. Without that funding and without these

gauges, all the work we have done for flood preparedness over the last 40 years would be for naught.

Contrast the loss of gauging in the Chemung Basin with the ongoing activity that resulted from the 2006 flooding on the North Branch of the Susquehanna. That area is trying to add additional gauging to address their issues from this flood. The 2006 flood was on par with our 1972 flood. The communities impacted continue to struggle with stream maintenance issues, discussions about flood detection/flood warning, and debates over flood damage prevention techniques.

The issues surrounding the USGS gauging network reinforce our mission here at EES, which is to provide redundant river and stream gauges in order to back-up the primary gauging network and fill in data on the secondary tributaries. Our EES gauges allow for the inevitable “Murphy’s Law” that arises when a high-water event occurs and a gauge drops off line. There is always our data to back-up the primary gauge. However, our gauges are dependant on the gauge rating tables that are developed for the USGS stations. If these supporting data are not maintained, our stage numbers would become less valuable over time. On the positive side, our gauging system will allow us to weather a temporary reduction in the USGS network and our maintenance people have our system working very well. We have added a couple of additional gauges and have another slated for installation this year. Time and again, the years have proven that the founders of this organization had tremendous vision when they created our “self-help” flood warning organization.

The success of an organization is wholly dependant on those people who work behind the scenes to keep it going. EES is no different. We are blessed with a group of volunteers who continue to give of their time and talents. I want to recognize the members of our flood warning group who meet monthly to keep up to speed on flood operations and the changes in technology that we continue to throw at them. Thanks are also due to our CHIT volunteers, who participate in training and work on exercises to keep their expertise at the ready in case of a hazardous materials incident. Hats off to the maintenance team that keeps the EES gauges and computers running to the high levels of performance we have come to expect. And last, but surely not least, my management team, Joy Brewer, Scott Rodabaugh, and Janet Thigpen, three people who keep this organization running on an everyday basis. Genuine thanks to all.

Michael A. Sprague  
President – EES

## **MESSAGE FROM THE VICE PRESIDENT**

2008 thankfully continued the recent trend of “quiet” years with respect to flooding, drought or hazardous material emergency incidents. And for the Environmental Emergency Services (EES) organization, it also continued the trend of growing support from the local communities and counties it serves. That support can be measured not only by the financial contributions that EES receives, but far more importantly, by the ongoing strong dedication, interest, and involvement shown by local emergency management offices, industry, volunteers, and the coalition of agencies brought together under the EES umbrella. It is with that strong support that EES can continue to maximize the value of benefits realized in relation to dollars received. It is also with that support that the dollars spent are assuredly spent wisely.

If you wish to learn more about the EES organization and its history, please visit our website at [www.highwater.org](http://www.highwater.org). Also read carefully the reports prepared by our Flood Warning Service, Chemical Hazard Information Team, and Public Information & Education representatives.

In closing, I would like to again express thanks to our many volunteers and representatives from local agencies and industry for their countless hours and efforts in maintaining the EES organization’s preparedness for an environmental emergency event. I would also like to express my sincere gratitude to the President of EES, Mr. Michael Sprague, whose efforts are too often taken for granted. Mike has quietly guided the EES organization for nearly two decades (since 1991), and it is largely through his efforts and vision that EES has grown into the successful organization it is today. Thank you Mr. President!

Scott Rodabaugh  
Vice President – EES



EES climate station and lake level gauge on Keuka Lake.

## FLOOD WARNING SERVICE (FWS)

Again, a relatively uneventful year, but I'm not complaining. Other than one small flash flood event on September 28, this quiet has allowed the Flood Warning Service more time to prepare for the day that Mother Nature will rear her evil head. A couple of our new gauges got a workout with the September 28<sup>th</sup> rain event. The East Campbell precipitation gauge measured 3" of rain and the Hornby precipitation gauge read 2.4". Both gauges showed 1" of rainfall over a half-hour period from 8:00 a.m. to 8:30 a.m. During this event Meads Creek rose about 6 ½ feet at the Taft Road stream sensor (4 feet in one hour) and 5 ½ feet at the Meads Creek gauge (3 feet in one hour). It took about 2 hours for the heavy rainfall to reach the Taft Road gauge and about another hour to reach the Meads Creek gauge. This historical data will help us to use these new gauges in future events.

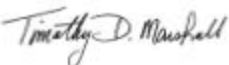
Routine maintenance was conducted throughout the year to keep the real-time gauge system ready for use. Tom Shugars replaced some of the transmitters at our climate stations, using new technology to improve the accuracy of future data. We also met with Corning Inc. and the Village of Addison to prepare the site for a new stream sensor on the Canisteo River below the confluence of Tuscarora Creek. When it's installed in 2009, this new gauge will provide real-time data on the Canisteo before it gets to the Erwin Valley area. During a June work bee, volunteers cleaned up the Emergency Operations Center, install new radio equipment, and installed the new DTN weather station. This work included changing antennas on the roof of the Corning Fire Station, installing a new 2 meter radio, and getting the packet radio back into operation.

Friends and partners from the National Weather Service attended our June training and talked about initiatives they are working on that will make our jobs easier. One project involves integrating radar and precipitation data into a precipitation map. They are also working on small sub-basin forecasting, which integrates slope and soil information for our smaller streams and creeks. This will enable better forecasting of smaller basins during flash flood events. In December, we held a "Winter Skywarn" Training program instructed by Dave Nicosia, Warning Coordination Meteorologist from the Binghamton Weather Office. A big thank you goes out to our weather service partners, Dave Nicosia, Mike Schaffner, Bill Marosi, and Scott Kroczyński.

I would also like to thank the volunteer staff of the Flood Warning Service for keeping things running and always coming together to train and maintain: Bob Gardner, Tom Shugars, Sue McLaughlin, Pete Wilson, Dave Colvin, Ed Torns, Bob Russo, Janet Thigpen, Fred Bucholz, John Meyer, George Brasted, Fred Marvin, Ron Boyle, Bob Ohl, and all of the Amateur Radio Spotters who support our program. I expect 2009 to be filled with more training and services.

Our organization relies on the help of dedicated and enthusiastic volunteers. This past year we celebrated the accomplishments of one of our first volunteers, Bill Dorman. At our Volunteer Recognition Dinner in October, we recognized more than twenty-five years of service from this amazing individual and honored him with a special "Certificate of Merit" from the New York State Assembly. Bill will be greatly missed as he finally retires from his volunteer service, but his contributions to the Flood Warning Service will be remembered. Every time we step into the Gustina Emergency Operations Center and look at the large basin map on the wall we are reminded of Bill's presence. Thank you so much Bill for all you have given to this organization!

Respectfully submitted,



Timothy D. Marshall  
FWS Coordinator

## CHEMICAL HAZARD INFORMATION TEAM (CHIT)



The Chemical Hazard Information Team is a resource for First Responders in the three counties: Chemung, Schuyler, and Steuben. The CHIT provides technical information for Hazardous Materials (HazMat) response teams and Incident Commands during emergencies involving chemicals or suspected chemicals. The CHIT is made up of volunteers with professional backgrounds in industry or academia and a diverse spectrum of expertise and experience.

CHIT volunteers are generally summoned by the Communications Center or the HazMat Commander at the time of an incident. The CHIT has many sources of information and computer access at the gathering point designated in each county. Based on information gathered about an incident, the HazMat Team with CHIT input will develop a plan for mitigation. Typically, a CHIT volunteer will be dispatched to the “cold zone” of the incident to verify conditions and modify directives based on the visual circumstances encountered. All scene information will be shared with those CHIT members at their information command post using various means of communication.

Training is a means of providing familiarity among members and involved groups: CHIT, HazMat, and Incident Command. Training may include table-top exercises, technical equipment and use capabilities, or full blown simulations in the field.

A full blown training simulation was held in the northeast corner of Chemung County in 2008. While the chemicals were simulated, the heat, bugs, and very rural surroundings were quite real. This complicated simulation involved the Van Etten Volunteer Fire Department and the Elmira HazMat Team. Members of the Central New York HazMat Responders Consortium from Ithaca and Owego were also summoned to provide specialized equipment and expertise for incident mitigation. All parties to this “staged” incident learned lessons and felt positive about the chance to gain additional confidence in their roles.

CHIT was called on to respond to an actual incident involving a structure fire at a rendering plant in Southport on a Sunday during the summer. The HazMat Commander, in concert with CHIT and Incident Command, decided that further response was not warranted for the existing situation.

Reeve Howland  
CHIT Coordinator

## **PUBLIC INFORMATION AND EDUCATION (PIE)**

In 2008, the Public Information and Education Committee wrapped up some on-going projects and worked on several new efforts.

EES was proud to help support Steuben County Eagle Scout Mike Hitchcock in his effort to fulfill the requirements of that elite Boy Scout honor. Hitchcock's Eagle Scout community service project was to implement a campaign to help keep area residents safe during a high water event. He crafted signs that are now used on local roadways warning motorists "Flooding Ahead, Turn Around, Don't Drown." EES not only donated some funds, but also helped publicize Hitchcock's achievement by issuing a press release and urging the media to attend the presentation of the signs at a Town of Campbell meeting.

EES also ran another media campaign geared toward community safety during flooding. A print campaign urged people to refrain from using motorized vehicles, including motorcycles and ATVs, on the flood control levees. These vehicles cause damage to the levees by creating ruts and killing grass. This puts the levees at a greater risk for failure during a high water event.

We distributed brochures that were created for the communities in our tri-county area to earn Community Rating System (CRS) points towards rate reductions in the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP). Many communities have benefited from this updated brochure, not only through reduced Flood Insurance costs, but also by having more knowledge about how to prepare, respond and recover from a high water event.

The PIE Committee is developing an electronic public education campaign to help residents respond to emergencies. Concerns stemming from past problems during hurricanes, worries about a Pandemic Flu outbreak, and the devastation closer to home from flooding and winter storm events, prompted requests for a media campaign to help educate residents on what they can do to stay safe and be self sufficient in an emergency. Look for our informational offerings on the web in 2009! Stay tuned – or in this case stay on-line: our videos and electronic information will be appearing on the EES website soon!

Over the course of the year, EES and PIE members have make presentations to various groups about who we are and what we do. If your group or organization would like to know more about EES, flooding issues, chemical hazards, or emergency preparedness, please contact us! PIE also continues to help with recruiting volunteers for EES programs. If you or your group would like to get involved, please ask for information on volunteer opportunities as well!

Respectfully Submitted,

Kristin A. Card  
PIE Chairwoman



## 2008 FINANCIAL SUMMARY

### Funding:

Cash on Hand January 1, 2008	\$ 61,979
Chemung, Steuben & Schuyler Counties	18,400
Local Government	15,350
Interest Income	<u>516</u>
<b>Sub-Total</b>	\$ 96,245
Corning, Inc. (Scudder Bridge Gauge and Maintenance)	5,500
PSCIM	<u>473</u>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$ 102,218</b>

### Expenditures:

Operating Expenses	
Communications	3,867
Accounting Fees & Tax Reporting	1035
Bank Charges, Contingencies and Miscellaneous	631
Clerical	5,269
Flood Warning Service Equipment Maintenance & Repair	13,074
Equipment	0
Equipment Rental	9,185
Flood Warning Service Education and Meetings	2,818
CHIT Training and Reference Materials	970
Public Information & Education (PIE)	<u>0</u>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$ 36,849</b>

**CASH ON HAND JANUARY 1, 2009** **\$ 65,369**

## 2008 FINANCIAL SUMMARY (continued)

### FORECAST FOR 2009

#### **Estimated Funding:**

Cash on Hand January 1, 2009	\$64,896
Chemung, Steuben & Schuyler Counties	18,400
Local Government	15,350
Interest Income	<u>500</u>
<b>Sub-Total</b>	\$99,146
Corning Inc. (Scudder Br. Maintenance, Addison Gauge & Maintenance)	8,000
PSCIM	<u>473</u>
<b>TOTAL Funds</b>	<b>\$107,619</b>

#### **Estimated Expenditures:**

Operating Costs for Flood Warning Service	37,000
Equipment Reserve Fund	37,000
Equipment Rental	10,000
Training Fund	
Flood Warning Service	10,000
CHIT Training and Reference Materials	2,000
Public Information & Education (PIE)	<u>10,000</u>
<b>Sub-Total</b>	\$106,000
PSCIM Expenses	<u>473</u>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$106,473</b>

**FORECASTED SURPLUS:** **\$ 1,146**

Joy Brewer  
Treasurer – EES

## 2008 CONTRIBUTORS

The Board of Directors is grateful to the following local governments and businesses for their financial contributions to the operating expenses of EES:

Chemung County  
Steuben County  
Schuyler County  
Arkport (V)  
Ashland (T)  
Bath (T)  
Bath (V)  
Big Flats (T)  
Corning (T)  
Erwin (T)  
Elmira (T)  
Elmira (C)  
Horseheads (T)  
Horseheads (V)  
Lindley (T)  
Savona (V)  
South Corning (V)  
Southport (T)  
Tuscarora (T)  
West Union (T)  
Corning Incorporated



EES helps Chemung, Schuyler and Steuben Counties earn National Weather Service designation as StormReady Counties.

## **2008 DIRECTORS AND MEMBERS OF THE CORPORATION**

### **DIRECTORS**

**President:** Michael Sprague, Steuben County Emergency Management  
**Vice President:** Scott Rodabaugh, NYS Department of Environmental Conservation  
**Treasurer:** Joy Brewer, NYS Department of Environmental Conservation  
**Secretary:** Janet Thigpen, Southern Tier Central Regional Planning & Development Board  
**PIE Chair:** Kristin Card, Chemung County Emergency Management  
**FWS Coordinator:** Tim Marshall, Steuben County Emergency Management  
**CHIT Coordinator:** Howard Phillips  
Gary Blitz, Elmira City Fire Department  
Bob Gardner  
Brian Gardner, Schuyler County Emergency Management  
Reeve Howland, REM, Motor Components, LCC  
Wayne Huggler, Corning Incorporated  
Chad M. Kehoe, NYS Department of Environmental Conservation  
Bill Kennedy, Schuyler County Emergency Management  
Merrill Lynn  
Rita McCarthy, Town of Erwin  
Dix McDonald  
Stephen Monroe, Corning Fire Department  
Jeff Parker, Steuben County Soil and Water Conservation District  
Daniel Smith, Hornell City Fire Department  
Mike Smith, Chemung County Emergency Management  
Brian Tyndell

### **MEMBERS**

Vern Anderson  
Allan Buddle  
John Chiaramonte  
Scott Foti, NYS Department of Environmental Conservation  
David Jessick, Elmira City Fire Department  
Jim Lynch, NYS Department of Environmental Conservation  
Philips Lighting Company  
Robert (Bob) Ohl, Corning Incorporated  
Kenneth Rohrer  
Mike Schaffner, NOAA National Weather Service  
Ramona Sprague, Town of Erwin  
Dave Swan, Jr., Corning Fire Department  
Lynn O. Szabo, U.S. Geological Survey