US&R Team Rescues Trapped Survivor in West Reading

On the evening of Friday, March 24th at approximately 9:18 PM, Berks County Emergency Management requested the Montgomery County Urban Search and Rescue (US&R) Team to respond and assist at the Palmer chocolate factory explosion in West Reading. This county-to-county request was specifically for a technical search of a building collapse caused by the explosion.

Montgomery County US&R responded as a convoy of four apparatus traveling west on the Pennsylvania Turnpike. Once on location, team officers met with local officials and other state agencies. An assessment was made, and US&R became the lead for search operations. US&R assets moved to a forward staging area on Side Bravo, which allowed for better access to and overall visibility of the rubble pile.

US&R members were broken into two squads, each equipped with technical search cameras, acoustic listening devices, and GIS tracking. Working with state search K9s, these squads began a systematic approach to searching the pile. In the meantime, US&R’s Structural Specialist was conducting exposure evaluations of the surrounding buildings to establish safety zones.

Throughout the night, both squads worked on the pile using cameras and technical search techniques to locate and enter survivable void spaces. At approximately 1:42 AM on Saturday, March 25th, Squad 2 located a larger void space and requested an all-quiet on the pile. They hailed into the space several times and waited for a reply, but there was no answer. Before moving on, they decided to call out one final time and this time, they finally heard a cry for help.

One by one, the members of Squad 2 lowered themselves down 12 feet into waist-deep water, navigated through the collapsed structure another 22 feet towards Side Charlie, and hailed again to locate a survivor approximately 18 feet closer to Side Alpha.

The survivor was positioned between two tanks, shoulder-deep in the water. Squad 2, working with the team’s Medical Specialist, moved the survivor back through the gauntlet of obstructions to the awaiting ladder supplied by Squad 1, who were now
responsible for survivor transport. The survivor was then packaged, moved across the rubble pile, and transported to a nearby hospital by local EMS. Squads 1 and 2 went right back to work, searching until 7:00 AM when they were relieved by the state.

Montgomery County US&R would like to thank Berks Station 25 (Exeter Township Volunteer Fire Department) and Station 95 (Boyertown Area Fire & Rescue) for their assistance in safely and carefully transporting the survivor across the rubble pile.

2022 Telecommunicator and Trainee of the Year Announced

On April 11th, during National Public Safety Telecommunicators Week, the Department of Public Safety’s 2022 Telecommunicator of the Year and 2022 Telecommunicator Trainee of the Year were announced and presented with their awards by DPS leadership.

2022 Telecommunicator of the Year: Gus Petrogiannis (right)

Gus has received numerous commendations for his performance on the radio, frequently handling high call volume on busy police zones with relative ease. With his positive attitude and willingness to help where needed, Gus is quickly becoming a leader on his shift. His work ethic and approachability lead his coworkers to ask him questions or advice on how to handle certain calls. Gus never backs down from a challenge and his trainability is rare in today’s world. He is reliable, has a great sense of humor, and is easy to talk to. His supervisors rest easy knowing they can count on him when major incidents happen.

2022 Telecommunicator Trainee of the Year: Zachary Fee (above, left)

Zach has a positive attitude and upbeat personability, which makes working with him fun. He has a great heart, a passion for his work, and a true desire to improve his skills. Zach is very reliable and is frequently willing to adjust his schedule to assist with staffing. He recently received a commendation from Upper Providence Township in recognition of his work. Zach took a call and helped save a man’s life by guiding his wife through CPR over the phone.

Way to go Gus and Zach! Keep up the great work!

Save the Date: Montgomery County Hero Fund Fundraiser

While a flyer is not yet available, the Montgomery County Hero Fund has selected a date for their second annual 5k Race, Beer Festival, and BBQ Competition. The event will take place on Saturday, September 30, 2023 (Rain date: Sunday, October 1, 2023). More details will be included in future editions of PSN when available. To learn more about the Montgomery County Hero Fund or to donate, visit https://montgomerycountyherofund.org/.
Governor Shapiro Visits EOC to Discuss 9-1-1 Funding Proposal

On March 30th, the Department of Public Safety was honored to host Governor Josh Shapiro at the Emergency Operations Center for a tour of the 9-1-1 center, a roundtable discussion about 9-1-1 funding with Department staff, and a press conference to promote his proposed budget, which includes a significant increase in funding for 9-1-1 centers across the Commonwealth.

Currently, the vast majority of funding for Pennsylvania’s 61 PSAPs (Public Safety Answering Points) comes from a monthly $1.65 9-1-1 surcharge levied on all mobile and landline phones. The surcharge amount has remained the same since 2015, despite major increases in the costs of operating a 9-1-1 center over that period of time.

Governor Shapiro’s 2023-2024 budget proposal includes a $0.38 increase in the 9-1-1 surcharge, bringing it to $2.03 per line per month. At the same time, he proposes to eliminate the Gross Receipts Tax and the Sales and Use Tax currently imposed on wireless services. This plan will bolster funding for 9-1-1 centers while at the same time ensuring no added cost to the consumer. The Department of Public Safety would like to thank Governor Shapiro for his attention and dedication to this important initiative!

9-1-1 Training and Quality Assurance Receive PEMA Certification

In April, the Department of Public Safety recognized two teams that provide essential yet often unrecognized support to 9-1-1 calltaking and radio dispatch operations: Training and Quality Assurance (QA). A few years ago, the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency (PEMA) adopted new minimum training, certification, Quality Assurance, and Quality Improvement (QI) requirements for Public Safety Answering Points (PSAPs) across the Commonwealth. By August 31, 2020, each PSAP (there are 61 in PA) had to submit documentation of compliance, after which PEMA’s 911 Office conducted individual reviews to confirm whether each PSAP met the new standards.

Last month, the Department of Public Safety was notified that both the Training and Certification Program and QA/QI Program are fully compliant and meet or exceed PEMA’s requirements! Many hours of hard work went into meeting the new standards and preparing all of the required documentation. Congratulations to our Training and QA teams on a job well done!
Dept. of Public Safety Thanks Telecommunicator Week Donors

The Department of Public Safety would like to sincerely thank all of the organizations and individuals who donated food and other items on National Public Safety Telecommunicators Week!

Chick-fil-A Audubon
Collegeville Borough Police Department
Fire Department of Montgomery Township
Franconia Township Police Benevolent Association
Interaction Insight Corporation
King of Prussia Volunteer Fire Company
Limerick Township Police Department
Lower Providence Township Police Department
Montgomery County Ambulance Association
Montgomery County Commissioner Joe Gale
Montgomery County Fire Chiefs Association
Montgomery Township Professional Firefighters IAFF Local 4890
Norristown Fire Department
Second Alarmer's Association and Rescue Squad of Montgomery County
Swedeland Volunteer Fire Company
Swedesburg Volunteer Fire Company
Towamencin Township Police Department
Upper Gwynedd Police Department
Upper Merion Township Fire & EMS
Upper Moreland Township Police Benevolent Association
Upper Moreland Township Police Department
Upper Perk Police Department
Upper Providence Township Fire & Emergency Services
Upper Providence Township Police Department
VMSC Lansdale
Wegmans Asset Protection Team
Whitemarsh Township Police Department
Whitpain Township Police Department

US&R and Drone Team Assist with Missing Person Search

On Wednesday, April 19th, the Department of Public Safety’s Drone Team and Urban Search & Rescue (US&R) Team assisted Upper Providence Township Fire & Emergency Services and Upper Providence Police with a missing person search in Upper Providence Township for several hours. Fortunately, the subject was located safely.
Students Complete Fall EMT Training Program

Congratulations to the 18 members of the Fall 2022 Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) Program, who recently finished all of their required classroom and practical training hours! The students will now go on to complete the cognitive and psychomotor exams.

The students are pictured here with their course coordinators: Rebecca Werner (bottom right) and Maria Pierce (top left).

Congratulations to the following graduates:

- Zoe Bagosy
- Lawrence Beer
- Josh Boulware
- Ian Burton
- Daniel Cooper
- Martha Finegan
- John Frangiosa
- Saoirse Ahumada Furin
- E’lyce Lee
- Kimberly Linette
- Sophia Mercier
- Hope Mitchell
- Alan Nichols
- Ross Osborn
- Sharon O’Shea
- Sam Petersen
- Solomon Rios
- Jack Wolf

Department of Public Safety Career Opportunities

The Department of Public Safety is seeking qualified applicants for the following vacancy. For more information about the role or to apply online, visit www.montcopa.org/jobs or click on the link below.

- The Fiscal Grant Manager will assist with the financial administration of the Homeland Security Grant agreements for the six member counties of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Regional Task Force, to ensure financial accountability and fiduciary reimbursement. This position is a point of contact with various agencies in PEMA, Grants Management.

- The Emergency Preparedness Specialist (Chemical Safety Program) coordinates and implements the day-to-day operations of the Federal Emergency Planning and Community Right to Know Act of 1986 (SARA Title III, EPCRA) and the Pennsylvania Hazardous Material Emergency Planning and Response Act of 1990 (Act-165) for Montgomery County. Using these statutes, this position is responsible for ensuring compliance in both chemical quantity reporting and emergency planning. In addition, the position will ensure that usable plans are developed and distributed to aid first responders for these facilities in question.

In addition, the application period for 9-1-1 Telecommunicator Trainee will open on Monday, May 1st. Visit www.montcopa.org/jobs on or after that date to apply.

To learn about the benefits of working for Montgomery County, visit www.montcopa.org/benefits. With questions, email publicsafety@montgomerycountypa.gov or call (610) 631-6500 during business hours.
Special Operations Teams Complete Busy Month of Training

As April comes to a close, the Montgomery County Hazardous Materials Response (HazMat) Team and Urban Search and Rescue (US&R) Team look back on a busy month of training. To start off, US&R got right back to training after returning from their deployment to West Reading. Rescue specialists spent an evening at the Fire Academy completing window and door shores, utilizing both wood and Paratech struts. Crews had to operate in and around simulated building debris, as well as from ground ladders and aerial devices.

Special thanks to the Union Fire Association for attending with Ladder 28 (above)!

On April 4th, the HazMat Team refreshed their skills in technical decontamination of HazMat technicians and other first responders operating at an incident. Decon of chemical protective suits is necessary so that a previously uncontaminated responder won’t become contaminated while removing their suit. The team used a specialized training substance that is invisible to the naked eye but glows green under UV light to ensure decon was performed correctly and thoroughly.

On April 11th, 18 US&R members attended a structural shoring drill. Using Paratech rescue struts, the team was tasked to construct two types of raker shores, which are utilized to provide lateral stability for a damaged wall on a structure. The team’s structural specialists evaluated the building and determined the required location and insertion height for the shores. Then, each squad had to achieve two benchmarks. First, they had to construct one 45-degree woodless raker shore on sloping ground. Next, they had to build one 60-degree flying raker shore with wood bracing, which is used when a debris pile at the base of the wall doesn’t allow for a conventional solid sole raker.

Finally, on April 15th, the HazMat Team practiced assessment, mitigation, decontamination, and restoration for a simulated release incident involving a rail car carrying chlorine (right). The team reviewed various leak scenarios, as well as the components of the specialized mitigation equipment, commonly known as a "C Kit." In addition, HazMat technicians integrated using fire service ladders, basic knots, and ropes to safely and efficiently move equipment to the top of the rail car.
Electronic Naloxone Request Form Now Available

Utilizing grant funding from the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency (PCCD), the Montgomery County Department of Public Safety distributes Narcan® (naloxone) nasal spray for use in response to opioid overdoses. First responders and other pre-approved organizations can receive Narcan® through this grant.

To request a supply of Narcan®, approved organizations can click on the link below. After the Department of Public Safety approves or rejects the request, the requestor will receive an email.

Request Narcan® Here

DPS Technology Division Provides Updates for Fire and EMS Agencies

Updated Bucks County Programming for Bordering Fire/EMS Agencies

The Department of Public Safety has updated the Bucks County radio programming that is currently installed in all Montgomery County fire and EMS radios owned by agencies situated near the Bucks County border.

In the coming weeks and months, the Department’s Technology Division staff will be reaching out to those agencies to schedule in-person reprogramming of all radios, in order to incorporate this updated programming. Technicians will also be upgrading the firmware in each radio during this reprogramming effort.

Reminder About Cradlepoint Modem Installations for Fire Companies

Over the past several years, the Department of Public Safety’s Technology Division staff have issued new Cradlepoint modems to replace the old Sierra wireless modems in Montgomery County fire company vehicles. To date, hundreds of these new Cradlepoint modems have been installed. However, there are about 80 modems that have been issued to various fire agencies that are not yet installed.

The Department of Public Safety is requesting that these agencies get the Cradlepoint modems installed as soon as possible or, if they are no longer needed, return the modems to DPS so other agencies can utilize them. DPS staff will be reaching out to the agencies with uninstalled modems in the coming weeks.

Fire Academy in Need of Wooden Pallets for Spring Training

The Montgomery County Fire Academy is in need of wooden pallets for the upcoming burn season. The pallets should be standard size (approximately 4’x4’) and free and clean of any paints or oil. It is preferred that they be dropped off at the Fire Academy, but arrangements can be made to pick them up if needed.

Please contact Marty Joyce at Martin.Joyce@montgomerycountypa.gov or (215) 436-5100 if you or someone you know is able to donate these valuable training supplies.
Fire Academy Updates Registration Form, Posts Act 155 Form

Course Registration Form

The Montgomery County Fire Academy has updated their Course Registration Form, the new version of which is available in the April 2023 Notices and on the Fire Academy’s website. Please note that a FEMA Student Identification (SID) number is now REQUIRED to register for a course. To register for or look up your FEMA SID, visit https://cdp.dhs.gov/femasid.

Act 155 Permission Form

In addition, the Pennsylvania State Fire Academy Act 155 Permission Form is now available online, as well as in the April 2023 Notices. With the passage of Act 155 of 2022, the minimum age to register for Interior Firefighter (ELIF, MCFA #4004) has been reduced from 18 to 17, as long as parent/guardian AND fire chief consent is received. The Act 155 Permission Form will be required at the time of registration. Without proper consent forms, the minimum age will remain at 18.

US&R Team Places New Collapse 20 in Service

Over the past few weeks, members of the Montgomery County Urban Search & Rescue (US&R) Team worked to put their new collapse unit in service. This new truck, a primary response unit for the team, will transport equipment for trench rescues and building collapses.

Trench and building collapse incidents require specialized tools not commonly carried on a typical fire truck. For trench rescues, Collapse 20 has 12 specialized trench panels that US&R specialists can use to form protective “walls” in and around the trapped underground subject. When placed, the panels are then supported by either wood or Paratech struts (right), which are also carried on Collapse 20. In terms of lumber, the truck holds 2x4, 4x4, 2x6, 6x6, and 12x12 timbers, all 12’ in length.

Building collapse is a general term used in rescue, but this truck has what is required for all types of collapses, from wood framed homes to reinforced concrete commercial buildings. Tools carried on Collapse 20 include three hydraulic jackhammers, two demolishing hammers, six assorted rotary hammer drills, and two types of concrete cutting chain saws.

The examples above do not even begin to cover the 13,500 lbs. worth of technical rescue equipment carried on the new Collapse 20. Since no one trench rescue or building collapse is ever the same, the cache of highly specialized equipment was carefully selected to allow US&R specialists to safely and effectively handle any conceivable scenario and to save lives.

Before moving the equipment to the new truck, members checked and serviced each tool to ensure operational readiness. Currently, Collapse 20 responds from the Special Operations substation in Fort Washington.