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Wolf Administration Discusses Need for Flexible Disaster Emergency Declarations for Long-Duration Disaster Incidents

Harrisburg, PA – The Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency (PEMA) today discussed how flexible disaster emergency declarations allow emergency officials to maintain response and recovery operations for the extent of long-duration disaster incidents.

“The current declaration period of 90 days permits continuity of response and recovery operations for higher-magnitude disasters which have affected the state in the past, as well as future large-scale disasters that may occur due to our evolving threat and hazard landscape,” PEMA Director Randy Padfield said. “It’s important that the public understand what their vote means and how it could impact them, their neighbors and communities across the state.”

Padfield was joined at today’s press conference by Kevin Molloy, who served as the emergency management coordinator in Dauphin County during the 1979 accident at Three Mile Island and later worked at PEMA and the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

"The current law in Pennsylvania is more than adequate to provide the foundation upon which a response to disaster emergencies is based. Change in my opinion is both unnecessary and unwise," Molloy said. "One cannot call a "time-out" at the end of 21 days to have a political discussion. The disruption to the disaster response has the potential to be catastrophic itself. I would urge that Pennsylvanians vote no to changing the existing emergency law."

Padfield said that by prematurely terminating a disaster declaration, the commonwealth signals to the federal government that the emergency or disaster, no matter what the cause, is under state control, meaning the federal government could end the disaster period.

This could impact future federal funding for any ongoing response or recovery operations, which can total in the millions of dollars, and the state would ultimately bear those costs. This also comes at a time when FEMA is urging states to take a more active role in leading disaster response and recovery operations as their ability to continue to provide resources outside of financial reimbursement is limited due to the ever increasing scale and magnitude of disasters facing the nation.

So far for the [COVID-19 disaster incident](#), the federal government has obligated approximately \$292 million to eligible Pennsylvania applicants to reimburse costs for eligible expenses under the Public Assistance program.

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