

PENNSYLVANIA WATER RESCUE PROGRAM CONTINUES TO SAVE LIVES

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The City of Pittsburgh is creating one of the best water rescue response plans in the nation by having approximately 1,600 police officers, firefighters and paramedics go through the Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission's (PFBC) Water Rescue training. Through this training, the City of Pittsburgh will create about 10 new swiftwater rescue teams including a pair of elite teams for the most difficult assignments. The training began November 2011 and is in response to four fatalities that occurred during a flash flood on Washington Boulevard. Public Safety Director Michael Huss said, "During that same flood about a dozen others were rescued by emergency management workers." Under Huss's plan, all police cars and fire trucks will be equipped with life jackets and rescue throw bags. The city will purchase 11 swiftwater boats and place them at flood-prone areas throughout the city.

Huss said he hopes to create "one of the most robust water rescue programs in the nation." In a previous position, as fire chief in Johnstown, Cambria County, Huss developed a swiftwater rescue team that has assisted during floods in Allegheny County. In Pittsburgh, he envisions a "tiered level of capability" that requires new cooperation among the police, fire and Emergency Medical Services bureaus.

In addition to this initiative, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania is also improving response to water-related emergencies. During Hurricane Irene and Tropical Storm Lee, qualified first responders across Pennsylvania mobilized and deployed to affected areas. Numerous rescues were made and not one first responder from Pennsylvania was injured.

During Hurricane Irene, the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency called for the Region 13 Task Force to mobilize and be deployed to aid the southeast part of the state. Twenty technician-level Swiftwater Rescue Teams, equipped with trained personnel, boats, communication and command centers, were mobilized and formed into a Northern Team and Southern Team. The Northern Team went to Lackawanna and Luzerne counties and surrounding areas in the northeast. The team was eventually deployed

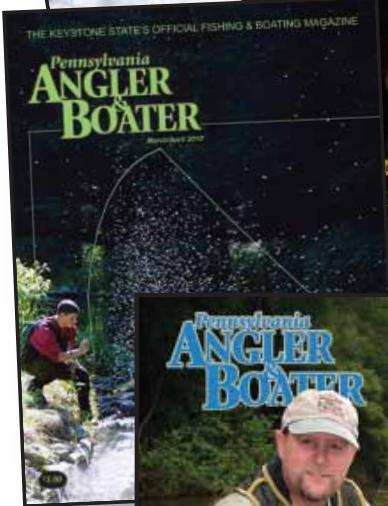
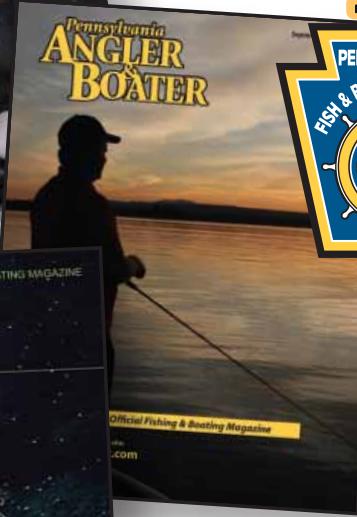
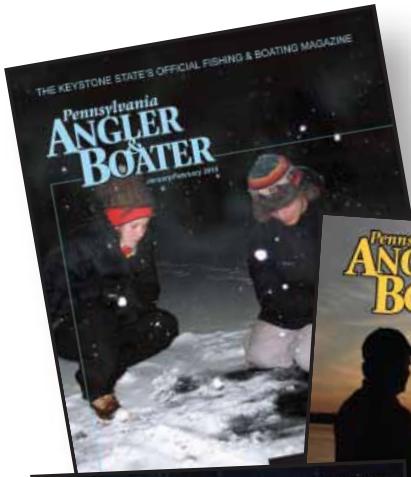
into New York. The Southern Team went to Montgomery County and conducted more than 200 reported rescues by the end of the disaster.

The PFBC Water Rescue Program holds operations of this magnitude together with first responders trained uniformly by the Commission's curriculum and having National Fire Protection Association Awareness, Operations and Technician level training. In addition, a partnership with the Office of the State Fire Commissioner, Pennsylvania Department of Health, Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency, Rescue Task Force of the Pennsylvania Emergency Health Services Council and PFBC has created a Volunteer Rescue Service Recognition Program that utilizes PFBC training and types teams according to their ability. This enables the state to deploy qualified teams to areas in need within the state and nationally.

The Pennsylvania Water Rescue Program is designed to train fire, rescue, police, park and other emergency services personnel in the most current techniques of swiftwater rescue and safety. The program's purpose is to familiarize the rescuer with personal and team safety and the proper procedures used in water and ice safety and emergency boat operations. The objective for the rescuer is to develop and demonstrate proficiency in water rescue techniques relative to his or her individual capabilities. This results in a rescuer developing a greater sense of competency in dealing with on-the-water emergencies.

The Commission initiated the Pennsylvania Water Rescue Program in 1983. Since that time, more than 25,000 students have been trained in the most current water rescue techniques. It is now the largest, non-profit, public water and ice rescue training program known to exist in the United States.

For more information about the Pennsylvania Water Rescue Program, visit the Commission's website at www.fishandboat.com/waterrescue.htm. ☐



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