

# State of Emergency Requires More Public Information

This disaster requires a real leader. The response to the water emergency in West Virginia is being



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bungled by a lack of leadership. It does not matter, at this point, whether the water is dangerous or not. Most of the 300,000 people affected are afraid to use it. There is no continuity of information being presented to the people. Anyone with half an idea, and a couple website references to support it, can captivate the minds of the public and send them into hysterics. The public is panicked. When I worked for the West Virginia Conservation Agency, I was frequently

dispatched to work at the Emergency Operations Center, in the Capitol basement, with the **Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Management (DHSEM)**. One of my duties at the center was to assist in the coordination of agency resources with other state and federal agencies during flood disaster-related states of emergency.

The recent State of Emergency declared by Gov. **Earl Ray Tomblin**, covering the nine counties affected by the crude MCHM spill of January 9, should be handled in a similar manner. Understanding that **Freedom Industries** and **West Virginia American Water** are private businesses, during the declared state of emergency their activities related to site remediation, system flushing and decontamination of water company filtration

system should be regularly reported to the public.

As with any disaster recovery project, local, county and state emergency officials, school systems and governmental bodies located within the affected area should meet regularly, discussing options, approaches and coordinating schedules of recovery activities. These meetings should continue until the state of emergency is lifted.

The recent decision to flush water lines in the schools, while students are present, or will be shortly, is proving to be a short-sighted plan. Whether real or imagined, the odor from the water or simply the knowledge that flushing is occurring is enough to cause the children fear or nausea. Parents have a right to know about plans for flushing activity before it begins.

Regular reports to the news media are a must. The people have the right to know what is going on. They deserve to know if the contaminated water filtration system is being replaced. Government resources must be made available to speed the cleanup, and the transportation and placement of new equipment if necessary, then send an invoice. It is unacceptable for clean water drawn through contaminated filters to be distributed to the public.

This disaster requires a real leader to step up. A leader who will stand in front of the people, keep them informed, listen to their fears and work publicly to fix this problem.

Holstein is a former state employee of 12 years and owns her own administrative consulting company.