



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
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David S. Ekern, P.E.
COMMISSIONER

May 2, 2008

MEMORANDUM

TO: The Honorable Pierce R. Homer
Secretary of Transportation

FROM: David S. Ekern, P.E. *dse*
Commissioner

RE: A Commitment to Focus—VDOT's Action Plan for Improving Emergency Response

Following the February 12 ice storm that shut down the Springfield Interchange and a spate of recent traffic-clogging interstate crashes, I am directing VDOT to refocus on our vital mission as one of Virginia's key emergency response agencies. Attached is a emergency response action plan that will reinforce VDOT's commitment to keeping Virginians safe during inclement weather and other emergency events.

This direction was developed from an ongoing series of meetings with transportation professionals, our partners in law enforcement, EMS agencies, neighboring jurisdictions, and public input. It addresses key areas of focus necessary to meet customers' expectations that VDOT, like fire departments and law-enforcement agencies, will provide critical emergency services during all unforeseen events.

The plan outlines thirteen action directions to adopt industry best practices and to overcome geographic inconsistencies and barriers that contribute to delays in clearing incidents. Implementing these action items will result in improved communications with the public; implementation of National Incident Management System practices; adoption of industry best practices; staff training to reinforce VDOT's emergency response duties; and improved coordination with local, state, and federal agencies involved in incident response.

This effort will not come without a cost. To modernize our equipment, train staff and install/remodel technology necessary to restore vital transportation arteries after a serious event will require monetary commitments and a concerted agency effort over the next 18 months. It will also entail four to five years of focused commitment to emergency response in order to complete the necessary long-term changes in VDOT activities and practices. I will provide you with a program deployment estimate the week of May 5.

This is a commitment worth making because it will drastically improve the safety of every Virginian traveling on our transportation network. The energies and resources devoted today will protect the quality of life throughout the Commonwealth for years to come. I will personally lead this action plan.

CC: Colonel Steven Flaherty
Mr. Michael Cline
Mr. Steve Mondul
Mr. Gregory Whirley
Chiefs
District Administrators

VDOT'S COMMITMENT TO FOCUS ACTION PLAN FOR IMPROVING EMERGENCY RESPONSE



Prepared by:

**David S. Ekern, P.E.
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Virginia Department of Transportation**

April 28, 2008



VDOT's Commitment to Focus A Long Term Action Plan for Emergency Response

INTRODUCTION

On Tuesday, February 12, 2008, the Northern Virginia region was hit with a severe ice storm that significantly impacted the flow of traffic throughout the region. This event focused attention on how important the highway system is in the lives of Virginians and emphasized that emergency response is one of the most important responsibilities for the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT). This plan contains action items that will improve VDOT's capabilities as a critical incident response agency and will raise the level of service during incidents to that expected by the citizens of Virginia. The central themes of the plan are:

- Improving communication with the public and media to guarantee they are informed about the impact incidents have on transportation safety;
- Implementing best practices statewide for consistent, dependable and timely response to incidents;
- Adopting the National Incident Management System principles and procedures applicable to all incidents and recognizing VDOT's role as a first responder agency;
- Improving and institutionalizing incident response training; and,
- Improving coordination with and support for other state, federal, and local agencies involved in incident response.

Implementation of the plan will:

- Create a Department-wide comprehensive and coordinated incident response focus;
- Realign available funding, equipment, and resources to strengthen incident prevention, preparation, response, and recovery;
- Balance VDOT and contract resources to improve snow and ice management; and,
- Eliminate administrative barriers that hinder response.

An organizational structure for implementation of the plan is shown in Appendix A.

There are four classes of incidents¹:

1. Weather related (snow, ice, flooding)
2. Major or minor crashes
3. Hazardous materials spills (hazmat)
4. Terrorist attacks

¹ For the purposes of this document, an incident is defined as an occurrence, natural or human-caused that requires an agency response to protect life or property or to restore traffic to its normal rate of flow. For some classes of incidents, VDOT will be in command; for others VDOT will support other agencies that are in command. In all cases VDOT's priorities are as follows:

- The safety of the public and those responding to any incident will not be compromised.
- Maintaining or restoring traffic movement. After safety is addressed, traffic will be restored to normal flow as quickly as is practical.
- Efficient, effective, use of resources will be considered after safety and traffic movement are properly considered.

What is the National Incident Management System?

The National Incident Management System (NIMS) is a comprehensive approach to incident management that is applicable at all jurisdictional levels and across functional disciplines. NIMS is applicable across the full spectrum of potential incidents and hazard scenarios, regardless of size, complexity or origin of the event. It also is designed to improve coordination and cooperation between public and private entities in a variety of incident management activities. The NIMS will be used as the foundation for all VDOT responses to the four categories of incident noted previously.

The components of NIMS are

- Command and Management
- Planning and Training
- Resource Management
- Communications and Information Management
- Supporting Technologies and
- Ongoing Management and Maintenance

NIMS employs two levels of incident management structure, depending on the nature of the incident:

- Level 1--The Incident Command System (ICS) is a standard, on-scene, all-hazard incident management system. ICS enables users to adopt an integrated organizational structure to match the needs of single or multiple incidents.
- Level 2—Multi-agency Coordination Systems are a combination of facilities, equipment, personnel, procedures, and communications integrated into a common framework for coordinating and supporting incident management.

The following principles guide VDOT's incident response activities.

1. VDOT's focus on incident response will support managing and responding to incidents on the network of roads and bridges on a system basis rather than by geographic area.
2. The plan will focus on PREVENTION, PREPARATION, RESPONSE, and RECOVERY. VDOT will institute a clear and consistent chain of command which has no more than three levels to reach a final decision and is based on the NIMS and ICS philosophy. The VDOT organization for maintenance and operations (incident response and system management) will be clear and accountable.
3. The system of response will employ a consistent approach on a statewide basis with all variations being conscientiously agreed to and documented. The system will recognize and embrace what has worked in the past, but will not retain practices simply because they are comfortable and familiar.
4. The system will be jurisdiction neutral and seamless. It will view all resources employed for an incident (including those from the private sector and other governmental units) as a single, coordinated response entity.
5. All changes to current approaches and other aspects of incident response will be measured by the time to implement, the sustainability of the change, and its ability to be institutionalized in VDOT.

ACTION ITEMS

A number of action items have been identified that will move VDOT toward the goal of improved incident response.

1. *Beginning with the 2008 winter season, VDOT will implement an anti-icing program by initially focusing on high-risk locations.*
 - a. Maintenance and Operations field operators and first-line and mid-level managers will be trained in the principles and use of anti-icing techniques for snow removal and ice control. Training will also provide guidance on how to balance an anti-icing approach with more traditional approaches.
 - b. VDOT will develop a plan to extend the anti-icing program statewide.
 - c. VDOT will review its snow response fleet for opportunities to implement the latest technological improvements where cost effective.
 - d. VDOT will implement technologies that can aid in the deployment of snow and ice control techniques such as decision support tools and information management tools.
2. *Each district will establish snow and ice mobilization plans that emphasize a system approach to response.*
 - a. The plans will emphasize the sharing of resources across existing area headquarter, residency and district boundaries.
 - b. The plans will employ a consistent NIMS “all hazards” approach for chain of command, preparation and communications both within VDOT and with other responding agencies.
3. *VDOT will institute a formal command and control structure and protocols for all incident response based on the National Incident Management System (NIMS).*
 - a. Districts will implement a unified command structure that integrates operations and maintenance.
 - b. The role of incident commander will be established in each district and staffed with a rotating duty roster comprised of individuals with the knowledge, skills, and authority to handle incidents. An incident commander will be on-call 24/7/365.
 - c. The district incident commander will make the call to activate the district command post based on the latest weather predictions or other information about events with district-wide impact.
 - d. Protocols will be developed that will determine the appropriate level of response – local, regional, or statewide.
 - e. A protocol will be implemented that determines when VDOT public affairs staff is activated to assist in incident response communications.
4. *VDOT will expand the focus of the five regional traffic management centers (TMCs) to become transportation operations centers (TOCs) with responsibility for active incident response.*
 - a. The TOCs will serve as command posts for all significant events. Appropriate management personnel will staff the command posts to include representation from maintenance, operations, public affairs, and the Virginia State Police (where appropriate.)