


MILFORD BOARD OF SELECTMEN

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TO: Atty. Brian W. Murray, Chairman

FROM: Louis J. Celozzi, Town Administrator 

RE: EVALUATION – TOWN OF MILFORD/MILFORD WATER CO.

DATE: August 31, 2009

As a result of the recent water emergency (Boil Water Order issued by D.E.P.) of August 9, 2009, I had determined, with your Board's approval, to undertake an evaluation of the Town of Milford's response to the crisis as well as an evaluation of the Milford Water Company's initial response to the problem and subsequent notification to the Town of Milford.

Therefore, I will confine my observations to issues that effected the Town of Milford and not the issues of water quality or; factors that caused the contamination of the water quality as these issues will be investigated by the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MADEP) and hopefully the Department of Public Utilities. After careful consideration, I have identified the following issues and problem areas:

1. Communication – The discovery and subsequent notification that bacteria was present in the town's water supply, was unnecessarily delayed by the Milford Water Company. On Saturday, August 8, 2009, a message was left on my home recorder at 9:45PM informing me of a problem and to call the Milford Water Company. Unfortunately, I had been away for the day and had returned home at 11PM and did not check the recorder until 5:30AM on Sunday, August 9, 2009. Even at that time, I had difficulty reaching Mr. Papuga and my notification to the Board of Selectmen was delayed. Fortunately, both the Police and Fire Chiefs contacted me early Sunday morning. I believe this initial delay further slowed the attempts to notify our residents as quickly as we should have. We probably should have attempted to inform the entire community by Saturday evening.

Recommendation

- Simple notification via cell phone would have been acceptable. In the future, it should be made clear to all utilities, departments, etc., that the Emergency Management Director (Fire Chief) should be contacted immediately and that he, or the Police Chief, will contact the Town Administrator (who in turn will contact the Board of Selectmen) and any other town official he deems necessary. Each of us is available 24/7.

2. Reverse 911 System – The first communication (actual message) to our residents informing them of the Boil Water Order was initiated a day late, it was too long and the timeframe for informing approximately 12,000 households was too long and incomplete. The present E-911 system utilizes eight (8) telephone lines and due to the length of the message, it took over 16 hours to notify all residents. Indeed, some residents never received a call.

Conclusion-While it is clearly evident that the present E911 software was inadequate, I must point out that we did react immediately to improve subsequent notifications. The next day, August 11, 2009, I met with Bob Noonan of Sheriff Glodis' office and was informed that the Town of Milford could utilize E911 software available through the Homeland Security Office. This system with 48 lines is able to deliver 15,000 half-minute messages in under 3 hours. In addition, we utilized the Milford School Department's system, which was of great assistance. Our response time during the next two notifications was much better as it appears almost everyone was notified within 3 hours. I have met with Police Chief O'Loughlin and Fire Chief Touhey to address this problem and both agree that an upgrade of our E-911 software is crucial. It is estimated that the Town of Milford has approximately 12,000 telephones. This number will increase as we receive land-line and cell phone numbers from residents. The total number of telephone lines that would have to be contacted in an emergency could approach 15,000. The present Reverse 911 system at the Milford Police Department, which has 8 telephone lines available requires almost 16 hours to deliver these same 15,000 half minute messages, and the Reverse 911 system at the Worcester Sheriff's Office, which has 48 lines available requires under 3 hours to deliver 15,000 half minute messages.

Recommendations

- The Town of Milford enter an agreement with Blackboard Connect, Inc., to provide the Connect CTY notification system to the Town of Milford. Connect CTY purchases telephone line space from seven(7) telephone companies and has the ability to send 3.2M one-minute messages per hour. Connect CTY states that they would send between 2,000 and 3,000 calls per minute to the Town of Milford in an emergency. At the rate of 2,000 calls per minute, Connect CTY would be able to notify the entire Town of Milford in under six (6) minutes. The proposed cost of this system is \$20,066.46.
- The present Reverse 911 system will be eliminated
- The Town will enter into an agreement with Sheriff Glodis' office to allow access to their 48 line, Reverse 911 System as a back-up and for those emergencies requiring a smaller notification. There will be no cost to the Town of Milford.

Atty. Brian W. Murray, Chairman
August 31, 2009
Page 3

3. Town of Milford Website – During the course of the water emergency, it became quite apparent that our website was not up to par. As you know, we have a volunteer who does a terrific job maintaining the site but the lack of a professional site with someone in control daily is a problem. While we were able to update our site with daily information, we were still lacking the ability for complete presentation and an ability to provide updated information on a continuous basis. Please note that this deficiency is not a surprise to us as I have made the recommendation for the past five years, with your Board's support, to seek additional funds for an improved site. Unfortunately, fiscal concerns have prevented this advance with other priorities taking precedence.

Recommendation-

- The Town of Milford is most fortunate to have a resident/volunteer step forward to assist us. Bob McCarthy has reviewed the existing website and after a discussion with Richard Stearman of Ashdown Technologies has compiled a plan to revise the site at a reduced cost. He will develop and design the Home Page but will need a company to implement and host the website. Ashdown Technologies has been hosting our site at no cost for the last decade and they have revised their previous cost proposal.

The proposed initial cost is \$4,600.00 for development and basic hosting an additional \$20.00/month.

I would recommend the implementation of this proposal as I am confident that this solution will be successful.

4. Town of Milford/Response Action

I believe our decision for a daily meeting, effective Monday, August 10, 2009 was beneficial as it allowed us, including the Fire Chief, Police Chief, Paul Mazzuchelli, members of the Board of Selectmen, Mr. Papuga, D.E.P. officials, Rep. Fernandes and others to review daily progress and plan accordingly. These meetings continued until August 25, 2009.

Recommendation-

- I would continue these daily meetings in any future emergency situations as we were able to understand and better inform the public.

The above issues were, in my opinion, crucial to the water emergency. As I had explained, in my first paragraph, I would address the issues only affecting the Town of Milford and our immediate response to the water emergency. Both the Fire Chief and the Police Chief will expound on the public safety aspects of this problem.

While the above issues were crucial, it is important to note that all are correctable at minimal cost.

Atty. Brian W. Murray, Chairman
August 31, 2009
Page 4

Finally, I would like to point out that the Town of Milford and its residents should be quite proud of the professionals engaged in Emergency Management. Both the Fire and Police Chiefs performed superbly and worked long and difficult hours. Other departments including Highway Parks, School, etc. responded quickly and assisted without complaint. We should also be thankful for the many volunteers that came forward to assist our professional staff. Their efforts were most commendable.

Naturally, I am prepared to respond to any questions that your Board may have.

cc: Board of Selectmen
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