

**April 15, 2016**

Blenheim-Gilboa Pumped Storage Power Project

1378 NY-30

North Blenheim, NY 12131

**Subject: Fire/Emergency Medical Service Safety Submission**

### **Recent Dam Safety Developments**

Recent developments lead us down a path of protection from cyber threats and or cyber-attack. Recently as of March 2016 and we quote from CNN, The Obama administration is preparing to publicly attribute a 2013 cyber-attack against a New York dam to Iranian hackers, according to U.S. officials familiar with the investigation. The Justice Department has prepared an indictment against people thought to be behind the attack, according to the officials. An announcement could come in the next week. The intrusion at the Bowman Avenue Dam, around 30 miles north of New York City in suburban Rye Brook, New York, isn't considered sophisticated -- the hackers managed only to get access to some back office systems, not the operational systems of the dam, U.S. officials say. U.S. investigators quickly determined the attack was carried out by hackers working for the Iranian government. But the attack alarmed Obama administration officials who have voiced concerns about the vulnerability of U.S. infrastructure to cyber-attacks.

We ask for comment/commitment from New York Power Authority on who is protecting access controls on your computer systems department, plans in dealing with cyber-attacks, notification process when recognized and in general how they know they are protected from this occurring at the Blenheim-Gilboa Pumped Storage Power Project 1378 NY-30, North Blenheim, NY 12131.

### **Public Safety/Fire and EMS/Our Dedicated Volunteers**

As the Villages, Towns, Fire Districts Fire and EMS departments of Schoharie County prepare for their future; most things are easily pre-planned and prepared for. One unknown factor is the number of volunteers diminishing from these most professional departments. Recruitment programs are financed from F.A.S.N.Y. (Firemen's Associate of State of NY), for the departments advertising cost. However, retention programs such as Low-SAPP and retirement packages are way out of financial range for most departments to keep talented trained personnel from leaving these organizations. These programs are essential for retaining personnel, the departments ensure itself and it enables them to enforce mandatory annual training requirements. All members would have to keep up to date with their required annual training to be eligible for that years point in years of service point system. Better trained department's to lower the departments

insurance rates which will impact the reduction cost for that community. Number one factor with better trained personnel is that it helps in lowering their community's ISO (Insurance Service Office) rating on access property tax. Lowering ISO rating among the county would decrease the high insurance rates for all businesses and residents. EMS field will have to start to do soft billing/hard billing and a pay per call for personnel.

Overall, starting retention programs among the county and maintaining it for the 50 years is essential for each individual devoting their time to volunteer but also having saved tax payers millions of dollars over a 50 year period. We would like NYPA to take a hard look at helping in this field and setting examples to be a key in holding on to our great loyal volunteer base personnel. New York's Volunteer Firefighters not only save lives, they also save billions in tax dollars for the state. In fact, New Yorkers save more than \$3 billion each year due to the services provided by the State's volunteer fire service according to a financial impact study released today by the Firemen's Association of the State of New York (FASNY). We need our volunteers to stay and help show respect for their service however we must ask NYPA to help fund this extremely important program.

### **Public Safety Buildings/ Fire EMS Apparatus, Equipment, and Training**

Building/renovating public safety building is essential to lowering I.S.O. ratings and maintaining a low fire protection tax. Many public safety fire/emergency medical service buildings have expired over time and do not have that financial backing to build new. To those departments who have recently replaced existing buildings, can't keep up with their operating equipment cost. The departments have to sacrifice one thing for another as in paying for their new building and holding off for 25-30 years for replacement of equipment. In the public safety field we can't continue to do this due to the entire standards placed on our field. Fire and emergency medical service (EMS) departments must always be 100% compliant with NFPA, OSHA, and PESH.

Over the last 10 years fire and ems apparatus has skyrocketed so fast that most fire departments especially in Schoharie County have not had the time to keep up with the demanding cost due to not being allowed to go over 2.3% cap for raising fire tax on annual basis. A standard fire engine and EMS apparatus has to meet standards set by NFPA (National Fire Protection Association) before that new apparatus leaves the manufacturer. Just to meet the standards for these manufactures the cost now varies \$120k - \$150k which drives the overall cost of a standard fire engine to \$620k-\$750k. A standard ambulance now can range from \$220k-\$300K.

With not only apparatus cost skyrocketing, fire and EMS equipment cost for example simple Scott Air Pack over the last 10 years has risen from \$2300.00 to over \$4500.00. Turnout gear in which a NFPA standard reads all interior firefighter must have new turnout gear in place no longer than 10 years. Cost of turnout gear for just a coat and pants is over \$5000.00. Still needed would be a helmet, gloves, nomex hood, and boots in which is recommended these items should be replaced annually. Personal DRD/belay devices can drive the cost up another 1k. Most fire departments in Schoharie County still don't have a thermal imaging camera that generally cost about 8k. An EMS standardize sketcher is well over 5k. AED have stayed around the 2k mark. Thumper machines range about 10k. These astronomical rates continue to go up on an annual basis with no ceiling caps in which most communities can't keep up.

Training cost for EMS takes a toll on departments such as an EMT has to pay over \$1500.00 and the cost goes up after individual moves on to paramedic or higher. Fire departments are in search of funding for specialized training and equipment which is not covered by the state. Such as advance swift water, confine space rescue and all technical rescues course.

With all demands of providing public safety to have personnel trained adequate. The financials are not there to meet this costly service for the communities however is much needed to lower each individual insurance premiums. We ask that NYPA to review and consider all proposals from fire/EMS departments among Schoharie County who need financial support to help preserve these professional assets of the county.

### **FIRE/EMS Communications**

One essential part of operations for fire/EMS is that they must have strong clear communication system. One thing we have learned during the last several disasters we had in Schoharie County is that we don't have adequate communications system. Fire/EMS personnel continuously can't be heard on our active system. A recent Blue Wing Communication study (on file in Schoharie County) found that Schoharie County does not have adequate communications for emergencies. Blue Wing study found that to significantly increase and have proper communications in Schoharie County for fire/EMS a high band 800 megawatt trunk system is needed with minimum of least 15 communication towers strategically place across the county which would increase the value of firefighter and EMS safety of the counties 3 operating communication towers. Fire/EMS in Schoharie operates on a low band system. The main issue is high level of noise of interference overcoming this old obsolete low band system. Also, high band radio frequencies (channels) are becoming extinct to add to our old current high band system that is running law enforcement radio system. The solution according to

the Blue Wing study recommended a high band trunk system to be installed at a rate of over 23 million dollars. We recommend that NYPA seriously considers this proposal to finance and maintain this for Schoharie County to help support communications throughout the county for the priority of safety first.

### **Water System (Dry Hydrants) I.S.O. Ratings**

Dry water systems placed throughout Schoharie County can be substantial in lowering fire protection I.S.O. (insurance service office). Why this is so substantial is due to lowering the I.S.O. rating of a fire protection district the lower the home owner would pay on his fire protection tax on their access property value. Along with updated public safety buildings, new equipment, communications, waters systems (dry hydrant) placed and maintained properly fire protection areas will lower their ISO ratings.

We would ask NYPA to install and properly maintain dry hydrants along the Schoharie Creek as designated areas throughout the county. Overall, our key factor in helping our communities grow and keep our fire protection rates down is through ISO (Insurance Service Office). Helping fire EMS departments among the flood prone areas are a key to having these communities succeed for the future. Numerous fire protection tax rates on access property level are extremely high due to our I.S.O. ratings of 9 or higher. That fact is with better equipment, water systems (Dry Hydrants) along the Schoharie Creek,

### **Safety Training and Drowning Incidents**

We propose that a release and hold program be started at NYPA. Several different reasons for this program we would like to include for first responders training in swift water and non-motorized boat rescue training. Most important a hold program for safety situation in event rescue or recovery event of a drowning subject(s). We truly understand at certain times these request may not be able to be authorized due to high water or low water amounts and or conditions. A request would be made through the county fire coordinators office for such an event.

Overall New York Power Authority can not only help them-selves but help their local communities and take stand as a great neighbor by helping reduce operating cost of public safety departments for next 50 years. We can ask as well how the NYPA has been a good neighbor in the past 50 years. We know of their small donations and we thank them for their annually or bi-annually basis for the last 10-12 years, however these donation are not sufficient enough to make a difference. Better protection for the communities of Schoharie County not only benefits all the residents and visitors of this great place but also entails a safer Blenheim-Gilboa Pumped Storage Power Project. Our priority is to make safety

the utmost important task and we know NYPA it's not the responsibility to provide public safety among the county, but this would be a great start to provide a partnership of easing financial responsibility to these towns and villages that are responsible to ensure public safety. This may give them that much needed boost to complete this task and make public safety first priority in all decisions before other projects. We strongly urge NYPA to consider all proposals to become our good neighbor in helping us protect all in public safety.

Submitted by Michael Devlin  
Fire/EMS Committee Member Schoharie County, NY