

# Columbia County Emergency Management

## Independent County Department Fact Sheet

December 28, 2021

**Emergency Management History:** Emergency Management is an entity required in every NYS county and evolved many years ago from the county Civil Defense department. Prior to 2011, the Columbia County Emergency Management Office (CCEMO) was an independent county department with part time staff. As a cost saving effort in 2011, the Board of Supervisors and CCEMO Director William Black requested that CCEMO merge with the Sheriff's Office under then Sheriff (David Harrison, Jr). This was a time when the overall economy was not doing well and county department heads were required to submit annual budgets with a 5% decrease. Under the Sheriff's Office, CCEMO was restructured so that a Sheriff's Office member (Corrections Lieutenant) could carryout CCEMO and Local Emergency Preparedness Committee (LEPC) duties full time as needed during business hours. The Director and Deputy Directors were part time.

It is noted that at the time, the county EMS Coordinator and Fire Coordinator informed the Board of Supervisors that they did not support CCEMO becoming part of the Sheriff's Office and felt it should stay an independent county department.

In other NYS counties, a large majority of county Emergency Management departments are not part of the Sheriff's Office. When both departments merged in 2011, it was not agreed or expected that CCEMO would always stay part of the Sheriff's Office.

### **CCEMO Current Staffing:**

- CCEMO is currently a completely part time civilian service of the Sheriff's Office. Sometime after 2014, CCEMO was restructured again, with all current staff being part time.
- CCEMO staff consist of one Director, three Deputy Directors and one Sheriff's Office Liaison to CCEMO (Corrections Lieutenant).

### **CCEMO Function:**

- Columbia County CCEMO is the county department that works to minimize personal injury, loss of life and damage to property and the environment from man-made or natural disasters through mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery; while working with local, state and federal agencies, overseeing operations of the county Emergency Operation Center, all in accordance with the Columbia County Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan.
- CCEMO updates the county Multi-Jurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan every five years, oversees various agreements and MOU's with the Red Cross, Humane Society, Agricultural Society, and other public and private entities when planing and preparing for response and recovery of a disaster.
- CCEMO works with NYS (and FEMA) when organizing recovery funding from FEMA to public and private entities in Columbia County.
- CCEMO applies for and manages Homeland Security and other NYS & Federal grants.
- CCEMO works with NYS and the FIRE & EMS Coordinators to provide training to local officials, emergency services and the general public.

### **What agencies does CCEMO work with:**

- CCEMO works with agencies and organizations including the NYS Division of Homeland Security & Emergency Services Office of Emergency Management, county Dept of Health, Fire Coordinator,

EMS Coordinator, 911 Department, Police, Fire, EMS emergency services, Facilities Department, the three power companies servicing Columbia County, FEMA, Weapons of Mass Destruction Work Group, Coroners, gas pipeline companies, town supervisors & mayors, Questar III Boces, public and private schools, spiritual leaders, the hospital, nursing homes, organizations such as COARC and the community college as part of disaster preparedness, exercise's, drills, disaster response, training and recovery.

#### **How much does CCEMO interact with the Sheriff's Office:**

- CCEMO is set up within the Sheriff's Office as a stand alone service with it's own budget in a separate section of the Sheriff's budget.
- Article 2B of the NYS Executive Law requires the Chairman of the Board of Supervisors (or County Executive) to complete Emergency Mngt training and annual refresher courses as he/she has the responsibility to organize and provide county resources, declare countywide (or multiple town) State of Emergencies and to take what action is needed for county residents during a disaster.
- CCEMO works closely with the Chairman of the Board of Supervisors to organize and provide countywide emergency management functions, while currently still required to also report to the Sheriff.
- The Director of EMO has no supervisory authority over members of the Sheriff's Office (other than CCEMO members). If assistance is needed from the Sheriff's Office, as with any other agency, the CCEMO Director makes a request through the Sheriff, Undersheriff or CCSO Liaison to CCEMO. Any request is typically made at least 24 hours before assistance is needed. For example, since the courts were not operating during the early COVID Pandemic, assistance from Sheriff's Office Corrections transport officers (and occasionally Sheriff's Patrols) was requested. This assistance was very much appreciated, but limited to help with preparing and delivering PPE to entities identified by NYS.
- The CCEMO Director also made numerous requests to the county Facilities department to assist with their "box truck" to retrieve PPE from NYS stockpiles (along with a CCEMO member) and with sanitation and maintenance issues at Quarantine locations NYS required the county DOH to maintain.
- During the Pandemic, the vast majority of hand sanitizer and PPE were delivered or distributed from the Public Safety Facility by CCEMO members, (not other Sheriff's personnel).
- Additionally during the pandemic, CCEMO has worked directly with NYS DHSES, county Facilities Dept, FIRE & EMS Coordinators and Health Dept on a much much larger scale than members of the Sheriff's Office.
- CCEMO is issued one (prior patrol) 2012 4WD Tahoe operated and maintained by the Director.
- CCEMO Deputy Directors routinely use their own vehicles for CCEMO business and submit mileage for reimbursement.
- During the pandemic, a Sheriff's Office (enclosed) trailer was used to distribute hand sanitizer and PPE. However, that trailer was needed for other Sheriff's Office duties and CCEMO is currently using a trailer borrowed from the Fire Coordinator.

#### **Emergency Operations Center (EOC):**

- CCEMO oversees and maintains the county Emergency Operations Center which is now located at the Public Safety Facility.
- Over the past few years, while designing and now completing the Fire Training Center, plans included a storage area, larger office and county EOC areas with much more space than the current EOC, (including parking).
- Earlier this year, the Fire Coordinator reported that the EOC & CCEMO space at the Fire Training

- Center is ready for use.
- This move will free up the old EOC space at the Public Safety Facility for much needed expansion by the Sheriff.

**What is proposed regarding CCEMO:**

- As planned for and discussed in previous committee meetings, CCEMO is proposing to move it's office and the county EOC to the Fire Training Center.
- Additionally, it was discussed earlier this year with current Sheriff Bartlett about making CCEMO an independent county department as it was before 2011. He agreed it's best for CCEMO and plans to move forward would be finalized after the Sheriff's election.
- The section of the Sheriff's budget already designated for CCEMO (except for funding from one budget line that pays for Sheriff's Office maintenance agreements) would remain with CCEMO.
- This move provides CCEMO approximately \$65,000 in operating budget lines and \$34,000 in payroll.
- NO new additional county funds are needed.
- Making CCEMO a county department does not violate a local or other law or regulation.
- Within the next three years, CCEMO will propose a plan to the Board of Supervisors for one full time non-management position for a CCEMO Coordinator/Clerk. This position would be initially funded by grant funding available by NYS. Researching positions in other counties and working with county Civil Service & HR to establish duties and salary, then applying for grant funds and if awarded, seeking approval from the full Board of Supervisors, this process will take more than a year and possibly 2 + years to complete.
- There has NEVER been discussion about two full time positions or for a full time CCEMO Director's position.
- The Sheriff's Office has and does apply for grant funding on its own. The Sheriff's Office will continue to benefit from Homeland Security (or other grant funding) typically applied for and awarded to CCEMO. It is noted that the grants applied for by CCEMO also include funding for county emergency training and equipment for county FIRE & EMS teams, operations, etc.

**Why is this CCEMO move needed:**

- Especially as we continue to experience this pandemic, it's been apparent that NYS DHSES Office of Emergency Mngt, as part of their disaster planning and operations, considers county EMO's to be the "Disaster Hub" for "everything disaster" in that county.
- All requests for state and federal resources must be made through the county EMO via the NYS NYRespond web network.
- Over the past several years and even since 2011, EMO has been restructured numerous times.
- This move to make CCEMO it's own independent county department allows it to report directly to the Chairman and Board of Supervisors through the process followed by other county departments.
- Making CCEMO an independent county department provides the long term advocacy and stability needed to be more proactive, stay current and keep up with the increasing duties and interactions with NYS and other agencies and organizations.

**Who has had input and supports this CCEMO move:**

- The past EMO Director, current EMO Director, current Sheriff Bartlett, county EMS Coordinator, county FIRE Coordinator, county 911 Director, current EMO staff, Chairman of the Board of Supervisors and the majority of Supervisors (Dem & Rep) who sit on the Public Safety Committee (and voted in favor of the move at the November 2021 PS meeting), agree that making CCEMO an independent county department is best for CCEMO and for present and future public safety and

Columbia County residents.

**What negative effect will the CCEMO move have on Public Safety or the Sheriff's Office:**

- None what-so-ever.
- Being physically located at the Fire Training Center and CCEMO being it's own county department will only enhance it's ability to function and stay active with current and future responsibilities.
- If assistance is needed from the Sheriff's Office (or other agency) CCEMO will request the assistance as before, through the CCSO Liaison to EMO, the Undersheriff or Sheriff.
- As a county department, CCEMO will continue a public safety partnership with the Sheriff's Office. Being a (new) county public safety administrator, it's believed that Sheriff Elect Krapf (like Sheriff Bartlett) will approve a request(s) for assistance from CCEMO. If for some reason the request is not approved or assistance is unavailable, CCEMO will make the request to another agency.

**Other Issues with CCEMO being part of the Sheriff's Office:**

- During the early times of the COVID Pandemic, many calls from public officials and the general public were received by CCEMO, reporting violations of NYS emergency orders and demanding that as part of the Sheriff's Office, CCEMO enforce the orders. Many did not understand that CCEMO is a completely civilian part of the Sheriff's Office with no enforcement authority at all. The complaints were referred to the Sheriff's Law Enforcement Division or appropriate town authority.
- In mid 2018 after the current Director was appointed, while reviewing the county Special Needs Registry program then overseen by CCEMO, it became apparent that some people who would benefit by registering, were hesitant to do so, or chose not to do so, because they did not want to provide basic personal and medical information to a "police department." Luckily, after discussions with county DOH, it was agreed that they would be a better fit to oversee the Special Needs Registry and took over the program.

**Why the CCEMO move should NOT be delayed:**

- This is a process that began well before the Sheriff's election of 2021.
- Design plans that include CCEMO and the completion of the Fire Training Center, support reports of prior committee discussions about the physical move plan.
- Moving the EOC and making CCEMO an independent county department is not about WHO is Sheriff. It has been thought out and approved by all current county level public safety leaders and would happen no matter who is Sheriff.
- After Sheriff Elect Krapf was informed of the move during a meeting initiated by Chairman Murell before the November 2021 PS meeting, it was requested that the move be delayed so more information could be provided. Subsequently, the process was delayed so an informational session could be scheduled with the Board of Supervisors and for two additional meetings with the Sheriff Elect and Undersheriff to be.
- Delaying the CCEMO move will not change the information and facts needed for a Board of Supervisors resolution vote.
- Further delaying the process continues to put CCEMO in "limbo" with at least one January 2022 tabletop exercise and other non essential CCEMO activities being delayed.
- It is respectfully requested that this move be approved ASAP and not further delayed.