

Emergency personnel sworn in

By PAUL KRILL
Staff Writer

NEWTON — Members of the emergency medical services division of the Sussex County Emergency Management Office were sworn in Friday by county Clerk Helen "Honey" Ackerman.

"What we're going to do is have better communication and better rapport between rescue squads," in the county, said Emergency Management Coordinator John Bopp. Division members are to serve as advisers to the office on coordinating emergency services, he said.

Sworn in were: Keith Fletcher of Newton, division coordinator; Phyllis Esteves of Branchville, deputy coordinator; Craig Fary of Hampton, communications officer; Patrick Coleman of Hardyston, equipment officer; Shelley Belcher of Vernon, personnel officer, and Wayne Ross, liaison officer

All are members of rescue squads in the county and have extensive first aid training.

The group has already begun seminars on emergency services in the county, Fletcher said.

"Our major purpose is to assist first aid squads in providing better care to the citizens of Sussex County," said Fletcher.

Sussex trains rescuers to 'manage' disasters

By PATTY PAUGH

Fun turns into disaster at the crowded Sussex County Farm and Horse Show as a ferris wheel topples onto another amusement ride, injuring dozens of people and creating hysteria.

The magnitude of that hypothetical situation could overwhelm rescue personnel if it ever occurred, according to Sussex County emergency management officials.

But they say disaster planning efforts received a large boost last week when the freeholders swore in five volunteers as members of the county's new Division of Emergency Medical Services.

Headed by coordinator Keith Fletcher, the division will concentrate on emergency planning, training of emergency workers and coordination of rescue efforts during disasters.

But the addition of volunteers to the division that was staffed singlehandedly by Fletcher for the past year will allow the agency to augment its programs.

For example, he said, the division wants to train rescue squad volunteers to deal with casualties of large numbers of people and to cope with accidents involving hazardous materials.

Fletcher pointed out the potential for spills of toxic substances presents itself daily through the transport of these materials over highways and on the recently reactivated New York, Susquehanna & Western Railway.

John Bopp, director of the county's Office of Emergency Management, agrees that all emergency personnel—police, fire and first aid squad members—need more training in dealing with hazardous substances. He said his office and Fletcher's division can work together to offer necessary training programs.

Bopp pointed out volunteers also can jeopardize their own lives if they do not take proper precautions at an accident scene where toxic materials are involved.

"The biggest problem we have is these people are so anxious to get in there and save somebody's life that they risk their own life. Then you have

another casualty and the loss of a volunteer," he said.

Another key obstacle in preparing emergency personnel for a disaster is teaching them to work together, according to Bopp.

"Each group understands their job and does it well. But they don't understand each other's job and how they can work together," he said.

"You need a unified team approach to a disaster, with rescue (squads), fire (departments) and police all working together," Fletcher agreed.

In the collapsed ferris wheel scenario, Bopp maintained that rescue efforts could be thwarted by the lack of cooperation. First-aiders may not transport victims to hospitals if police do not clear roads and calm crowds, and fire could spread if firefighters do not have access to the accident, he said.

The only way to counteract that problem is through joint drills, involving police, fire and first-aiders, Bopp added. He hopes to stage some of those practice sessions this year.

Bopp believes greater cooperation will be ensured simply by the expansion of Fletcher's division. The extra members will help overcome what Bopp termed "turf protection" among emergency personnel over calls because they all belong to local rescue squads in the county, and provide better communication between his agency and the municipality.

In order to carry out their goals, both Bopp and Fletcher acknowledged their agencies require some additional equipment, especially radios. Currently, emergency personnel from different municipalities do not have the ability to communicate on the same frequency when they respond to a call, according to Bopp.

That could prove disastrous in a large-scale emergency that demanded coordination of dozens of volunteers, he maintained.

Fletcher added the county also needs a stockpile of at least 100 backboards used for the stabilization and transport of accident victims. That amount would be necessary to handle a disaster involving large numbers of casualties, he explained.