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# 2023 & 2024 ANNUAL REPORT

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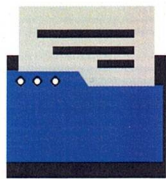
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# Introduction

## The Mission

The mission of PA US&R is to provide people, equipment, and expertise to assist first responders with highly technical rescue operations when requested.

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## The Vision

PA US&R is a NIMS typed, to Federal standards, and State Recognized US&R Task Force. We provide personnel and equipment to perform rescue operations in situations that are outside the scope of local responders. We have highly trained people, state-of-the-art equipment, and the experience required to perform high-risk/low frequency operations safely and efficiently.

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## What we've accomplished so far

This report covers two of the most dynamic years in the history of the organization and marks the re-birth of a Commonwealth wide response system. Buoyed by bipartisan and bi-cameral support, substantial advances have been made to prepare, equip, and enhance a Commonwealth Urban Search & Rescue Team that existed with insufficient attention and funding from the Commonwealth. The unanimous passage of HB843, now Act 113, solidifies our existence and codifies the requirement for a Type III - Urban Search & Rescue Task Force in the western portion of Pennsylvania.

The organization takes pride in its role as a catalyst, initiating long overdue attention, investment, and modernization of the stagnant and neglected Commonwealth Urban Search & Rescue System.

The team has invested countless hours assessing, categorizing, preparing, inventorying, and packaging response equipment; this work continues.

Presented below are reports from the Managers of the individual disciplines that comprise the team, as well as an administrative review of the Western Pennsylvania Regional Urban Search and Technical Rescue Team (WPARUSATRT), the non-profit corporation which administers the initial grant investment, and partners with the City of Pittsburgh to administer future grant investments.

# Team Component Reports

## Rescue - Team Managers John Soderberg and Gregory Porter



The Rescue discipline of the team continues to close equipment gaps to achieve Type III Task force capabilities. A solid gap assessment is complete, and the focus has shifted to procurement, packaging, and readiness.

A complete inventory of Concrete Breaching, Rope and Confined Space equipment has been completed and only a few items remain to complete the Type III requirements.

Significant progress has been achieved in packaging rescue assets into kits for forward deployment.

A new lumber trailer has been delivered and is now in the process of being configured and loaded. The trailer has onboard power generation, compressed air, and integrated awning for deployment in inclement weather

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## Training – Team Manager David Naples



The Training Team identified a few critical challenges during training and exercises conducted in 2023. In one session crews learned a valuable lesson in physics, when improper load dynamics caused a rescue system failure. As a result, the 2024 training plan includes focused modules to correct the assumptions and reinforce best practices.

### 2023 Accomplishments

Appointment of a New Training Manager in June of 2023 – David Naples. Dave is a founding member, who has the passion and dedication to lead our training operations.

Seven bi-monthly team trainings held



- January- Night shoring operations and B.O.O setup
- March- Heavy lifting and Rigging
- May- Concrete breaching
- July- Obstacle course using simple machines to move heavy loads
- September- Back to basics individual cadre training: (Rescue, Search, Medical, Plans, Engineering, HazMat, Logistics)
- November(X2)- Personal gear loadout, New equipment orientation, Facepiece fit testing, New facility orientation. Cadre Logistics.

Daylight/Weekday training session – In an effort to accommodate requests from team members for alternatives to the traditional Saturday training, we responded with a weekday option. The attendance and



enthusiasm for this schedule option demonstrated the need to deliver training when it aligns with the members schedules. This alternate training schedule continued in 2024 with three additional weekday training opportunities for team members.

- Total Training Attendance across all sessions – 608 participants
- (3,217) Hours were focused on Team Training
- (342) Additional Hours were dedicated to individual Cadre and Classroom training
- Five members attended Medical Specialist training. Three members attended a Homeland Security Exercise Evaluation Program training.
- Twelve members attended the State Urban Search & Rescue Association conference.
- Five members attended the Structural Collapse Specialist (SCS) course



A Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PENDOT) approved Commercial Drivers License (CDL) training program has been established within the team to develop and increase competent and capable commercial vehicle operators.

#### 2024 In Review

Building on lessons learned during a 2023 training mishap, the 2024 training plan focused on multiple training modules to correct these assumptions and reinforce best practices

#### 2024 Accomplishments

Nine bi-monthly team trainings were held.

- January- Engineering shoring review and Cadre logistics
- March- Basic lifting Techniques, A-frame lifting with picket anchors and Airbag lifting



- March(X2) Forklift Safety - 12 members + 1 Regional guest
- May(X2)- Concrete breaching
- July-(X2)- Medical Cadre training Con Space Medicine, (Team) Tech Search review of new equipment and practical on ACFA grounds.
- August- VFIS Trailering and UTV Train the Trainer Safety course.
- September- Multi agency large scale exercise Oil City
- November(X2) - Annual Bloodborne, GPS and Fit testing. CISM Awareness training. Introduction to new battery powered equipment and Concrete breaching.

Increased Daylight/Weekday training sessions – In an effort to accommodate requests from team members for alternatives to the traditional Saturday training, we responded with three additional weekday options. The attendance and enthusiasm for this schedule option validated the need to continue to deliver training when it aligns with the members schedules. This alternate training schedule will continue in 2025 with five additional weekday training opportunities for team members bringing the total to eleven opportunities.

- Total Training Attendance across all sessions – 613 members
- 3,582 Hours were focused on Team Training
- 958 Additional Hours were dedicated to individual Cadre and Classroom training.
- Three members attended Structural Specialist update training.
- Thirty-two members attended the SUSAR Conference receiving training in the following areas.
  - EMAP 1
  - Flood Rescue Logistics 4

- Logistics 4
  - Medical Prep Response for Bombings 1
  - MSOC 19
  - Task Force Communications Specialist 2
  - Technical Search Spec 1
- The Plans team continued to increase the level of professionalism with full IAPs available for training.
  - Plans team expanded the application of providing real time information to RSOs in the field.
  - Plans initiated the integration of the EMOS sign in process for tracking training attendance.
  - In mid- 2024 the Training Team initiated “Training Tuesday.” This initiative shares short educational training videos via email on the first Tuesday of the month. The topics range from, manufacturer provided content about equipment, YouTube demonstrations of skills, and general awareness of safety issues.

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## Water Rescue—Team Manager Mike Kaplan

### 2023 Review:



We have further refined our water operations mission and have developed partnerships to support the deployment and movement of this specialized team component. Recognizing the demands of this cadre, Mike Kaplan has been elevated to the role of Water Rescue Team Manager. The Water Team achieved NIMS typing/certification as a Type 2A Swift water rescue Team. Our water rescue cadre continues refinement of response packages, partnership and



collaboration with R13 specialty assets, and continuous honing of skills. In addition to team typing/certification, multiple members of this cadre achieved professional certification as Surface Water Rescue Technicians and/or have received the designation of Certification Evaluator for Surface Water Rescue Technician.



2023 Joint Training - Team members participated in a multi-agency readiness drill on the Pittsburgh Rivers with VRSR Teams around the Region. Mission readiness is a key element and PA US&R members assisted with water operations, transport of personnel, and providing waterway assistance for the PA Hart team simulating hoisting operations.

#### 2023 Equipment Received

- 2- 14' Aluminum Jon Boats for water related evacuation
- 4- 14' Inflatable Rescue Crafts for Swift Water Operations
- 8- 30HP Mercury Outboard Motors
- 2- Double Stack Tilting Trailers

With these additional components and equipment the US&R Water Cache has been established with Mission Ready Push Packages. The packages were developed to assist in regionalized flooding events throughout Pennsylvania and neighboring areas when requested. With the equipment being wheels ready this will allow for more efficient departure of personnel and equipment to flooding sites around the region.



In 2023 The Water Cadre has dedicated over 400 hours of training, logistics inventory and maintenance of new and existing equipment to ensure supplies and personnel are mission ready.

#### 2024 Review:

In 2024 The Water Cadre has dedicated over 300 hours of logistics inventory and maintenance of new and existing equipment to make sure supplies and personnel are mission ready.

2- Mission Ready Double Stack Trailers have each been loaded with 2 IRB's, 1 Jon Boat, and 4-30HP Mercury Outboard Motors to support water operations.

The enclosed Water Trailer will support onsite logistics and operations and is nearing completion with the typing inventory.

In late 2024 USAR Water Recertified as a PA VRSR Type 2A Team.

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## Planning/Communications –Team Manager Donald Baird

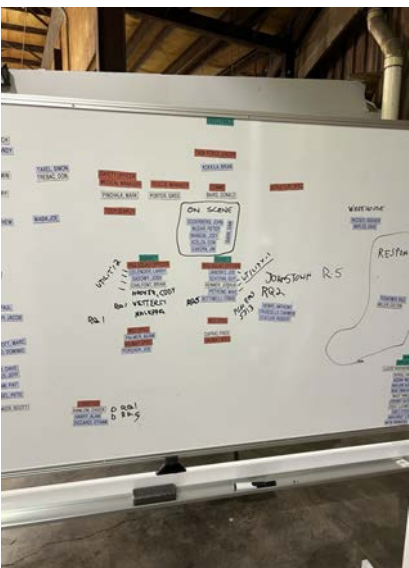


Donald Baird appointed to Planning Team Manager position following the retirement of Todd Plunkett.

Purchased necessary equipment as per the FEMA US&R Cache list for the planning section.

Introduced several new technology platforms to the team to assist in operations and management including:

- SARCOP – Search and Rescue Common Operating Platform
- iOS Platform for field capabilities including iPhones and iPads
- CradlePoint and NetGear mobile hotspots for network connectivity
- Implementation of myDBSolution's - EMOS database system. Used to track all aspects of the team including:
  - Personnel
  - Training
  - Deployments
  - Cache and Resource Inventory/Management



Currently in the process of streamlining the “Check-In” Process for activations by implementing EMOS and technology aspects.

The Plans team continued to increase the level of professionalism with full IAPs available for training.

Plans team expanded the application of providing real time information to RSOs in the field.

#### Communications Team Accomplishments

- Initiated purchasing of communications equipment per the FEMA US&R Cache list for the Communications section.
- Worked with the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency (PEMA) and the Pennsylvania State Police (PSP) to secure access for all team radios to the State radio system ensuring interoperability during incidents.
- Worked with individual Region 13 counties to access their radio systems.
- Deployed new APX 8000XE portables and APX 8500 mobiles.
- Implemented JASON cases for radio storage and deployment.
- New team vehicles were upfitted with new APX 8500 mobiles.

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#### Medical –Team Manager Mark Pinchalk

The Medical Team consists of three (3) Physicians and multiple Paramedics who have completed a 46+ hour US&R Medical Specialist Program

- Provided medical screenings and medical support for all bimonthly team trainings
- Produced ICS-206 medical plans for all Bimonthly team trainings
- Produced and executed COVID-19 screening and force protection plans until the termination of the Public Health Emergency in May 2023
- Conducted a Medical Team Specific training at the May Training focusing on advanced medical support in the US&R environment:



- Crush Medicine Updates
- Hypothermia management
- Pain Control
- Extended Field Care
- Executed pre-deployment medical screening and on scene medical coordination for the team response to Westmoreland County for a female who fell into a mine shaft December 3-4.
- Ordered and processed medical supplies and equipment for Type III NIMS typing requirements
- Working on a Vendor Managed Inventory (VMI) agreement with Allegheny General Hospital or UPMC - Presbyterian Hospital for the US&R Type III Medical Pharmacy Cache.

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## Logistics –Team Manager Rodger Ricciuti

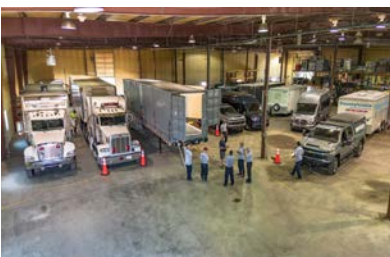


The Logistics section has been extremely focused on the assessment, gap identification, closure, and preparation of means of conveyance.

Multiple significant improvements have been accomplished in the last (2) years.

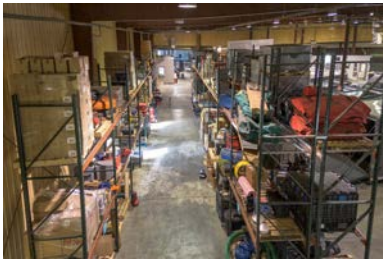
### Rolling Stock

- (4) ¾ Ton Crew Cab pickup trucks have been purchased, upfit and are in service. (3) have covered rear cargo areas with cargo slides, (1) has a Ladder Rack
- Replacement vehicle for the Johnstown component purchased, upfit and soon to be in service
- Tractor trailer combination unit to transport the Rescue Cache procured, upfit, and in service. This unit features a unique and innovative design utilizing a flatdeck trailer fit with (2) customized, side open shipping containers. The design includes a trailer mounted forklift for field unloading of cargo. The side open design provides rapid access to the cache equipment



when compared to a traditional van style trailer, and was accomplished at a fraction of the cost of a walk-around style rescue trailer.

- A curtain side style, tractor drawn trailer has been purchased. The used trailer was refurbished, saving significant costs. The trailer is designated for the loading and transport of the team support equipment.
- (3) Passenger vans have been purchased, upfit, and are in service. The vehicles were sourced from the used market, given that production lead times were forecast well beyond the need window.
- Enclosed Lumber Trailer was purchased, upfit and is in the process of being made operational. The trailer was sourced used from an emergency service organization that was downsizing its operations.
- Enclosed UTV Trailer was purchased, upfit, and is operational. The trailer was sourced used from an emergency service organization that was downsizing its operations.
- (2) UTVs were purchased, minor upfit was conducted to add driving/scene lighting. Both were sourced from the pre-owned market.
- Enclosed Water Rescue Trailer was purchased, upfitted, loaded, and is operational.
- Enclosed Communications/Planning Team trailer was purchased. Upfit is underway and loading for operational deployability will be completed soon.
- Procured a tractor and trailer from the used marketplace to serve as a commercial driver training platform.



### Warehouse Operations

- In 2023 the team secured a lease for a warehouse space. The bare warehouse required some work to make the space functional. Pallet racking, sourced from the pre-owned marketplace was purchased and installed. The warehouse, while not an ideal space for our operations, finally moved the vehicle parking indoors, and secured a dedicated space that is utilized for training, deployment, cache inventory



and maintenance, and the facility serves as our administrative home.

- Warehouse forklift purchased and in service.
- Network and security systems have been installed and are operational.
- The team has continued to organize and make effective use of the space.

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## Structural Engineering/Heavy Equipment & Rigging – Manager Thomas Anthony, P.E.

The Engineering and Heavy Equipment & Rigging (HERS) team has made substantial improvements in the packaging and deployability of the equipment cache dedicated to their specialty component of our mission.



- The engineering cache was reconstituted into two recon kits plus one kit for all of the additional equipment or equipment that is less likely to be used. One of the recon kits will be carried on one of the first out trucks while the second can be placed in one of the pick ups and used for engineering, callouts or rapid assessments.
  - Three team members attended a US&R Structures Specialists refresher class.
  - HERS equipment packaging, The HERS equipment - comprised of heavy cables, shackles, rigging accessories, and pulling machines - were previously packaged into cases that required hand unloading. The equipment has been re-distributed into pallet crates for ease of loading and unloading.
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## Technical Search – Manager Michael Petrone



The Technical Search Team has completed multiple tasks to close a majority of the technical gaps of the discipline. With a majority of the technical cameras and listening devices in inventory, a shift in focus to accomplish a critical Type III US&R capability, canine search assets, has been initiated and is solidly underway.

- Technical Search Specialist, Bill Cummings, with the assistance of Search Team Manager Mike Petrone have researched and developed a comprehensive canine search program. The program has been adopted by the organization.
- WPARUSTRT executed a purchase order for (2) search canines. The canines names have been selected to honor a deceased team member and a deceased team supporter.
- The Technical Search Team has initiated training with neighboring US&R Task Forces engaging with the partner canine search teams.
- Developed and packaged (2) matching Technical Search Specialist equipment recon packages. The recon packages provide the specialty tools and equipment for our Technical Search Specialists to perform rapid and calculated search assessments.

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## Hazmat –Manager Jim Eaborn



The Hazmat Group is progressing to become a FEMA Type III Urban Search and Rescue team by expanding the Hazmat cache with additional equipment. The acquisition of atmospheric monitoring meters and the meter's calibration station makes this equipment deployment ready at all times.

The Hazmat Group has modified the Hazmat equipment cache packaging of all equipment for a much faster deployment in a more organized manor.

Additionally, the Hazmat Group has multiple members scheduled in 2025 to attend the FEMA Hazmat US&R specialist course to meet the FEMA Type III personnel requirements

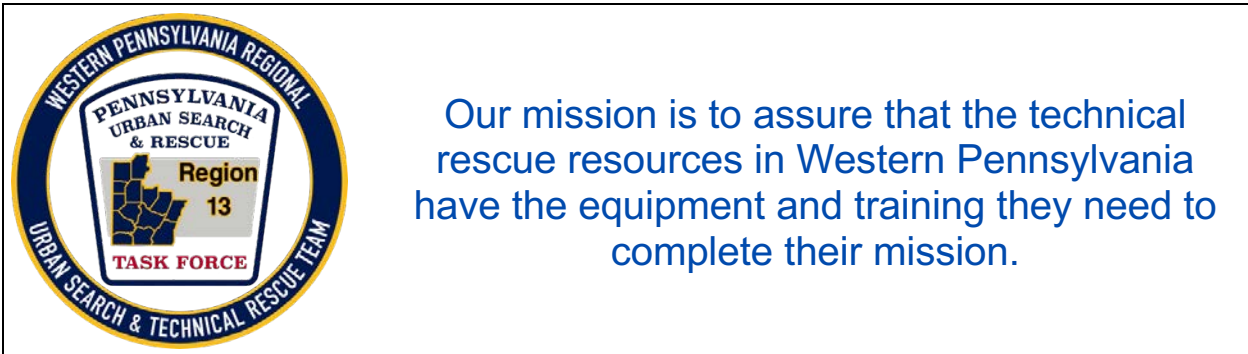
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# Pennsylvania Air National Guard 171<sup>st</sup> Air Refueling Wing

Over the last several years we have been fostering and expanding our relationship with the Pennsylvania Air National Guard - 171<sup>st</sup> Air Refueling Wing based at the Pittsburgh International Airport. The partnership started as a discussion and has developed into a blending of resources, leading to integration. The partners have each hosted the other at their facilities, and have had multiple opportunities to benefit from the engagements.



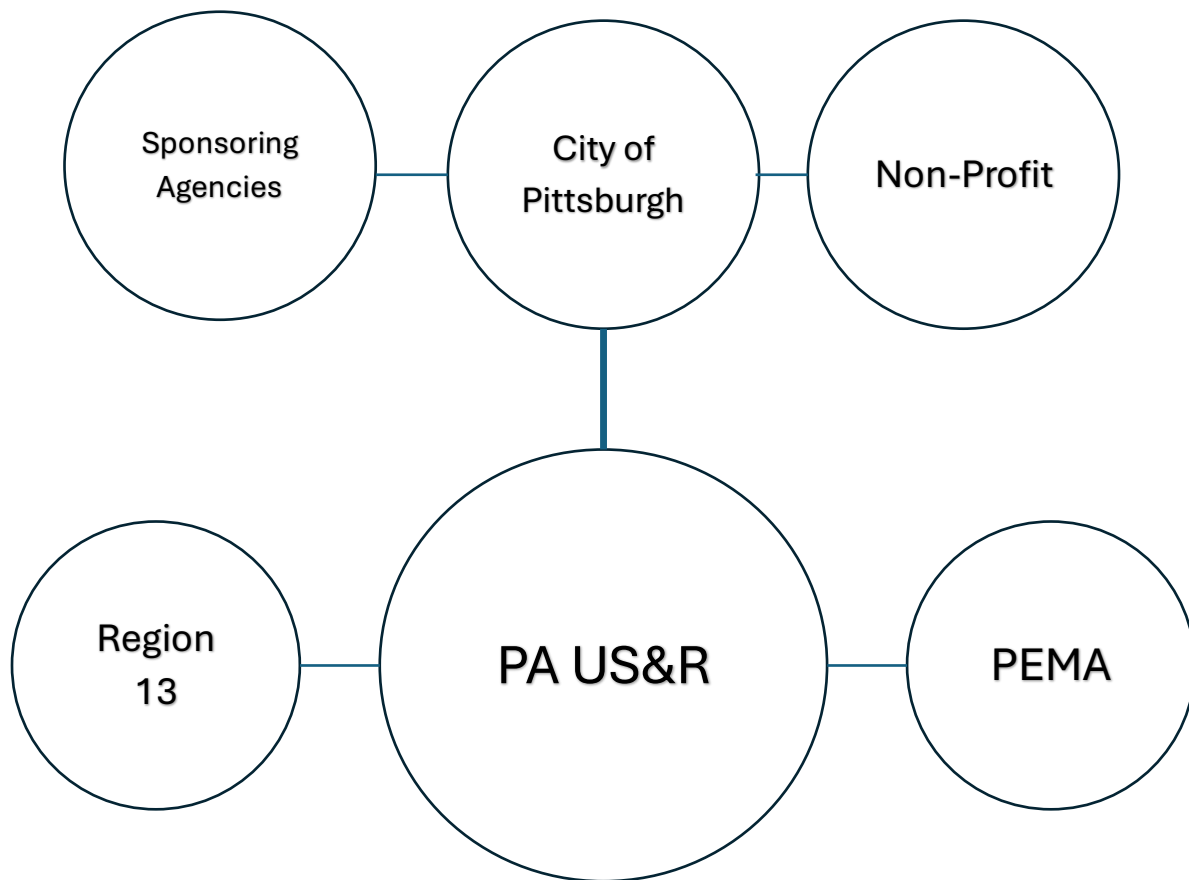
# Western Pennsylvania Regional Urban Search and Technical Rescue Team (WPARUSATRT)



The WPARUSATRT, established in 2021, exists and serves as a 501(c)3 non-profit corporation supporting the Western Pennsylvania US&R Task Force. The WPARUSATRT serves as the grant awardee for the initial targeted Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED) funding which accomplished a significant re-investment of our organization and focused fiscal resources to close known critical equipment and training gaps, primarily in 2023 and 2024. The initial grant performance period closes in June of 2025.

The WPARUSATRT will partner with the City of Pittsburgh who will serve as the Primary Sponsoring Agency for the team and act as the fiduciary agent managing Commonwealth grant dollars. To solidify this partnership the Board of Directors added a dedicated board position for a representative of the City of Pittsburgh.

This graphic represents the partners in our success. The City of Pittsburgh, the Non-profit, and member sponsoring agencies form the foundation for the team. PEMA and Region 13 provide the funding required for team operations, maintenance, and growth.

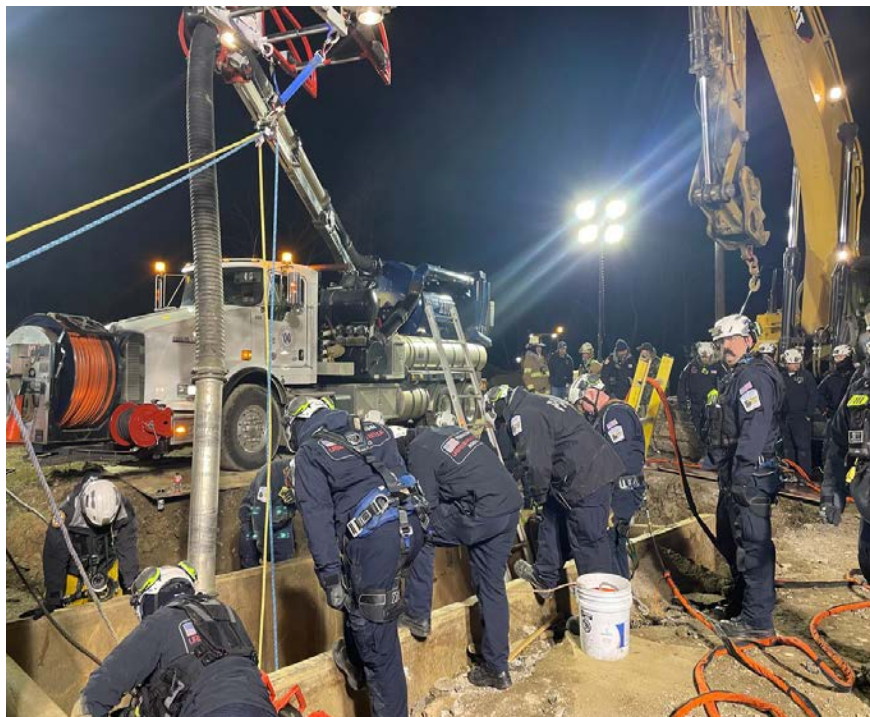




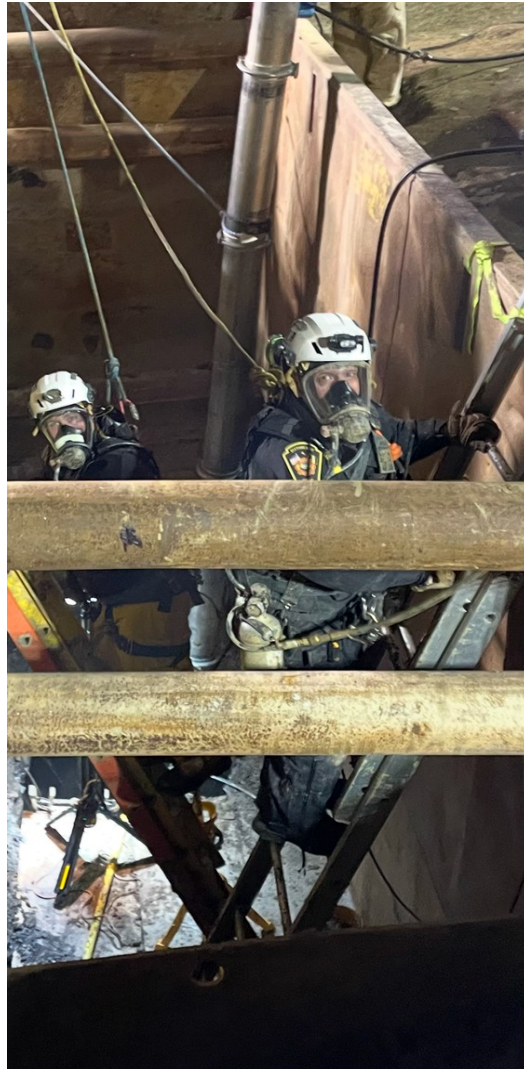
# Unity Township Regional Response

On December 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2024 in Unity Township, Westmoreland County a subterranean mine collapse created a sinkhole which entrapped a female victim who was searching for a missing pet. The local resources in Unity Township rapidly recognized the scope and scale of this complex search & rescue operation. The complex conditions included a deep trench opening, leading to intersecting mine tunnels/shafts. During the response, atmospheric monitoring equipment became paramount for air monitoring below ground level. During the initial air monitoring it was quickly determined that an oxygen deficiency existed. The responders utilized self-contained and supplied air breathing apparatus. Continuous air monitoring was employed with the atmospheres migrating from the coal mine and seam unknown

Initial response included an advisory group which expanded into a full local team response to operate in the multiple work cycle response. The team ultimately took the lead in entry and access responsibilities as well as Operations lead in the Unified Command structure. On December 3<sup>rd</sup> & 4<sup>th</sup>, the team, operated in a complex environment, while enduring the complicating weather conditions.



The opportunity to support the responders of Westmoreland County further developed our relations with Region 13 responders and leaders and demonstrated the team's competence and capability.

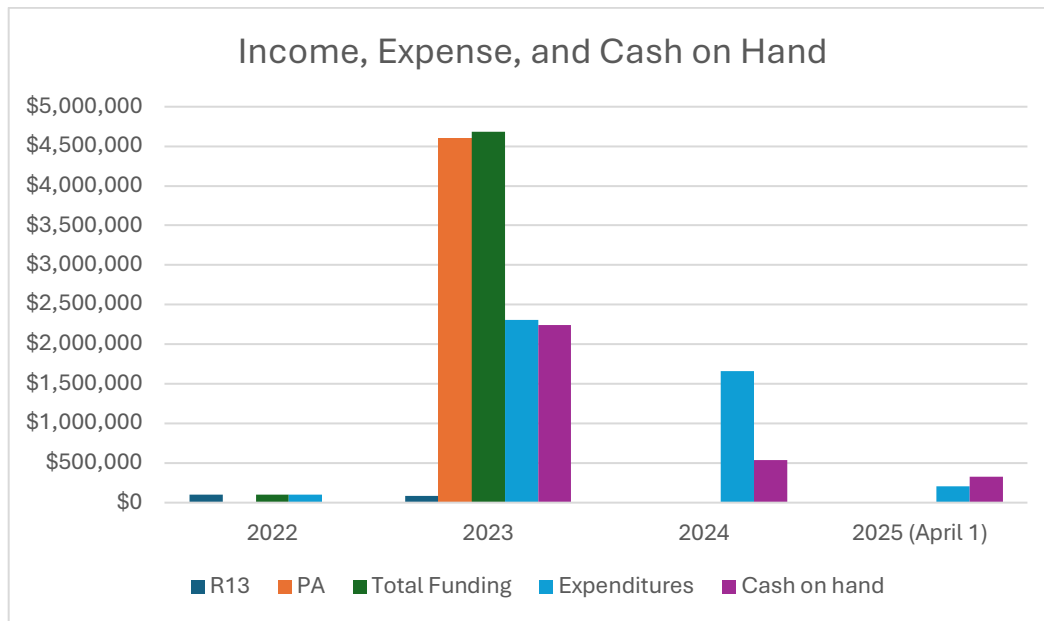


# Financial Performance

## Grant Dollar Investments

Over the course of the last 3-years, the investment by the Commonwealth Legislature (2022/2023 initial DCED Targeted Grant) has significantly enhanced the response capabilities. Future known funding includes a PEMA legislation targeted grant that continues the investment and development of response capabilities. NOTE: as of the publishing of this report in April 2025, the FY 2024/2025 targeted budget allotment has not been distributed to the Sponsoring Agency by PEMA.

A very special thanks to Senators Devlin Robinson and Jay Costa for championing the financial investment in the PA Senate, and Representatives Dan Miller, Natalie Mihalek, and Josh Kail in the PA House of Representatives.



# Future Plans

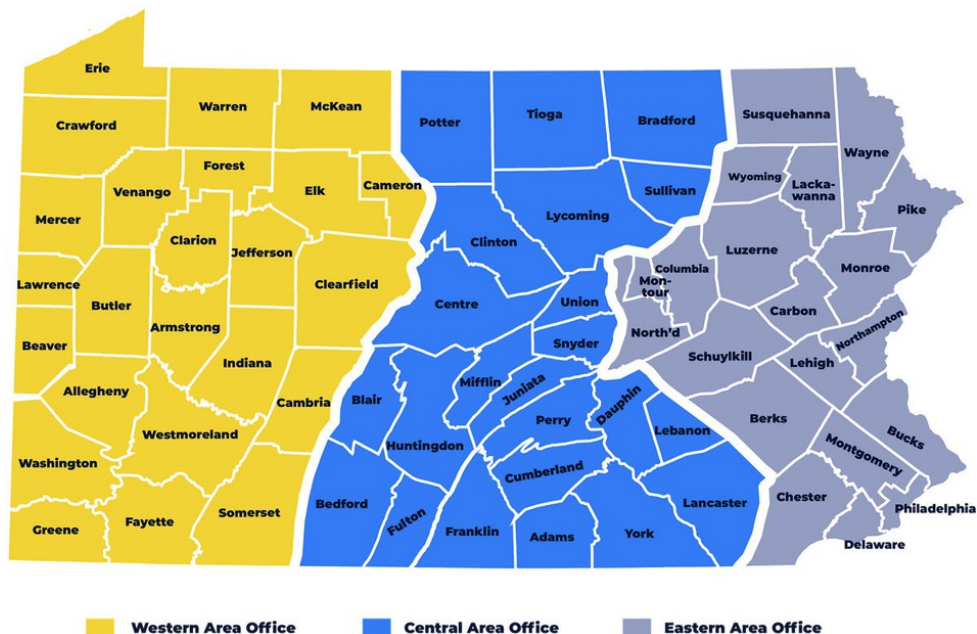
Strategically, the focus of the future is on professional development of the current and future team members. The team, recognizing its median age, invests significant outreach effort to identify and attract the next generation of members.

The City of Pittsburgh has reached initial agreement to serve as the Primary Sponsoring Agency of the Task Force. The Primary Sponsoring agency will be the singular link between PEMA and the Task Force. The supporting sponsoring partner agencies will continue to serve a crucial role in providing the personnel to satisfy deployment rostering.

A critical focus will be the legislative dedication of annual sustainment funds targeted to sustain, and maintain operational readiness of the team equipment and personnel.

The development of a permanent home supporting the capabilities of the team, including storage, indoor parking for response assets, administrative offices, equipment maintenance space, training/meeting space is a crucial initiative. Additionally, the development of training venues in the region to generate enhanced training capacity and participation of local level response assets, will be a future focus.

Opportunity exists for further consolidation of Western Commonwealth US&R resources, to align cohesively with the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency (PEMA), Western Area Office or beyond.





*“Our continued success is rooted in the internal and external relationships, teamwork, and partnerships. We value the partners we have and look forward to continued collaborative success” - TFL Brian Kokkila*



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## Reach Out

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