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Pennsylvania Food Merchants Association and Pennsylvania Convenience Store Council Partner with Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture On Emergency Preparedness Guidance

Emergency Preparedness and Response Guidance Created for Emergency Managers, Wholesale Distributors and Retail Food Merchants

CAMP HILL – The Pennsylvania Food Merchants Association (PFMA) and Pennsylvania Convenience Store Council (PCSC) have partnered with the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture (PDA) to create Emergency Preparedness and Response Guidance for wholesale distributors and retail food merchants that can be leveraged during times of emergency.

This guidance establishes a foundation upon which Pennsylvania's food distribution network and PDA as well as the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency (PEMA) can build an ongoing and mutually beneficial relationship. This state-level initiative assists with on-going efforts between the private food sector and county and local emergency authorities.

In times of emergency, supplies such as rapidly distributable food, over-the-counter (OTC) drugs and pharmaceuticals, as well as other consumer products, are critical, and depending on the scope of the emergency, can also be in short supply. Keeping our critical distribution systems moving in an emergency maintains stability, public health and confidence for the state's 12 million residents.

PFMA and PCSC members understand that the mission of PDA, and ultimately PEMA, is to ensure the safety of its citizens by working to develop and coordinate a unified, all-hazards planning and response effort for any emergency event.

In April 2008, the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture began the process of drafting the document. The Emergency Preparedness and Response Guidance for Pennsylvania's food retailers and wholesale distributors was approved for dissemination in November.

"When disaster strikes, the food system is often impacted, therefore partnerships built before a disaster strikes are key to the state's short and long-term response and recovery and PDA's work on this project was essential in creating the guidance," said Randy St. John, senior vice president of Association Services at PFMA.

This Emergency Preparedness and Response Guidance details the appropriate processes, procedures and communication protocols that the state can use to integrate the private food distribution sector into a coordinated all-hazards emergency response plan by:

- Utilizing procedures and communication protocols to support real-time, two-way sharing of situational awareness and incident management between the private food distribution sector and state government during an incident of state or national significance. Situational awareness may include but is not limited to: power outage projections; major road closure information; critical weather service alerts; and general two-way coordination;
- Streamlining paperwork for calls for emergency assistance and Hours of Service (HoS) waivers; and
- Conducting coordinated response plan training with private food sector, emergency response and sector specific agencies at the state, county and local levels and more.

The Emergency Preparedness and Response Guidance is available to any food retailer or distributor in Pennsylvania. The guidance is not limited to the PFMA and PCSC membership. To request copies of the guidance and to get involved in the two-way communication network, please contact Annette Knapp at aknapp@pfma.net.

The Pennsylvania Food Merchants Association/Pennsylvania Convenience Store Council is a statewide trade association representing more than 1,100 retail food and convenience stores, wholesale distributors and other associated business members throughout Pennsylvania.

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