

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

December 22, 2016

[View Online](#)

Governor Wolf Announces 511PAConnect to Keep Stranded Motorists Safe, Informed

Harrisburg, PA – Governor Tom Wolf today announced the launch of 511PAConnect, a new initiative that will provide information updates to motorists in the event of a long-term road closure due to accidents on the Pennsylvania Turnpike or other state roadways. Following last year’s significant trapped queue during Winter Storm Jonas, Wolf tasked state agencies to develop a tool to better keep drivers informed in similar situations in the future.

“People being stuck on roadways due to an accident isn’t a new problem, but we’re using modern technology to keep motorists informed about the status of accident cleanup and highway reopening,” said Governor Wolf. “This connection with motorists will also allow us to have a clearer picture of who is sitting in a vehicle and where they are, so we can better plan for the use of our resources.”

Wolf said when personnel from the PA Turnpike and PennDOT identify a potential long-term closure, they will notify staff at the 24-hour Commonwealth Watch and Warning Center at the PA Emergency Management Agency, who will issue an initial location-based alert to motorists in the area of the closure. Law enforcement also uses the alerting system to issue Amber Alerts for missing children.

“This system will only be used for emergencies that will last for a sustained period,” said PEMA Director Richard D. Flinn Jr. “It is important for motorists to recognize that the system

will only work in areas with cell phone service, and that this is not a substitute for calling 9-1-1 if you have an actual emergency in your vehicle.”

Motorists who receive the alert will have the option of registering for automatic text messages or phone call updates. Follow-up notifications will be generated by Turnpike and PennDOT staff monitoring the closure. Once the incident is resolved, motorists who registered for the alerts will automatically be unsubscribed and all personal data will be scrubbed from the system.

“This new 511PAConnect initiative helps PennDOT in its mission to serve drivers regardless of weather or road conditions that may impede travel,” said Department of Transportation Secretary Leslie S. Richards. “While we hope we never have to use it, drivers will now have rapid communications on conditions when emergencies or major incidents impact their travel.”

“We certainly recognize that it can be stressful for travelers caught in an extended roadway closure, not knowing where they are, worrying how long they may have to sit there,” said PA Turnpike CEO Mark Compton. “At a time like that, just knowing someone is out there who is aware of your predicament can be a comfort; and the updates and life-safety messages we push out through this tool help to make stranded travelers feel connected.”

PennDOT and the Turnpike offer a variety of tools to keep travelers informed during all levels of incidents — including the 511PA smartphone app, phone number, online sources and social media platforms — but 511PAConnect is the first initiative of its kind to link directly to a targeted group of travelers who are being impacted by, or who are

approaching, a large-scale emergency.

Governor Wolf also said motorists should maintain a small stash of emergency supplies in their cars year-round. A basic emergency kit should include non-perishable food and water and a cell phone charger, and any specialized supplies such as baby or pet care items, as well as items appropriate for the weather such as a blanket, small shovel or rain gear.

Free emergency kit checklists for your vehicle or home and family emergency plan templates are available online at www.ReadyPA.org.

MEDIA CONTACT:

Jeffrey Sheridan, Governor's Office – 717-783-1116

Erin Waters-Trasatt, PennDOT – 717-783-8800

Carl DeFebo, Turnpike – 717-645-2265

Ruth A. Miller, PEMA – 717-651-2009 or ruthmiller@pa.gov