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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
March 27, 2007**

GOVERNOR RENDELL RESPONDS TO INDEPENDENT REVIEW OF STATE'S SNOWSTORM RESPONSE; PLEDGES REFORMS TO EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT OPERATIONS

REPORT BY JAMES LEE WITT ASSOCIATES IDENTIFIES IMPROVEMENT ITEMS AT PENNDOT, STATE POLICE, PEMA, NATIONAL GUARD

HARRISBURG — Governor Edward G. Rendell said today that an independent review of the state's response to the Valentine's Day snowstorm has yielded valuable insight into Pennsylvania's emergency response operations that will help public officials better respond to future incidents.

The report, issued by James Lee Witt Associates, evaluated the performance of the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency, state police, Department of Transportation, and the National Guard, and identified key areas in need of operational reform.

In response to the report, Governor Rendell issued three directives to PennDOT, PEMA and the state police, ordering immediate adoption of changes that address specific findings outlined by the firm.

The Governor added that James Lee Witt Associates will be retained to help state government officials look at broad and major changes in the commonwealth's system of emergency preparedness.

"With today's action, I can assure the citizens of Pennsylvania that specific deficiencies in our planned readiness will be addressed immediately," Governor Rendell said. "For example, I will ask PennDOT to work with James Lee Witt Associates on a second report that is specifically designed to foretell traffic conditions

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instantaneously. Additionally, we'll take steps to immediately repair each component of the roadway weather information system so PennDOT can improve its situational awareness in future events similar to this.

"These changes are much needed and, frankly, should have been done a long time ago. They will be corrected. Our work to revamp and improve this system will continue with the help of Mr. Witt and his team," the Governor said.

Governor Rendell went on to express his disappointment at the state's failure to address the issues outlined in the reports, despite being noted in earlier after-action reports, and accepted responsibility for not acting on these matters.

"The most disturbing part of the report, I find, was its findings that state emergency system management is lacking and is not on par with national standards," said the Governor

"I take full responsibility for that failing," he said. "As Mr. Witt noted in the report, 'The winter storm was not the first sign of issues with emergency management in Pennsylvania. After action reports on previous emergencies outline many of the ongoing problems with emergency management in the commonwealth. Yet, due in great part to extraordinary efforts by individuals in response to previous events, these problems had not surfaced to the extent that they did during the winter storm.'

"Since I've been Governor, there have been eight different disasters where we have been called on to provide emergency services," said the Governor. "In each and every case, that response was more than satisfactory and received high praise from citizens and commentators alike.

"In retrospect, I see that the above portion of the report is correct; the extraordinary effort of many Pennsylvanians overshadowed systemic failings and lured us into a sense of complacency. What happened in this snowstorm, therefore, was a much needed wake-up call.

"I would note that in the snowstorm we experienced on March 16, although it did not present similar challenges to the Valentine's Day incident, our response did demonstrate that some of those lessons have already been learned."

Following a slow response by state officials to two days of freezing rain and snowfall across Pennsylvania, and what he deemed a "total breakdown in communications," Governor Rendell asked that James Lee Witt, chairman and CEO of James Lee Witt Associates, a part of GlobalOptions Group, conduct an independent review into the state's performance.

The report issued today by the Washington D.C.-based public safety and crisis management consulting firm, is the result of that review.

The firm's examination included interviews with key personnel involved in the response from that state and local levels; compiling a detailed chronology of events leading to the storm and the response in the days that followed, analyzing pertinent records within each agency, and evaluating the statutes and missions to which each department adheres.

Looking at PennDOT, JLWA found conditions at the agency in the weeks prior to the storm contributed to its performance in clearing the roadways and maintaining safe driving conditions. Among the firm's findings:

- PennDOT did not have sufficient manpower to operate the available plows beyond one 12-hour shift in Berks County, apparently due to lack of oversight at the local level regarding staffing practices
- The agency does not subscribe to one weather forecasting service, leading to varied weather outlooks between local districts
- Some PennDOT officials has no previous experience dealing with a storm of this magnitude, particularly in Berks County where the management team had been in office less than a month following the former team's retirement
- The state's roadway weather information system was not operational due to improper maintenance
- The department did not grant high priority to customer information systems, causing many highway information signs to be neglected and provide outdated or inaccurate information

The James Lee Witt Associates report characterized PEMA's level of readiness as below what was expected, citing its reluctance to activate the state emergency operations center to Level 3 and not fully implementing procedures required by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's National Incident Management System.

Additionally, the report says, the agency failed to communicate the seriousness of the events to the Governor and his office.

State police were found to have lacked a coordinated response to the storm until early in the evening of the second day. This hampered information flow from the units on the ground because there was no overall incident command at the regional or state levels. It was not until Commissioner Jeffrey B. Miller learned of problems on I-78 that the department was able to raise situational awareness to the point where a common operational picture could emerge.

The report's findings also said that the National Guard could have begun initial distribution of food and supplies to stranded motorists as early as 3 a.m. on Feb. 15, rather than shortly after 10 a.m. as was the case. JLWA said the earlier delivery start time could have been made possible if PEMA had assigned the Guard with the mission earlier.

Overall, the Witt team faulted the commonwealth for not adopting emergency management as a core principle, and found a lack of awareness among all levels of the state's system.

The report went on to make several recommendations to the administration, including steps to:

- Ensure that emergency preparedness and management is a higher priority in the commonwealth
- Instruct PEMA to more clearly define the roles and responsibilities of each agency during emergencies, in accordance with Title 35 of the Pennsylvania Code, which outlines the agency's statutory powers and duties
- Expedite the adoption and full implementation of the National

Incident Management System

- Establish of a joint information center at the state emergency operations center that could coordinate messages to the public and media in times of emergency
- Improve horizontal and vertical communications through an improved, formal notification process developed by the state police commissioner that maximizes situational awareness
- Develop and implement ongoing training and exercises to test the state's system and employees
- Appoint a team of state and local officials, lead by the secretary of Transportation, to develop written traffic diversion plans along primary interstate and state highways that will also serve the commonwealth in the event of a statewide evacuation.

The report also outlined additional steps for the transportation secretary that includes implementing management protocols that assure the department's ability to maintain and operate portions of Pennsylvania's interstate highway system; revising its customer communication goals; and immediately direct the repair of all tools and technology PennDOT can employ to enhance awareness in Harrisburg and among motorists throughout the state.

Governor Rendell was urged to call for an extensive examination of the commonwealth's preparedness and emergency management capabilities. The evaluation should include key leaders at the local, state and federal levels, as well as representatives from academia and the non-profit sector, according to the report. Such an assessment should cover management structure, legislative and policy changes, and new procedures.

Founded in 2001, James Lee Witt Associates is a public safety and crisis management consulting firm based in Washington, DC with offices in Atlanta, Chicago, Little Rock, and Sacramento. Led by James Lee Witt, the Federal Emergency Management Agency director under President Bill Clinton, JLWA has unrivaled experience and hands-on knowledge of public safety, disaster response, continuity of operations, and emergency management issues. JLWA was retained by the State of Louisiana to help coordinate activities in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, and has conducted analyses for the City of Philadelphia and other cities, counties, universities and corporations.

To learn more about the firm, visit <http://www.wittassociates.com>

A full copy of the report by James Lee Witt Associates can be found [here](#).

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EDITOR'S NOTE: Letters from Governor Rendell to Secretary of Transportation Allen D. Biehler, State Police Commissioner Jeffrey B. Miller, and PEMA Director James R. Joseph discussing the report and its findings are available [here](#).

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