

Orange County Department of Emergency Services  
Walter C. Koury, Commissioner

# Impact of Casinos on the Emergency Services of Orange County, New York

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## **I. Introduction.**

With the construction of large casinos resorts in Orange County becoming a distinct possibility, the Orange County Department of Emergency Services has undertaken this preliminary study to gauge the possible impact that these large facilities might have on the State, County and Local Emergency Services agencies that serve Orange County.



Due to a lack of funding and dedicated resources, the undertaking of a scientific study of issue is impossible at this time. This initial study is simply intended to frame the issue to determine if further study is necessary at a later junction.

## **II. Executive Overview.**

As part of this study, the Orange County Department of Emergency Services contacted numerous emergency services agencies in New York and Connecticut in an attempt to determine the impact that casinos have had on their jurisdictions.

The overall findings from these telephonic interviews is that the casinos have had a minimal impact in terms of crime rates, medical calls, fire related incidents, and emergency management activities. The common theme from all the representatives interviewed for this study was that the impact of the casinos caused some initial issues but as the facilities matured, the impact was minimized.

The one exception to this trend was vehicular traffic. Each of the jurisdictions interviewed cited a significant increase in vehicular traffic leading to and from the casinos. As a result of this increase in traffic, the number of vehicle related emergency calls has significantly increased.

It is the recommendation of the Department of Emergency Services that a complete traffic impact study be completed should the selection of a casino site in Orange County become a reality. Additionally, special equipment should be installed in any large complex to enhance the communications capabilities of emergency responders working therein.

## **III. Outreach.**

As part of this non-scientific study, members of the Orange County Department of Emergency Services have contacted several emergency services agencies in communities which have existing casinos in order to determine the impact that these facilities have made to their jurisdictions.

In an effort to further understand the issue, the following agencies have been contacted:

| Agency                                      | Location                   | Casino                               |
|---|----------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| American Ambulance (Commercial Service)     | Norwich, CT                | Foxwoods Resort Casino & Mohegan Sun |
| City of Oneida Police Department            | Oneida, NY (Oneida County) | Turning Stone Resort & Casino        |
| Niagara County Office of Emergency Services | Niagara County, NY         | Seneca Niagara Casino                |
| Oneida County Emergency Services Office     | Oneida County, NY          | Turning Stone Resort & Casino        |
| Town of Montville Police Department         | Montville, CT              | Mohegan Sun                          |
| Town of Ledyard Police Department           | Ledyard, CT                | Foxwoods Resort Casino               |
| Town of Ledyard Fire Marshal                | Ledyard, CT                | Foxwoods Resort Casino               |
| Verona Fire Department (Fire & EMS)         | Verona, NY                 | Turning Stone Resort & Casino        |

#### IV. Impact on Law Enforcement.

In terms of the impact a casino may have on community law enforcement, the discussion is broken into two categories, traffic and crime.

##### a. Traffic Management



Craig Cherry, Deputy Commissioner of the Division of Police Liaison Services, conducted telephone interviews with representatives from the City of Oneida NY Police Department, along with the Town of Montville and the Town of Ledyard Police Departments in Connecticut. Additionally, published traffic related data was researched.

All three of these police departments report that since the casinos have opened in their jurisdictions, they have experienced a significant increase in traffic leading to and from the casinos.

This increased traffic has resulted in a corresponding increase in the number of traffic related incidents requiring the involvement of law enforcement. According to a Lieutenant from the Ledyard Police Department, the increase in traffic and the resulting traffic related incidents are the most significant impact to his Police Department since the opening of Foxwoods Resort and Casino.

According to data from the 2004 New York State Thruway Annual Report, Exit 33 near Turning Stone Resort & Casino is one of the busiest highway exits in the region. However, data from the NYS Department of Motor Vehicles for the period of 1998 – 2012 indicated vehicular crashes in Oneida County have stayed relatively consistent.

Without an in-depth emergency services-focused traffic impact study of casinos in the Orange, Sullivan, Ulster County region, it is impossible to predict the true impact of casinos to the Emergency Services agencies in Orange County.

A reasonable assumption can be made, however, that the impact on the existing traffic infrastructure could be significant, as the placement of casinos in the New York State Route 17 corridor either in Orange, Sullivan or Ulster Counties could have significant impact on Route 17, particularly during the summer months.

#### **b. Crime**

During Deputy Commissioner Cherry's telephonic interviews with the City of Oneida Police Department, the Town of Montville Police Department, and the Town of Ledyard Police Department determined that these Police Departments have not experienced any substantial increase in criminal activity directly attributable to the presence of casinos in their jurisdictions.

Available published data supports that reportable crime in these jurisdictions actually decreased in direct proportion with the statewide and nationwide decrease in crime witnessed across most of the nation in recent decades.

Prior to the construction of these casinos it was feared that there would be a significant and measurable increase in alcohol related traffic incidents, disorderly conduct arrests, murder, rape, robbery, assault, burglary, and theft. These fears have been largely unfounded according to the police department members interviewed.



One aspect of crime statistics that ran counter to this trend were some of the surrounding towns with low income housing. These areas did not experience the decline in crime as other surrounded communities did. Crime in these low income areas largely remained static.

## **V. Impact on Fire Services.**

As part of this report, Vini Tankasali, Deputy Commissioner of the Division of Fire Services, interviewed representatives from the Oneida County Emergency Services Office and Verona Fire Department in New York and the Town of Ledyard Fire Marshal in Connecticut. The impact of a casino resort on the fire service varied depending on whether the facility is located in a volunteer fire district or in the jurisdiction of a career fire department like the City of Newburgh.

### **a. Call Volume**

All of the fire service representatives interviewed by Deputy Commissioner Tankasali indicated that an initial increase in call volume was due to traffic as well as fire related alarms and incidents. The representatives also noted that the increase was greater initially but seemed to reduce as the facility matured. Of specific note to this discussion, due to the size of their respective casinos, the Mohegan Sun Casino and the Foxwoods Casino both maintain their own on-site paid fire departments. The Verona Fire Department (volunteer) remains the primary fire protection for the Turning Stone Casino. Any increase in call volume would need to be analyzed to understand the impact on staffing for career fire departments or capabilities to meet staffing needs by volunteer fire departments.

**b. Training**

The fire departments that would respond to incidents at casino resort complexes would require extensive training specifically designed for large scale commercial occupancy structures.

According to Deputy Commissioner Tankasali's interview with the Verona Fire Department, specialized training was needed to educate firefighters on high-

rise type structures. This training was contracted through another fire department and required funding to obtain this training.



These facilities may also have specialized fire suppression systems that may require initial and periodic training on part of the fire departments.

**c. Equipment and Apparatus**

The fire departments tasked with responding to incidents at a casino resort may need custom equipment and apparatus in order to properly mitigate any potential hazardous events.

For instance, a casino may be built in a fire district that currently does not own a ladder truck. In this case, the fire district may have to purchase a ladder truck to properly respond to a multi-story structure in the casino complex.

Depending on the size and functionality, new ladder truck can cost \$500,000 to \$1,500,000.

Another example brought up in Deputy Commissioner Tankasali's discussion with the interviewed Fire Services representatives was the need for special equipment to handle special circumstance fires. One such instance would be vehicle fires in parking areas with limited or no access to fire apparatus. Specialized equipment may be needed by the fire departments in order to handle these types of incidents not typical of existing properties in the local jurisdiction.

**d. Staffing**

According Deputy Commissioner Tankasali, if a casino resort were to be located in a jurisdiction with a career fire department, additional staffing may be required in order to meet the increased demands potentially placed on the fire department.



**e. Facilities**

Depending on where a new casino resort is located, the need may arise to place a new and separate fire department substation near the casino. The need for this may be dictated by traffic concerns or other variables such as the proximity needed to provide adequate fire protection.

**VI. Impact of the Emergency Medical Services (EMS).**

Frank Cassanite, Deputy Commissioner of the Division of Emergency Medical Services, contacted the Verona Fire Department which provides EMS coverage for Turning Stone Resort & Casino and American Ambulance which provides EMS coverage for both Mohegan Sun and Foxwoods Resort Casino.

Both of these EMS providers related that the impact of the casinos was minimal in their daily operations. American Ambulance stated that each casino added three to four calls per week to their normal activities.

**VII. Impact on Emergency Communications (911).**

Allen Wierzbicki, Deputy Commissioner of the Division of Emergency Communications, reported that the projected impact on the 911 Center is anticipated to be limited. Should there be a significant and continuous increase in casino related 911 calls then the level of staffing at the 911 may have to be increased.

Consideration should also be given by building authorities to require the installation of Bi-Directional Amplifiers in all casino buildings. Such equipment is designed to improve both radio and cellular communications for emergency responders working within such structures or complexes thereby enabling them to communicate with other responders located either on different floors of the same building or who are working elsewhere within the building complex.

### **Impact on Emergency Management.**

Deputy Commissioner Seamus Leary of the Division of Emergency Management spoke with Director Jonathan Schultz from Niagara County Office of Emergency Services and Director Kevin Revere from Oneida County Emergency Services Office to determine the impact of casino resorts in counties similar in nature to Orange County.

Director Schultz related that the impact of the Seneca Niagara Casino was minimal to his department. Most of the impact of the casino was limited to the City of Niagara Falls and that casino was just one more entity in the county for his office to coordinate with.

Director Revere stated that the impact of the Turning Stone Resort and Casino was minimal to the county. Turning Stone Resort and Casino is located on the sovereign land of the Oneida Indian Nation. As such, many of the emergency management functions are undertaken by the Oneida Indian Nation and not Oneida County. Director Revere did state that his office had a good working relationship with the casino, and just like in Niagara County, the casino is just one more entity to coordinate with in the community.

### **VIII. Initial Conclusion.**

Based on interviews from members of the Emergency Management, Fire Service, EMS, and Law Enforcement agencies that service existing casino resorts in New York and Connecticut, the overall impact on the emergency services in these communities is minimal.

The one exception is traffic related incidents. It seems that there is a significant increase in vehicular traffic on the roadways leading to the casinos. As a result, there is an increase in vehicular related emergency calls. Although not interviewed for this study, it could be logically assumed that the outlying jurisdictions surrounding casinos could also experience an increase in traffic and traffic related calls for emergency services.

Without knowing the exact placement of a casino in Orange, Sullivan or Ulster Counties it is difficult to determine the true impact on our specific emergency services agencies at this time. As part of the location selection for a potential casino in Orange County, the Department of Emergency Services recommends that a traffic impact study be commissioned with a particular emphasis placed on the impact of increased traffic to the emergency services.

Once the location of the casino is known and a traffic impact study is complete, then a comprehensive study should be undertaken by an outside organization to study the true impact of a casino in the region and to make staffing, training, and equipment procurement

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recommendations that will ensure the continued safety of Orange County's emergency responders and the general public.

Finally, improvements to radio and cellular communications between emergency responders working within large complexes would be enhanced through the installation of Bi-Directional Amplifiers.