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OSIG NEWS

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For Immediate Release: August 12, 2022

OSIG FINDS LESSONS LEARNED NOT IMPLEMENTED DURING I-95 SNOW INCIDENT

On January 3-4, 2022, the first major snowstorm of the 2021-22 snow season moved across Virginia. When temperatures dropped after sunset, the snow and slush turned into an icepack that brought I-95 to a stop.

“This storm came at a time when many new snow removal contractors and employees were coming on board with the Virginia Department of Transportation and had not undergone the typical training provided prior to COVID-19,” said State Inspector General Michael C. Westfall. “When the storm intensified and traffic slowed due to disabled vehicles, including jackknifed tractor trailers, the resulting traffic backed up significantly and impacted VDOT’s ability to clear the roadway as plows could not remove the accumulating snow.”

In its [audit of the 2022 I-95 Snow Incident](#), the Office of the State Inspector General also found that the Commonwealth did not apply lessons learned from a very similar snow event, the 2018 I-81 Snow Incident of December 9-10 near Bristol. This incident resulted in a VDOT After Action Report that included recommendations applicable to the 2022 I-95 Snow Incident. In addition, the Virginia Department of Emergency Management has general (all-hazard) emergency plans for natural disasters, but no hazard-specific snow event response planning for the Commonwealth had been performed.

Furthermore, communications to the public were not effective as demonstrated by the traffic that continued to enter the I-95 area near Fredericksburg. “Either the public received messages to avoid the area and ignored them or they did not receive the messages,” added Westfall.

Among OSIG’s recommendations to improve on applying lessons learned, snow-related disaster response and recovery exercises and subsequent training should be performed by the Commonwealth. In addition, to improve on future messaging in disaster-level events, VDEM should facilitate communication training for all three agencies involved.

VDOT, VDEM and Virginia State Police generally agreed with OSIG’s findings and recommendations.

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Established in 2012, the Virginia Office of the State Inspector General manages the State Fraud, Waste and Abuse Hotline; conducts investigations and performance audits of state agencies; provides training and standards for the commonwealth’s internal audit programs; and conducts inspections and reviews of Virginia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services-run facilities and programs.