

IT'S YOUR CALL!

CACIWC is pleased to provide Conservation Commissions with this **Environmental 911** guide as a resource tool to help commissioners properly assess development proposals and answer the call.

ACTION IS CRUCIAL:

As towns try to balance development with conservation of irreplaceable resources and scenic vistas, it is critical that all aspects of any development be carefully assessed and weighed by using all available tools. Conservation Commissions have a responsibility to provide timely oversight and make local land use recommendations in order to ensure fragile ecosystems, wetlands, watersheds, open space, and natural habitats are protected.

The conservation commission is an official body of the municipality, created by vote of the local legislature, with its members appointed by the chief executive officer. The enabling legislation for Connecticut conservation commissions is found in Chapter 97, Section 7-131a of the Connecticut General Statutes. Its duties and discretionary abilities stem from its purpose: "...the development, conservation, supervision and regulation of natural resources, including water resources within its territorial limits." According to the legislation, a conservation commission must keep an index of all open areas, publicly or privately owned, including open marshlands, swamps and other wetlands, for the purpose of obtaining information on their proper use. Commissions must conduct research into existing and potential use of land of the municipality.

Can you imagine dialing 911 and having NO answer? Conservation Commissions should have their own **Environmental Emergency 911.**

Some Conservation Commissions are missing in action; be sure to have a current contact telephone number and e-mail address routinely available at your Town Clerk's office.

911 CONTACT LIST

Following is a listing of one of many expert resources that provides technical assistance to help commission members make sensible and timely decisions on good land use management.

- 📞 Environmental Review Team: www.ctert.org
- 📞 UConn-Cooperative Extension: extension.uconn.edu
- 📞 Connecticut Non-point Education for Municipal Officials (NEMO): nemo.uconn.edu
- 📞 Center for Land Use Education and Research (CLEAR): clear.uconn.edu
- 📞 Soil and Water Conservation Districts: conservect.org
- 📞 Natural Resource Conservation Service: www.ct.nrcs.usda.gov
- 📞 Department of Public Health: ct.gov/dph
- 📞 Army Corp of Engineers-New England: www.nae.usace.army.mil
- 📞 United States Geological Survey-Connecticut: <http://ct.water.usgs.gov>
- 📞 Environmental Protection Agency-Region I: www.epa.gov/region1
- 📞 Department of Environmental Protection—all departments: tinyurl.com/CT-DEP-Contacts
- 📞 CT Comprehensive Wildlife Plan link: tinyurl.com/CT-Wildlife-Plan

For more information, visit CACIWC.org

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IT'S YOUR 911 CALL!

Your Environmental Toolkit for Properly Assessing Development Proposals



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A 'HOW TO' APPROACH WHEN TIMING IS CRITICAL HOW TO BE PROACTIVE AND READY BEFORE THE 911 CALL

The following **Before** and **After** steps provide commission members with knowledge and tools that can be easily undertaken if every commission member selects one point in each category. This will facilitate the ability for each member to share information in these areas.

How to be Proactive and Ready before the **Environmental 911** call:

1. Become knowledgeable of location and use of town's natural resources. Conduct and periodically update a townwide Natural Resource Inventory. Continually educate residents of town's unique assets and role of Commission.
2. Keep up to date on potential changes in land use and threats to town natural resources. Request placement on Inland Wetlands (IWC) and Planning & Zoning Commission (P&Z) mailing lists to receive (electronic preferred) agendas and minutes. Make an effort to join IWC and P&Z Commissions on site walks with landowner's permission. Take digital photos before development and share with Conservation Commission (CC), IWC, P&Z public hearings, etc.
3. Maintain working knowledge of town Plan of Conservation & Development (POCD) and associated maps. Know details of Smart Growth concepts, Livable Communities and Low Impact Development.
4. Understand the responsibilities of IWC and P&Z Commissions. Review their regulations in detail. Ask staff to describe and discuss regulations, especially Upland Review Area setback, Subdivision Regs, Open Space Requirements, Design Criteria, etc.
5. Build community support. Collaborate with other local and civic groups such as Watershed Associations, Land Trusts, Economic Development Commission, Neighborhood and Historical Groups. Determine how statewide organizations can assist. Contact CT Environmental Organizations including CACIWC, Sierra Club, Audubon Society, Connecticut Fund for the Environment, Trust for Public Land, and UConn NEMO.
6. Create a Geographic Information System (GIS) Parcel Evaluation Matrix and Map of existing open space from a sample matrix (consult with town staff and/or see CACIWC.org). Recommend Greenways, Walkable and Connectable Communities, Open Space set-asides, and Sensitive Areas of Concern to P&Z and others. Update wetland and watercourses map with highlighted Upland Review Areas for IWC or seek GIS assistance.
7. Conduct a Cost of Community Services Survey showing the real costs of residential, commercial, or industrial development.
8. Perform Annual Rapid Bioassessments of Benthic Macroinvertebrates (Rapid Bio) of local streams. Conduct town-wide vernal pool survey and field review.
9. Consult with CT DEP or CT Department of Public Health (CT DPH) regarding groundwater protection. Request Source Water Assessment Program (SWAP) maps of your town and review local health department or district regulations dealing with septic systems, wells and water quality monitoring.
10. Research stormwater permitting procedures and determine who oversees application process locally. Most IWC and P&Z Commissions can request notification of CT DEP Stormwater permit approval.

PROFESSIONALLY RESPONDING TO THE CALL! TEN S.O.S. STEPS AFTER THE 911 CALL

Properly addressing the potential **Emergency** and professionally responding to the call:

1. Review applicable state and local regulations and GIS resource maps that apply to the "emergency"— a threat to critical natural resources either on-site or off-site. Consider filing Intervenor Status if project may significantly affect the environment. See CGA Sec. 22a-19. Request applicant discuss project with Commission. Let applicant know your concerns.
2. Request Environmental Review Team conduct a study early in the process (see CTERT.org).
3. Consult with local Soil & Water Conservation Districts and be familiar with services they offer to municipalities.
4. Obtain CT DEP Department directory as a reference (see CACIWC.org). Contact appropriate employees and/or Commissioner for technical information.
5. Delegate one or two CC members to attend all public hearings and offer written or oral testimony if applicable.
6. Reference POCD and associated maps, State Erosion & Sediment and Storm Water Management Guidelines, etc., when offering testimony and provide detailed reasons for opposition and/or recommendations for change based on impacts to critical natural resources and town policy and regulations. Refer to POCD and associated maps, State Erosion & Sediment and Storm Water Management Guidelines, etc., Utilize resource maps by including vernal pools, trees of significant size, etc. Research CT DEP Natural Diversity Database site and others for presence of endangered, threatened, or species of special concern (or uncommon).
7. Refer to a Parcel Evaluation Matrix and Map when commenting on development applications or land acquisition. See CACIWC.org
8. Check with Town Historian for unique historical features. Consider archaeological concerns, stone walls, Native American burial grounds, and Public Archaeology Survey Teams (PAST) digs. Check with State Archeologist regarding statewide inventory of protected archaeological or historic sites.
9. Research any existing local or state Aquifer Protection Regulations (if applicable). Check on Stormwater Permit application, and if it is filed, if project qualifies or is approved and is over 5 acres. Projects disturbing over 5 acres of land require a State Stormwater permit. Check on status.
10. Consult with CT DPH regarding potential threats to groundwater supplies such as community wells. Look into blasting permit process. If blasting is proposed, Check with Fire Marshal and CT DEP on permit requirements. Pre-blast surveys can be required if necessary. The authority to issue these permits rests with the local Fire Marshal or Deputy. See blasting regs at Sec 29-349-106 of the CT regs.