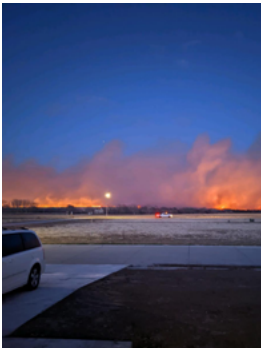


Nebraskans Respond to Wildfires

739



We envision safer, less vulnerable communities in Nebraska made possible through effective collaborative partnerships committed to saving lives and reducing the impact of disasters.

Our mission is to coordinate, support and serve Nebraska through an effective and relevant emergency management agency.

**A Message from
NEMA Assistant Director**

Erv Portis



As drought continues across Nebraska, local, state and federal emergency management and our partners in public safety continue to remain vigilant to wildfire potential across the state. It has been a busy spring with fires during April and May collectively burning more than 115,000 acres across the state.

While fire danger indicators such as the National Weather Service's 3-day rangeland fire danger forecasts and the Rocky Mountain Area 7-Day Fire Weather Outlook have shown a significant decrease in day-to-day risk, fire services and emergency management remain cautious and alert. The fire risk can increase to critical levels in less than a day with the right combination of warm temperatures, low relative humidity, gusty winds and dry fuel such as grass, trees, and crops.

The State of Nebraska annually contracts a Single Engine Air Tanker (SEAT) to provide aerial fire suppression from July into September. Due to the heightened fire danger, the decision was made to bring the SEAT into Nebraska starting in April. The SEAT is a valuable asset allowing local emergency managers to get a plane up in the air to drop retardant on fires as soon as possible after they are detected. Since its April arrival, the SEAT has been deployed within the state on several firefighting missions.

All Nebraskans can do their part to prevent wildfires. Please remember to: report unattended fires; extinguish fire pits and campfires when done; do not throw lit cigarettes out of a moving car; use caution when using flammable liquids; pay attention to local ordinances for trash burning; only use fireworks in clear areas with no woods or dry vegetation nearby and pay attention to the risk of wildfires in your area.

We also need to remember severe weather season will likely impact the state as it does every year. A May 12 storm has already caused significant damage in multiple counties due to straight-line winds that destroyed trees, grain bins, irrigation systems, roofs, buildings and electrical transmission lines. Damage reports are being compiled from the event which may lead to a disaster request from the Federal Emergency Management Agency. Please continue to be prepared, have a plan and stay weather aware.

Sincerely,

Ervin L. Portis

Assistant Director



Gov. **Pete Ricketts** and NEMA Assistant Director **Erv Portis** depart a Nebraska National Guard UH60 following a damage assessment flight over the 702 Road Fire on May 3 in Furnas and Red Willow Counties in west-central Nebraska.

Multiple Wildfires Impact Nebraska

Nebraska faced significant challenges as multiple fires occurred simultaneously in different areas of the state in late April. It required the effort of local, state and federal agencies to work together to respond and provide assistance.

Fifteen days after the 739 Road Fire burned about 35,000 acres in Gosper and Furnas counties, another blaze started near Norton, Kans on April 22. The Road 702 Fire moved rapidly northward through Furnas and Red Willow counties spurred on by high winds and dry fuels.

Region 17 Emergency Management Director Roger Powell said he arrived at the Nebraska-Kansas line just after 4:30 p.m. about 15 minutes after a page went out to local firefighters reporting the fire.

"I saw how fast it was moving and how high the smoke was getting into the air," Powell said. "But I still thought we had a chance to get in front of it."

The Rocky Mountain Complex Incident Management Team 1 was called in to work on the response and the fire eventually burned 45,000 acres

The west central fires were not the only ones Nebraskans battled in April. Here is a round up of other fires reported to NEMA.

Elsie Fire, April 22 – Four fires near the village of Elsie, were reported to the NEMA Watch Center, primarily affecting farm and cattle grazing lands. The fires burned an estimated 4,970 acres. Four firefighters sustained non-life-threatening injuries. Perkins County made an emergency declaration on April 22.

Purdum Fire, April 22 – In Blaine County, near Purdum, five large fires were reported with more than 20 volunteer fire departments responding. Three fire trucks were damaged in this nearly 30,000-acre fire, which was contained as of April 23.

Cheyenne and Deuel Counties, April 22 – Three large fires broke out between Sunol and Lodge Pole.

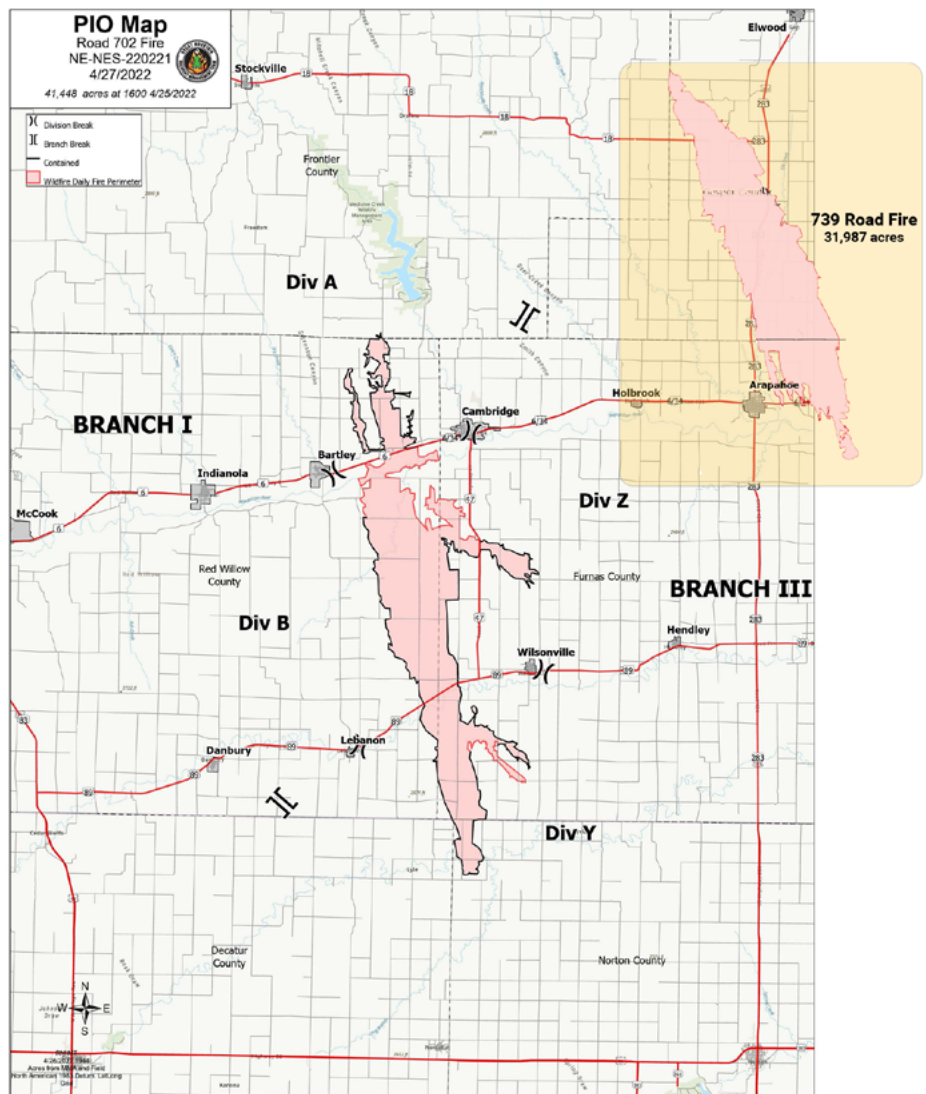
Residents of the area were temporarily evacuated. The fires were contained on April 23.

Scotts Bluff County Fire, April 22 – high winds of 83 mph spurred on nine separate fires. Dozens of power poles snapped, trees uprooted, five structures were damaged and uncontrolled fires burning in rural areas caused evacuations. Upwards of 4,000 customers were without power. Western Nebraska Regional Airport closed Saturday for safety reasons. It was reported 100 percent contained as of April 23.

Burt County Fire, April 23 – a fire was reported at Lyons, which continued toward the village of Macy, which was evacuated. Eighteen volunteer

fire departments responded to the fire, which destroyed one fire truck and one house and damaged three other structures. Four injuries have been reported, one requiring life flight. A county declaration was issued on April 23rd.

Tuls Dairy Calf Farm Fire, Rising City Fire, April 22 – One hay barn, 100 calves and 900 calving hutches were lost. Two firefighters were transported to the hospital for smoke inhalation, while several others were treated on the scene for eye irritation. The fire was caused when a front-loader bucket sparked on concrete and ignited a hay facility. Eight volunteer fire departments responded to this fire.



An overlay of the Road 739 Fire is included on this map of the 702 Fire.

Association holds Annual Conference

The Nebraska Association of Emergency Management held its 2022 *Finding Our Focus* Conference at the Borders Inn & Suites in Grand Island, April 6-8.

The annual conference gives the state's emergency managers an opportunity to listen to speakers, visit with vendors and network with colleagues, according to outgoing NAEM president **Nick Kemnitz** who is the Wayne County emergency manager.

"We hope that everyone had a chance to find their focus for the upcoming year," Kemnitz said. "The speakers gave us valuable information to help us as we meet the emergency management needs of our communities across the state.

Grand Island **Mayor Roger Steele** opened the conference and welcomed participants to his city.

Nebraska Emergency Management Assistant Director **Erv Portis** and Federal Emergency Management Agency EMA Region VII Administrator **Andrea Spillars** updated the attendees on their agency activities.

"We really do have the same goal as you to serve the people in your communities," Portis said.

Spillar addressed the goals and



The Nebraska Association of Emergency Management Conference kick off in Grand Island on April 6.

objectives of the FEMA strategic plan which include:

- **Goal 1:** Instill equity as a foundation of emergency management
- **Goal 2:** Lead whole of community in climate resilience
- **Goal 3:** Promote and sustain a ready FEMA and prepared nation.

Spillar told the local emergency managers in attendance that FEMA wants to "make your life easier."

Tim Eggebraaten was the keynote speaker for the conference. Eggebraaten retired in 2016

as chief of police with the Detroit Lakes, Minn. Police Department. He uses music and stories to tell about his leadership journey. He found that discussing personal and emotional topics helped in his own healing process. He said he learned that others can benefit from knowing they are not alone in their own journey.

A good start to each day, Eggebraaten said, is to ask: "What will today's adventure be?"

"If you're focused on the negative all the time, that's all you'll see," Eggebraaten said.



Erv Portis and Federal Emergency Management Agency FEMA Region VII Administrator **Andrea Spillars** updated the attendees on their agency's activities.



Tim Eggebraaten used music to share his message of making positive thinking a habit, filtering the negative and counting one's blessings. Eggebraaten said "look for the good."

NAEM Conference Continued

Right: From left, **Colt Farringer** of Thayer County, **Amanda Burki** of Johnson/Pawnee counties, and **Mark Hosking** of Lancaster County discuss how they used the Incident Command System to manage the National Finals High School Rodeo in Lincoln.

Below: Other speakers at the conference included LTC **Shane Varejka**, Major **David Strom**, **Nic McKinley**, **Tim Newman**, **Tia Loftin**, **Jodie Fawl**, **Jon Rosenlund**, **Kirk Smith**, **Julie Rother**, **Andrew Mills** and **Nick Kennitz**.



Nick Kennitz presents **Dawna Whitcomb** of Adams County, **Jill Harvey** of Phelps County and **Laura Hintz** of Knox County with Presidents Awards. Whitcomb also was installed as the new president of the association. Harvey was named deputy emergency manager of the year and Hintz was named a lifetime member.

Tom Smith of Dodge County was honored as Emergency Manager of the Year.



Nik Kennitz, president of NAEM presents the family of **Lynn Marshall** with a posthumous president's award from the association. Lynn Marshall served as Sarpy County Emergency Management Director until he died from COVID in November 2021 at age 64. Pictured from left are: Lynn's wife **Margie Marshall**, grandson **Braxton Huegenrich** and daughter **Erika Huegenrich**.

Nik Kennitz presents **Jeff McGill** of Cuming County with the new emergency manager of the year award.



Nik Kennitz recognized and thanked **Leroy Janssen** for 35 years of service to the association.

Paul Johnson of Douglas County and **Kevin Garvin** of Cedar County (not pictured) were recognized for 25 years of membership in the association.

Exercise Becomes Reality at NAEM Conference

Troy Harris of Nebraska Emergency Management Agency and Corey Simmons of the Office of the Chief Information Office represented the state communications unit at the Nebraska Association of Emergency Management Conference in Grand Island, April 8, to assist with a communications exercise and to provide a demonstration of the cache radios available for deployment to local jurisdictions following an emergency or disaster.

During the exercise the state received a request to deploy the radios to the 739 Road Fire in Gosper and Furnas County.



"We stopped exercise operations and transitioned to pre-deployment preparations," Harris said. "We identified conference attendees who were comms unit trainees and requested their assistance to program radios and repack the equipment in the comm unit trailer."

"It was a great opportunity to demonstrate the capabilities of the Comms Unit in action and show how fast we can get equipment out to the field," Harris said. "Simmons then left Grand Island to deliver the radios to the field and deploy as the Comm-L unit leader for the fire."

Cybersecurity 101: How to Stay Safe at Home, at Work or in the Field

It's time to "Be Smart, Be Safe and Be Aware" according to Nathaniel Smith, information technology infrastructure support analyst of NEMA who spoke to all agency staff, May 10.

"We need to be constantly vigilant," Smith said. "Staying safe at home, at work or in the field is not just for the nerds."

Smith outlined a variety of methods for staying safe while using the computer.

At home, he said:

- **Secure your Wi-Fi** password (change the default SSID(name) and Security Key(password). Make sure the password is a combination of letters, numbers, and symbols. At least 8 characters long.
- **Enable Multi-Factor Authentication whenever possible to log into sites.** MFA makes it more difficult to hack an account as the hacker needs both the password and another method of authenticating.

- **Keep devices up to date.** As soon as possible whenever there is an update for your phone, computer, router, etc., perform that update in order to patch any security vulnerabilities.
 - **Use virus and anti-malware software** (at a minimum on windows devices run scans regularly with Windows Defender).
 - **Do not install untrusted applications** on computers and mobile devices. Malware is often times tied to Mobile Applications and Desktop Applications.
 - **Do not share personal information on social media such as addresses, phone numbers, email, and birthdays.** Hackers can use this information to guess usernames and passwords
- Smith said at work the best practices include: not opening email links that are unexpected or from un-



Smith

known sources; reporting suspicious emails; not downloading suspicious files or programs; and not keeping passwords in plain-text on your desk or in an unsecured document on your computer.

"Again, make sure your passwords are long and strong," Smith said.

When working away from home or the office there are also best practices, Smith said.

"Do not connect to public WiFi and watch out for 'shoulder surfers' a term for people who peek over your shoulder to steal log in information or see private documents," Smith said. "When working in the field, do not leave devices unattended and never plug unknown flash drives into your computer."

Another thing to watch out for is social engineering where someone tries to manipulate you into giving out confidential information or secure access.

"It takes awareness to be safe online," Smith concluded. "Be sure you think about all the choices you make while working online."



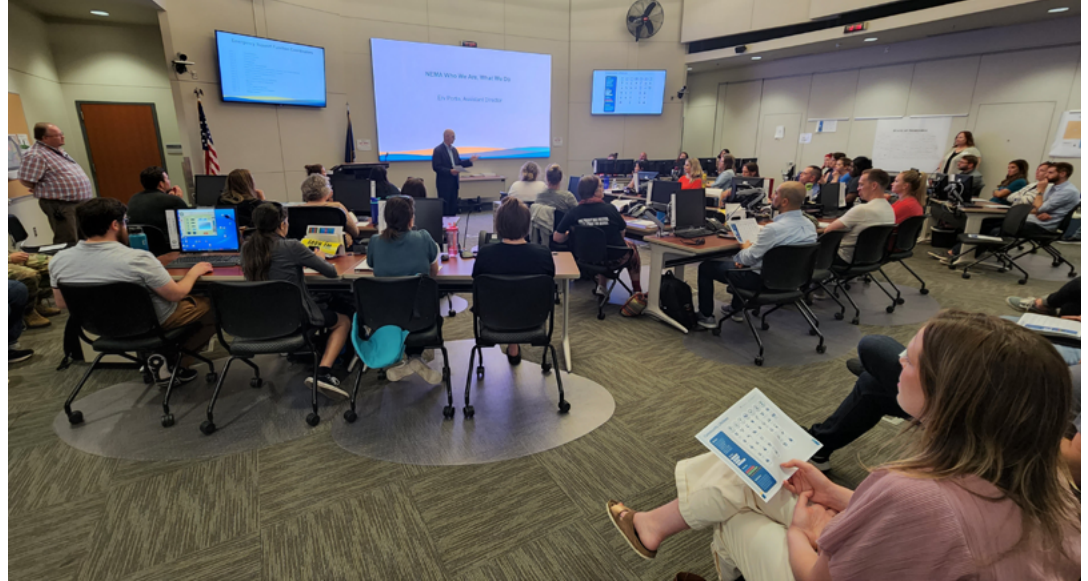
FIRE SCHOOL

Nebraska Emergency Management Agency staff and local emergency management staff assisted with resource tracking, set up and student tracking in 12 hands-on classes at the 2022 Fire School in Grand Island May 16-22.

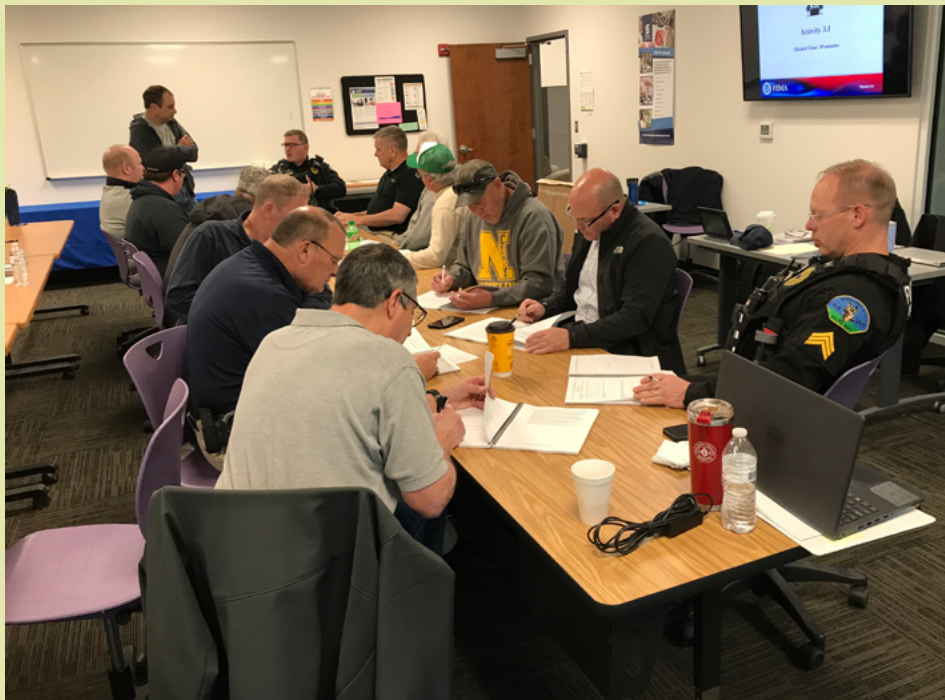
Leadership Lincoln Participates in Emergency Response Exercise

Leadership Lincoln met at Nebraska Emergency Management Agency, May 12 to learn about management of a disaster through an exercise held in the State Emergency Operations Center.

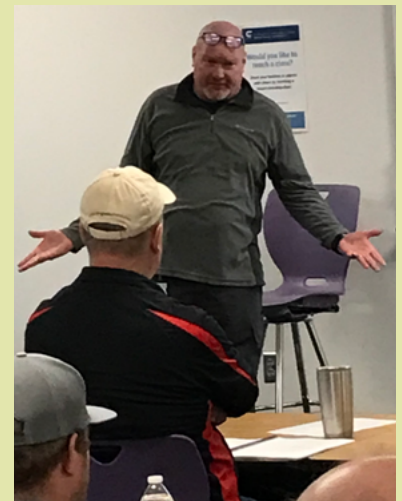
Participants discussed how they would respond if a tornado impacted a large portion of Lincoln. They discussed community lifelines and how various responders would work together in the event of such a disaster.



Training Offers Information on Basic ICS



G191: Incident Command System/ Emergency Operations Center Interface was offered April 20 in Nebraska City Southeast Planning, Exercise and Training Region. Instructors included Roger Conrad, below, and Larry Fichtner, not pictured.



Evaluated Exercise Held for REP Program

Nebraska Emergency Management Agency participated in an evaluated exercise for the Cooper Nuclear Station on May 24 along with state emergency support function coordinators and Nema-ha and Richardson county emergency management agencies.

In addition, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) requires Cooper Nuclear Station to have a dress rehearsal which was held April 5.

Pictured clockwise from right:

1. NEMA's **Sean Runge**, **Erv Portis**, **Mack Johnson** and **Deb Robinson** work in the Emergency Operations Facility at Auburn.



2. **Norm Valentine** of FEMA, **Jodie Fawl** of NEMA and **Gary Lesoing** of Nemaha County discuss joint information center operations during the dress rehearsal.



3. Richardson County staff work in their emergency operations center.



4. **Jeff Powell** of DHHS serves as the state's spokesperson during a mock news conference at the Emergency Operation Facility in Auburn.



Region 11 Emergency Management held a full-scale hazmat exercise in Norfolk, May 24. The exercise included fire, law enforcement, emergency medical service personnel and a variety of volunteers. Norfolk High School drama students portrayed victims.



Nemaha County Emergency Management and Nemaha County volunteers participate in an Emergency Worker Decontamination Center (EWDC) evaluated exercise on May 23. The purpose of this drill was to ensure the county can safely and properly process, assess and, if needed, decontaminate, any emergency worker who would respond to a radiological release at Cooper Nuclear Station. An effective EWDC is paramount in the event of a radiological release response, as it ensures all emergency workers can safely exit the potentially contaminated area.

Harris Joins NEMA's Hazard Mitigation Unit



Chelsea Harris joined Nebraska Emergency Management Agency on May 16 as supervisor of the hazard mitigation unit.

Harris attended Southeast Community College and the University of Phoenix studying early childhood and criminal justice.

She came to NEMA from the Department of Agriculture where she worked as an Emergency Response Coordinator and has been an ESF for 6 years. She also previously worked at the Department of Corrections for 2 years and was in the military for 10 years.

She is married to her husband, Ryan, and they have three children, a son Ethan who is 17, a son Aiden who is 14, and a daughter Aylish who is 4.

She enjoys spending time outdoors and fishing and spending time with her children.

NEBRASKA
EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY

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Governor Pete Ricketts

State Homeland Security Director, **Lt. Gov. Mike Foley**

NEMA Director, **Major General Daryl Bohac**

Assistant Director **Erv Portis**

NEMA is charged by Nebraska statute to reduce the vulnerabilities of the people and communities of Nebraska in terms of injury, loss of life and property damage resulting from natural, technological or man-made disasters and emergencies.

NEMA is responsible for coordinating the state response in any major emergency or disaster including the support of local governments as needed or requested, and coordinating assistance with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and other federal partners.

The Beacon includes emergency management news and activities from across the state. Please forward story ideas or photos for inclusion in the newsletter to: Public Information Officer **Jodie Fawl**, 402-471-7428 or jodie.fawl@nebraska.gov.

