Ingestion Pathway Dress Rehearsal Exercise Held for Cooper Nuclear Station

Nebraska Emergency Management Agency staff and emergency support function representatives participated in a two-day exercise, Feb. 25-26 in preparation for a FEMA evaluated exercise scheduled in May.
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.

We are fast approaching the first anniversary of last year’s disaster that affected nearly the entire state. While we will be working on DR4420 for years to come, the one year anniversary is time to reflect on all we have accomplished during this last year. Gov. Pete Ricketts is holding a news briefing, March 9 to discuss the progress we have made and the preparedness efforts we are working on to help Nebraskans get ready for future natural disasters. It is also the date of the proclamation signing for Nebraska Severe Weather Awareness Week to be celebrated the week of March 22-28.

State agencies from agriculture to transportation, from economic development to natural resources, have worked alongside Nebraska Emergency Management Agency, local communities, federal partners, nongovernmental organizations and voluntary organizations active in disaster to meet the needs of Nebraskans following last year’s disaster.

This joint long-term recovery effort includes developing recovery and resiliency plans that will help us for years to come. Already more than 500 payments are in progress or have been completed on public assistance projects totaling more than $11 million. There are 11 long term recovery groups actively addressing individual and family needs across 18 counties. The University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension offices and agricultural stakeholders are also working to address needs in other, more rural communities. While we have accomplished a great deal this last year, there are still challenges going forward.

Among the various efforts we are undertaking is coordination with the Nebraska attorney general to stop predatory landlord practices arising in some communities. Examples include property owners refusing to make repairs on properties or pressuring tenants into multi-year extensions in order to get repairs completed. We are providing assistance to homeowners to help them navigate insurance and mortgage broker issues. We are working to address weather-related housing needs during the winter months and the ongoing issues of mold remediation, abatement and safety training for people whose homes were damaged. Services for mental and behavioral health issues that are exacerbated by disasters and by the approaching anniversary of last year’s event are being addressed by Nebraska Extension, Department of Health and Human Services and VOAD.

Another issue being addressed is the lack of subcontractors in most impacted areas and VOAD, Habitat for Humanity, Mennonite groups and others are striving to fill these gaps. We are also working to identify unmet needs in rural areas. The capacity of local groups is also being addressed. Full-time LTRG staff and Disaster Case Managers are able to adequately work about 30 cases at any one time, but they do so with a prioritized list of hundreds of cases. Funding is also an issue. Long term recovery groups have long lists of cases that require funding, which totals much more than what is available in their community.
There is a variety of work left to complete and we are working together to get it done. We are continuing to develop the Long-Term Recovery and Resilience Plan, which will serve as a guide for recovery on this and future disasters. We are continuing our work on:

- Housing needs in impacted areas
- Returning economic and business activities to a healthy state
- Restoring services that protect health and safety
- Designing and implementing interim, temporary and permanent housing solutions
- Revitalizing Infrastructure systems
- Protecting the natural cultural and historic resources
- Supporting the efficient restoration and revitalization of agricultural systems
- Offering training and capacity building for long-term recovery groups, local NGOs, and community leaders and Educating about preparedness, mitigation, resiliency

We will continue to work together to prepare for the next disaster before it hits.

Sincerely,

Bryan Tuma
NEMA Assistant Director

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Judges Decide on Top Posters in Annual Contest

Judging for the yearly Severe Weather Awareness Poster Contest was held at NEMA on Feb. 24. NEMA staff, Nebraska Association of Emergency Management representatives and National Weather Service personnel participated. Winners will be announce on March 9 at the proclamation ceremony for Severe Weather Awareness Week, which will be celebrated March 22-28.
Numerous agencies from across Nebraska met Feb. 12-13 at Doane College-Lincoln for the Vigilant Guard final planning meeting. Vigilant Guard is a series of exercises that take place in each FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) region annually. The training exercise program sponsored by U.S. Northern Command (USNORTHCOM), in conjunction with National Guard Bureau, provides civilian-military first responders and emergency management personnel the opportunity to evaluate their capabilities and identify areas for improvement, in the most realistic, large-scale disaster scenarios possible. The exercise is scheduled for May 18-21 in various locations across the state and will include representatives from National Guard units in 13 states.
The Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and its public health partners continue to closely track the unfolding outbreak of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) and anticipate its impact on Nebraska and its health care systems. The virus originated in China and has spread to multiple other countries including the United States. So far, there have been no cases identified in Nebraska residents.

“Ensuring the health of Nebraskans is our main priority and public health officials continue to actively monitor self-isolated Nebraska residents who recently returned from China,” said Dr. Tom Safranek, State Epidemiologist for DHHS. “Based on the spread of COVID-19 and an increase in cases in other countries, DHHS is now including Hong Kong, Japan, South Korea, Iran, Italy, Singapore, Taiwan, Thailand and Vietnam, along with China. We're asking people with travel to these countries in the last 14 days to either self-report to the Nebraska public health online system at: http://dhhs.ne.gov/Pages/Coronavirus.aspx or contact their local health department for guidance and next steps. Informing the local health department of recent travel history is the most direct way to ensure timely medical care if needed and to minimize the potential risk to others.”

A map of Nebraska’s local health departments can be found here: http://dhhs.ne.gov/CHPM%20Maps/NE_Health_Dept_Map_Dec_2016.pdf .

It is important to remember that people who may become ill upon returning from overseas travel are more likely to have other respiratory illnesses typically seen this time of year like flu, which might also require treatment.

However, it is very possible that we could see travel-related COVID-19 cases in Nebraska residents. State and local public health officials continue to take action to prevent the spread of disease and protect the health of Nebraskans including:

- Sharing the latest guidance and information with local health departments, hospitals, health care providers, first responders and local and state labs through our extensive Health Alert Network to ensure a well-coordinated response in Nebraska. DHHS Health Alert Network - http://dhhs.ne.gov/Pages/Health-Alert-Network.aspx
- Assessing the health care system’s readiness to identify, monitor and treat patients with COVID-19.
- Engaging in active and ongoing communication with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and other state and federal partners as part of the overall national response to this emerging public health threat.
- Reviewing and enhancing response plans to be ready for the detection of COVID-19 in our state.
- Facilitating confirmatory testing, isolation and monitoring of Nebraskans experiencing symptoms to identify cases as soon as possible.
- Updating dhhs.ne.gov/coronavirus with the latest information and resources.
- With our local health department partners, we have a system in place to track and monitor people who have contact with a confirmed case in an effort to immediately detect secondary cases and minimize the potential for ongoing, undetected, person-to-person transmission.

Nebraskans are also encouraged to review their family preparedness plans in the event that COVID-19 continues to spread in the United States. More resources will be available soon at http://www.dhhs.ne.gov/coronavirus.

People can help protect themselves from COVID-19 and other respiratory infections by:

- Washing hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water aren’t available, use an alcohol-based sanitizer.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Avoid close contact with sick people and stay home if you are sick.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze then throw the tissue in the trash.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces. To learn more about COVID-19, go to http://www.dhhs.ne.gov/coronavirus or https://www.cdc.gov/covid19.
Heather Thole joined NEMA on Feb. 3 as a hazard mitigation unit planning specialist. Thole has a bachelor of geoscience from the University of Wisconsin Stevens Point and a master of science in hazard mitigation from Michigan Technological University. Prior to joining NEMA, thole was a hazard mitigation intern for Wisconsin Emergency Management, an environmental management specialist Peace Corps volunteer in Jamaica from 2017 to 2019. Gray grew up outside of Ceresco, but moved to Lincoln before high school.

She has two children, Isabella (Izzy), 7, and Zachary, 4. She also has one “fur baby,” a 80-pound labrador mix named Bruce. She said in her free time she enjoys walking with her dog, taking her kids to museums and the zoo and relaxing at home with a good show on Netflix.

Chelsea Gray joined NEMA, Feb. 17 as a financial aid administrator in the grants unit. She attended Kansas State University for animal science. Prior to joining NEMA, Gray was a program specialist for Nebraska Total Care at the Department of Health and Human Services. She worked at Bryan Health as a patient service center representative and at Ameritas as a provider relations specialist. Gray grew up outside of Ceresco, but moved to Lincoln before high school.

She has two children, Isabella (Izzy), 7, and Zachary, 4. She also has one “fur baby,” a 80-pound labrador mix named Bruce. She said in her free time she enjoys walking with her dog, taking her kids to museums and the zoo and relaxing at home with a good show on Netflix.

Tia Loftin started with NEMA on Feb. 3. She is a planning specialist in the planning, exercise and training unit.

Before starting with NEMA, Loftin worked as a stay-at-home mom and prior to that she worked in aquatics management.

Loftin earned her bachelor's degree in public administration from Flagler College in Florida and is currently working on a master’s degree in emergency management. Loftin and her husband, Brian, have two sons: Merrick, 17, and Constantine Elliott, 4. In her spare time Loftin enjoys paranormal research and learning and researching history.

**National Weather Service-Spring Flood Resources/Outlook**

For much of the area, there is an above-normal risk of flooding this spring. According to the National Weather Service Omaha Spring Flood Outlook, it is too early to determine how severe the flooding could be, but the conditions already in place have elevated the flood risk.

NWS is urging Nebraskans to stay informed and updated by checking their local weather service websites throughout the spring flood season.

As is typically the case, the location and severity of flooding this spring will depend on the location and intensity of spring rains and thunderstorms. Ice jams can also be a threat this time of year.

Check out the information posted on the NWS office closest to you for more information:

**NWS Cheyenne Wyo:** [https://www.weather.gov/cys/](https://www.weather.gov/cys/)

**NWS North Platte:** [https://www.weather.gov/lbf/](https://www.weather.gov/lbf/)

**NWS Hastings:** [https://www.weather.gov/hastings](https://www.weather.gov/hastings)

**Goodland, Kans:** [https://www.weather.gov/gld/](https://www.weather.gov/gld/)

**Sioux Falls, S.D.:** [https://www.weather.gov/fsd/20200227hydrologicoutlookesf](https://www.weather.gov/fsd/20200227hydrologicoutlookesf)

**NWS Omaha/Valley:** [https://www.weather.gov/oax/Spring-FloodOutlook](https://www.weather.gov/oax/Spring-FloodOutlook)
A full-scale shelter exercise was held, Jan. 31 and Feb. 1 at Calvary Christian Church in Sarpy County in preparation for future natural disasters.

According to Sarpy County Emergency Management Program Specialist Jesse Eret, Sarpy County partnered with the American Red Cross to conduct the full-scale disaster shelter exercise.

“The exercise gave volunteers from the Red Cross and Citizen Corps programs the opportunity to practice opening and operating a disaster shelter in a low stress, no fault environment,” Eret said. "It gave participants a chance to run a shelter like those used during the flooding that affected the state in spring of 2019.”

Eret said volunteers role played as people seeking shelter, as the injured and as those with service animals. Other volunteers trained on what questions to ask people that are seeking shelter, how to set up an emergency shelter area and how to help the wounded.

According to Eret, the Omaha metro area has 30 to 35 designated shelter areas for emergencies.

Area residents who need to know where emergency shelters are located can visit redcross.org or download the Red Cross app.
Scotts Bluff County Designated as a Primary Natural Disaster Area

Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue designated Scotts Bluff County as a primary natural disaster area for agriculture producers who suffered losses due to snowstorms and freeze Oct. 9-10 and Oct. 26-27, 2019. Producers may be eligible for U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Farm Service Agency (FSA) emergency loans.

Emergency loans can be used to meet various recovery needs including the replacement of essential items such as equipment or livestock, reorganization of a farming operation or the refinance of certain debts.

Producers in the contiguous Nebraska counties of Banner, Box Butte, Morrill, and Sioux are also eligible to apply for emergency loans.

The deadline to apply for these emergency loans is Oct. 7.

Farmers may contact their local USDA service center for further information. Additional information is also available online at [farmers.gov/recover](http://farmers.gov/recover).

Southeast Nebraska Healthcare Coalition staff attended a day-long public information officer class taught by PIOs Jodie Fawl of NEMA and Mike Wight of the Department of Health and Human Services on Feb. 21 at the Lincoln Lancaster County Health Department. The workshop focused on the Joint Information System, Joint Information Center and how PIOs work together to get the right information to the right people at the right time.