A Message from
NEMA Assistant Director
Bryan Tuma

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.

This legislative session there are a few bills and a resolution of interest to the emergency management community in Nebraska that we will be monitoring throughout the session. They include:

- **LB 284 - Introduced by Machaela Cavanaugh** — Provide requirements regarding federal funds under the Governor’s Emergency Program. This bill would make changes in the Governor’s Emergency program to include: that any expansion of federal programs during a declared emergency shall be implemented for the duration of the declaration; application for federal relief funds shall be made for the maximum allowed by federal law; and if such federal funds are made available, the legislature shall appropriate the funds from the state treasury to the Governor’s Emergency Program or such other agency or program as appropriate to address the emergency.

- **LB394 - Introduced by Adam Morfeld** — Adopt the Public Health Emergency Housing Protection Act and change deadlines for trials in actions for possession and forcible entry and detainer. This bill would allow a municipality, county board or health department to enact a moratorium on evictions and foreclosures if necessary to protect public welfare from the spread of a virus or infectious disease.

- **LB 512 - Introduced by Tom Brewer** — Adopt the Critical Infrastructure Utility Worker Protection Act. The purpose of the act is to provide for protection of critical infrastructure utility workers during disasters; to provide priority access to personal protective equipment, medical screening, testing, preventative health services, medical treatment and administration of vaccines for critical infrastructure utility workers in the event of an emergency; and to authorize financial aid for critical infrastructure utility workers during emergencies.

- **LR27CA - Introduced by Tom Brewer** — Proposal to ask voters in the November 2022 elections to add approve an amendment to the the Nebraska State Constitution that would allow the continuity of government provisions already existing in the constitution to be used during a pandemic.

Nationally, the National Emergency Management Association reports that legislation is expected to include several emergency management-related funding measures. The House Budget Committee is scheduled to prepare the bills committees drafted earlier this month – the House Transportation & Infrastructure Committee’s portion currently includes $50 billion for the Disaster Relief Fund and an extension and expansion of funeral assistance. It is still expected that the House will seek to pass the measure by the end of the month and pitch to the Senate for approval by mid-March when many pandemic-specific programs are scheduled to sunset.

Looking beyond this relief proposal, up next on President Joe Biden’s legislative agenda is a package that is expected to include infrastructure spending and funding for expanded broadband networks. Rumored to be included is funding for hardening the electric grid, which may be an idea that picks up momentum after the rolling blackouts in many areas nationwide as a result of extreme winter weather. This package is still in its formulation stage and thus is subject to significantly change.

Hearings this last week of February were held on the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, Pathway to Protection: Expanding Availability of COVID-19 Vaccines and Confronting the Coronavirus: Perspectives on the COVID-19 Pandemic One Year Later.

Sincerely,

Bryan Tuma
Intense winter weather, including heavy snow and extended days below freezing, increased concern over the possibility of ice jams and flooding on Nebraska rivers. However, the extended forecast looks like a slow and steady melt should leave the state in good shape.

Increased ice led staff at local emergency management agencies, the National Weather Service offices, natural resource districts, the U.S. Corps of Army Engineers and Nebraska Emergency Management Agency to carefully monitor river conditions.

Observation flights along Nebraska rivers have been conducted throughout the month to provide information on river flows.

“Channels remain open in all rivers and the forecast looks good for a slow steady melt,” said NEMA Assistant Director, Bryan Tuma. “We are looking at a low probability for ice jam-related flooding along Nebraska rivers this year. Ice jams have historically been a problem on the Platte River, and every year there is a concern we could experience ice jam flooding.”

Tuma said that lower water levels in the Missouri River mean there is plenty of room for melting ice and snow.

The two most recent observation flights were conducted on Feb. 24. NEMA’s Preparations and Operations Administrator Sean Runge, and Dodge County Emergency Management Director Tom Smith, and Dodge County supervisor Patrick Tawney flew from North Bend to Ashland and NEMA’s Preparations and Operations Manager Earl Imler, Platte County Emergency Management Director Tim Hlobauer, and Platte County Sheriff Ed Wemhoff flew over the Platte and Loup near Columbus.

As temperatures have begun to rise, ice on Nebraska rivers has started to melt and move.

A rapid thaw could cause large chunks of ice to break up and jam along the river followed by snow melt building up behind dams and eventually spilling over the banks.

The expected slow melting during the day and refreezing at night that is forecast reduces the need to consider alternative ways to break up the ice, such as ice dusting.

Ice dusting is one method to mechanically weaken the ice cover by spreading ash over a river to weaken the ice and increase the rate the ice melts.

Residents along all Nebraska rivers, especially those who live, or drive, near areas that historically have been affected by spring flooding, should remain aware of the nearby river conditions and be prepared to evacuate if necessary.

NEMA recommends following your local weather service office for alerts and watching local news stations for flood alerts.
Nebraska Severe Weather Awareness Week is

March 21-27

Nebraska Severe Weather Awareness Week is a time to remind Nebraskans that severe weather season is upon us and that we all need to take steps to be ready. The week includes a practice Tornado Drill at 11 a.m. on Wednesday, March 24 (NOTE: the time is an hour later than previous years.) It’s a good time to practice a tornado safety plan. Help us promote preparedness for severe weather with the following suggestions.

- When severe weather strikes, listen carefully to instructions from local officials.
- Take the recommended protective measures to safeguard life and property when a disaster or severe weather event occurs.
- The devastating impacts of extreme events can be reduced through improved readiness. Before an event occurs is the time to prepare for severe weather. Take steps to ensure your home and business are prepared for a possible emergency.
- Important items to include in your ready kit are:
  - Battery-powered radio (like a NOAA Weather Radio)
  - Flashlight with extra batteries
  - Food, water and medicine – enough for all household residents AND Pets for at least 3 days
  - Change of clothing, blankets
  - Hand-operated can opener, utility knife
  - First-aid supplies.
  - Copies of important documents and cash
- You can find more preparedness tips and more items to include in your preparedness kit at: https://nema.nebraska.gov/files/doc/preparedness-kit.pdf.
- One of the best ways to prepare is by working together. For instance, at the state level, each time the National Weather Service holds a conference call about potentially severe weather approaching, a variety of people representing state and local emergency managers, National Guard, schools, hospitals, state and even federal agencies, monitor the call to be ready for potential effects of severe weather that may impact the state.
- Citizens can prepare by finding a trusted source of information and using it to stay informed. Monitor your weather radios, phone apps, private company alerts, local news outlets and the weather service. All this information can help you to be informed of approaching severe weather.
- Individuals need to recognize hazards and understand terms such as a tornado watch, which means conditions are favorable for a tornado to develop, versus a tornado warning, which means a tornado has been detected by radar or reported by storm spotters, AND to be prepared to act appropriately.
Governor Pete Ricketts hosted a press conference at the Capitol, Feb. 22, to announce the launch of the State’s Emergency Rental Assistance Program. The program, funded through the U.S. Treasury as part of a federal coronavirus relief package, is available to eligible tenants and landlords. The state’s program provides assistance for both rent and certain utilities. The program is available for renters and not homeowners according to federal guidance. Some localities in Nebraska are receiving federal funds directly, and they will operate rental assistance programs separately from the state. These include the City of Lincoln, the City of Omaha, Douglas County and Lancaster County. Residents in these locations will need to apply through their jurisdiction’s program rather than through the state’s program. The Nebraska Investment Finance Authority (NIFA) is coordinating with the state to administer the rental assistance program. Shannon Harmon, NIFA’s Executive Director, joined the governor to discuss who is eligible and how to apply. Starting today, Nebraskans can apply online at coronavirus.nebraska.gov.

Nebraska Department of Transportation (NDOT) received a $12.5 million federal grant allocation as part of the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) recent allocation of $2 billion funding under the FAA’s Airport Coronavirus Response Grant Program (ACRGP). The ACRGP funding was approved by Congress in late December as part of the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriation Act (CRRSA). Nebraska airports will receive $12,528,712 in grant allocations from the ACRGP. This includes 72 airports throughout the state. A complete list of the airports receiving grant funds is available at grant awards. These funds will provide economic relief to Nebraska airports affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. The FAA will make grants to all airports that are part of the national airport system, including all commercial service airports, all reliever airports, and some public-owned general aviation airports.

Two notable updates were provided to previous FAA guidance on the ACRGP, including concession relief and mask requirements at airports. Concessions will also be provided relief from rents and minimum annual guarantees to on-airport car rental, on-airport parking, and in-terminal airport concessions. Grant agreements will include a special condition that airport sponsors implement a policy requiring persons to wear a mask at all times while in the public areas of the airport, except where certain conditions apply. Additional updates and FAQs will be posted on the FAA website https://www.faa.gov/airports/crrsaa/ and on the NDOT Aeronautics website: https://dot.nebraska.gov/aeronautics/.

Nebraska Department of Labor (NDOL) is issuing 1099-G tax forms to unemployment claimants who received benefits in 2020. The forms are normally released in January, but the IRS granted the department’s request for a 30-day delay while additional fraud checks were performed. Claimants can download the forms in NEworks.nebraska.gov.

Unemployment fraud through identity theft has been prevalent nationwide throughout the pandemic. Any individual who received a 1099-G from NDOL, but did not file an unemployment claim, should report suspected fraud by emailing NDOL.1099fraud@nebraska.gov and filing a police report. NDOL has hired additional staff for fraud prevention and detection, including income and identity verification. A new federal requirement for Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) is to verify self-employment and identity of claimants. Even if a claim was previously approved, each claimant will be asked to provide additional information. Resources for reporting identity theft and fraud are:

Federal Trade Commission: https://www.identitytheft.gov/Information
U.S. Department of Justice: https://www.justice.gov/disaster-fraud/ncdf-disaster-complaint-form

NDOL news releases are available online at dol.nebraska.gov

National Weather Service has a new tool to find weather information for your specific location at https://www.weather.gov/forecastpoints Click on your location and an hourly table graph will load below the map.
Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services reports its COVID-19 vaccination portal reached and exceeded the milestone of 200,000 Nebraskans registered for the COVID-19 vaccine as of Feb. 18. "This is a significant moment in Nebraska's effort to mitigate COVID-19 and ensure access to the vaccine," said DHHS Chief Information Officer Lori Snyder. "It means the systems we have put in place are reaching Nebraskans and making the process of getting the vaccine as easy and equitable as possible for residents."

Launched the last week of January, Vaccinate.NE.Gov is the State's official COVID-19 vaccine registration portal. Those who have registered for vaccination with their local health department do not need to register a second time using the state site as information will be transferred between local health departments and DHHS. Nebraska is updating its Vaccine Phasing guidance to provide further information and expectations as to when the general population will be eligible to receive the COVID-19 vaccine. Health departments are currently in Phase 1B, vaccinating those over 65 years old or working in critical infrastructure. Comorbidity categories are not included in Phase 1B. As Phase 1B continues, Nebraska is finalizing plans to vaccinate the general population.

To follow Nebraska's COVID-19 vaccination progress, please visit the COVID-19 Vaccination dashboard.

This week, the State announced its official COVID-19 vaccination campaign: Finish Strong Nebraska! For more information and to register on our vaccine portal, you can visit FinishStrong.Ne.Gov

DHHS COVID-19 Vaccine Update More than 52,844 COVID-19 vaccine doses were administered during the week of Feb. 15-19 bringing the Nebraska total to more than 344,165 doses of COVID-19 vaccine to those in Phase 1 priority groups. Additionally, 107,807 Nebraskans have completed vaccination which represents 7.3% of Nebraskans aged 16 years of age and older. DHHS has a website available so Nebraskans can register and get notified when COVID-19 vaccinations begin in their area. A Spanish translation of the website is now available. To access, users select Español from the language drop-down menu at the top-right side of the page. As of Feb. 22, there have been 211,237 Nebraskans who have registered to receive the vaccine at vaccinate.ne.gov. Those interested in registering will need to provide name and contact information, date of birth and answer health questions used to help determine priority group eligibility. Any information entered is strictly confidential and used solely for this purpose. Friends, family and caregivers are encouraged to assist others with vaccine sign-up if needed. The DHHS Information line can assist those with limited technology, language or Internet access, and is available by calling 531-249-1873 or 833-998-2275. All Nebraska counties are vaccinating Phase 1B priority groups.

Federal Emergency Management Agency — FEMA has increased its support to states, tribes and territories for vaccination centers. FEMA has already obligated more than $3.63 billion to states, tribes and territories, and Washington, D.C., for community vaccination centers. As the number of states with obligations increases, we will work alongside other federal agencies to provide federal support for critical staffing, supplies and other shortfalls that can help get more people vaccinated.
In preparation for upcoming radiological emergency preparedness exercises with Cooper Nuclear Station, staff from Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services and Nebraska Emergency Management agency met, Feb. 17, to review roles and responsibilities during a nuclear power station incident.

According to Deb Robinson, senior radiological planning and training specialist with NEMA, additional training was needed as staff in key positions were taking on new roles following the retirement of key personnel at DHHS.

“This was an opportunity for DHHS staff to learn more about NEMA’s leadership roles and response functions,” Robinson said.

Participants reviewed the State Radiological Emergency Response Plan and the activities expected of NEMA and DHHS personnel during a radiological response.

NEMA Assistant Director Bryan Tuma outlined his responsibilities as the governor’s authorized representative (GAR) during a radiological event and how he relies on the recommendations of DHHS personnel to determine when shelter-in-place, evacuation orders or other protective actions need to be issued.

DHHS interfaces with the GAR to make public health recommendations. They may also need to communicate with locals on public health considerations during the re-entry, relocation, and/or return (Triple R) portions of a response.

Robinson said the training gave DHHS staff a chance to identify what is needed from the person who fills the role of DHHS Emergency Response Manager.

The training offered an opportunity for all DHHS personnel to learn how their various positions fit into the overall response picture for a nuclear power plant response.

Discussions included other roles and responsibilities that DHHS supports, including joint information center/public information and coordination and incorporation of federal support teams and resources.
Nebraska Association of Emergency Management 2020 Award Winners Named

EM Support Professional of the Year: Kay Anderson with Morrill/Garden County — Anderson was nominated by Ron Leal, director for Region 21 Emergency Management Agency. He wrote: "Kay has been a deputy director in Region 21 EMA for 14 years. Kay is 100% involved in Emergency Management. She is Deputy Director of Morrill County has been acting deputy director of Garden County for the last two years. Kay makes time for all training offered not only within the regions but also training outside the region. Kay has been secretary for the Morrill County local emergency planning committee (LEPC) for the last 14 years and the secretary for the Garden County LEPC for the last two years. Kay works closely with the North Platte NRD as the North Platte river flows through Morrill and Garden County. I can count on Kay to be there in a disaster, to put in long hours and to be an excellent liaison with all city and county officials. Kay is very knowledgeable in all areas of emergency management, she takes a lot of pride in being the deputy director for both counties. Kay is a CPR instructor and teaches numerous classes throughout the regions. Kay is also on the school board in Morrill County and keeps them involved with emergency management. She is also a big part in all planning, training and exercises in both counties. If I need help in any of Regions 21’s five counties, Kay will be there ready to work. I believe she is not only an amazing asset for Region 21 and the Panhandle of Nebraska, but for the whole State of Nebraska."

New EM Professional of the Year: Denise Ziemba Region 44 — Ziemba was nominated by Nance County Board Chairman Timothy Cornwell. "Denise Ziemba is a true self starter," Cornwell wrote. "She has been aggressive in her training from the very beginning with little to no time with outgoing staff. Seven months into her role, all three of her counties were hit by one of the largest disasters in Nebraska's history (2019 flooding). The amount of damage in Nance County alone was among the most extensive in the state. Denise immediately hit the ground running to serve her region. The professionalism she demonstrated along with her ability to be an ambitious team player/leader, all while learning her position during this immense disaster is something I feel is worth the utmost recognition."

EM of the Year: Terry Miller, Saunders County Emergency Management Director — Miller was nominated by Doris Karloff of the Saunders County Board of Supervisors. "In the past year, Terry Miller has been instrumental in Saunders County's recovery from the March 2019 flood event," Karloff wrote. "He was on site immediately after the flood, assessing damage and taking pictures. At the first Saunders County Board meeting following the flood, he gave a presentation addressing the damage, which included pictures and video. He has also assisted residents with claims for grants to repair their homes. Terry assisted the Saunders County Highway Department by coordinating a meeting between FEMA and all of the townships that had experience damage from the 2019 flood. He also conducted a meeting with all the local fire departments to assist them with reimbursement from the flood." According to Karloff, Terry assisted Saunders County in its COVID-19 response by briefing the board on the quarantine at Camp Ashland, applying for emergency grants for equipment, such as tourniquets. He coordinated a propane contamination drills and streamlined communication between local fire departments throughout the county.

Presidential Awards: Laura Hintz and Dawna Whitcomb — were presented by Jon Rosenlund who served as the 2019-2020 president who wrote that Whitcomb "has been an extremely valuable member of NAEM for many years and her support and assistance has helped on many occasions. She always seems to have information we are looking for readily at hand. When I was president, I would often ask for information about prior decisions made, notes taken, or assignments. She always had that right at her fingertips. Her documentation has helped the association avoid problems, make timely decisions, and clarify confusion. She goes above and beyond when asked to help the association run smoothly."

Rosenlund wrote that Hintz “is such a wonderful advocate for emergency management throughout the state and is a great leader and example for all of us. She manages the association’s poster contest so well and was instrumental in creating the public service announcement contest, which has been a big success. She is always encouraging to those around her and provides valuable feedback that has helped the association over and over. When I served as president, it was always very reassuring when Laura was there with great information, guidance, counsel and ideas. She was someone whom I knew I could count on for great ideas, willing to pitch in and help, and dependable follow through with everything she took on.”
Multiple agencies in the Hastings area came together Feb. 10 to focus on keeping residents safe in the event of a breach or a lower level emergency at the Hastings Northwest Dam.

Agencies including the City of Hastings, Adams County Emergency Management, Hastings Police Department, Adams County Highway Department, Upper Big Blue Natural Resources District (UBBNRD), Nebraska Department of Natural Resources and the National Weather Service met at the Hastings Auditorium to update and practice the Emergency Action Plan for the Hastings Northwest Dam.

The dam, located north of the Hastings Municipal Airport, is categorized as a high-hazard dam. This means that there is a probable loss of human life and property should the dam fail.

There are approximately 110 homes downstream of the dam. For this reason, an emergency action plan is required and a tabletop review of the EAP is required every five years.

Participants reviewed the best practices for keeping the dam and spillway clear of shrubs, debris and other obstructions, and identified various emergency levels in exercise. It was also noted that presently the dam is in good condition and inspected regularly.

Agencies ran through a mock scenario, describing significant rainfall and the progressing effects on the dam.

The scenario began at a level 1, which indicates abnormal activity at the dam where extra observation is required. Level 2 becomes an emergency situation with increasing water flow from the dam, and agencies practiced providing the proper notifications to one another and the public, and identified plans to obtain sand bags and road barricades, prepare for possible evacuations, and plan to provide shelter to those who may become displaced.

A level 3 emergency means the dam has failed and evacuations are needed immediately. Participants completed a mock scenario to notify the proper agencies and prepare for potential rescue operations. The exercise allows the dam’s owner, UBBNRD, to make the necessary changes and updates to the EAP. The designated primary dam observer, alternate dam observer and landowner of the auxiliary spillway also participated in the exercise.
The Beacon – February 2021 in Review

COVID-19 by the Numbers

1 Major Disaster declaration issued by the President to authorize Federal Emergency Management Agency funds for eligible applicant costs.

$1.25 Billion Coronavirus Relief Fund

Through CRF, Nebraska received $1.25 billion of which Douglas County received $166 million. $130 million each was assigned to the state and local programs. NEMA is the point of contact for this program. Under this act, Nebraska received funding for necessary actions needed to respond to the coronavirus pandemic.

- 190 Total Applicants
- $130,000,000 Allocated
- 44 Local Governments Reimbursed
- $107,560,349 Disbursed
- $83% has been disbursed

16 State of Nebraska Requests to FEMA

- 8 Personal Protective Equipment
- 4 Strategic National Stockpile
- 4 Title 32 Nebraska National Guard

- Completed all payment file processing for Department of Economic Development and Department of Health and Human Services programs; all disbursements have been completed by the State. Final disbursement email notifications have been completed to remaining applicants
- Call center has handled 12,791 calls through 11 January.
- $94M in reimbursements approved ($124M including Omaha) through the Local Government CRF Program

ICS 300/400

Coordinated and instructed Incident Command System 300/400 class in support of state response to COVID-19 Pandemic.
COVID-19 by the Numbers

79 Incident Support Plans produced since activation of the State Emergency Operations Center on March 16, 2020, for COVID-19 response.

62 Lifeline Briefings Coordinated
for Emergency Support Function Coordinators and Local Emergency Management Directors

Informational Briefings

19 COVID-19 Working Group Meetings with Governor and State Leadership
4 Nebraska Association of County Officials (NACO)
4 League of Municipalities
26 Local Emergency Managers
24 Emergency Support Function Coordinators (ESFC)
35 White House/Intergovernmental Affairs Office (Virtual and/or Conference Call)
26 COVID-19 Finance Team
16 Deloitte Finance Team
31 DHHS Fusion Cell (Virtual Meeting)
31 Medical Emergency Operations Center (MEOC) (Virtual Meeting)
6 DHHS Vaccination Distribution Planning (Virtual Meeting)
12 Tri-State Touch Point COVID-19 Calls with Nebraska, Iowa and South Dakota (State/local EM, State/local Health Departments and Hospitals)

Review, Approve, Process Payments

- Cares Act Relief (CRF) $1,084,000,000
- $2,000,000 split equally between 19 Local Health Districts
- Public Assistance (PA)
- Food Bank Stabilization Grant, $11,000,000
- DAS/DHHS contracts
  - NOMI
  - Deloitte
  - Nebraska Accommodations Program
- Provided Technical Assistance to local jurisdiction on eligibility of presumptive costs related to Cares Act Funds, $130,000,000

Personal Protective Equipment — 90% of $44,124,129 has been distributed to Local Health Districts across the state.

Coordinated project for COVID-19 related data entered into Knowledge Center logging system with Department of Health and Human Services, University of Nebraska Medical Center, Nebraska Medicine and the Nebraska Health Information Initiative.
Nebraska Emergency Management Agency exercise training officers Roger Conrad and Larry Fichtner delivered Incident Command for Expanding Incidents (ICS 300) to emergency management students at Union College in Lincoln during the week of Feb. 8. ICS 300 provides an in-depth focus on the Incident Command System (ICS) and includes the tools, practices, and procedures that are available in ICS to effectively manage emergency incidents or planned local events.
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Kathryn Erickson, a senior at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, is serving as intern at Nebraska Emergency Management Agency this semester until April.

She is a criminal justice major and classics minor.

She started in January as an intern in the hazard mitigation unit and is working on hazard mitigation projects associated with DR 4420, the flooding from 2019.

Erickson is from Glenwood, Iowa, and will graduate in May 2021.

She says she would love to continue working in emergency management after graduation either at the state, local or federal level.

The University of Nebraska at Omaha featured NEMA’s Sara Jackson on its website highlighting her as one of their graduates that started her position as planning specialist in the hazard mitigation unit at NEMA. Check out their article on Sarah Jackson.

Cooper Nuclear Station Exercise Held

A Cooper Nuclear Station Radiological Emergency Preparedness exercise, held on Feb. 2, included fewer participants, more facemasks and virtual participation via a webinar. The exercise was held at the Emergency Operations Facility (EOF) in Auburn with reduced in-person participation. Additional staff from Nebraska Emergency Management Agency participated virtually.

COVID-19 precautions limited the number of in-person participation to members of the governor’s authorized representative’s team. Joint Information Center staff and State Emergency Operations Center staff participated from their own offices.

Photos by James Rachilla

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.