NEMA’s Jodie Fawl and Alyssa Sanders delivered Nebraska’s first offering of L0105 Public Information Basics. The three-day course replaced G290 as one of FEMA series of PIO courses which also includes PIO Awareness, Advanced PIO and the Master PIO Program.

The basic course equips participants with the skills needed to be full or part-time PIOs, including oral and written communications; understanding and working with the media; and basic tools and techniques to perform effectively as a PIO, both in the proactive/advocacy times and crisis/emergency response.

Emergency managers, public health, department of corrections, police and fire representatives were members of the inaugural course.

Another offering of the course is set for Aug. 9-12 in Dakota City.
We received word, July 27, that President Joseph Biden approved a major disaster declaration request from Governor Pete Rickets for public assistance as a result of severe weather including thunderstorms, extremely high winds and tornadoes, May 12.

The National Weather Service reported that a line of severe thunderstorms developed along the Kansas and Nebraska border mid-afternoon on May 12 that resulted in reports of large hail, funnel clouds, torrential rainfall and tornadoes that lasted throughout the night. The first line of storms started with high winds causing a major dust storm that brought visibility down to about half a mile. The storms produced winds topping 90 miles per hour, three confirmed tornadoes and hail up to three inches in diameter.

The declaration covers 20 counties and means emergency work and repair or replacement costs for damaged facilities belonging to state, tribal and local governments — and certain types of private non-profits — may be eligible to apply for assistance. Private property damages from the storm did not meet the threshold to trigger a request for individual assistance from FEMA.

Damage as a result of the storm affected electrical lines and power poles, trees and small structures. The storm also heavily damaged the Garfield County Frontier Fairgrounds, also known as the Burwell Rodeo Ground, a historic property dating to 1922 and listed on the U.S. National Register of Historic Places. Debris management costs were also identified. Preliminary damage assessments report more than $4 million in damage. It is anticipated that the damage estimate will increase as further information is collected from eligible Nebraska communities now that the approval has been granted.

Between 2015 and 2022, Nebraska has had nine, now 10, federal disasters resulting in a combined state funds obligation in excess of $29,500,000.

Sincerely,

Ervin L. Portis
Assistant Director

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**Presidential Disaster Summary 4662-DR**

Declared, July 27, 2022

**STATE:** Nebraska

**NUMBER:** FEMA-4662-DR

**INCIDENT:** Severe Storms and Straight-line Winds

**INCIDENT PERIOD:** May 12, 2022

**DATE REQUESTED BY GOVERNOR:** July 6, 2022

**FEDERAL COORDINATING OFFICER:** Andrew P. Meyer, National FCO Program

**DESIGNATIONS AND TYPES OF ASSISTANCE**

**INDIVIDUAL ASSISTANCE** for individuals and households was not requested.

**PUBLIC ASSISTANCE** for emergency work and the repair or replacement of disaster-damaged facilities in Antelope, Boone, Burt, Cedar, Cuming, Custer, Dixon, Garfield, Greeley, Holt, Knox, Logan, Pierce, Polk, Sherman, Thurston, Valley, Wayne, Wheeler, and York counties.

**HAZARD MITIGATION GRANT PROGRAM** Assistance for actions taken to prevent or reduce long term risk to life and property from natural hazards: All areas in the State of Nebraska are eligible for assistance under the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program.

**OTHER:** Additional designations may be made at a later date if requested by the state and warranted by the results of further damage assessments.
Otoe County residents have a new way to report property damage following severe weather.

The ORION Damage Assessment System, which is accessible through the Otoe County Emergency Management Agency’s webpage, collects property reports and provides the county emergency management agency with a comprehensive map of damage following storms.

Otoe County Emergency Management Director Gregg Goebel and Deputy Director Steve Cody spoke to the Nebraska City Rotary Club June 22 about the new reporting system, and they provided a brief history of the county’s severe weather events.

Goebel said the ORION system allows trained storm spotters and members of the public to upload pictures and information from a smartphone or iPad using the property address.

The program provides latitude and longitude coordinates for the address as it creates an overall damage map, and it accesses the county assessor’s records to calculate property damage estimates, as well, in case a disaster declaration is needed to qualify for state or federal assistance, he said.

Cody talked about the 1913 tornado that struck Berlin (now Otoe) and killed 12 people. It began south of Douglas and passed near Syracuse before hitting Berlin. The same storm system caused tornadoes in Omaha and Yutan that night.

“Where stood a happy, prosperous and contented village of some 300 people, there remains but two dwelling houses, partly in ruins, now temporary hospitals for those were severely injured in the storm of Sunday night, which literally swept an Otoe County town off the map,” according to the Nebraska Daily Press.

Cody spoke about a 2017 tornado that was reported in Talmage, Nebraska City, and Syracuse before being confirmed in Dunbar by two trained storm spotters. This storm was unusual, he said, in that it stayed in a single spot and didn’t cause a great deal of damage.

Cody also showed a composite radar image of one of the most recent storms, the Dec. 15, 2021, derecho, which caused 120 tornadoes across the Midwest, including two in Otoe County. He said 80 mph winds recently triggered every emergency warning siren in the county, although the storm that produced the winds did not produce any tornadoes. In addition to weather event responses, the Otoe County EMA is responsible for creating and maintaining disaster plans for the county’s towns and villages and special events that take place in the county.

OEMA also coordinates disaster response in the event of a release of nuclear material at Cooper Nuclear Station near Brownville, and it prepares and performs tabletop disaster exercises for local government, school districts, and businesses in the county. Both Goebel and Cody can operate drones to help survey grass fires and other incidents that might benefit from an aerial view of the situation.
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State Emergency Response Commission Hosts Guest Speaker

Tim Gablehouse, an attorney with an environmental practice in Denver and 34-year member of the Colorado Emergency Planning Commission, was the featured speaker at the July meeting of the State Emergency Response Commission (SERC) held July 12 in Lincoln. He told SERC members that Local Emergency Planning Committees need to make sure that local plans adequately cover people with disabilities. Gablehouse said it’s important that citizens know what a local response is capable of doing and what their own individual responsibilities are in a response. “Their plan can’t be only to call 911. We need to create adequate expectations.” From a civil rights point of view, Gablehouse said, elected officials have a duty to prepare and plan for emergencies. “The potential for liability is clear. In the nation’s system of emergency management, the local government acts first to address the public’s emergency needs.”

Seated from left, NEMA Recovery Section Manager Lexy Hindt and Public Assistance Unit Supervisor Kyle Winchell, were panelists at a League of Nebraska Municipalities workshop held June 27.

ICS 300 and ICS 400 were delivered July 25-29 in North Platte by NEMA Exercise Training Officers Roger Conrad and Larry Fichtner. The Intermediate ICS for Expanding Incidents and Advanced ICS for Complex Incidents are prerequisites for many other FEMA courses.

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.