State Emergency Operations Center Activates, March 16, for COVID Response

Daily Virtual Meetings Held After Initial Activation

Governor Pete Ricketts addresses SEOC staff, March 16.
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.

The changes we have faced because of COVID-19 are difficult to fathom. We have physically distanced ourselves from our favorite people and places. Many businesses have been forced to either close or significantly reduce staff. Schools are holding classes online. Some people are working from home and others are out of work and financially strained. Public health officials continue to recommend these measures as the best way to stop the spread of COVID-19. The entire nation is responding to this pandemic. Every American has a role to play.

FEMA Administrator Pete Gaynor outlined an emergency management response plan in a letter from March 27, which we have printed on the pages following this letter. He emphasized that this response will take a whole community response. That is definitely what is happening in Nebraska.

Local, state and federal emergency managers and all of our partners are working to support our public health colleagues during this worldwide crisis. This is a team effort to keep people healthy and safe. All of us at Nebraska Emergency Management Agency are appreciative of the efforts being made by our partners. This team effort includes:

- Local emergency management agency staff across the state who are supporting their local health departments and providing updates to the State Watch Center.
- Nebraska emergency support function coordinators and agency staff who are working in the virtual State Emergency Operations Center and collecting needed resources for citizens and healthcare workers across the state. The State Watch Center continues to provide situational awareness updates and other NEMA staff are producing the COVID-19 Daily SEOC Briefing and the incident support plan to keep everyone aware of the rapidly-changing response we are working.
- NEMA staff who are monitoring needs and requirements from emergency managers, supporting DHHS which is taking the lead on this disaster. We have taken aggressive actions to source our own supply of personal protective equipment.
- State public information officers who are working through the Joint Information System to provide Nebraska Joint Information Center updates each weekday on the steps being taken in Nebraska’s to protect its citizen’s from COVID-19.

Governor Pete Ricketts has been holding daily news conferences at 2 p.m. to address the state’s COVID-19 response. The news conferences are live streamed at http://netnebraska.org/. (Scroll down to the Today’s Live Streaming section.) News releases from the governor office detail all the actions taken by the governor and are available at https://governor.nebraska.gov/.

The Nebraska Legislature passed LB 1198, an $83.6 million bill to aid in the fight against COVID-19. The money will go to the Department of Health and Human Services and the University of Nebraska Medical Center for such things as medical and laboratory equipment, personal protective equipment, UV light boxes, staffing and testing. The money will go from the state’s rainy day fund to the governor’s emergency fund to the military department for a new program: the Governor’s Emergency Program — COVID-19.

Nationally, Congress passed a $2.2 trillion virus rescue package March 27. It will send payments of up to $1,200 to millions of Americans, bolster unemployment benefits, offer loans, grants and tax breaks to businesses large and small and flush billions more to states, local governments and the nation’s all but overwhelmed health care system.

Sincerely,

Bryan Tuma
NEMA Assistant Director
Fellow Emergency Managers,

The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has transformed our daily lives and our profession in a matter of weeks. Together with our public health colleagues, we work as a team to battle the nationwide effects of this virus. I thank you for your tireless efforts under these unprecedented and very demanding circumstances.

I write to you today as the Administrator of FEMA and a former state and local emergency manager. Now more than ever, we must work as a team to deliver locally executed, state-managed, and federally supported solutions on behalf of the American people. The best and the brightest emergency managers, public health officials, private industry partners, scientists, and medical doctors and nurses are assembling at FEMA Headquarters and in our regional offices; in your state and local emergency operations centers; and in hospital operations centers across the country. This is truly a whole-of-nation response. Rest assured, the full weight of our Nation is supporting all of us to overcome the pandemic and I have no doubt that we will be successful in defeating the spread of COVID-19.

To be successful across the nation – from the smallest town, tribal nation, island, and to the largest city – we must act decisively and immediately. Today, many of you are at the center of the battle, in places like New York, Washington, California, and Louisiana. Others of you may only have a few cases. It is our collective responsibility to do our very best today, so we can continue to blunt the spread of COVID-19. If you have excess capacity, please consider using EMAC to offer resources that your peers from around the country may need.

As the Nation’s lead emergency manager, I want to be completely transparent about our national response and your responsibility to respond proactively and aggressively. To that point, I would like to share seven critical steps that I ask you to immediately consider and act upon.

First, mitigation works. Ensure you preserve your “force” while maintaining the ability to respond in a COVID-19 degraded environment without access to the tools typically used in an emergency or disaster like mutual aid and EMAC. Ensure that your communities, small or large embrace mitigation efforts. Every American has a role to play in defeating COVID-19, including good hygiene and social distancing. Follow the President’s 15 Days to Slow the Spread.

Second, integrate all emergency management and public health operations. Identify and integrate your leading health official into your Emergency Operations Center and Unified Command Group at every level of government. You must form a unified Emergency Management – Public Health Team. Ensure that the entire state political leadership team understand the emergency management process. All requests to the Federal government must be formally communicated by the state’s emergency manager to the FEMA Regional Administrator. This is the same process as natural disasters.

Third, collect public, private, and government hospital bed capacity data, if you haven’t already – total beds, acute care beds, normal occupancy, predicted surge occupancy. This data will assist you in crafting requests for high demand, low density critical resources should the time come that you may need it. We must use all data wherever possible to allocate scarce resources, including consideration of population size, demographics, and vulnerability.

Fourth, actively plan to stand-up Alternate Care Sites. Be creative in identifying facilities that can support low acuity patients and require a minimal amount of medical staff, already in short supply. Consider locations such as convention centers, hotels, shuttered hospitals, college or university dormitories, or vacant open space in commercial buildings. Ask your FEMA Regional Administrator to brief you on the US Army Corps of Engineers “Hotel to Healthcare” initiative. If you need a plan, here is a link to a plan.

Fifth, maintain situational awareness of ventilators that may be used across your area. Check hospitals, acute care sites, outpatient locations, and any other location that may use these devices, especially those that may be a source for reallocation.
to an area of greater need. Like hospital bed capacity, this data will help you understand what you have and what you may need, informing your resource management strategy for these high demand, low density critical resources should the time come that you may need it. Just as we are moving resources nationally, you should also be moving resources within your state.

**Sixth, identify all sources to surge medical professionals.** Look for retirees, medical contract services, nurses, respiratory therapists, medical students, and emergency medical technicians or local equivalents. You will need them to support the increased hospital surge and management of patients on ventilators and you should be cataloging and training them now, as appropriate.

**Seventh, manage Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) carefully.** We have stood-up the Supply Chain Stabilization Task Force within FEMA with the purpose of increasing the flow of critical medical supplies such as N95 masks, surgical masks, and ventilators. We are using four guiding principles: 1) preserve what we have; 2) locate medical stockpile around the globe; 3) distribute them to locations most in need; and 4) build capacity in America through partners with industry. While some of these strategies will yield near-term benefits, it must be your highest priority to carefully manage what you have available to you now.

To help you with this, the CDC produced a [Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) Burn Rate Calculator](#). This spreadsheet-based model provides information for healthcare facilities to plan and optimize the use of PPE for response to COVID-19. Similarly, non-healthcare facilities (e.g., correctional facilities) may find this tool useful for planning and optimizing PPE use as part of the response to COVID-19. This tool can also be used for planning PPE use outside the context of COVID-19, where PPE shortages may also occur due to supply chain issues related to the COVID-19 response (e.g. manufacturing facilities).

FEMA will reimburse all eligible expenses for emergency protective measures under the Stafford Act; however, do not wait for the PPE from the Federal government to show-up. Take aggressive action now to source your own. Because of the actions the Administration and federal government is taking, you will begin to see PPE supplies come online in the weeks ahead as the commercial distribution chain adapts as well as the quantities of shipments from the Strategic National Stockpile continue to move. Continue to be resourceful, ask the building trades to donate PPE or that they allow you access to their supplier; and, ask dental and outpatient offices that are closed to donate PPE to local hospitals and care critical care sites. And finally, I ask you to review and utilize the guidance the Supply Chain Stabilization Task Force released regarding guidance for PPE. Lastly, some **external communication** resources that may be helpful:

- **Best Practices:** This page provides a platform for sharing best practices and lessons learned by the government, private sector, academic institutions, professional associations, and other organizations to support the whole of community response.
- **Rumor Control:** This page is to help the public distinguish between rumors and facts regarding the response to COVID-19.
- **How to Help:** This page provides guidance on how to donate critical resources & supplies; how to do business with FEMA; and, how to volunteer.

These are unprecedented times and many lives are potentially at stake. We are doing things many of us have never imagined, especially at this scale. As professional emergency managers, we are built for this – this is what we do best; coordinate, problem-solve, and act. I ask all of you to lead, innovate, and be resourceful. This is a whole of nation response and I need every emergency manager to be an active participant.

We are emergency managers and America needs us at our best.

Respectfully,

Pete Gaynor
Administrator
Christopher Smyth joined NEMA on March 2 as a planning specialist in the Public Assistance Unit of the Recovery Section.

Smyth has a bachelor of science in criminal justice with a minor in emergency management from the University of South Florida.

Prior to joining NEMA, Smyth served as an intern at Hillsborough County, Fla., Emergency Management, as a Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) program leader, and as an Intern at the Tampa Electric Co.

Smyth worked for seven years in the Florida Army National Guard as a computer networking specialist. He deployed first to Iraq and then Qatar.

Smyth was born in Omaha. His father was military so he moved around a lot and was most recently living in Tampa, Fla.

His family lives in Omaha and Florida.

Smyth said his interests include woodworking and building things. He said he enjoys making costumes and going to comic cons.

Gassmann to Serve as State Hazard Mitigation Officer

John Gassmann was named state hazard mitigation officer (SHMO) and started with NEMA on March 16. He is also the Hazard Mitigation Unit supervisor and will work in the Recovery Section.

Gassmann earned a bachelor of arts in political science from the University of Kansas; and a master of arts in National Security from the U.S. Naval War College.

Experience/previous jobs: 13 years of active duty service in the U.S. Army from 2005 to 2018; two years of service with the Nebraska Army National Guard; and two years of volunteer service with Team Rubicon

Gassmann is origanally from Riley, Kans.

He and his wife, Jaime, have two sons, James, 10, and Joe, 6.

His interests include shotgun sports (trap and sporting clays); old Volkswagens; cooking and baking.

Above: Gov. Pete Ricketts and Dr. Gary Anthone, chief medical officer and director of the Division of Public Health at DHHS, kick off a news conference on March 9 that marked the year anniversary of the 2019 flooding with and update on COVID-19

Right: NEMA Assistant Director Bryan Tuma reviewed progress the state has made to recover from the floods.
The U.S. Small Business Administration is offering low-interest federal disaster loans for working capital to Nebraska small businesses suffering substantial economic injury as a result of COVID-19.

SBA Offers Disaster Assistance to Nebraska Small Businesses Economically Impacted by the Coronavirus (COVID-19)

SACRAMENTO, Calif. – The U.S. Small Business Administration is offering low-interest federal disaster loans for working capital to Nebraska small businesses suffering substantial economic injury as a result of the Coronavirus (COVID-19), SBA Administrator Jovita Carranza announced today. SBA acted under its own authority, as provided by the Coronavirus Preparedness and Response Supplemental Appropriations Act that was recently signed by the President, to declare a disaster following a request received from Gov. Pete Ricketts on March 17, 2020.

The disaster declaration makes SBA assistance available in the entire state of Nebraska and the neighboring counties below.

- Neighboring Colorado counties: Logan, Phillips, Sedgwick, Weld and Yuma;
- Neighboring Iowa counties: Fremont, Harrison, Mills, Monona, Pottawattamie and Woodbury;
- Neighboring Missouri counties: Atchison and Holt;
- Neighboring South Dakota counties: Bennett, Bon Homme, Charles Mix, Clay, Fall River, Gregory, Oglala Lakota, Todd, Tripp, Union and Yankton;
- Neighboring Wyoming counties: Goshen, Laramie and Niobrara.

"SBA is strongly committed to providing the most effective and customer-focused response possible to assist Nebraska small businesses with federal disaster loans. We will be swift in our efforts to help these small businesses recover from the financial impacts of the Coronavirus (COVID-19)," said Administrator Carranza.

SBA Customer Service Representatives will be available to answer questions about SBA's Economic Injury Disaster Loan program and explain the application process.

"Small businesses, private non-profit organizations of any size, small agricultural cooperatives and small aquaculture enterprises that have been financially impacted as a direct result of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) since Jan. 31, 2020, may qualify for Economic Injury Disaster Loans of up to $2 million to help meet financial obligations and operating expenses which could have been met had the disaster not occurred," said Carranza.

"These loans may be used to pay fixed debts, payroll, accounts payable and other bills that can't be paid because of the disaster's impact. Disaster loans can provide vital economic assistance to small businesses to help overcome the temporary loss of revenue they are experiencing," Carranza added.

Eligibility for Economic Injury Disaster Loans is based on the financial impact of the Coronavirus (COVID-19). The interest rate is 3.75 percent for small businesses. The interest rate for private nonprofit organizations is 2.75 percent. SBA offers loans with long-term repayments in order to keep payments affordable, up to a maximum of 30 years and are available to entities without the financial ability to offset the adverse impact without hardship.

Applicants may apply online, receive additional disaster assistance information and download applications at https://disasterloan.sba.gov/ela. Applicants may also call SBA's Customer Service Center at (800) 659-2955 or email disastercustomerservice@sba.gov for more information on SBA disaster assistance. Individuals who are deaf or hard-of-hearing may call (800) 877-8339. Completed applications should be mailed to U.S. Small Business Administration, Processing and Disbursement Center, 14925 Kingsport Road, Fort Worth, TX 76155.

The deadline to apply for an Economic Injury Disaster Loan is Dec. 21, 2020.

For more information about Coronavirus, please visit: Coronavirus.gov.
For more information about available SBA resources and services, please visit SBA.Gov/coronavirus.
Lt. Gov. Mike Foley recognized the winners of the annual Severe Weather Awareness Contest at ceremony at the Capitol March 9.

The winning and honorable mention posters will be featured in NEMA’s 2021 Severe Weather Awareness Calendar.

Pictured front row from right:
First Place: **Kiersten Hans**, 9, Bloomfield, Bloomfield Elementary School, Knox County
Second Place: **Ike Carlson**, 9, Norfolk, Christ Lutheran School, Madison County
Third Place: **Bella Moss**, 8, Bellevue, Cornerstone Christian School, Sarpy County
Fourth Place: **Leah Gompert**, 8, Center, North Street Academy, Knox County

Honorable mentioned:
**Zoey Rademaher**, 9, Loomis, Loomis Public School, Phelps County
**Eliza Maynard**, 9, Kearney, Buffalo Hills Elementary, Buffalo County

**Roman Buerer**, 8, Kearney, Meadowlark Elementary, Buffalo County
**Hanna Mader**, 9, Grand Island, I-R School, Hall County
**Mercy Mae McDonald**, 8, Rockville, Centura School, Howard County
**Ellie Swartz**, 9, Bellevue, Cornerstone Christian School, Sarpy County
**Aaron Andrews**, 9, Geneva, Fillmore Central Elementary, Fillmore County
**Sadie Rakes**, 9, Wymore, Southern School District No. 1, Gage County
**Levi Cada**, 9, Clarkson, Howells Community Catholic School, Colfax County

“The devastating impacts of extreme events can be reduced through improved readiness,” said NEMA Assistant Director Bryan Tuman. “Make a safety plan, create a preparedness kit and review proper safety precautions. It’s just a good practice for those of us who live in areas affected by tornadoes, floods and severe thunderstorms.”
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 to: Jodie Fawl, Public Information Officer, 2433 N.W. 24th St., Lincoln NE 68524; 402-471-7428, jodie.fawl@nebraska.gov.

www.nema.nebraska.gov