Gov. Pete Ricketts Thanks Hubbard Gap Fire Responders

Communications Exercise Held in Southeast Nebraska

West Nebraska Engine Academy Offers Training Opportunities
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.

Each September, during National Preparedness Month, the emergency management community ask citizens to do their part to prepare for the potential disasters that could strike in their area. We share posts on Facebook and tweets on Twitter to get people thinking about what they can do to prepare their family for a disaster. I hope you took some time to make some plans for future disasters.

A preparedness kit that includes with food, water and supplies could sustain you and your loved ones for a weather event that damages your home and cuts power for an extended period of time. Making plans for where you would seek shelter during a tornado could save lives, and developing a communication plan with your family members will help to be ready when disaster strikes.

None of us are exempt from potential disaster, they can strike any time. Having a planned response for when you’re at home, at work, at school or on the road can reduce fear, anxiety and losses. The need to prepare is real. Disasters disrupt hundreds of thousand of lives every year and have lasting effects, both to people and property.

If a disaster occurs in your community, local government and disaster relief organizations will try to help you, but you need to be ready as well. Local responders may not be able to reach you immediately or they may need to focus their efforts elsewhere before they are able to help you.

We urge you to be ready to be self-sufficient for at least three days. This may mean providing your own shelter, first aid, food, water and sanitation. Make sure you take some time today to be ready for a future disaster.

As we develop our plans for future events, we continue to deal with the pandemic that has faced us since early this year. Worldwide, more than 1 million people have died because of COVID-19, according to John Hopkins University of Medicine. In the United States, more than 200,000 people have died. In Nebraska, we have more than 100 new cases per 100,000 population, which places us in the red zone for cases.

The Governor’s COVID-19 Working Group reports that recent increases in positive test results are largely attributed to return to school and college-age students engaged in large gatherings.

Hospital capacity remains very good with low ventilator use in both Omaha and Lincoln. More than 21% of Nebraskans have been tested with a 2% positive test rate on all tests and a 1.14% fatality rate.

The federal government is working with states to develop vaccination plans. The plans include the identification of processes to receive vaccine supplies, partners to address effort, development of a tracking system, and prioritization of groups for testing.

Until we have that vaccination ready for distribution, we need to continue to wear masks, socially distance, wash our hands, know our risks, stay home if sick and get tested if we have been exposed.

One last suggestion: get a flu shot this year. With COVID-19 still in full swing as we head into fall, health care providers across the country are bracing for dealing with COVID-19 and influenza.

While researchers are still searching for a coronavirus vaccine, we already have a widely-available flu vaccine. Influenza is a very serious disease and about 40,000 people die from it every year. Do what you can to reduce your risk by getting a vaccine.

Sincerely,

Bryan Tuma
Gov. Ricketts, State Agencies Announce Creation of Incident Management Team

Gov. Pete Ricketts and Maj. Gen. Daryl Bohac, director of Nebraska Emergency Management Agency (NEMA), announced that, for the first time in its history, the State of Nebraska has a fully operational Type 3, all-hazards incident management team (IMT).

“This new incident management team is helping better coordinate Nebraskans to provide leadership during extended emergencies including wildfires, floods, and other disasters,” Ricketts said.

“An IMT works to coordinate incident management to secure resources and personnel needed to respond to a wildfire or other disaster.

“The IMT demonstrates our continued commitment to building and maintaining strong partnerships for the benefit of the people of Nebraska,” Bohac said. “Development of partnerships from the federal, state, to local level are an effective and efficient way to respond to all disasters.”

Once a local jurisdiction declares an emergency, a state declaration must be approved by Gov. Ricketts to allow state resources to be made available to aid in the response. Previously, state resources would provide assistance to local emergency managers during a disaster. With the new IMT in place, local jurisdictions can now request for the State to directly manage the disaster response.

A Type 3 IMT includes a minimum of eight command and general staff members who manage an incident after being delegated authority by a local jurisdiction faced with a disaster that exceeds its capabilities and resources. An incident management assistance team (IMAT) includes credentialed members who deploy as needed to integrate with local responders to assist them in managing their incident.

Team members can include trained command, operations, planning, logistics, and finance/administration personnel from different state agencies, fire departments, and local emergency management who work together within the confines of the Incident Command System (ICS). ICS is part of the National Incident Management System, which allows the whole community to work together to manage all threats and hazards regardless of cause, size, location, or complexity.

Team activation is requested through local emergency managers to the Nebraska Emergency Management Agency. Under the Nebraska Emergency Management Act, an IMT or IMAT in Nebraska deploys as a state emergency response team (SERT) under the authority of the adjutant general of the Nebraska Military Department.

State Fire Marshal Chris Cantrell said the State made the choice to support responders and citizens of Nebraska with development of an IMT/IMAT because of lessons learned from previous large wildland fires.

“The support this team brings to firefighters, emergency management, local jurisdictions, and the citizens of this state is essential,” Cantrell said. “A Type 3 team can

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Incident Management Team ... continued from page 3

provide relief to local jurisdictions when an incident increases in complexity, and can also help to get control of an incident before it becomes too complex, such as a Type 2 or Type 1 incident. The transition from local incident management to mid-level management has never been an option in our state before. This is a major milestone towards Nebraska being capable of assisting its citizens in their greatest time of need.”

“Fires are just one of the reasons an IMT or IMAT would be deployed,” NEMA Assistant Director Bryan Tuma said. “The team can assist with incident management activities during all-hazards events, including natural and human-caused events, as well as planned events.”

“Having a state IMT is a cost-effective way to respond to incidents,” State Forester John Erixson said. “Cost of a national Type 1 and Type 2 team is considerably higher than that of a Type 3 team.”

Nationally, there are five types of IMTs:

- Type 5: A local village and township team composed primarily of fire officers from neighboring departments trained to serve in command and general staff positions during the first 6–12 hours of an incident.
- Type 4: A city, county, or fire district including fire, EMS, and law enforcement officers from a larger and generally more populated area during the first 6–12 hours of an incident.
- Type 3: A state or metropolitan area team comprised of several entities within a state or region, activated to support incident management at incidents of extended duration.
- Type 2: National and state teams used on smaller-scale national or state incidents.
- Type 1: The most robust IMT with the most training and experience. These teams operate through interagency cooperation of federal, state, and local land and emergency management agencies.

State Fire Marshal Chris Cantrell, Maj. Gen. Bohac, NEMA Assistant Director Bryan Tuma and State Forester John Erixson prepare for a news conference at the Capitol announcing the establishment of Nebraska’s incident management team.
The Southeast Planning, Exercise and Training (PET) Region emergency managers held Operation Can You Hear Me Now? on Sept. 3 at the Gage County Fairgrounds in Beatrice to test communications equipment available in the region.

The full-scale exercise included local, regional and state partners testing interoperable communications capabilities. Mark Hosking of Lancaster County Emergency Management Agency served as exercise director.

Hosking said the capabilities tested included:
- Operational coordination
- Access control and identification verification
- Operational communication
- Situational awareness.

“The emergency managers in the Southeast Planning, Exercise and Training Region have invested regional funds in tracking and accountability along with improved communication capabilities between counties,” Hosking said.

“This exercise was designed to provide the opportunity to bring resources such as Salamander Technology and mobile operation centers (MOCs) together to test interoperable communication. This exercise was a great opportunity to understand what resources are available in the southeast region.”

Objectives of the exercise included:
- Establishing a coordinated operational communication structure with all organizations involved in the incident and maintaining it for two hours.

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Operation Can You Hear Me Now?

- Verifying the ability to communicate with local emergency managers and Nebraska Emergency Management Agency assets within one hour of reporting on site.
- Providing information to all relevant personnel on the status of response efforts within one hour of the exercise activation.
- Establishing a tracking and accountability system for up to 50 people within 20 minutes of arrival on scene.
- Maintaining tracking and accountability for 2 hours.

Amanda Burki, emergency management director for Johnson and Pawnee counties, served as the exercise controller.

“From this exercise, I learned a lot about preparedness and travel campers,” Burki said. “This was a resource that has existed prior to my time as EMA director. Mostly I was given a healthy dose of reality and that we need to do this exercise yearly.”

Burki said she learned that she needed to begin this project earlier and incorporate it into regular planning, training and exercises not only in her jurisdiction but across the planning, exercise and training region.

“Emergency managers are trying to prepare for all-hazards incidents within the jurisdiction that they serve,” Burki said. “While regular inventory was done on these assets, exercising was not. I now plan on pulling our trailer out at least two times a year to get it up to speed.”

Participants also were involved in mobile operation center demonstrations following the exercise to discover capabilities and determine MOC resource types available.

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Troy Harris, communications coordinator at NEMA, said the exercise provided an excellent opportunity for local emergency managers and NEMA to get command vehicles out in the field and to actually work out of them.

“The benefit of being in a low-key environment to test equipment and capabilities cannot be overstated,” Harris said. “Exercises are a great opportunity to discover if we have the equipment needed to respond to real emergencies and to determine if all the equipment we do have works as it should.”

“We can’t just show up on scene and hope everything works,” Harris said. “We have to test equipment, know it works and practice using unfamiliar, and even in some cases, familiar equipment, so that we will be ready when disaster strikes.”
Be Prepared Awards Recognize Volunteers and Communities

Lt. Gov. Mike Foley presented this year’s Be Prepared Awards in a virtual ceremony, Sept. 28, that recognized volunteers and community organizations for excellence in emergency preparedness and disaster response.

Presented during National Preparedness Month, the Be Prepared Awards program is in its 13th year of honoring Nebraskans who volunteer their time and energy to support preparedness in Nebraska communities.

The awards are sponsored by the Nebraska Emergency Management Agency, in partnership with the Nebraska Citizen Corps Program and the University of Nebraska Public Policy Center.

“While trained professionals like police, paramedics, firefighters and medical workers are essential in a crisis, volunteers also play a critical role in our response to any emergency situation,” Foley said. “The Be Prepared Awards recognize the efforts of both of these groups, Nebraskans who are always ready to assist at a moment’s notice.”

Cody Meredith and the Southeast Medical Reserve Corps of Continued on page 7

Local Hero Award
Cody Meredith – Southeast Nebraska Medical Reserve Corps
Crete received the Local Hero Award, recognizing extraordinary service and leadership. Their work in contract tracing and logistical support was crucial in assisting health departments respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Central District Health Department, based in Grand Island, received an award for Excellence in Community Preparedness, recognizing its work leading the community’s pandemic preparedness efforts.

St. Francis Medical Center, of Grand Island, received an award for Excellence in Community Response, recognizing its heroic response to one of the heaviest COVID-19 caseloads in the state.

Megan Wade of Omaha, received an award for Excellence in Volunteer Preparedness Education and Outreach. Wade is the coordinator of the Eastern Nebraska/Western Iowa Medical Reserve Corps. The award recognizes her work on the Masks for Many project and her efforts supporting local health departments and increasing volunteerism.

Jim Kuddes of Ashland, received the Citizen Corps Volunteer of the Year award, recognizing his work with Dodge County CERT responding to severe flooding in February 2020.

The Dodge County Citizen Corps Council, based in Fremont, received the Citizen Corps Council of the Year award, for their work responding to severe flooding in the Fremont area in February, and their volunteer work during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Honorable mentions were awarded to Dale Clausen, of Papillion, Pam Denney, of Omaha and Miles Glasgow, of Omaha for their outstanding service to their communities during the past year.
More than 160 firefighters from multiple departments, along with several local, state and federal agencies, participated in the West Nebraska Engine Academy, Sept. 12-14 in the Cedar Canyon and Buffalo Creek Wildlife Management areas south of Gering.

For the third year in a row, the live-fire exercise helped prepare firefighters to manage a complex wildfire incident through hands-on training in structure and hazardous materials protection, fire suppression, aerial firefighting support, fire ignitions and Incident Command System operations. West Nebraska Engine Academy is planned and run by a Type III incident management team of close to 35 people.

This unique training opportunity allows firefighters to develop skills and knowledge in areas of fire operations, suppression, aerial suppression, structure triage, water handling, heavy equipment and tree felling, among many others. Participants pursuing position task book typing also have the opportunity to be evaluated for position specific roles such as engine boss, task force leader and firing boss.

The academy also provides an opportunity to conduct prescribed burning, a tool used to manage fuel loads in the wildlife management areas.

"Prescribed burning is an effective tool we use to promote healthy habitats and landscape," said Alyssa Sanders of NEMA. "By clearing away dead and invasive vegetation, it allows for new growth that wildlife uses for food and shelter, and also reduces buildup of hazardous fuels which can cause devastating fires if left uncontrolled."

In addition to two single engine air tankers, the Nebraska National Guard sent five helicopters to train pilots and firefighters. Air-to-ground communications is a crucial aspect of fire suppression to ensure water and fire retardant is delivered in the correct areas.

This exercise is made possible by the following agencies: Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, Gering Fire Department, Banner County Fire Department, Nebraska Emergency Management Agency, Nebraska Forest Service, Nebraska National Guard, Nebraska State Fire Marshal’s Training Division, Nebraska State Fire Marshal’s Office, Scotts Bluff County Mutual Aid District, U.S. Forest Service, and the State of South Dakota Division of Wildland Fire. Most importantly, this exercise would not be possible without the dedication of local and regional firefighters participating in the training.

More information and photos from the weekend can be found on the West Nebraska Engine Academy Facebook Page.
The Beacon – September 2020 in Review

Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services

Dr. Gary Anthone, chief medical officer and director of public health for the DHHS, reported that the daily average of positive COVID cases in Nebraska for the week of Sept. 19-25 was 396 compared to the daily average of 364 for the previous week, and 311 and 318 in recent weeks. “We’ve also seen hospitalizations significantly increase this week and even though some of us may be experiencing COVID-19 fatigue, it’s critical that we continue to take preventive actions to help limit the spread of COVID-19 in our communities,” Anthone said.

- **Wash your hands** - [https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/when-how-handwashing.html](https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/when-how-handwashing.html)
- **Get tested** - if you’ve been exposed or have symptoms via TestNebraska.com or TestNebraska.com/es for Spanish, or another testing site in your community

Nebraska Department of Labor

The Nebraska Department of Labor (NDOL) announced today that payments are being issued for the final three weeks of the FEMA Lost Wage Assistance Program (LWA). LWA payments are $300 per week. The week ending September 5 is the last week covered by the program nationwide due to exhaustion of FEMA funds. The program applies to workers who were unemployed due to COVID-19 and eligible for a weekly benefit amount of at least $100 before taxes during the covered weeks. Payments are being issued for the weeks ending Aug. 1, 8, 15, 22, 29 and Sept. 5. DOL issued instructions in NEworks.nebraska.gov for eligible individuals. Others are receiving payments automatically based on previous certification of eligibility. Eligibility is considered on a week-to-week basis, so some individuals will not be eligible for all six weeks. State and federal tax withholdings apply to these payments.

“Individuals who have not completed their certification should do so as soon as possible to expedite payment,” said Commissioner of Labor John H. Albin. “Claimants who aren’t sure whether they qualify should check their NEworks account for the LWA Self-Certification option, which is only available to eligible individuals.” NDOL has paid $47,412,390 in Lost Wages Assistance payments so far.

U.S. Department of Homeland Security and the National Cyber Security Alliance will mark October as National Cyber Security Awareness Month. This effort, created in 2003, ensures that every individual stays safe and secure online. Make sure to take steps for your online safety.

- **Keep a clean machine**: Keep all software on internet-connected devices, including personal computers, smartphones and tablets, up-to-date to reduce risk of infection from ransomware and malware.
- **Lock down your login**: Your usernames and passwords are not enough to protect key accounts like email, banking and social media. Fortify your online accounts and enable the strongest authentication tools available, such as biometrics or two-factor authentication.
- **Share the best of yourself online**: Before posting online, think about what others can learn about you and who will see it in the future; such as teachers, parents, colleges and potential employers.
- **When in doubt, throw it out**: Links in email, tweets, posts and online advertising are common ways cyber-criminals try to compromise your information. If it looks suspicious, it’s best to delete it.
- **Safer for me, more secure for all**: What you do online affects everyone. Good online habits help the nation’s digital community.
Federal Emergency Management Agency
FEMA Region 7 has provided more than $1.1 billion in financial assistance to the states of Iowa, Kansas, Missouri and Nebraska as part of the regional and national response to COVID-19.

By the Numbers
- Public Assistance Grant Program: $239 million
- Individual Assistance Program: $808.5 million
- Crisis Counseling: $18.3 million
- Lost Wages Program: $790.2 million
- Note: Figures as of Sept. 18, 2020
- Mission Assignments: $133 million
- Note: Figure includes Title 32 Support for the National Guard
- Assistance to states for survivor supplies: $1.7 million
- Grand Total: $1,182,193,220 (Total as of Sept. 18).

State-by-State Recap of FEMA Funding:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State/ Tribal Nation</th>
<th>Public Assistance</th>
<th>Crisis Counseling</th>
<th>Lost Wages</th>
<th>Mission Assignments</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>$31.5 million</td>
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<tr>
<td>Missouri</td>
<td>$16.7 million</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nebraska</td>
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<td>Ponca Tribe of Nebraska</td>
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*Note: The Ponca Tribe of Nebraska is choosing to use CARES Act funding first before applying for assistance from FEMA.

Emergency Management Performance Grant-Supplemental (EMPG-S)
This grant program assists states, local governments, tribal nations and territorial governments with their public health and emergency management activities that support the prevention of, preparation for, and response to, the ongoing COVID-19 public health emergency. The following awards have been made:
- Iowa: $1,320,520
- Kansas: $1,276,804
- Missouri: $1,859,809
- Nebraska: $1,099,792

U.S. Department of Health & Human Services (HHS):
HHS has provided funding to all Region 7 states under various programs including: emergency supplemental appropriation funding provided in the Coronavirus Preparedness and Response Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2020, the Families First Coronavirus Response Act, the CARES Act (Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act), and the Paycheck Protection Program and Health Care Enhancement Act. Here’s a look at what has been provided:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Funding</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Iowa</td>
<td>$226.37 million</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kansas</td>
<td>$204.16 million</td>
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<tr>
<td>Missouri</td>
<td>$400.43 million</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nebraska</td>
<td>$174.12 million</td>
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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.

ICS 300 (Intermediate Incident Command System for Expanding Incidents) and ICS 400 (Advanced ICS for Complex Incidents) was held Sept. 21-25 at the War Skills Building on the Nebraska National Guard Airbase in Lincoln. The courses include mini-exercises and provide an indepth look at how to effectively manage emergency in emergency or planned events.