Post, Vista Trend Fires Strike Nebraska Panhandle

Story and Photos Pages
Photo by Chief Warrant Officer 3 Lewis Messier
A Message from NEMA Director

Maj. Gen. Daryl Bohac

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.

Last Friday, I had the honor to recognize and thank Bryan Tuma on the occasion of his retirement as assistant director of Nebraska Emergency Management Agency. He provided tremendous leadership for the day-to-day operations of an agency that was integral to the response to Nebraska’s largest disaster—the 2019 floods. But it would be a mistake to let his tenure as the assistant director be defined by the 2019 floods alone. His vision for stakeholder engagement, re-organizing the staff aimed at improving customer service, and finding ways to leverage innovative methods in order to serve the citizens of Nebraska all are hallmarks of his leadership of the agency.

As Bryan noted in his remarks, this is his second attempt at retiring from public service. He spent 32 years with the Nebraska State Patrol and retired in 2011, where he held the patrol’s top leadership position, superintendent of law enforcement and public safety. He then went to work in the private sector but missed his role in public service. When I was looking to fill the position of assistant director in 2014, Bryan was clearly the right person at the right time to lead NEMA. His calm and caring demeanor set the bar high and was just what this state needed. During his seven years with the agency, we stood shoulder to shoulder to serve Nebraskans. He has been a great leader, and I am honored to be his friend.

While Bryan’s knowledge and skill will be missed, I am excited about the possibilities Erv Portis brings to the Nebraska Emergency Management Agency. Erv brings a vast amount of public service experience to the agency and knows the needs of Nebraska’s local communities from his years as city administrator in Plattsmouth and local law enforcement.

I wish Bryan well in his retirement and look forward to working with Erv as the assistant director of NEMA.
Sept. 30 was Bryan Tuma’s last day as assistant director of Nebraska Emergency Management Agency. The Nebraska Military Department hosted a retirement celebration that gave his colleagues an opportunity to express their appreciation for his years of service to the state.

1. Julie Mayers, on behalf of all NEMA staff, presented Tuma with a plaque and photo composite recognizing his service to the people of Nebraska.

2. Tuma, an avid motorcyclist, holds a BMW watch NEMA staff presented him.

3. Lt. Gov. Mike Foley recognized both Tuma and his wife, Judy Tuma, for their commitment to the state. Foley said Tuma was always the best prepared, most knowledgeable, person in the room during the many briefings and meetings they attended.

4. Col. John Bolduc, superintendent of law enforcement and public safety with the Nebraska State Patrol, presented Tuma with a plaque in appreciation for his service at NEMA.

5. Kathy Fields, FEMA Region 7 administrator, thanked Tuma for his work with FEMA.

6. Tuma was also recognized by his family, including his five grandchildren.

7. NEMA Director Maj. Gen. Daryl Bohac, presented Tuma with the Legion of Merit and a U.S. flag that flew over the Nebraska State Capitol, Joint Forces Headquarters and on a Nebraska National Guard helicopter across the state. Bohac said Tuma provided tremendous service to the State of Nebraska as NEMA assistant director for seven years, and previously for 32 years with the Nebraska State Patrol, where he retired as superintendent of law enforcement and public safety.
Nebraska Receives Federal Approval for Public Assistance Following Windstorm Damage

President Joseph R. Biden, Jr. approved a federal disaster declaration for Nebraska on Sept. 6 as a result of the severe storms and straight-line winds that struck the state on July 9-10.

The windstorms downed power lines, broke tree limbs, and caused widespread power outages.

Gov. Pete Ricketts issued a state disaster declaration, July 23, and then requested the federal declaration for public assistance, Aug. 19.

In his letter requesting the federal disaster declaration, Ricketts outlined the damage to the state’s electrical grid from the hail and wind.

“At one point, approximately 200,000 customers, or 37% of the state, was without power after the storms moved through,” Ricketts wrote. “This event caused Omaha Public Power District’s largest power outage in history.”


Communities are eligible to apply for assistance for emergency work and the repair or replacement of disaster-damaged facilities.

“Public assistance refers to assistance for public entities such as utilities and infrastructure,” said Nebraska Emergency Management Assistant Director Erv Portis. “For this event, Nebraska qualified for the public assistance program, but not for the individual assistance program. Private property damage for this event did not meet the thresholds required to get an individual assistance declaration.”

The federal disaster declaration also makes funds available through the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program. These federal funds, available anywhere in Nebraska, can help with the costs of public projects undertaken to decrease the risk of future damage from natural disasters.

Additional disaster assistance is available to certain, eligible, private nonprofits (PNPs) through the Small Business Administration. As more details are available, they will be shared on the Nebraska page of the SBA’s website and on social media.

FEMA Administrator Deanne Criswell named Robert Haywood as the federal coordinating officer for federal recovery operations in the affected areas.

Gov. Ricketts named Molly Bargmann, NEMA Recovery Section manager, as the state coordinating officer for the disaster.

For more information on the federal disaster declaration, visit FEMA’s website by clicking here. Additional designations may be made at a later date, if the state requests it and if it is warranted by the results of further damage assessments.
The outbreak of two wildfires in the Nebraska Panhandle, less than 75 miles apart, turned into a statewide effort to achieve containment and suppression.

Reported only hours apart, the two major wildfires broke out in Dawes and Scotts Bluff counties. The Post Fire was located five miles south of Crawford, and the Vista Trend Fire was located southwest of Scotts-bluff. Both fires burned a cumulative 8,236 acres.

More than 500 firefighters from across the state and other resources from Kansas, South Dakota, Colorado, Utah and Oregon worked for almost a week to achieve 100 percent containment on both fires.

Various local, state and federal resources collaborated to combat a variety of challenges that came with having two significant incidents only miles from one another. A state type 3 incident management assistance team deployed to each location to assist in response operations. Gov. Pete Ricketts issued an emergency declaration Sept. 17, in support of response efforts.

Region 22 Emergency Management Director Tim Newman said, "The lessons learned at the West Nebraska Engine Academy continue to help the incident management team manage larger incidents such as these. The experience that the fire crews get from the academy help them understand the concept of working within strike teams and task forces and that leads to better safety and accountability on these fires."
NEMA Conducts Applicant Briefings for New Disaster

Photos and Story by
Brendon Collins

Nebraska Emergency Management Agency’s public assistance unit carried out six applicant briefings, four in-person and two virtual, the week of Sept. 20-24 to begin the recovery process for a new federally declared disaster for the State of Nebraska.

Disaster 4616 DR-NE was declared on Sept. 6 for 14 counties within the state as a result of a series of severe storms and straight-line wind events experienced July 9-10. These storms caused more than $30 million in damage throughout the state.

State Public Assistance Officer, Patrick Conway, led each of the meetings to inform potential applicants of the laws, policies and procedures governing Federal Emergency Management Agency’s public assistance program. The in-person applicant briefings were held in Aurora, Madison, Papillion and Omaha. In order to guarantee equity of access to the information, two virtual applicant briefings were held for those applicants that were too far from the in-person briefings or for those who have not been able to return to the office due to the pandemic.

Members of Conway’s public assistance team and members from the hazard mitigation team were also available at each meeting to answer applicant questions about different aspects of the public assistance program as well as provide technical assistance with setting up accounts in Grants Portal for applicants who had not done so yet.

Applicant briefings are an important first step of the public assistance program for both NEMA and its local partners. They help set the tone for the recovery process and introduce local stakeholders to the NEMA team members who will be assisting them throughout their recovery and help them build back stronger.

"Through these applicant briefings, NEMA demonstrates its commitment to its local partners and stakeholders through the entire emergency management cycle," Conway said.

State Public Assistance Officer Patrick Conway answers applicant questions during the applicant briefing in Papillion.

Deputy State Hazard Mitigation Officer Lexy Hindt updates applicants on the Hazard Mitigation program to allow applicants to build back stronger.

Hazard Mitigation planning specialist Marisa Alvares, helps applicants sign in and hands them their red folders before the applicant briefing in Papillion.
NEMA Participates in Multi-Jurisdictional Hazmat Response Exercise

by James Rashilla,
NEMA Technical Hazards Unit Supervisor

Dodge county first responders conducted a multi-jurisdictional full-scale exercise Sept. 23 in Fremont with the Nebraska National Guard’s 72nd Civil Support Team-Weapons of Mass Destruction (CST-WMD).

Fremont Fire Department responded to a call that simulated a chemical spray attack at a swim meet at the Fremont YMCA aquatics center. Upon discovery of chemical devices, they requested assistance from the 72nd CST to identify the nature of the hazard and mitigate the scene.

Upon entry, the CST discovered a radiation exposure device (RED) designed to expose and injure first responders.

The CST identified and isolated the radioactive material and mitigated the chemical spray devices. The training provided local first responders the opportunity to interface with the state’s only Type 1 Hazardous Materials Response Team and learn how to work together during an actual event.

Members of NEMA’s Technical Hazards Unit provided low activity sources to provide realistic training for the 72nd CST. Health Physicists from the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Radiological Health were also on scene to assess first responder actions and interface with the FBI WMD coordinator and the National Guard’s technical experts.

State employees instructed first responders on radioactive threats and methods to reduce risk to first responders. The goal during a radiation response is to keep the total dose as low as reasonably achievable or ALARA. The ALARA principle is used in emergency response activities, as well as industrial and medical applications of radioactive material.

If your jurisdiction is interested in radioactive materials response training, please contact NEMA’s Technical Hazards Unit at (402) 471-7421.
Gov. Pete Ricketts announced that the state is extending its directed health measure (DHM) to address hospital staffing shortages. Initially, the DHM was set to expire on Sept. 30. With the extension, it will remain in force through October 31, 2021 unless renewed. The DHM suspends inpatient Class D and Class E elective surgeries for all acute care, critical care and children's hospitals in Nebraska. These are elective surgeries that can wait four weeks or longer without substantially changing a patient's outcome. The DHM is available by clicking here.

Federal Emergency Management Agency continues to maximize available COVID-19 assistance by retroactively reimbursing 100% of costs to support the safe opening and operation of eligible facilities through its Public Assistance program. The funding is available to state, local, tribal and territorial government entities and certain private nonprofit organizations for work conducted from Jan. 20, 2020 onward, with the 100 percent federal cost share effective through Dec. 31, 2021. All PA-eligible applicants can seek reimbursement for safe opening and operation costs for facilities including schools, medical facilities and government facilities open to the public. Reimbursement is exclusive to COVID-19 emergency and major disaster declarations. Items that may be eligible for reimbursement include face coverings, personal protective equipment, cleaning and disinfection, COVID-19 diagnostic testing, screening and temperature scanning and portable temporary physical barriers for social distancing. For additional information on FEMA's updated Safe Opening and Operation Interim Policy, please visit FEMA.gov.

U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) — In response to severe drought conditions in the West and Great Plains the USDA is updating the Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybees and Farm-Raised Fish Program (ELAP) to immediately cover feed transportation costs for drought impacted ranchers. USDA’s Farm Service Agency (FSA) will provide more details and tools to help Nebraska ranchers get ready to apply at their local USDA Service Center later this month at fsa.usda.gov/elap

The Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency in partnership with the National Cybersecurity Alliance, is promoting the Cybersecurity Awareness Month. This monthlong campaign highlights what you, your employees, and your own partners can do to ensure cybersecurity is always on their minds as they conduct business in cyberspace. Themes for 2021 are: Week of October 4 (Week 1): Be Cyber Smart. Week of October 11 (Week 2): Phight the Phish! Week of October 18 (Week 3): Explore. Experience. Share. – Cybersecurity Career Awareness Week. Week of October 25 (Week 4): Cybersecurity First. Cybersecurity Awareness Month has been an annual campaign since 2004.

FEMA Approves State Hazard Mitigation Plan Update

by Marisa Alvares, Hazard Mitigation Planning Specialist

The 2021 Nebraska State Hazard Mitigation Plan first-year update was approved by FEMA on Sept. 7, 2021.

Hazard mitigation plans are required to be updated in five-year cycles; however, FEMA recommends that the plan is reviewed and updated annually to incorporate adjustments to the state's hazard environment, vulnerabilities, funding availability and needs and federal and state policy changes.

NEMA amended the State Hazard Mitigation Plan to ensure eligibility for FEMA’s Rehabilitation of High Hazard Potential Dams (HHPD) grant program. The HHPD grant program provides technical, planning, design, and construction assistance for eligible rehabilitation activities that reduce dam risk and increase community preparedness.

Western Nebraska Engine Academy Prepares Firefighters

Photos and Story by Alyssa Sanders, NEMA SERC Coordinator and Type 3 IMT PIO

“Panhandle region firefighters from multiple departments, along with several local, state and federal agencies, participated in the Western Nebraska Engine Academy, Sept. 11-13 in the Buffalo Creek Wildlife Management Area outside of Gering.

The weekend’s activities helped prepare firefighters and incident management staff to manage a complex wildfire.

Gaining experience in structure and hazardous materials protection, fire suppression, aerial firefighting support, fire ignitions and Incident Command System operations has proven to be a necessity in the area during an already busy wildfire season.

This training opportunity allowed 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 had the opportunity to be evaluated for position specific roles such as engine boss, task force leader and firing boss.

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

This academy was 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 State Fire Marshal’s Training Division, Nebraska State Fire Marshal’s Office, and the Scotts Bluff County Mutual Aid District.

Most importantly, this exercise would not have been 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 [Western Nebraska Engine Academy Facebook Page](https://www.facebook.com/WesternNebraskaEngineAcademy).
NEMA PIO Earns Master PIO Designation

Nebraska Emergency Management Agency Public Information Officer Jodie Fawl has earned the Master Public Information Program Officer designation from the Emergency Management Institute in Emmitsburg, Md. She is the first PIO from Nebraska, and one of approximately 90 nationwide to earn the designation.

The MPIOP is a three-course series that prepares public information officers for an expanded role in delivering public information and warning using a strategic whole community approach. Candidates were selected from a nationwide pool of applicants and acceptance for this FEMA training is extremely selective. Each applicant must have a minimum of five years’ experience and have demonstrated contributions to the advancement of public affairs and external communications. In addition to classroom training and exercises, each participant designs, develops, and presents a research project that contributes to the public information body of knowledge.

Fawl’s research paper was entitled The Impact of Situational Awareness on Social Media Monitoring and included survey results from local emergency management staff in Nebraska and public information officers nationwide. The paper also included a literature review on the importance of social media monitoring to improved decision-making, and methods and applications to effectively conduct monitoring.

As part of National Preparedness Month in September, NEMA’s Recovery Section Manager Molly Bargmann spoke to kindergarteners at Seward Elementary School. Her son, Briggs Bargmann was among the students who learned about emergency preparedness.
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.