

NEMA Committee Reports

NEMA 2025 MID-YEAR FORUM

MARCH 21-25, 2025 WASHINGTON, DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

NEMA Legal Counsel Committee
March 21, 2025
Meeting Summary

Roundtable Discussion with FEMA Chief Counsel

Legal Counsel Committee Chair, Will Polk, welcomed everyone to the meeting and reflected on the changing emergency management and legal environment driven by the Trump Administration. He then invited Colt Hagmaier, Acting Chief Counsel of FEMA, to give remarks. Hagmaier began by emphasizing that it is a time of change and churn at FEMA and across the federal government. As of the date of the meeting, there had been 145 executive orders (EO), and almost all had some impact on FEMA. He also highlighted the FEMA Review Council which was established by EO and is headed by the Secretary of Homeland Security and Secretary of Defense. While Hagmaier did not know the members of the Council, he noted that they will be convening by mid-April and are charged with making recommendations to the President on the future of FEMA. Hagmaier encouraged those in attendance to view this Council—and the period of change, more broadly—as an opportunity for the profession.

Hagmaier encouraged the legal counsel on the committee to advise state officials, local officials, and communities to lean into the coming changes, regardless of how FEMA changes as an agency. Specifically, he recommended that when advising their clients, to examine their Emergency Management Assistance Compact (EMAC) structure, state code, and sources of revenue. He noted that it's important to consider where they are going to get the revenue that may not be provided in the same way as before (e.g., rainy day fund, new taxes, state relief funds). Additionally, Hagmaier recommended examining whether each state has the necessary pre-disaster contracts established and a sourcing structure that is rapidly available and not being relied upon by multiple jurisdictions for the same services. Lastly, he emphasized that FEMA is just a piece of the disaster “puzzle.” It takes a whole community to support survivors; a lot comes from state, local, tribal, and territorial governments, but also state Voluntary Agencies Active in Disasters (VOADs), philanthropic organizations, and other sources. It's important to determine whether the states need to make memorandums of understanding (MOUs) or otherwise formalize those relationships.

Hagmaier then answered questions from the committee, noting that he may not have all the answers at this point in time. When asked about the role of his office and the regional counsel, in the context of the devolution of power from the federal government to the states, he noted that they have roughly 350 attorneys in FEMA, but this is a period of attrition. They are focusing on making sure they are covering their core functions, and he stated that it is important that FEMA counsel is working with the state counsel to enable them to do their jobs. Hagmaier also noted that some EOs are taking longer to implement than others because they are government wide. For example, the deregulation EO is a challenge because the definition of rules and regulations is broader than typically used, so they are currently navigating how to interpret that.

When asked about the multiple EOs that reference “diversity, equity, and inclusion,” Hagmaier emphasized that the non-discrimination aspects of the Stafford Act are still in place and do not conflict with the EO. He also noted that the emergency management community uses terms that are interpreted differently (e.g., equity vs. fairness) and recommended that states recalibrate their vocabulary in plans or applications that are going to FEMA in ways that mirror the new direction of the agency. Lastly, Hagmaier was asked about the status of several specific grants and programs, but he stated that he was not in a position to provide estimates about timelines or potential changes.

Review of Lessons Learned from 2024 Disasters

Will Polk introduced the discussion of lessons learned by highlighting the scale of the 2024 disasters. NOAA has reported that there were 27 confirmed weather disaster events with costs exceeding \$1 billion. With that in mind, several states that experienced significant disasters in 2024 highlighted lessons learned with the committee. Examples of these lessons learned are briefly summarized below:

North Carolina:

It is critical that legal counsel is engaged at the onset of a disaster, when key decisions are being made. Communication is critical to providing good legal counsel and counsel needs to understand the issues that are present in real-time. It is not enough to get a “back brief” on meetings— legal counsel needs to be in those meetings to fully understand the context. It is also important that decisions made during meetings are memorialized in writing. Pre-positioned contracts are also critical, and states need to ensure that they are not “stale.” North Carolina ran into that issue with debris removal for Hurricane Helene and it became a bidding war among the impacted states. For this reason, it’s important to be able to quickly amend contracts. Contracts need to be legally sound and reflect the current reality, which may mean re-procuring them more frequently.

Data sharing was vital in this event on multiple levels. In the FEMA-State Agreement it is now a lot easier to get an initial data sharing agreement in place. The form and flow were a lot smoother for Hurricane Helene. Where the issues arise with data sharing is that many of our counties have executed their own Information Sharing Agreements (ISAs) with FEMA. For example, we have housing programs implemented by the counties, and because of a weird quirk in the law, they can’t share information with third parties. There are also cases where we can’t share information that we’d like to, because of the agreements in place, even though everyone is pulling information from the same FEMA dataset.

Nevada:

While Nevada did not have any major disasters in the last few months, they were impacted by a disaster in another state that almost created an emergency for Nevada. During the California wildfires, the initial conversations in Nevada were normal wildfire support discussions to understand how they could help California. They were then notified that power had been shut down in Southern California, including the pipeline that brings fuel to the Las Vegas Valley. That

pipeline provides 75% of Nevada’s fuel and all flow had stopped. They have a statute in Nevada law that is dedicated to energy emergencies—they include a procedure for declaring an energy emergency and giving the governor special powers at that moment to allocate fuel. The state, however, has never used that statute and none of the procedures were set up to use it. For that reason, a key lesson learned is not to assume that just because there are attorneys that are specializing in energy or other areas, and there are statutes that allow certain uses of power, that they're being trained or that procedures are in place.

Nevada also learned valuable lessons when working to bring fuel into the state to make up for the impacted pipeline. While it’s common to use motor carrier regulation waivers to truck in fuel, it wasn’t feasible to truck in enough fuel to make up for a 75% loss of fuel. The state ended up having to ask for waivers from the EPA on emissions for fuel, which was not something they were familiar with doing. They emphasized the importance of getting to know EPA and other agency waivers and regulations (e.g., motor carrier regulations, oversized vehicle waivers, etc.) before an event happens, to avoid the need to quickly research specific regulations in the middle of the response. This event also underscored the importance of knowing what pipelines you have coming into your state and where they originate from, so potential fuel issues can be better predicted following disasters in other states.

Mississippi:

In 2024, Mississippi only had one declared disaster, which was Individual Assistance (IA)-only. This was the first disaster under the new IA reforms. It was a relatively small event that ended up being very expensive, especially for Other Needs Assistance (ONA), as the state’s 25% share was larger than expected. Mississippi had a legislative session to consider how to deal with that issue. The state has a \$6 million disaster trust fund, which is supposed to be used for state shares, EMAC missions, and for locals to get money from state to rebuild. However, between the ONA and EMAC missions, that fund was getting very small. Ultimately, the legislature enabled the state to get a line of credit to cover unexpected costs—this required educating the legislators about why the line of credit was so critical.

Debris was also a problem, which is quite common in the state. Mississippi does not enter into debris contracts—the local governments do. The state legislature tasked the state with developing an approved vendors list for locals to use and to work with them to make sure everything is compliant. The state received guidance that locals would have to do the full competitive bidding process and could only use the approved vendors list as a starting point, with some limitations. Developing and leveraging pre-approved contracts is always the best approach and they encourage locals to do that.

Alabama:

Alabama emphasized the importance of managing the expectations of local governments and other partners. Alabama gets a lot of severe weather and has historically issued a significant number of governor’s states of emergency when disasters do not reach the federal threshold. Recently, however, Alabama has seen a rollback and a higher bar for state emergency declarations. As a result, that state had to do a lot of education with partners in local jurisdictions

to help them think about states of emergency differently. This included the need to be more self-reliant and use the powers they have as local governments. The state has helped them understand what they can do without a state of emergency and tried to push back on relying so heavily on the governor's state of emergency.

Ohio

Recently, Ohio has focused more on advising the outside world than advising the state emergency management agency itself. They have developed a large number of one-pagers and other guidance materials, as elected officials, other agencies, the public, and other stakeholders don't necessarily understand how emergency management works. Some of that education and guidance was even more basic than explaining emergency management, for example, explaining home rule authority.

Ohio emphasized the importance of helping people understand the federal, state, and local relationships. They do not always understand that local governments must request state support, just as states must request federal support, and certain criteria must be met. Ohio has also helped people to understand that declarations are not needed for everything. In some cases, declaring emergencies—whether needed or not—is for public optics, so everyone knows that “we're here and we care”.

Ohio is also currently working on an exercise for cabinet members. In this exercise scenario, all communications will be shut down, and participants will have to convene at the EOC for the exercise.

Connecticut:

Connecticut experienced a thousand-year flood in August, but emergency alerts did not go out until the flooding was happening. This has resulted in a lot of lessons learned related to emergency communications. Shortly after the flooding, Hurricane Helene occurred, and the resulting misinformation spilled into Connecticut. FEMA teams on the ground were starting to get threatened and the state advised them not to wear FEMA gear. To address misinformation, Connecticut highlighted an approach to using the fusion centers to monitor the dark web, as theories that originate from the dark web can quickly enter the mainstream news and social media. This approach to monitoring enables them to get ahead of stories and counter rumors before they take hold.

Connecticut also discussed the recent wildfires that impacted the state. They had never managed a Fire Management Assistance Grant (FMAG), so they emphasized the importance of the support they received from states around FEMA Region 1 and other states that frequently do receive FMAGs. This was a great learning process, and they ultimately received their FMAG and have begun distributing money. Additionally, during the wildfires, the state employed a tracking dashboard to show all active fires, regardless of size. It was a Teams-based system that enabled the state to report all fires and send out local teams to respond.

NEMA EMAC Committee
March 22, 2025
Meeting Summary

EMAC Committee Vice Chair Bryan Fisher (AK) opened the meeting at 1:30 pm.

Roll call was completed. There was a quorum.

The meeting started with a memorial tribute to Jack Jowett, EMAC Advisor.

Presentation: Dispatching Solutions: Lessons Learned from an Ohio Telecommunicator Emergency Response Taskforce (TERT) EMAC Deployment to North Carolina

Nick DiCicco, Chagrin Valley Dispatch / Ohio TERT briefed on the deployment of their Type 1 TERT Team to Buncombe County, NC, October 1-30, 2024. This was the largest and longest TERT mission completed by the team. They deployed into Buncombe County where there was very little to no infrastructure or support services. The 911 call center had been staffing calls around the clock and sleeping on-site prior to the TERT team's arrival. The deployment was initially self-sustaining but was able to transition to a first responder FEMA provided camp. The team answered almost 20,000 calls during the deployment. A suggestion for improvement would be to pre-deploy and stage TERT so they can help from the start of the incident reducing the stress and load on the in-state 911 resources who were impacted by the disaster.

Update: Reimbursement from the Republican National Convention

Director Greg Engle (WI) thanked states that sent resources to WI in support of the 2024 Republican National Convention, where over 1,800 EMAC personnel responded to provide surge agency staffing to assist in the reimbursement process. Milwaukee has received an extension beyond the March 31st deadline to be able to reimburse Assisting States but there is a need to get the reimbursement packages submitted in a timely fashion. The biggest issue in the reimbursement process is the new grant requirement for a travel policy as identified in the Addendum. This requirement is outside normal EMAC procedures. The state of Wisconsin is holding weekly coordination calls with the city of Milwaukee regarding reimbursement issues.

Brief: National Special Security Event (NSSE): EMAC Guidance

Beth Zimmerman briefed that she and Matt Cowles (NEMA) met with the DOJ and provided an EMAC briefing. DOJ stated they will not change the grant guidance to align with EMAC procedures, but appreciated the education on the EMAC process. They would also like more information in the future on how to better integrate EMAC.

Presentation: EMAC's Role in the Hawaii Wildfire Response: Brian Fisher, Hawaii Emergency Management Agency

Brian Fisher (HI) provided a briefing on the EMAC response to the Hawaii Wildfires, where 269 personnel were deployed to Maui. Lessons learned from the reimbursement phase included requesting W-9's early and working with Assisting States to follow up on

reimbursement packages as soon as they were received. Hawaii paid out reimbursement packages very quickly upon receipt, as they had already created purchase orders within Hawaii's payment system to expedite reimbursements.

Brief: EMAC Executive Task Force Update

Jordan Abshire (AR), EMAC Executive Task Force Chair briefed that nearly 15,000 personnel deployed with 75 opened events since March 2024.

In December 2024, NEMA hosted a two-day EMAC Coordinator Workshop, which was an outstanding success, bringing together EMAC Coordinators from 34 states. The workshop created an in-depth scenario and used the new EOS 4 to challenge the EMAC Coordinator to think critically. A Dump the Box Reimbursement Exercise was a highlight where participants worked regionally to put together a reimbursement package. The need for additional training on reimbursement policies and for the states to evaluate their own EMAC reimbursement procedures was discussed, as well as developing strong relationships between EMAC Coordinators and State Directors. The takeaways from the workshop will help the Executive Task Force and NEMA identify areas for advanced training, which will hopefully result in faster and more effective responses nationwide.

North Carolina developed Open Office Hours as a best practice and lesson learned from Hurricanes Helene and Milton. This practice allowed Assisting States to call in during Office Hours and ask North Carolina's A-Team questions they had about EMAC missions or other disaster-related questions.

The EMAC Operations System (EOS) 4 went live in December 2024. The biggest change is the integration of DocuSign to complete RSAs. It has been stressed for each EMAC Member to complete testing and whitelist DocuSign emails so they are able to receive the RSAs for signature to mitigate delays in the event of a real-world EMAC event.

Executive Task Force Policy Updates:

- NELT/RELT SATF-a recommendation will be put forward to the EMAC Committee to deploy personnel to the NRCC who display confidence and comprehensive knowledge of the EMAC system to effectively advocate for, and to educate others on, the EMAC process and what resources are being requested and sent
- The SATF on Continuous Improvement developed new guidance that will be voted on for adoption to be included in the EMAC Operations Manual. Continuous Improvement should be completed at the state level, with pertinent findings shared with the ETF and NEMA. This recommendation will also be brought to the EMAC Committee for approval
- The ETF updated the EMAC Eligible Expenses Guide, the EMAC Exercise materials available on the EMAC website, and the EMAC Tips for Public Information Officers

Chair Abshire thanked the EMAC Executive Task Force and the leads on the SATFs - Matt Cook (MI), Jonathan Anschutz (PA), and Michelle Earnhart (AR) for their work.

EMAC Executive Task Force Leadership Transition:

Ms. Abshire was recognized for her outstanding support to the ETF.

Ms. Abshire took forward the unanimous nomination from the EMAC Executive Force to appoint Jaci Hamel (MA) to serve as Chair Elect to the ETF.

Motion to accept the nomination of Jaci Hamel (MA) to serve as Chair Elect to the EMAC ETF.

Motion made by: Director Lavine (AZ)

Motion seconded by: Director Engle (WI)

Motion passed

Butch Wise (AZ), now the current EMAC Executive Task Force Chair briefed on his priorities:

- SATF for NELT/RELT
- FIFA World Cup
- Reimbursement opportunities

Adjournment

Vice Chair Fisher (AK) asked if there was a motion to adjourn.

The motion to adjourn was made by Director Lavine (AZ)

The motion was seconded by Director Morgan (KS)

Motion passed.

The meeting was adjourned at 2:26 pm.

NEMA Whole Community Committee
March 22, 2025
Meeting Summary

Presentation by U.S. Small Business Administration Associate Administrator Chris Stallings

After a brief introduction from the Committee Chair, Dawn Brantley, Associate Administrator for the Office of Disaster Recovery and Resilience of the U.S. Small Business Association (SBA), provided an overview of SBA's services and programs.

The Associate Administrator began his remarks by giving an overview of the Administration's priorities and how SBA will work towards these goals. Administrator Loeffler's top three priorities included supporting President Trump's America First Agenda, eliminating wasteful spending, and empowering small businesses. Associate Administrator Stallings emphasized the importance of disaster survivors and working towards helping make survivors whole again. To do this, he shared that making processes simpler and educating consumers was the first step. For example, sharing that over 80% of SBA loans go to homeowners or renters can be especially relevant when business owners live close to their businesses. Regional Recovery Coordinators will be integrated into communities before, during, and after disasters to support local officials. Part of their responsibilities will include introducing people to SBA programs. Stallings also shared that improving SBA's approval rates for disaster loans was a focus.

One of the programs highlighted was Disaster Assistance for Rural Communities Act. With rural communities making up a significant portion of the U.S. land area, this program allows SBA to declare a disaster in a rural area upon request by the Governor of the State or the Chief Executive of the Indian Tribal Government. A Rural Agency Declaration can be provided under the following conditions:(1) The county (or other political subdivision) has received a major disaster declaration from the President under the Stafford Act, but individual assistance (IA) was NOT authorized (i.e., a Public Assistance major disaster declaration), and (2) The county or other political subdivision contains a non-urban area, as defined by the Census Bureau, and (3) any (ONE) home, small business concern, private nonprofit organization, or small agricultural cooperative in a non-urban area within the county has incurred significant damage. This only allows for physical and economic injury disaster loans to the primary county. Other notable developments at SBA include developing a unified lending program that would be an app-like platform, have chat functions, and allow access to important documents. Such technology would provide greater responsiveness before, during, and after disasters.

Examining the Reagan National Airport Incident, Deputy Director Justin Brown, District of Columbia Homeland Security and Emergency Management Agency (DC HSEMA)

Justin Brown, Deputy Director of DC HSEMA, gave a presentation covering the Reagan National Airport plane crash that occurred on January 29, 2025. Quickly after the collision, the priority was to inform the mayor about each agency's roles and set up a joint information center (JIC). This incident was unique in that it had 100% fatality, and that altered the response efforts. As a result, in large part, this incident was a human services event. One of the major takeaways from this event was that mass care and human services require further investment and resources. Human services must be prioritized further to meet people's needs.

Regarding the response, the event involved multiple jurisdictions and federal and state agencies, further complicating the response. The National Incident Management System (NIMS) was relied upon heavily to determine the best way forward in a complex response. One of the significant challenges of this response was that key federal partners, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the U.S. Secret Service (USSS), and the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB), do not use incident management and do not readily share planning information and expectations despite relying on locals for support during an incident. The Deputy Director urged this to be a point of improvement for federal partners involved in the response, arguing that this framework allows for a quick and comprehensive response.

In addition, the Deputy Director pointed out the growing demands of emergency management, which have led to, at times, unreasonable expectations. He emphasized that people expect us to meet them where they are, know what they need, and provide it. Further complicating these expectations is the media and dealing with misinformation as well. Claiming that emergency management has grown into a “brand” and that negative experiences can drive people to seek more and more from the private sector.

NEMA Resilience Committee
March 23, 2025
Meeting Summary

Group Discussion About Resilient Emergency Alert and Notification Infrastructure

Resilience Committee Chair, Sima Merick, and Vice Chair, Bill Turner, welcomed everyone to the meeting, noting that they want to begin the committee meeting with a group discussion, rather than a briefing. Merick noted that the first half of the session will focus on hearing from the directors on the committee about any challenges they have in their states related to building or maintaining resilient emergency alert and notification infrastructure. This has been a frequent pain point identified in recent disasters, including the Maui and LA wildfires and Hurricanes Helene and Milton. Merick then explained that the second half of the session would transition to a group discussion about successes the directors have had in enhancing the resilience of their emergency alert and notification infrastructure and any best practices that they can share with other states.

The discussion was wide-ranging, with directors summarizing key challenges they've faced in a variety of areas, including the following:

- The lack of a state-wide mass notification system introduces coverage challenges.
- Local governments require extensive support from the state in drafting and issuing messages.
- Many communities are highly diverse and speak many different languages, requiring tailored communications to ensure they are reached.
- It can be difficult to geographically select the area that needs to be a part of a particular notification (e.g., evacuation) without panicking other areas that may have seen the notification.
- Counties and other local governments will sometimes send out an IPAWS alert for something they should not.
- Highly rural areas may not have mass coverage, cell phones, or TVs.

The discussion then transitioned to success stories and best practices related to building or sustaining resilient emergency notification infrastructure. Merick and Turner encouraged the committee to view this as an opportunity to learn what is working for other states and consider whether they could take similar approaches in their own states. Examples of successes and best practices included:

- Having the state pay for all cities and towns to have Code Red
- Working with the counties to help them proactively identify their messaging needs based on their own understanding of the local demographics
- Offering translation services to provide pre-scripted messages
- Establishing a public information section that coordinates ahead of time as part of a community outreach program
- Passing state legislation that requires every jurisdiction to have an alerting authority and an authority plan
- Leveraging available resiliency grants for communications infrastructure projects
- Working with the private sector partners to utilize low Earth orbit satellites

- Leveraging informal communications methods when other systems fail (e.g., a network of firefighters' spouses who could communicate with each other)
- Encouraging counties to sign up for their own IPAWS, as it takes longer to go through the state
- Requiring weekly or monthly tests, to give staff confidence to send alert messages quickly
- Developing messages that are as direct and unambiguous as possible to avoid confusion or miscommunication
- Prioritizing the development of pre-scripted messaging

Arkansas Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) School Curriculum: Building Individual and Community Resilience

Sima Merick began the session by noting that a prepared individual and community is the foundation of a resilient nation, and mitigation often begins with individual awareness and action. She stated that individuals and communities can promote and implement mitigation activities without necessarily holding an official position. She then introduced A.J. Gary, NEMA's Vice President and Director of the Arkansas Division of Emergency Management, to provide his briefing on the CERT team training that Arkansas provides in schools, to teach kids at an early age to become more resilient.

Gary explained that Arkansas implemented an Emergency Response Program for all Arkansas high schools in 2022. This was part of the best practices recommendation that was approved by the Arkansas School Safety Commission in the Office of the Governor. That was the second commission put in place by the Governor—the first was in 2019 after a school shooting happened in another state. Gary was a member of both commissions and emphasized the importance of emergency management.

The program developed campus response teams that provide immediate care to victims of an emergent event until professional responders arrive. The training consists of CERT training, as well as “stop the bleeding” training and CPR. The curriculum educates volunteers; fosters preparedness for the hazards that may affect the community; and teaches response skills such as fire safety, light search and rescue, disaster medical operations, and team organization. After the classroom portion of the training, the students learn hands-on skills training and evaluation provided by local fire and EMS personnel who volunteer and assist at the schools. This gives the students an opportunity to get to know their fire departments, police departments, and EMS. It also helps to get the students interested in emergency management professions and encourages them to volunteer in their community.

Training for the facilitators is done through workshops hosted by the Arkansas Educational Services Cooperatives or at individual schools, as requested. Teachers are trained to be facilitators, and depending on the way each individual school decides to train, they can utilize the online course or in-person facilitation, and they're also taught to coordinate the hands-on skills portion of the training. The intent is for each school to “own” their teams—the state helps set it up, but once it's operational, it's on the schools to maintain the program. Gary emphasized that after working with different schools, they realized that there is no one-size-fits-all approach that works for every school.

A minimum of six students in grades nine through twelve are selected to receive the training and response equipment to serve on the school teams. Additional students can be trained and rotated off the team regular intervals to maximize participation. There's no limit to the size of the teams, but there are only seven CERT bags that the state donates. Currently, Arkansas has approximately forty-five schools that have equipped teams, and they have several additional schools that are interested in this program.

Tennessee Helene Emergency Assistance Loans (HEAL) Program: Best Practices

Bill Turner began the session by noting that Hurricane Helene introduced countless challenges to the impacted states, but it also highlighted new and effective ways to support survivors and communities to recover more resiliently. With that in mind, he introduced Patrick Sheehan, Director of the Tennessee Emergency Management Agency and a past NEMA President, to provide a briefing on Tennessee's Helene Emergency Assistance Loans (HEAL) Program. Sheehan began by explaining that due to the damage from Hurricane Helene, local jurisdictions incurred significant costs that they are unable to cover while waiting for FEMA reimbursement. In the days after Hurricane Helene unleashed catastrophic floods across parts of East Tennessee, the governor convened his cabinet members to urge his team to "think outside the box" about how to get money to hard-hit rural counties. The HEAL Program was created to allow impacted counties access to immediate cash flow to begin repairs to their water and wastewater infrastructure and to remove hazardous debris.

The HEAL program is a \$100 million fund to directly serve the health and wellness of Tennesseans in the aftermath of Hurricane Helene. The fund provides no-interest loans to eligible counties who have been impacted by the storm. Of the total amount, up to \$35 million was to be used for water and wastewater infrastructure repair and \$65 million was to be allocated for debris management across eligible counties. The maximum amount an eligible county could request through the HEAL Program is \$15 million. Importantly, the HEAL Program is a loan program and not a grant program, so it avoids concerns related to duplication of benefits and ensures the impacted counties are still able to recoup the maximum amount of FEMA Public Assistance funds. The HEAL Programs taps into a special savings pool within Tennessee's Medicaid program, which draws on a combination of state and federal funds to pay the health care bills for Tennesseans living in or near poverty.

Sheehan noted that at the time of the meeting, over \$80 million had already been loaned out, with significant demand still coming from the eligible counties.

State Hazard Mitigation Officers (SHMO) Subcommittee Report Out

Bill Turner started by noting that unlike past forums, the Committee was taking a different approach to the Subcommittee report outs this year. Rather than just providing a report listing all subcommittee activity over the last six months, they asked the subcommittee chairs to provide a slightly more substantive briefing on a single effort or accomplishment that they'd like to highlight for the group. Turner stated that the committee chairs have developed one-pagers that provide the full subcommittee report outs, and those were emailed to the full committee earlier that morning.

Turner then introduced Dinan Amin, the SHMO from New Jersey and Chair of the SHMO Subcommittee. Amin began by highlighting that the SHMO Subcommittee has been focusing a lot on how to provide the needed capacity to local communities. He noted that many of the states have great programs to develop that type of support and his briefing will address a program in Utah that uses state management costs to build capacity. Utah has created a direct technical assistance (DTA) program that they've been administering for about a year and a half, using their management costs from various grants, including the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program and others. They've been focusing on building community resilience, reducing disaster impacts, and strengthening local mitigation efforts, particularly for rural or resource-limited communities. Some of the goals of programs are to increase hazard mitigation capacity by helping communities identify risks and develop those mitigation strategies that address those risks, supporting project development, assisting with scoping projects, budget planning, and securing funding. They also facilitate grant applications by providing expertise, support with benefit cost analysis, and assist with challenges in navigating FEMA GO and other challenges associated with federal systems.

The program has enhanced resilience by developing mitigation solutions for flooding, seismic risk, wildfire, and other hazards in their communities. They've also supported communities with approving local planning codes and updating local hazard mitigation plans. Other examples of key accomplishments Amin addressed include:

- Over the last two rounds of the DTA that they provide, they've been able to help 14 applications during the first year and in the second year, they're currently working on 18 more.
- They have assisted over 30 communities with engineering assessments and risk evaluations.
- The program has helped numerous cities secure funding for critical projects that have gone unfunded.
- They have provided technical expertise for flood warning systems and other critical projects.
- The program supported two school districts with grant writing expertise, successfully steering funding projects that enhanced the safety of thousands of students within those two communities.

Amin emphasized that the benefit of using the state management costs is that they are very cost-effective. It enables them to get the money out quicker and more specifically address local needs. They are maximizing federal funding and reducing long-term financial burdens.

Public Information Officers Subcommittee Report Out

Bill Turner explained that Kevin Sur, Illinois PIO, was originally going to deliver this briefing for the PIO Subcommittee, but unfortunately, he was not able to attend the forum. Turner provided the briefing on Sur's behalf and noted that the Committee is grateful for his efforts and those of the rest of the PIO Subcommittee.

In the past six months, the PIO Subcommittee has focused on sharing best practices and lessons learned from incidents. They connected with members post-deployment to gather insights and provided resources to enhance practices. They specifically addressed issues of mis, dis, and mal-

information, working on strategies to counter rumors in real-time. In January, as part of the NEMA Empowerment Series, the Subcommittee contributed to a webinar titled “Navigating Crisis Communication: Lessons from North Carolina's Response to Hurricane Helene.” The webinar focused on lessons learned during the response to Hurricane Helene, the critical role of messaging, and the partnership between emergency management and public health agencies. Kevin Sur moderated the webinar, which featured speakers Brian Haines, Senior External Affairs Specialist, from the North Carolina Department of Public Safety, Division of Emergency Management and Sarah Lewis Peel, Communications Manager, from the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services. Notably, with nearly 600 participants, the session became one of the most attended in the Empowerment series. A central focus during the webinar was the coordination across state agencies that assisted with the response. The speakers emphasized the importance of engaging public information officers early on to align messaging effectively. They also discussed the implementation of Joint Information Centers and how early dissemination of information was crucial. From their experience, several lessons were shared, particularly highlighting the strategies North Carolina developed when communications systems failed.

Another significant part of the discussion centered on tackling mis, dis, and mal-information, a major challenge faced during the response to Hurricane Helene. The North Carolina Department of Emergency Management identified around 5.5 million unique instances of misinformation. To address these, the department created a website to dispel myths, answer FAQs, and provide reliable resources. One of the Emergency Management Department's strategies was to rely on analysts to perform social media scans to identify the rumors present and get ahead of them.

NEMA Legislative Committee
March 23, 2025
Meeting Summary

NEMA's Legislative Priorities for the 119th Congress and Appropriations Update

Legislative Committee Chair, John Benson, welcomed everyone to the meeting and began by highlighting the recently released NEMA legislative priorities for the 119th Congress. The appropriations priorities included the following:

- Restoring the cuts made to the Emergency Management Performance Grant (EMPG) during the FY24 appropriations cycle (to at least \$355 million) and work toward a \$100 million increase for a total of \$455 million.
- Funding the Emergency Management Assistance Compact (EMAC) at \$2.5 million annually to allow for modernization, integration, and expansion of state-to-state mutual aid.
- Restoring the cuts made to the State Homeland Security Program (SHSP) and Urban Area Security Initiative (UASI) in the FY24 appropriations cycle.
- Restoring the cuts made to training and exercise programs in the FY24 appropriations cycle, including Center for Homeland Defense and Security (\$18 million), National Domestic Preparedness Consortium (at least \$101 million), and Emergency Management Institute (\$32 million).

John Benson then transitioned to discussing NEMA's authorizing priorities and the status of the various bills and lines of effort. The top priority remains the *Disaster Management Costs Modernization Act*, which would allow states to utilize management costs across all open disasters, ensure the ability to build recovery and mitigation capacity, incentivize disaster close-out, and drive down the costs of disasters. H.R.744 and S.773 have both been introduced to codify this priority. Benson noted that H.R.744 has already been favorably reported by the House Transportation and Infrastructure (T&I) Committee during their markup on 2/26/25 and that S.773 was introduced on 2/27/25 and referred to the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs.

Benson also highlighted other authorizing priorities including H.R.1393, *The Wildfire Response Improvement Act*, which requires FEMA to update guidance related to Public Assistance, Fire Management Assistance Grants, and Benefit Cost Analyses to better reflect the unique needs of wildfires. H.R.1393 was introduced on 2/14/25 and referred to the T&I Committee. He also discussed S.861, the *Disaster Assistance Simplification Act*, which was introduced on 3/5/25 and referred to the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs. S.861 would create a universal application process by which information from disaster survivors could be shared across various federal agencies and allow survivors to complete one application for use by FEMA, the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the Small Business Administration (SBA), and others.

Benson then briefly highlighted NEMA's ongoing efforts to support reauthorization of the FirstNet Authority and to develop a Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) legislative reform package. There are frequent challenges with spending the obligated HMGP funding in a timely manner and complaints over the consistency of FEMA's policies, so this draft legislation

aims to streamline and standardize FEMA award reviews and enhance state and local capacity to manage HMGP grants.

Benson encouraged people to customize the NEMA legislative priorities one-pager for each state as a “leave-behind” for members of congress and others. Matt Cowles also encouraged directors to work with their congressional delegation and governors to communicate these priorities and other emergency management issues to the White House.

Finally, Benson asked Matt Cowles for a brief update on the FY25 appropriations process. Cowles noted that details are currently limited but in the next couple of weeks we’re likely to see a “skinny budget.” He noted that this is common during transition years, and it will lack details that are most relevant to emergency management. He noted that there are expectations that the budget will include 30-40% cuts across the board.

NEMA Legislative Awards

Benson then transitioned to a discussion of the NEMA Legislative Awards, which were awarded to Arizona State Representative Selina Bliss and Illinois State Representative Rita Mayfield. The award recognizes exceptional efforts by policymakers in support of the emergency management and homeland security community.

The Arizona Department of Emergency and Military Affairs, Division of Emergency Management (DEMA/EM), was proud to nominate State Representative Selina Bliss for the annual Legislative Award. The State of Arizona authorizes a Mutual Assistance Compact (AZMAC) in statute that operates in many ways like EMAC. The one critical difference within Arizona, however, is that while funds are reserved to support the initial EMAC deployment when requested by a neighboring state, there are no immediate funds available to support an initial AZMAC deployment within the state when political jurisdictions request assistance. Following engagement with her local communities and state-wide stakeholders, Representative Bliss introduced Arizona House Bill 2767 to minimize financial impacts on jurisdictions in need and support the deployment of resources in-state by providing the same type and level of funding available to AZMAC deployments as EMAC deployments. The bill was very prescient, as shortly following passage and the signing of the bill, the San Carlos Apache Tribe, a signatory to AZMAC, requested resources from across the State of Arizona to support the Tribal community’s response to the Watch Fire.

The Illinois Emergency Management Agency and Office of Homeland Security (IEMA-OHS) was pleased to nominate Rita Mayfield, Chair of the Public Safety and Infrastructure Committee in the Illinois House of Representatives, in recognition of her leadership and support over the past five years. Chair Mayfield displayed steadfast support and commitment to advancing the agency's priorities, particularly in ensuring the safety and security of the state and their communities. Through her leadership of the Public Safety and Infrastructure Committee, along with her backing of crucial initiatives such as the ‘Safe2Help’ school safety helpline and the ‘IL-Non-Profit Grant Security Program’, Chair Mayfield and her colleagues have made a significant and lasting impact on the safety and well-being of Illinois’ children and Illinoisans.

Discussion with Congressional Staff

Johanna Hardy, Staff Director of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee's Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings and Emergency Management provided an update on her committee's efforts and priorities. Hardy emphasized that her committee was always interested in hearing from stakeholders about potential reforms that could be taken up by Congress, and highlighted the upcoming hearing on the future of FEMA which would include the Government Accountability Office (GAO) and multiple state and local officials. She also briefly mentioned the FEMA Review Council—which is also focused on FEMA reforms—but noted that she did not know who has been appointed to the Council. Hardy noted that the Committee is trying to get out ahead of the Review Council by identifying some key reforms that could be introduced in the near term. She noted that they won't be comprehensive of every issue facing FEMA, but they want to make bold changes. Hardy noted that until now, a lot of focus has been placed on PA. Congress has passed reform after reform and each time Congress makes a change, either nothing improves, or it only briefly improves. For that reason, she's interested in NEMA input on reforms to Section 404 and 428 and wondered if something like block grants would be a better approach.

Specifically, she highlighted a desire to move away from pre-existing condition concerns. FEMA should not be determining the scope of work—the impacted jurisdiction should. They are working to develop language that might be workable and will share it with NEMA once it's drafted. Hardy also noted that another issue that commonly slows down the process is the Environmental and Historic Preservation (EHP) reviews. She noted that there are some categorical exclusions that FEMA isn't using that other agencies are and expressed support for the idea that if there was something there before, you shouldn't have to go through a full EHP review to rebuild.

After these updates, Hardy was asked to comment on the best method for state directors to share information and communicate with her committee. She noted that she welcomes both direct engagement by individual state directors and engagement coordinated through NEMA. Hardy emphasized that working through NEMA can be particularly helpful, however, as it enables the state directors to have internal discussions and agree on specific positions, rather than requiring the committees to individually collect and consider separate feedback from every state.

Discussion with the International Association of Emergency Managers (IAEM)

John Benson then introduced a discussion with Thad Huguley from IAEM, a key partner of NEMA. Huguley noted that it's been an intense couple of months for emergency management government relations at IAEM, particularly since the inauguration of President Trump. He noted that IAEM has just released their legislative priorities, and they look very similar to NEMA's. This similarity is intentional, and Huguley emphasized that IAEM and NEMA try to coordinate their efforts so that both associations are on Capitol Hill presenting a unified voice on everything we do.

Huguley also noted that IAEM's Government Affairs Committee is thinking long term, by creating a Subcommittee that is starting to dive into some of the more “existential” questions that are floating around right across Washington. The subcommittee is a recognition that in this era of change—when every day brings new changes and Executive Orders—that we need to be

thoughtful and need to get this right. Among the big questions that they are wrestling with as a committee are things like should FEMA change to a model using block grants for states? If so, what might that look like? Another big-picture question they are working through is whether FEMA should be moved out of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). There are strong opinions on both sides of that question, but it's one that they're wrestling with. At the same time, he noted that IAEM is encouraging the administration to slow down and have a very thoughtful, serious, intentional discussion about the future of FEMA and think about unintended consequences.

Lastly, Huguley spoke about IAEM's desire to do a better job of equipping their members with the tools that they need to advocate or to educate relevant stakeholders. He noted the importance of educating our elected officials about what emergency management does on a day-to-day basis, and why the various emergency management programs are so important. He noted that this does not necessarily mean that everyone needs to specifically ask policymakers for money or to vote in a particular way, but you can certainly let your elected officials know what certain programs mean to you and to your jurisdiction. Huguley explained that IAEM's President, Carrie Speranza, has put together a team at IAEM to come up with a plan for that initiative—there will be more on this coming out soon.

NEMA Private Sector Committee
March 23, 2025
Meeting Summary

Presenters & Guests:

- Tom Scull and Montana Harmon, FirstNet
- John Benson, Iowa Homeland Security & Emergency Management
- Wendy Huff Ellard, Baker Donelson

Welcome & Board Update:

- Erica Bornemann: Jon Hanian, the liaison for the Private Sector Committee for the State of Idaho, was unable to make it tonight but has been doing some great work with the private sector liaison committee. When Jay and I took the helm in the fall, we discussed strategic goals and what we wanted to achieve together. We discussed some gaps we feel exist and recognized the importance of strong public/private partnerships. We decided it was important to assess what can sometimes be the gap in trust between our state partners and private partners. There can be a tendency to keep folks who are there to support you at arm's length for many reasons (conflict of interests, misunderstanding of procurement rules). So, we have a subcommittee of folks who have volunteered to examine this problem and to bridge this gap. I'd like to start this conversation by looking at the state directors to give your initial impressions of the hallmarks of a relationship with the private sector and the dos and don'ts of the private sector trying to foster a relationship of trust with the state.
- John Benson: For myself, I need additional horsepower. If you are a state that does not have pre-existing master agreements where you can reach out and grab people in a major emergency, make sure you do that. It has always been incredibly valuable to us. Some aspects of intelligence come with that, in terms of things we may not have considered. Maybe you had an idea to go this way, but now you have an additional piece of information that opens another pathway.
- Erin McMahan: We have a great public-private partnership program in Oregon, which is largely spearheaded by the personalities that pull us together. We try to bring private entities into our exercises and training systems. I noticed an appetite to engage in the emergency management sphere from our private partners, and we must continue to build them into exercises to share information and provide opportunities.

FirstNet Authority:

- Harmon & Shull: NEMA has a Public Safety Advisory Committee (PSAC) with FirstNet liaison Patrick Sheehan (TN). We engage with state and local folks through PSAC, and the key is we have a 25-year contract, which kicked off in 2017. We currently have over 6 million connections, but the key for NEMA is that you guys need to tell us how things are going in the states and territories. We will invest over \$1 billion in infrastructure. We've done a lot in the past few years and represent over 250,000 agencies. We are investing a lot in coverage, and coverage is everything. We are innovating with solutions such as deployables, satellite devices, etc., so you can have coverage where you need it. We also have a dedicated security network and are constantly monitoring threats. We work closely with you and the authorities to ensure you have the coverage you need to

communicate in a crisis. The FirstNet Authority is housed in the Senate Commerce Committee, and we have a board of 15 members. We continue to roll out our investment program annually, implementing the feedback from our local and state partners. Here are some of the aspects we are focusing on:

- TTR (Tribal, Territories, and Rural Areas)
- 5G + LEO - the next technology that is moving fast
- 5G Band 14, which will give subscribers faster data speeds when they need it
- In-building, where if you are a FirstNet subscriber, you get enhanced coverage where responders operate.
- 5G Priority
- Harmon & Shull: We also have a network experience engagement program. This focuses on exercises (Inauguration), planned events (Super Bowl), and unplanned events (CA Wildfires). We have the FirstNet Response Operations Group, a team of former first responders and military, who will be your partner on the ground. NEMA and a cohort of emergency managers nationwide provided feedback on our emergency management resource guide. There are FirstNet authority workers across the nation, in all disciplines and states, willing to help you.
- Clint Osborn: What makes this a public-private partnership? What is different than a buyer-vender relationship?
 - Thomas Shull: This arrangement is built on a mission to go out and ensure the private sector executes. When we were created in 2012, Congress wanted more for first responders. So, they realized there is private sector expertise in telecommunications. The big solution was priority and pre-emption. We couldn't get the private sector to offer this pre-emption, which took a contract to accomplish. It's just another oversight to ensure that state, local, and federal companies get what they need.
 - Clint Osborne: Just want to say, on the record, AT&T and FirstNet have been very helpful. We must have the same level of conversations and expectations that resolve community-to-community communication. We all win when the carriers best serve their customers. Everyone wants good coverage, which will become another utility we rely on.
- AJ Gary: What does that mean when you are asking for re-authorization? Are there additional costs?
 - Thomas Shull: Our 2012 statute has a 15-year contract that sunsets on February 22, 2027. Fifteen years gives Congress the chance to look at where we are. It's a fallback mechanism. AT&T has been a great partner; we believe we are just starting. And whether it's good news or bad news, we work to improve daily.

Northwest Iowa Flooding Housing Partnership:

- Erica Bornemann: We thought it would be a good idea to have examples of the private sector working successfully with states to help generate innovative ideas.
- John Benson: In NW Iowa, we were in a drought. Then, over 3 days, we had too much water going into too small of a space. It exceeded the flood on record by 5 feet. One of the problems we ran into, besides the housing problem, was the public school in Rock Valley, which had 5-6 feet of water in it, but they wanted to be back in school as soon as possible. The mayor was adamant and didn't want anyone to leave the community

because of this flood. They wanted to start school on September 5th, so we had to figure out if the school could be used. We did some structural assessments, and as we worked through all of that, we determined that the school would not re-open in time. But the mayor would not let anyone move out, so what would we do? We found a company out of Sioux Falls, SD, who said they could help us. We had some quick discussions, and by August 2, we had reviewed and approved the plans. The building was delivered on August 29 and holds 150 students, meeting the school's needs. To make that happen, we also had to get all the learning tools and equipment on-site. We used some federal funds, but many private corporations (Corteva, Chevron) were willing to help by providing school supplies. Hegg put this together; they did the groundwork and solved the school problem. The other challenge we ran into was how we would house them. The concept of Non-Congregate Sheltering (NCS) came up, which can leverage existing resources and locations. It provided housing in 70 travel trailer units in a matter of days and coordinated with schools for busing. FEMA gets there; they want to do direct housing. FEMA had their entire direct housing mission done before Christmas, less than six months after the disaster. One of the things we discovered is that when FEMA is talking to their vendors, the vendor doesn't know who to talk to on the ground. By knowing the right person, what could've taken three days only took three hours. That's why private-public partnerships are important. As soon as there was an issue, we would reach out to someone local, and we could get it done.

BRIC: Utilizing a Public-Private Partnership to Support Community Lifelines:

Huff Ellard: Historically, we focus on public assistance programs, but when BRIC was created, we began to look at mitigation as an option to increase our services. Power is a huge issue; communities want it back as soon as possible. So, we are considering using FEMA's mitigation programs to make the power grid more resilient. This will also reduce spending because these power lines don't have insurance. We started to focus more on BRIC when FEMA began issuing guidance. Down in the south, especially in Louisiana, the power is owned by four major companies. We have a lot of partnerships in Louisiana, and we started to talk with everyone. Then Hurricane Ida happened. Towers were going down and into the water. We started figuring out what could be done differently. We began working with Jefferson Parish – Entity to increase emphasis on the electrical grid. It took a lot of trust. We also worked with GOEHSEP to get the BRIC applications done. We worked on a BCA that included consideration of lift stations, wastewater treatment stations, and ports. A big piece of the cost share is 75% Federal/ 25% Non-Federal, where small, impoverished communities may be eligible for up to 90% recovery costs. We consider this a great success story. The next year, we approved two more partnerships, and I am very optimistic that these are going to be great things.

NEMA Homeland Security Committee
March 24, 2025
Meeting Summary

New Jersey Counter-UAS Task Force Brief

NEMA Homeland Security Committee Chair, AJ Schall, welcomed everyone to the meeting and began by highlighting the many homeland security issues and events that have occurred in recent months. He noted that we're not even a quarter of the way through the year, and we've had significant attacks in New Orleans and Las Vegas, plane crashes in DC and Philadelphia, the Presidential Inauguration, a stream of wildfires and snowstorms, and other incidents. He also highlighted that there had already been 10 federal disaster declarations approved this year. Schall then introduced Lt. Michael Ward, Unit Head of the Target Hardening Unit and Co-Chair of the Domestic Security Preparedness Task Force (DSPTF) – Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS) Subcommittee. Lt. Ward explained that the DSPTF UAS Subcommittee was formed in 2017 to address emerging technology threats and capabilities. In 2020, the state ratified its UAS Defense Strategy, which has three main goals:

- Develop a Countering UAS (cUAS) Task Force.
- Expand Coordination Efforts with Government and Private Security Partners.
- Establish Public Information Sharing and Outreach.

The cUAS Task Force is primarily comprised of the Department of Corrections, New Jersey State Police, and the Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness. Lt. Ward listed many of the Task Force's partners—a wide-ranging group that included several dozen departments and agencies including the Department of Agriculture, Department of Criminal Justice, Office of Information Technology, New Jersey Air National Guard, Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, Federal Bureau of Investigation, and many more.

Lt. Ward then discussed some of the legal considerations associated with the cUAS mission. The two largest components of the existing legal framework are related to the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). The FAA regulates the national airspace and legally considers drones as aircraft, which means that they cannot be taken over or “downed” by the state. The FCC regulates transmissions between the drone and the controller, which impacts the state's ability to intercept signals to obtain serial numbers and location data.

Lt. Ward then detailed the *Preventing Emerging Threats Act of 2018*. This legislation grants specific federal agencies the authority to counter UAS posing a credible threat to safety or security. Specifically, it empowers the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and the Department of Justice (DOJ) to take certain actions against drones, including to: 1) Detect, track, and monitor UAS without consent; 2) Identify and access communications used to control UAS; and 3) Disable, disrupt, or seize control of drones deemed threats. Importantly, this does not extend that authority to state, local, or tribal law enforcement.

The discussion then transitioned to the Domestic Counter-Unmanned Aircraft Systems National Action Plan, which was released in April 2022. The plan is a whole-of-government approach that contains eight key recommendations. The plan recommended building off existing authorities to

address the threat and expand where we can protect against nefarious UAS activity, who is authorized to take action, and how it can be accomplished lawfully. It also called for extending authorities to state, local, tribal, and territorial governments; establishing a National cUAS Training Center; and developing a standardized equipment list. The plan called on Congress to introduce legislation that would achieve those goals.

Lt. Ward then transitioned to discuss the authorized detection equipment for state, local, tribal, and territorial governments. These include passive radio frequency sensors (e.g., DeDrone RF, DroneShield RF, Aerial Armor), radar (e.g., Echodyne, Fortem, Robin Radar), and electro-optical/infrared (EO/IR) cameras.

Lt. Ward focused the remainder of his briefing on the “NJ DroneGate” incident from late 2024. During this period, unauthorized drone activity, described as "swarms", were first observed in Morris and Somerset Counties on Nov 18, 2024. There were incursions detected at Picatinny Arsenal, Trump National Golf Course in Bedminster, and across Somerset and Morris Counties. Activity was reported near critical infrastructure including several local police headquarters and public safety communications towers, and it was repeatedly reported nightly beginning at dusk. The state’s cUAS Task Force deployed from November 18, 2024, until December 23, 2024, during which time they deployed multiple sensors in Morris and Somerset County. The Task Force also deployed Ground Interception Teams (e.g., NJ State Police, FBI, Federal Air Marshals) with trained UAS operators to try and assist with deconfliction of manned aviation and attempt to gain a better visual of observed aircraft.

Finally, Lt. Ward spoke about federal assistance made available for the “DroneGate” incident. Following several weeks of incidents that garnered significant media attention and public scrutiny, DHS deployed technical assets to assist with the detection and tracking of reported sightings. As media coverage increased, the number of reports surged. In response, DHS assets were operational within the state from December 13 to December 22, conducting daily operations between 4:00 PM and midnight. These operations included SIGINT (Signals Intelligence) and RF/Radar surveillance to enhance situational awareness and address the growing concerns. This led to the activation of the NJ All-Hazards Incident Management Team to help manage the complex incident. He concluded by noting that the delay in federal assistance likely missed the window of opportunity to detect and track the original observations.

National Homeland Security Consortium Paper on Nation-State Threats

The meeting ended with a brief discussion of a paper drafted following the last meeting of the National Homeland Security Consortium (NHSC). The NHSC met on February 5, 2025, in Alexandria, Virginia, to discuss the evolving nation-state threat and to identify recommendations for how the incoming FEMA leadership can best position the agency to support its stakeholders in confronting this threat. The paper, which both summarized the existing challenges and identified proposed solutions, was emailed to the committee previously and Committee Chair Schall asked that the members review the paper and provide any feedback to him or Matt Cowles by the end of the following week.

The report listed recommendations identified during the NHSC discussion, including the following:

- Increase education and information sharing
- Provide clarity to state and local governments on federal posture and expectations
- Develop A national civil preparedness initiative for the nation-state threat
- Provide additional mitigation opportunities

The report also notes that the NHSC stands ready to partner with and support FEMA in implementing these recommendations to ensure that all stakeholders have access to the right threat information, consequence management considerations, and capability-building frameworks necessary to create a unified and effective national approach to mitigating the risks posed by nation-states.

NEMA Response and Recovery Committee
March 24, 2025
Meeting Summary

Briefing from Keith Turi, Acting Associate Administrator, Office of Response and Recovery, Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)

FEMA is fully committed to reform as the agency sees change as an opportunity and looks forward to any guidance the FEMA Review Council may need in their review. The FEMA Review Council is co-chaired by Secretary Kristi Noem of the DHS and Secretary Pete Hegseth of the DOD. Representatives appointed on the council have not been disclosed to date but will meet on April 24 and have 180 days to provide a report to the President of the United States. Mr. Turi shared that states must prepare to recognize change and understand that response and recovery will no longer work at the status quo. The expectations for declaration requests are to be the best possible and in the most straightforward form to submit, as the bar will be higher on what will be granted. It's important to understand that June 30 is the deadline for COVID project submissions. FEMA looks to close these projects swiftly, understanding the RAND review of duplication of benefits should close out by the end of April; they have 1700 projects left to finish. The complications of the RAND process were noted, but the intent is to complete the project closeouts (minus outliers that may be appealed) by June 30. On other projects, VAYGO will continue as it helps to check costs and validate costs as projects progress.

Kansas/ESRI Partners GIS Award-Winning Program

Mr. Kyle Oneth, GIS Section Chief/Planner of the Kansas Division of Emergency Management (KDEM), and Mr. Mike D'Attilio, Senior Consultant with ESRI, shared their detailed account of the public-private partnership that led to an award-winning program that empowered emergency management in mapping success and collaboration. The whole state effort elevated a hub approach for KDEM to allow ease in partner participation, updating information, and easing change of plans or policies for their counties. Customization of the applications and tools allowed for situation reports and community impact analysis, creating speedy success measures for their communities' support. The county outreach assisted the most in the state's rural areas, and the story map tool helped illuminate the stories of the state's program and its partners.

State Self-Insurance and Disaster Recovery Impacts

Director Patrick Sheehan of the Tennessee Emergency Management Agency shared that for the Helene recovery, over 100 determination memos were provided to public facilities claiming the duplication of benefits due to those facilities being state-self-insured. While the FEMA policy on insurance could use an update, as it was issued in 2015, the essence of the policy still stands: the agency treats all insurance (private or state-facilitated) as the same. Therefore, those public facilities should go through insurance first.

Kentucky Pre-disaster Housing Initiative

As emergency management adopts a more disaster-survivor-centric approach to recovery efforts, more initiatives on pre-disaster housing help communities avoid disaster displacement – keeping their citizens at home. Director Eric Gibson and Deputy Director Dustin Heiser of the Kentucky Emergency Management have found creative solutions to help Kentucky's eastern communities, which have endured multiple accounts of devastating flooding in recent years. As they established

their planning efforts, through the recovery support framework, they were able to create a state data share plan. As the water rose and people needed to evacuate their homes, those survivors were placed in a shelter for one to two weeks, transferred to state parks to utilize their housing quarters, and then moved to a travel trailer if available. KEM became more efficient as this roadmap continued to be exercised in real time. They survey the survivors and use GIS tools to provide the situation analysis and share it with other agencies to help recovery efforts for the community. The high ground initiative was one of the creative ways KEM partnered to provide a buyout for flooded homes and place people in forever homes on safer ground. The high-ground initiative was established on old coal mining land donated to the Commonwealth to build neighborhoods to help people move out of the flood zone and remain in their home communities.

Tornado: What the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) and States Are Learning

2024 proved to be an active tornado year, with at least 1,797 tornadoes reported by NOAA. This was the second record-breaking year reported in history, behind only by 21 tornadoes to the record-breaking year in 2004, and some states have never encountered the hazard, albeit in a field that luckily only diverted cattle. Before the forum, we saw tornadoes touching down in Alabama and Arkansas. As Director Chris Currie of the Homeland Security and Justice at GAO brought to light, Alabama's tornado response last week impacted 80% of their counties, leading to a statewide event. GAO has been reviewing the response, recovery, and mitigation efforts for the hazard and is seeing the following insights: Public education and alerting is a key component GAO is studying- The alerting infrastructure is old and needs upgrades that most small or rural communities cannot afford; capacity at the local level is also a struggle in preparedness, education, and response; cost share is a barrier for the grants smaller communities would like to have but don't have the way to pay for their share; lack of insurance in some communities and the lack of building codes heighten the concern for communities that may not recovery well from tornado impacts. All to suffice, the vastly complicated recovery system plays a significant role in the recovery and mitigation efforts. Director Erv Portis with the Nebraska Emergency Management Agency provided a personalized story on how his state handled the impact of the 100 tornadoes on Arbor Day last April 24, 2024, ranging from varying EF levels. Director Portis shared how a factory had a place for their employees to go, and all stayed safe while their building fell, expressing the importance of the standards Director Currie shared. The estimated damage in individual assistance and public assistance surpassed thirty million dollars and counting. Director Portis brought back the focus on the survivor. He expressed concern that disaster case management is broken and that emergency management must elevate their expectation management so that their communities are prepared.