

THE HOOSIER RESPONDER

JANUARY 2024



THE HEART OF EMERGENCY CARE

A Focus on EMS Funding, Readiness and Vision 2025

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE:

- AUXCOMM Rebrand Offers New Opportunities to Leverage Key Partners
- Mental Health a 2024 Priority for State Fire Marshal
- PFAS Study to Make a Lasting Impact on Firefighter Health
- Partnerships Focus on Cybersecurity for the 2024 Elections
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MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

What a difference a year makes!

Just more than a year ago, the State Emergency Operations Center had been activated for severe cold and significant snowfall — just in time for the holidays. This year, we experienced an unseasonably warm holiday season. I hope you enjoyed the time with friends and family, despite the famously unpredictable Indiana weather pattern.

The end of 2022 seemed to foreshadow the destructive weather forces we experienced throughout 2023. Many counties across the state experienced tornadoes (including the second-worst one-day tornado outbreak in Indiana history) and strong winds that damaged property and took the lives of five Hoosiers.

These difficult times were managed by local, state and sometimes federal personnel. While challenging, these events brought us together to achieve the IDHS mission of working for all Hoosiers to provide a safe, secure and resilient Indiana.

We learned a lot about our ability to respond, recover and prepare for future incidents. We continue to review and learn from our strengths and work to mitigate our weaknesses.

In 2023, the focus of our agency was on resilience. It is in our mission statement, but how do we define it and what does it look like? All IDHS sections embraced this effort and challenged each other to build resilience within, so, collectively, we could build upon it outwardly across our state.

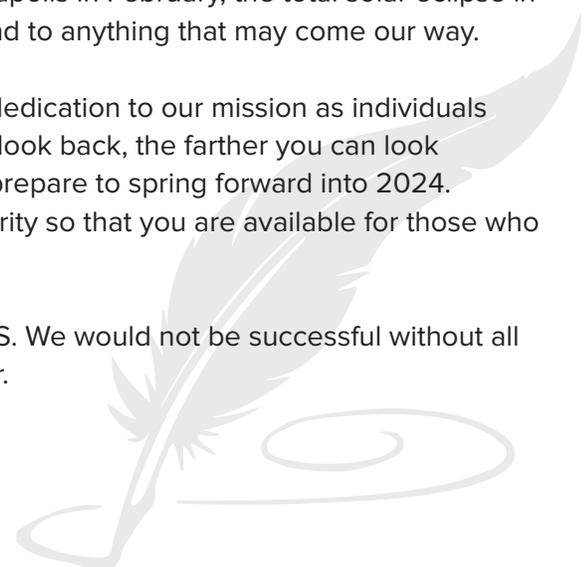
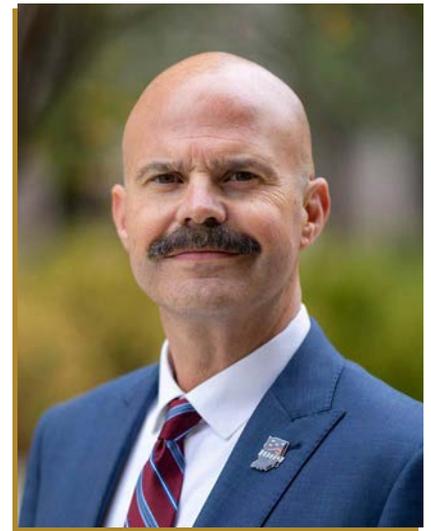
Looking forward to 2024, IDHS will build upon the lessons learned and focus on our mindset. We will look internally at the mindset of our agency and determine how we can engage in active open-mindedness to boost the level of assistance and support to all Hoosiers. The first half of the year is going to keep all of us busy. From potential weather events in January, the NBA All-Star Game in Indianapolis in February, the total solar eclipse in April and the upcoming primary election, we must be ready to respond to anything that may come our way.

As with every new year, there is a time for reflection and a renewed dedication to our mission as individuals and organizations. Winston Churchill once said, “The longer you can look back, the farther you can look forward.” I hope you can take some time, slow down, look back and prepare to spring forward into 2024. Ensure your personal wellness, both mentally and physically, is a priority so that you are available for those who need you the most.

Thank you for your collaboration and support of our staff here at IDHS. We would not be successful without all our partners in public safety. We wish you all the best in this new year.



Joel Thacker
Executive Director





RACES EXPANDING TO AUXCOMM AT IDHS

The RACES universe is expanding at IDHS, requiring a name change to accurately reflect the section's broad mission and responsibilities.

AUXCOMM is now the name of the section that will house the RACES team, ARES team and more. Expanding these capabilities allows AUXCOMM to enhance the state's disaster communications abilities. This change also will tie in with FEMA, Integrated Public Safety Commission and county terminology.

U.S. amateur radio operators are volunteers licensed by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), who communicate through allocated radio frequencies. In Indiana, there are more than 16,000 amateur operators with active licenses.

"What was once a hobby is now an available resource in a worst-case scenario to get messages through and serves as a supplemental communication capability during an event, incident or disaster," said Lewis Hartman, member of the AUXCOMM team and retired IDHS communications director.

"They are our backup comms service in the event that public

safety communication systems are not functioning. They have a long history of providing emergency communications services," said IDHS Response Director Brad Thatcher. "Many counties also have amateur radio teams and the IDHS AUXCOMM expansion allows us to establish that communications net throughout the state. They are a critical response system."

Some operators are granted the Radio Amateur Civil Emergency Service (RACES) status if they are certified volunteers registered with an emergency management agency.

Steve Wendt, a longtime member of the RACES team who recently stepped back from active participation,



says being a ham operator was important to him because of a principle he called the “5 P’s.”

“Prior planning prevents poor performance,” Wendt explained. Wendt describes the main reasons he decided to volunteer his time: “Helping people and having the ability to do something not many people are capable of or understand.”

Creating the AUXCOMM umbrella allows IDHS to utilize RACES operators in different ways. “We’re expanding how we can use them in different capacities in the EOC, field, etc.,” Thatcher said.

To become a member of the IDHS AUXCOMM team, an individual needs to meet the following qualifications:

- Have an amateur radio license
- Be 18 years of age or older
- Pass a background check
- Complete FEMA independent study courses 100, 200, 700 and 800

The AUXCOMM application is being updated to reflect the new changes. If you’re interested in joining, watch the [AUXCOMM webpage](#) for updates.

AUXCOMM AND THE TOTAL SOLAR ECLIPSE

The State Emergency Operations Center (SEOC) plans to utilize the skillset of the AUXCOMM team during the total solar eclipse.

Hundreds of thousands of people will be flooding into Indiana, which will tax the state’s cell network.

IDHS plans to have the AUXCOMM team functioning during the total solar eclipse to make sure the SEOC can stay in constant contact with counties and state partners.

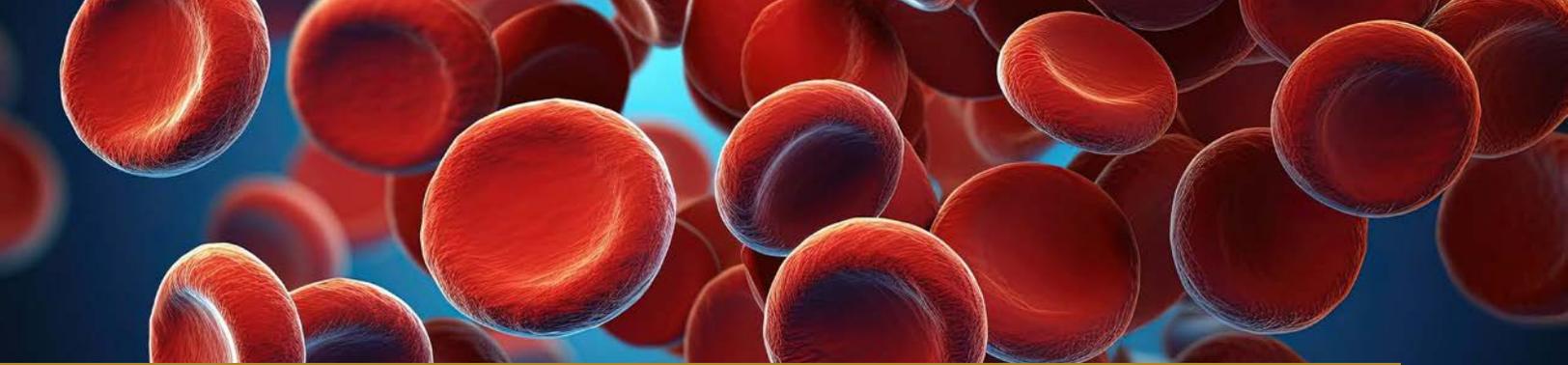
The total solar eclipse will occur on April 8, 2024.

MAKE YOUR MENTAL HEALTH A PRIORITY

Firefighters and other first responders face challenging and sometimes traumatic situations on a regular basis. These scenarios can take their toll over time. The significance of addressing your mental health and the mental health of your brothers and sisters in service cannot be overstated.

State Fire Marshal Steve Jones aims to raise awareness, spark conversations and promote a culture that prioritizes the mental health of those who dedicate their lives to protecting others.





MAKE A LASTING IMPACT ON FIREFIGHTER HEALTH

PFAS BLOOD TESTING PROGRAM COMING SOON

For years, it was common knowledge that the main health risk for firefighters was cardiac death. But occupational cancer has overtaken it and is now considered the leading cause of line-of-duty deaths in the fire service, according to the [International Association of Fire Fighters](#) and U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Understanding cancer risks in the fire service is a top priority for the state of Indiana. In the coming weeks, IDHS will launch a pilot program to test the presence of PFAS chemicals in Hoosier firefighters' blood. Created by legislation passed by the Indiana General Assembly in 2023, the program will not only help individual firefighters learn the amount of PFAS in their blood, but also it will provide insights, at a high level, of PFAS exposure in the Indiana fire service.

“My hope would be that as we get the info and study it,

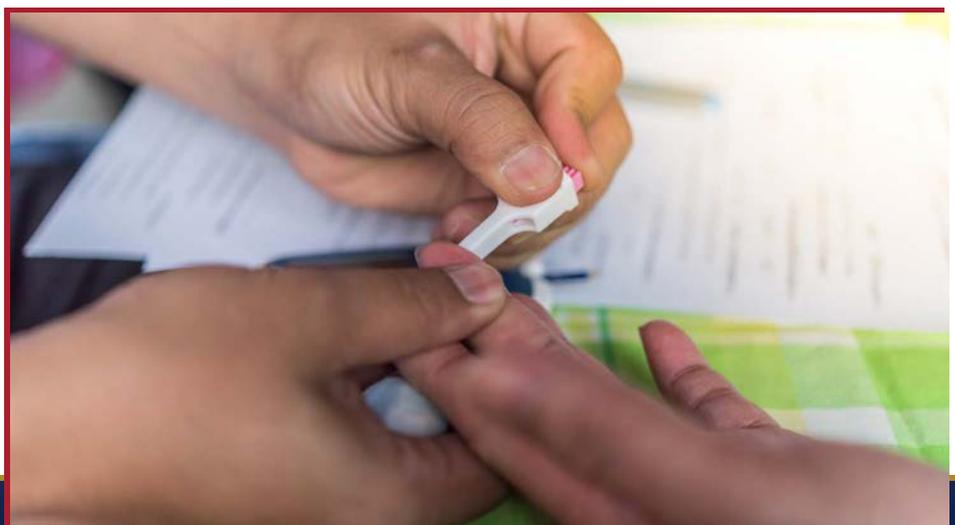
we will have a better idea of how to decrease cancer risk in the workforce,” said State Fire Marshal Steve Jones. “Where that leads may mean using gear that doesn't have PFAS in it, or wearing it less, or using a different type of foam. It can help us start making changes.”

Another new law (House Enrolled Act 1341) states after June 30, 2024, Indiana fire departments can purchase firefighting gear only if it contains a permanent label indicating whether the gear contains PFAS. Both laws come on the heels of the General Assembly in 2020 banning foam being used for training purposes if it contains PFAS. IDHS has

since led a successful effort to [collect the harmful foam from fire departments](#). To date, it has collected nearly 35,000 gallons of foam from nearly 250 departments for free.

State Rep. Maureen Bauer, D-South Bend, recognized the continued need to protect firefighters from toxic chemicals and [authored the legislation](#) that created the blood testing program.

“Firefighters deserve to know their own health,” she said. “We are looking for peace of mind for the fire service, or proof to take more action. If it is warranted, the pilot program can lead to investments



for PFAS-free gear or doing more health care screenings.”

The stakes could not be higher.

“Most of us firefighters have good and close friends who’ve died with cancer,” Jones said. “I have had friends that have died. When cancer comes, you are no longer that picture of a hero, you’re dying.”

Bauer echoed those sentiments. Like Jones, she attended the December dedication of a new state-of-the-art decontamination unit at Pike Township Fire Department in Indianapolis. The building has better cleaning systems to wash fire gear after every call. A plaque that adorns the unit says it all: *Dedicated to those Brothers and Sisters that cancer has taken from our lives.*

“These are not just statistics; they are colleagues and friends,” Bauer said, noting several South Bend firefighters from her district who have died due to cancer at young ages. “We are determined to stop PFAS exposure. We want to invest and empower fire departments to put health and safety first.”

The PFAS blood testing program will launch soon. Firefighters interested in participating can find out more information on the [IDHS website](#). Volunteer, municipal, combination, airport and industrial firefighters may apply. Current firefighters and former firefighters are also invited. Firefighters from all areas of the state will be selected. IDHS plans to test several hundred



firefighters with funds currently available for the program.

“We need a broad testing effort across Indiana because the test results need to be broad enough to draw conclusions,” Jones said.

After the application period closes, IDHS will select a representative assortment of applicants to be tested. Then each participant will be mailed a testing kit with instructions on how to do the test.

“We are trying to make it as easy for firefighters as possible to participate. That is why there will be an at-home finger-prick and no doctor visit needed,” said IDHS Legislative Director Alyssa Schroeder.

Participants then will drop their blood sample in the mail, according to the provided instructions, and that is it. After tests are processed at the lab, individual participants will receive their own test results.

“Take your results to your doctor and ask what you need to do, if anything,” Schroeder said.

IDHS will receive data associated with the testing results and analyze them to evaluate the levels of PFAS exposure found. IDHS will produce a report with the summary of the data.

The interest form to participate will be open for a limited time only, so Jones encourages firefighters to keep an eye out for official communication on when to sign up — and then put their name in.

“It is important for firefighters to know their participation will profit firefighters 50 years from now and help make better policies and procedures on how to fight fires. It is always the case that we should leave a place like our jobs better than when we started,” Jones said. “We had a big impact on the heart risks. We can make changes and improve. This is no different. If we know what can be done, we can make changes to help reduce the risk.

“We need to be part of this to help the people who come after us. All the testing we can do in the fire service, it needs to happen.”

ALAN BLUNK TAKES OVER AS STATE BUILDING COMMISSIONER

IDHS is starting 2024 with a new state building commissioner at the helm. Gov. Eric J. Holcomb appointed Alan L. Blunk to the position in November.

Blunk, a six-year leader of the IDHS Building Plan Review Section, has supervised a team of building plan reviewers responsible for more than 70,000 construction design releases during his tenure. By law, the Plan Review Section must approve all plans and designs for Class 1 structures (non-residential, publicly accessible buildings) before construction begins. Blunk also has worked with architectural and engineering firms and is certified in Indiana and Arizona with the National Council of Architectural Registration Boards (NCARB).

Blunk served as the section chief under Craig Burgess, the previous state building commissioner who retired in August. Blunk plans to continue business as usual in his new role while streamlining the business review process and improving customer service to builders across the state.

“I’m proud to have earned this appointment and look forward to working to ensure a timely, consistent, fair, accurate and thorough project experience for each client while continuing to foster goodwill for IDHS across the state,” said Blunk.



Blunk began in 2013 as a senior plan reviewer with IDHS. He is a certified fire inspector, commercial building inspector and plans examiner by the International Code Council. He earned bachelor’s degrees in architecture and science in environmental design from Ball State University and since has served as an architect or project manager on 150 projects across 34 years in the industry.

IDHS Executive Director Joel Thacker praised Blunk for his longstanding achievements in the industry and the consistency and leadership he will bring to the role as state building commissioner.

“Alan will continue to serve the state of Indiana well in this role as he has for the past decade,” Thacker said. “He leads a high-functioning team of plan reviewers and is the best choice to ensure public safety in future construction across the state.”

THE GRAND FINALE OF THE *GET SHAKIN'* VIDEO CONTEST

Pioneer Jr./Sr. High School's AP Biology class was awarded the top prize in the [2023 Get Shakin' video contest](#). The competition, designed to enhance awareness and preparedness for seismic events by Indiana students, saw the enthusiastic participation of 27 student groups. Pioneer's winning video not only delivered crucial safety tips but also infused a sense of fun into the serious subject matter, setting a commendable benchmark for promoting resilience and preparedness in the face of unforeseen natural disasters.

IDHS Emergency Management and Preparedness Director Mary Moran praised Pioneer Jr./Sr. High School, stating, "We congratulate Pioneer for its achievement in the *Get Shakin'* competition. Its commitment to earthquake education exemplifies the spirit of preparedness and community resilience we aim to foster."



While Shenandoah Middle School and Kankakee Valley Intermediate School received honorable mentions for their dedication to earthquake safety education, the overarching message encourages schools to leverage [GetPrepared.in.gov](#) for active participation in initiatives contributing to a safer and more resilient future. The grand prize for Pioneer's AP Biology class is an "Indiana Earthquake Day" event this spring, underscoring the significance of their impactful contribution to earthquake preparedness.

EMS UPDATES: MONTHLY EMS IN-SERVICE

State EMS Medical Director Dr. Eric Yazel hosts a monthly virtual EMS in-service to update EMS professionals on the latest information affecting Indiana EMS.

Each event includes housekeeping matters like updates from IDHS, the latest protocol adjustments, grant information and additional announcements. Then the agenda moves onto a Provider of the Month recognition and a discussion on relevant topics.

Attendees can claim one hour of training credits for professional development by participating. If you are interested, reach out to your [EMS district manager](#).



SECURITY IS PARAMOUNT FOR 2024 ELECTIONS

PARTNERSHIPS AT THE LOCAL, STATE AND FEDERAL LEVELS ENSURE YOUR VOTE IS COUNTED AS CAST

It should come as no surprise that the 2024 presidential election is expected to be one of the most anticipated and important events in modern history.

With that attention comes opportunity, especially for those bad actors who want to use Election Day as a springboard for illegal and damaging activities. This can include tampering with results, trying to shut down polling sites or even potentially targeting those sites for violence to disrupt the election: a cornerstone of American democracy.

“This is going to be an intense year,” Chetrice Mosely-Romero said recently at the 2024 Indiana Election Administrators Conference. Mosely-Romero, the former head of the Indiana Cybersecurity Program, now works as the cybersecurity state coordinator for Indiana for the

Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA), part of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

“Our elections in 2024 are going to have heightened attention like never before,” she said.

CISA works closely with state and local election officials in improving the security and resiliency of elections, which are considered part of the critical infrastructure of the country (like power grids, communications and health care systems).

CISA offers a suite of cybersecurity and physical security services and assessments to election infrastructure partners, at no cost. Additionally, CISA is adding an election security advisor for each of its 10 regions to strengthen CISA’s support and outreach to state and local election officials.

Cybersecurity is a major focus for CISA and state agencies (including the Secretary of State, IDHS and the Indiana Office of Technology). A recent [news story](#) reported that a nonprofit advocacy group believes there are “serious threats” involving cybersecurity for the upcoming election, and public safety agencies at all levels are working hard to protect the integrity of elections.

“We care as American citizens that your vote counts and that your vote is protected in every way possible,” Mosely-Romero said.

Indiana’s recent election security law addresses voting machine safety and requires a paper audit trail for all votes cast. It also enacted more safeguards around absentee ballots, which saw a sharp increase during the pandemic. Voters must provide their driver’s license number or the last four digits of their Social

Security number to request an absentee ballot. The law also extended a 2019 contract between the Secretary of State and local election boards to 2028.

Cybersecurity is just one piece — albeit a very significant piece — of ensuring election integrity, along with the physical security of polling places and the proper handling and processing of votes.

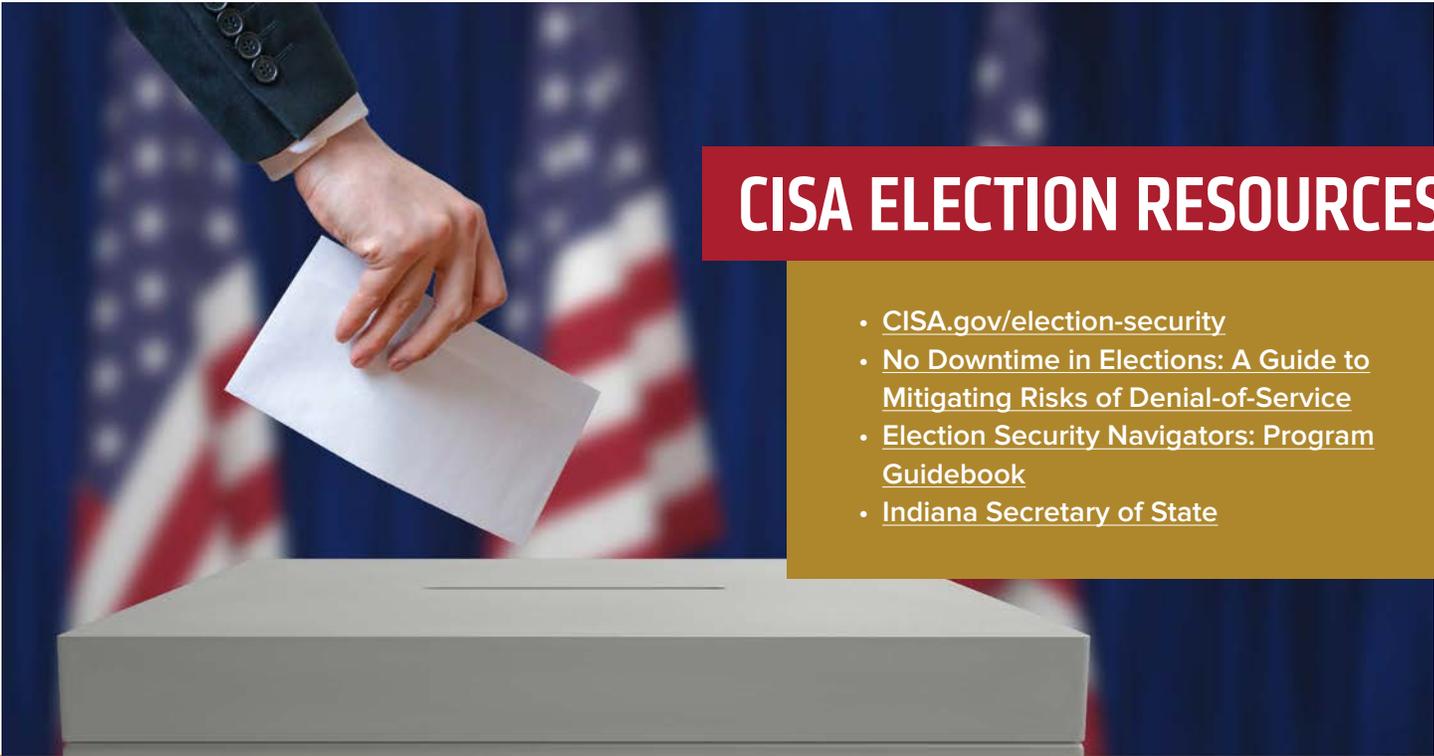
“Since taking office, increasing voter turnout and voter integrity has been a top priority,” said Indiana Secretary of State Diego Morales. “For the past year, our team has put a major emphasis on ensuring that when Hoosiers go to the polls, they are confident. 2024 is going to be a big year. The SOS office is already gearing up and has no plans of slowing down.”

New initiatives implemented by the Secretary of State leading up to the election include: \$2 million in election security grants to county election offices; a text feature to allow Hoosiers to text “IN” to 45995 with election questions or concerns; the establishment of the SOS Election Security Center to increase voter confidence and provide local officials on-demand resources; and the establishing of the 2024 Election Local Law Enforcement Partnership to guide and support local law enforcement during the election season.

CISA offers an important link for county and state election officials by offering a global view of the threat landscape. Through its resources, hands-on training and support and statewide coordinators for election security, CISA works year-round to protect national election systems.

“CISA is incredibly proud to partner with the Hoosier state, Secretary of State Morales and its clerks across 92 counties who are leading this effort,” said Cait Conley, senior advisor to the director for CISA. “From natural disasters to cyber threats and everything in between, Indiana’s election officials have taken these challenges head-on and embraced their responsibilities to ensure the security and integrity of election processes.”

“Indiana’s continued partnership is key to not just protecting elections locally, but everything we learn from the states helps to protect elections across the country,” Conley said. “It’s because of these efforts that voters can have confidence that the election will be secure, and their vote will be counted as cast.”



CISA ELECTION RESOURCES

- [CISA.gov/election-security](https://www.cisa.gov/election-security)
- [No Downtime in Elections: A Guide to Mitigating Risks of Denial-of-Service](#)
- [Election Security Navigators: Program Guidebook](#)
- [Indiana Secretary of State](#)



CHARTING A PATH FORWARD

Indiana's Initiatives Shape the Future of EMS

In 2024, Emergency Medical Services (EMS) is taking center stage in Indiana's public health landscape, spurred by Gov. Eric J. Holcomb's directive to the Governor's Public Health Commission. While not initially highlighted as a discussion topic, EMS emerged as a pivotal focus for the commission, resulting in historic funding dedicated to approved initiatives.

The challenge now is to channel this funding and attention into a transformative force for the Indiana EMS profession.

HEALTH FIRST EMS READINESS

The Governor's Public Health Commission's recommendations to improve EMS in Indiana laid the pathway to create the Health First EMS Readiness (EMS Readiness) initiative. The initiative has one focus: the workforce.

"The ultimate goal of everything that we are doing is to address the EMS workforce and workforce shortage," said State EMS Director Kraig Kinney. "We think that's the biggest gap."

The shortage has stressed the EMS workforce, causing some trained professionals to find other career options.

"EMS services across the state, as well as the rest of the country, struggle recruiting and retaining EMS personnel for numerous reasons," said Indiana EMS Association Executive Director Gary Miller. "In addition, the ongoing shortage has in itself aggravated the situation. Forced overtime, additional workloads and longer response times have all added to the already inherent frustrations with EMS like challenging hours and stressful working conditions."

To address the workforce challenges, Kinney's team is working with \$6.4 million in funding from the legislature, which will be divided into three main areas:

- Equipment
- Training
- Instructor development

EMS facilities likely have seen two opportunities to request assistance via these funds. The EMS Training Grant and the EMS Training Equipment Grant are in process. Award notifications for the EMS Training Equipment Grant are expected to be released in early February.

Kinney is excited to start rolling out new ways to support the EMS instructors the state already has and to bring new instructors on board. Indiana EMS is



looking at sending instructors to development courses like those organized by the National Association of EMS Educators, which has a very strong course that produces quality instructors.

Additional plans are in place to utilize the funds for Mobile Integrated Health programs, a workforce development component, 911 interoperability and an interfacility transfer pilot called RAPID.

Rural
Access
Paramedicine
Interfacility Transfers &
Didactics

RAPID stands for Rural Access Paramedicine Interfacility Transfers and Didactics teams. It was created by State EMS Medical Director Dr. Eric Yazel. The pilot program aims to ease a major concern for the EMS workforce that may require EMS ambulatory crews to choose between which calls they can take.

In rural areas, ambulance teams are stretched thin. While the crews do the best they can, sometimes trauma patients are left without an ambulance that can take them to the care they need. Kinney describes the scenario of a trauma patient who is taken to their local hospital. While there, doctors may realize the level of care the patient needs is beyond what the hospital can provide, meaning the patient needs a ride to a hospital outside of their county.

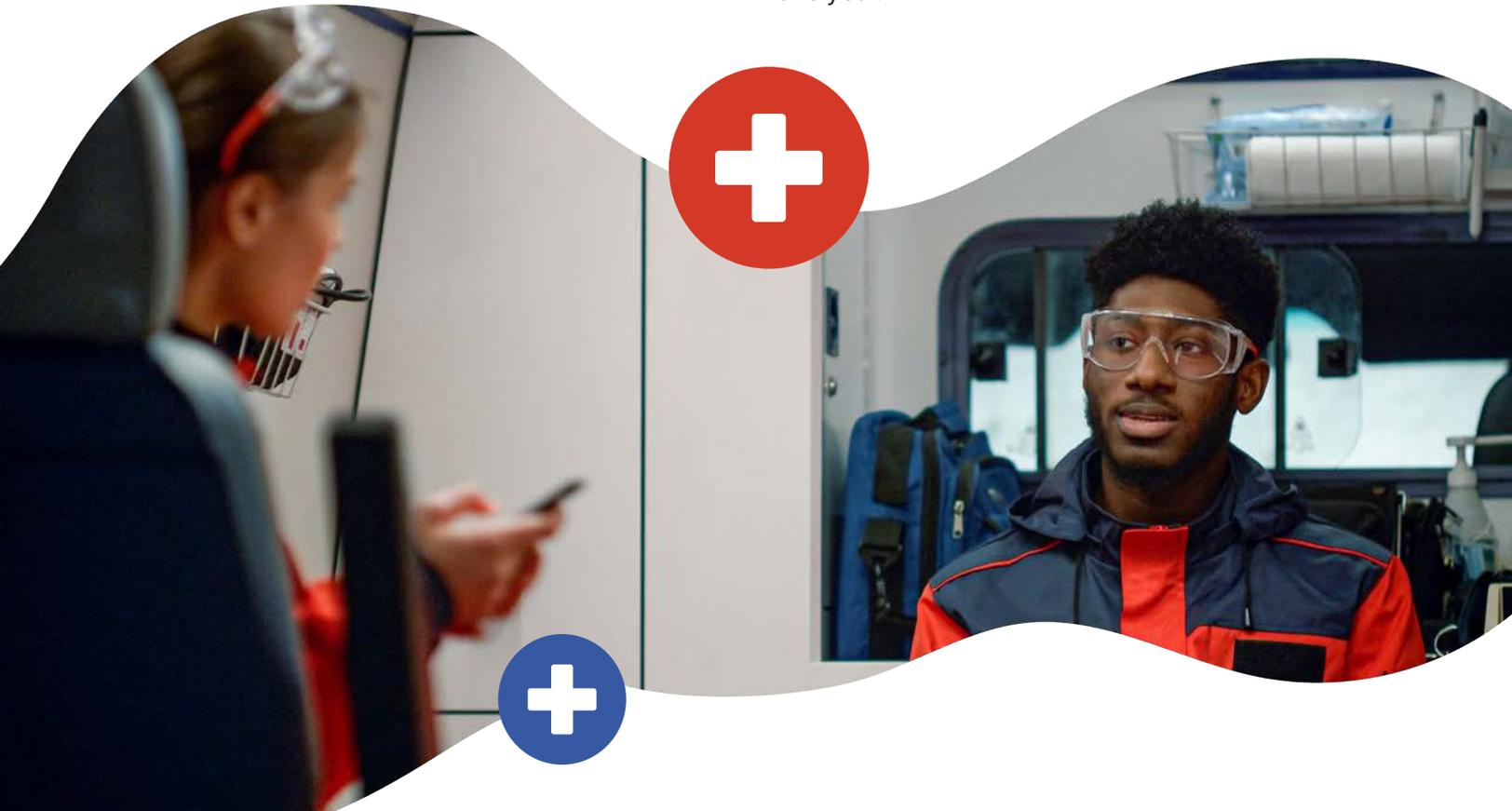
“You are seriously injured, then taken to a local hospital and the ambulance goes out on the next call, leaving you sitting there waiting to get transferred to a facility that can handle the trauma,” described Kinney. He noted that often the time can be critical to minimizing damage or even preventing death.

The pilot program will create a contract with an ambulance company that will provide an ambulance and crew whose only job will be to pick up those transfer patients. It will not be available for emergency 911 calls. When that crew has downtime, the contract will stipulate that the crew will work with [Mobile Integrated Health](#) programs in the area.

“We consistently hear the barriers that are faced with interfacility transfers, both from a workforce and financial standpoint. We also are working to improve our outcomes as a state in regards to time-dependent conditions such as major trauma, heart attacks and strokes,” said Yazel. “I feel like the RAPID team pilot project is a way to link these issues, helping to alleviate the strain our services experience with interfacility transfers and helping our patients get to a definitive treatment facility in a rapid manner. I am truly excited to see the impact it can have, especially in our rural areas.”

“The transfer program, we hope, will improve patient outcomes, but we also think it will relieve operations in those areas. Because a lot of the local services have to struggle with the question, ‘Do I cover 911 or do I transport this patient?’ It will help the workforce,” said Kinney.

The RAPID pilot program will focus on two areas in southeast and northwest Indiana where they do not have many hospitals that can efficiently handle a major trauma. This program is still in early development stages. A bid process will open later this year.





VISION 2025

Aside from the Health First EMS Readiness initiative, Indiana EMS is kicking off the start of a Vision 2025 workgroup. The idea started as Kinney and others were traveling around the state talking to EMS providers and personnel.

“We hear a lot of the same discussions, and we hear a lot of great ideas on how to address some of these issues,” noted Kinney. He decided it was time to get stakeholders in the same room to discuss these issues and create recommendations for the EMS workforce.

“I feel the most important goal of the EMS 2025 group is to expose the concerns of the numerous participants so that we can all work together to develop a comprehensive plan to take EMS in Indiana to the next level,” Miller explained.

The goal is to create an in-depth report (white paper) by June 2024 detailing some of the common problems EMS faces and recommendations from this workgroup on how to handle them.

The June deadline was set to ensure the white paper gets into the hands of the legislature to review over the summer for the 2025 legislative session “so if any

of these ideas need legislative enactments, They would be ready for consideration,” said Kinney.

Nothing is off the table for discussion. Kinney gave the example that if certifications are a major struggle for EMS, then the group can look at the problem and see if it can recommend changes to the EMS Commission.

“We can all work together to develop a comprehensive plan.”

Gary Miller, Indiana EMS Association Executive Director

A variety of groups are represented in the workgroup including the Indiana Statewide 911 Board, the Indiana EMS Association, the Family and Social Services Administration, the Department of Health, the Professional Fire Fighters Union of Indiana, Indiana Fire Chiefs Association.

“By having all the stakeholders in one room, it offers the ability for all the participants to contribute to potential solutions that otherwise would be limited in scope or, worse yet, might create negative

unforeseen problems,” said Miller. “Your geographic location, your past experiences and your own biases can easily limit your thought process. This diverse group helps tear down these mental barriers.”

Kinney added there is an additional benefit to bringing a diverse group to the table.

“Part of the reason we have stakeholders is several of them have professional lobbyists. They now have a tool as well that they can use to make a positive

change. So, we figured we would create a buzz and see if some of these recommendations can come to fruition,” said Kinney. “People are bringing their background expertise, but everyone seems open to discussion and negotiation and coming up with concrete ideas on how to make change. I think we’ll see some good recommendations out of this group.”

Miller echoed the thought: “The EMS 2025 group hit the road running and we have had some great early discussions.”



GET INVOLVED

As the Health First EMS Readiness initiative gains momentum and the Vision 2025 workgroup shapes the future of EMS in Indiana, active participation becomes crucial.

Stay informed about the EMS Readiness initiative through [IDHS emails](#) and consider joining the Vision 2025 workgroup meetings, where open discussions pave the way for meaningful change. These initiatives not only aim to address workforce challenges but also seek to secure the continued attention and support that is essential for Emergency Medical Services in Indiana.

The Vision 2025 workgroup has an open-door policy for its meetings. Anyone can come, listen and make comments on the discussion topics.

UPCOMING VISION 2025 MEETINGS

- | | |
|-----------------------------|--|
| Jan. 18
9 a.m. – noon | IN Hospital Association
500 N. Meridian St.
Indianapolis, IN 46204 |
| Feb. 14
10 a.m. – 4 p.m. | IN Hospital Association
500 N. Meridian St.
Indianapolis, IN 46204 |
| March 5
9 a.m. – noon | MADE@Plainfield
1610 Reeves Road
Plainfield, IN 46168 |

TORNADOES
FLOODING
EARTHQUAKES
HOUSE FIRES
DISASTERS
FOLLOW
NO SCHEDULE





READY TO GO

GET CREDENTIALLED FOR IMTs

Life changed abruptly for the town of Whiteland the night of March 31.

The community in northern Johnson County has been growing with new residential and industrial areas springing up, boasting more than 5,000 residents and projected to grow by 50% over the next few years.

“Everything was on a path of progress,” said Carmen Young, Whiteland director of administration.

At 11:33 p.m. on March 31, an EF3 tornado carved its own path, three football fields wide and more than three miles long through Whiteland. For the town whose motto is “Moving Forward,” the tornado brought everything to a halt, if only for a moment.

Young’s husband is Whiteland’s street superintendent and

received an overnight call from police that the town had been hit and the roads needed to be cleared. Search and rescue efforts were ongoing in the hours after the tornado.

Young herself hit the ground running: monitoring social media, managing the town Facebook page and sharing police messaging. She took the lead on the town administrative side and started making spreadsheets of who to contact about various new issues.

“I had no idea what I was doing, but I needed to do something,” Young said.

Thankfully, she got aid quickly. An Incident Management Team (IMT) spun up to help lead the response and recovery efforts. It was staffed primarily by Johnson County public safety personnel and other government and nonprofit leaders.

The IMT helped oversee debris management, coordinate traffic control, work to repair utilities,



manage volunteers, handle public relations and more.

“If something was not being done, they could help make sure we crossed the T’s and dotted the I’s, or show us how to do it. They made sure things were being covered,” Young said.

Within a week, the IMT stood down as Young and other Whiteland leaders were able to carry on recovery efforts themselves.

Incident managed.

IMTs like the one activated in Whiteland are critical assets for local leaders and first responders when disasters strike. Bargersville Fire Chief Eric Funkhouser has been involved with IMTs for years. He was a firefighter for a long time before he got involved in the emergency management side of incidents. A mentor helped train him as a planning section chief, and over the years he has worked multiple incidents as part of the

Johnson County IMT, including this year’s Whiteland tornado response.

“A lot of times it can be overwhelming for the local entity, and it is so nice to have people help who are already trained and know what they are doing,” he said.

To make sure other Hoosier communities can get the immediate help they need, Funkhouser is leading the state’s efforts to reinvigorate credentialing for Indiana’s IMT Qualifications Program. Over the past few years, opportunities for IMTs to deploy were few and not much credentialing occurred, though trainings continued to be offered. The COVID-19 pandemic gets credit for some of that disruption, but Funkhouser is forward-focused and wants to spread the word that the state is now actively

recruiting new IMT members and recredentialing those who have had IMT credentials in the past.

“This is an opportunity for people to apply for a task book again and to have a person available again who can answer questions,” said Funkhouser, who says people with all types of backgrounds are needed to build a deeper roster of deployable IMT members around the state.



Task books identify the competencies, behaviors and tasks that personnel should demonstrate to become qualified for a defined incident management and support position according to FEMA standards.



He estimates there are between 100 and 200 credentialed IMT personnel statewide, with recredentialing picking back up the past few months. Still, more are needed or need to refresh their credentials.

“We are looking for those with a service mindset and who want to

go to trainings,” Funkhouser said. “When someone calls and says, ‘I need a planning section chief,’ we want to have someone who knows how to do it and is not just filling the role. We are making sure there is a process, so you are qualified and so you can be credentialed and deployable.”

A [new webpage](#) on the IDHS website hosts resources for learning more and getting

connected to the IMT efforts. The page has downloadable task books, a guide about the credentialing process and forms to help update credentialing or become certified.

Young counts Whiteland lucky to have had a well-trained, organized IMT to see the town through the response and early recovery from the tornado that hit the community.

“Your public safety, fire and police, their primary role right after the incident is making sure people are safe, but there is a lot more to an incident after the first 24-48 hours,” Young said. “There are a lot of people in offices who need to help people impacted and help with next steps, who are not necessarily the boots on the ground but are working on the bigger picture and how to move things forward.”

INDIANA INCIDENT MANAGEMENT ASSISTANCE TEAM STILL SEARCHING FOR NEW MEMBERS

IDHS is rebuilding the Incident Management Assistance Team (IMAT), which is a forward response team during disasters and large-scale emergencies. It helps local jurisdictions that are responding to a crisis with additional resources and expertise.

The team helps to establish a unified command structure and, depending on the incident, provides awareness for both state and federal decision-makers to determine the kinds of immediate support that may be needed. It works closely with the State Emergency Operations Center, whose goal is to have a clear understanding of the situation and coordinate resources effectively. The IMAT also can deploy to

incidents outside of Indiana, such as to areas hit hard by tornadoes and hurricanes.

A number of different skill sets are needed to create a fully effective team. IDHS is looking for people with emergency management skills and people in the power, water, communications sections and more.

Joining the IMAT will mean a two-year commitment to be deployed when requested, in Indiana or elsewhere in the country. To begin the IMAT certification process, visit the [IMAT webpage](#), download the application and email the application to imat@dhs.in.gov.



Watch this video to learn more!



HIT THE ROAD WITH CONFIDENCE THIS WINTER

More than a year ago, a polar vortex took over central and northern Indiana. Temperatures plunged well below 0 degrees Fahrenheit with wind chill, and wind gusts picked up snow, creating whiteout conditions in some areas. The State Emergency Operation Center and county emergency operations centers activated as concern rose for drivers who might be stuck on the sides of the roads. If stranded drivers were unable to keep their cars warm, it would not have taken long for a dangerous scenario to play out.

The polar vortex proved the crucial need to keep an emergency kit in your vehicle. An emergency kit equipped with essentials such as blankets, non-perishable food, water, a flashlight and other basic tools can be a lifesaver if you find yourself stranded or facing car troubles in the cold.

Watch the video linked above and learn more about preparing for winter weather on [GetPrepared.in.gov](https://www.getprepared.in.gov).



LISTEN TO THE IDHS PODCAST

National Weather Service (NWS) Meteorologist Sam Lashley joins the podcast to discuss Indiana's winter outlook. The conversation dives into climate change effects and NWS initiatives, ensuring you are prepared for the winter season ahead.

Listen online at on.in.gov/hoosier-homeland or subscribe to the podcast using one of the podcast services below:





RESIDENTIAL FIRE FATALITIES ROSE IN 2023

REVIEWING THE DATA

The year 2023 saw an alarming rise in deadly residential fires, with a notable increase from 71 deaths in 2022 to 84 in 2023. This increase in fatalities underscores the need for public awareness and proactive measures to address the various causes of residential fires.

Of the 84 deaths in 2023, 73 were adult fatalities and 11 were juvenile fatalities.

“The increase in residential fire fatalities is deeply concerning, highlighting the urgent need for heightened public awareness. First responders must prioritize proactive education, empowering communities with life saving knowledge about fire prevention, safety measures and swift emergency response,” said Indiana State Fire Marshal Steve Jones.

Causes of fires:

- Unintentional/Accidental fires
 - Examples: Cooking fires, kids playing with matches, electrical malfunctions or heat sources left unattended.
- Incendiary
 - Example: Arson
- Undetermined
 - Fires are ruled undetermined due to an ongoing investigation or if there is not enough evidence to name the cause of the fire.

Emphasizing the importance of smoke detectors, fire extinguishers and evacuation plans can change the outcomes of fire. Education about fire safety before the emergency is crucial to empower individuals and families to protect themselves.

IDHS tracks deadly fires with the [Residential Fire Fatalities dashboard](#) to identify areas where further education could be warranted.

RESIDENTIAL FIRE FATALITIES BY YEAR, 2019-2023



ALTERNATIVE HEATING SAFETY

The most popular forms of alternative-heating equipment (space heaters and fireplaces/chimneys) caused 440 deaths and were responsible for 73 percent of home heating equipment fires in the United States between 2014 and 2018, according to the National Fire Protection Association. Space heaters alone accounted for more than 40 percent of home heating fires and about 80 percent of the deaths and injuries in home fires caused by heating equipment. Additionally, nearly half of the home heating fires during this period occurred during the winter months of December, January and February.

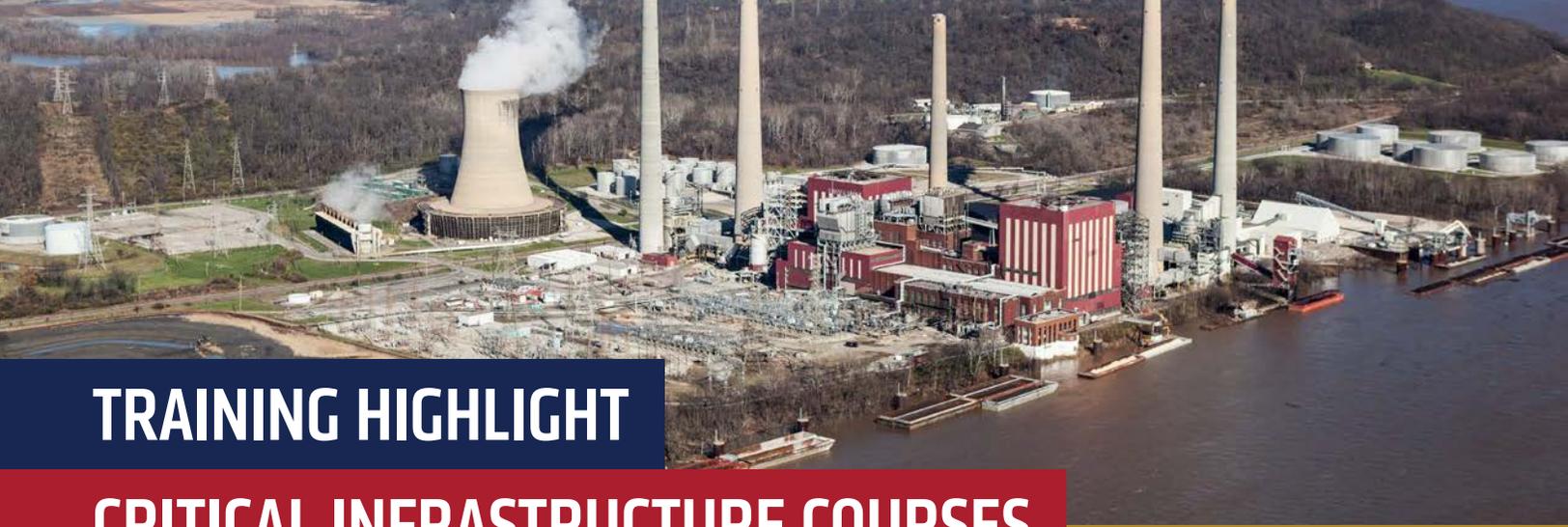
During the colder times of the year, alternative-heating sources should always be the last option used. If they cannot be avoided, caution and proper safety should be practiced. Remember, never use home appliances, such as ovens, as an alternative-heating source. Doing so can cause carbon monoxide poisoning.

QUICK TIPS

- Keep at least a 3-foot perimeter around space heaters at all times.
- Plug electrical space heaters directly into wall outlets, not multi-socket power strips.
- Purchase space heaters that come equipped with tip-over safety switches.
- Never leave space heaters turned on in unoccupied rooms, and never go to sleep or leave your home with a space heater turned on.
- Have chimneys regularly cleaned and inspected by a certified professional.
- Keep the fireplace damper open while hot ashes are still in the fireplace. Closing it can lead to carbon monoxide poisoning.
- Provide proper ventilation for gas fireplaces and keep a working carbon monoxide detector nearby.
- Extinguish fireplace fires before going to bed or leaving home.

Find and share additional alternative heating safety tips on [GetPrepared.in.gov](https://www.getprepared.in.gov).





TRAINING HIGHLIGHT

CRITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE COURSES

What would happen if the local water treatment plant stopped working for an extended time? What if gas pipelines were shut down resulting in all nearby retail gas stations being out of fuel for days? Or what about a widespread power outage that could take weeks or months to fix?

How to deal with disruptions to critical infrastructure systems like these are the focus of a series of courses being offered this year. Three of the courses are part of the TEEX [Infrastructure Protection Certificate Program](#), and IDHS may schedule the final course needed for the certificate depending on demand.

The courses cover the basics of what critical infrastructure security is and how to start protecting these all-important assets from both physical and cyber threats. This includes learning how to determine the specific high-level threats and hazards to local critical assets, form a community profile and figure out capability gaps and how to fix them.

IDHS Critical Infrastructure Planner Bryce Ahnfield says there is a general lack of knowledge of what critical infrastructure is, and people do not realize how much one system relies on another, which can lead to cascading effects.



UPCOMING COURSES

Feb. 12: Critical Infrastructure Security & Resilience Awareness (AWR-213)

April 24: Advanced Critical Infrastructure Protection (MGT-414)

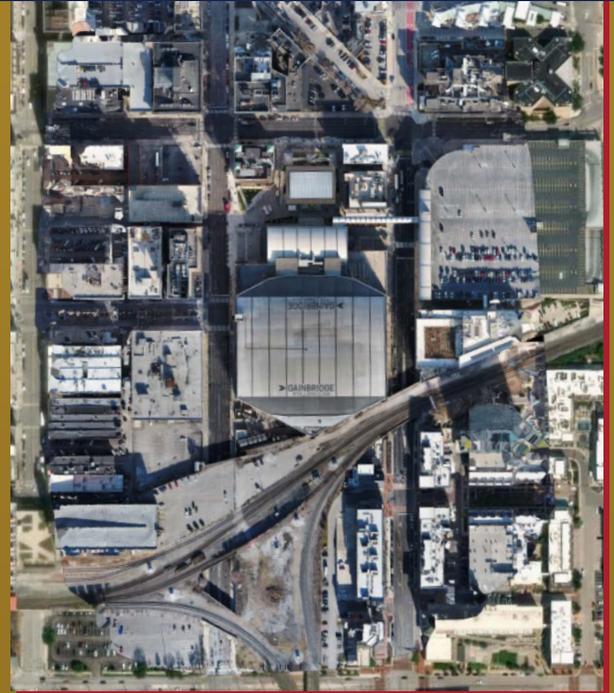
May 29-30: Threat & Risk Assessment (MGT-310)

June 5: Physical & Cybersecurity for Critical Infrastructure (MGT-452)

Register for courses on [Acadis Portal](#).

OUT IN THE FIELD

2024 NBA ALL-STAR GAME



Indianapolis will host the NBA All-Star Game in February for the first time since 1985. Event officials expect more than 125,000 visitors to descend on downtown Indianapolis for the three-day event taking place Feb. 16-18. Although the game itself will occur at Gainbridge Fieldhouse, the days-long festivities will overflow to surrounding facilities like the Indiana Convention Center and Lucas Oil Stadium.

IDHS has been working for months with local public safety partners to prepare for the event. The IDHS Radiation and Hazmat programs are assisting with security efforts and recently piloted a drone over the fieldhouse area to take photos and provide event planners with an updated aerial map of the event location. Planners wanted a clearer picture to use for security operations after construction of a plaza adjacent to the fieldhouse concluded recently.

“Critical infrastructure are the assets and systems that have been deemed necessary for the safety and security of the country,” said Ahnafield. “If these go out, bad things start to happen pretty quick.”

IDHS is currently identifying and prioritizing state-level assets in all 16 categories of critical infrastructure. This work is being done in working groups of federal, state, military and private-sector partners.

These organizations are the ones that typically engage in critical infrastructure planning and security, but this type of work can be enhanced when involving local first responders, so first responders and emergency managers statewide are encouraged to take advantage of these courses.

“It never hurts to have more education and training,” Ahnafield said. “This ties in to the [Business Emergency Operations Center](#) too, so share these classes with your private-sector partners as well.”

Learn more about critical infrastructure at GetPrepared.in.gov.



OUT IN THE FIELD

TOTAL SOLAR ECLIPSE 2024

There are fewer than 100 days until the total solar eclipse on **April 8, 2024**, which will plunge much of Indiana into momentary darkness. IDHS, state agencies and local government personnel are partnering together to ensure all Hoosiers and visitors can experience the spectacle safely.

IDHS and partner state agencies have been working on a state plan for years. Recently, agency partners met to discuss the State Emergency Operations Center (SEOC) plans, who will staff the SEOC and what each agency will be doing outside of the SEOC. This collaboration will ensure state officials have a constant flow of information about what is happening around the state during the event.

Look for information about the eclipse on the eclipse2024.in.gov website. It houses information for local governments on best practices for communities to plan for the influx of crowds, shareable public safety information and links to partner websites for additional information.



Share this video on your social media platforms and more. This video was created to get the public thinking about what to do before the day of the eclipse.



VISIT THE TOTAL SOLAR ECLIPSE WEBSITE AT

eclipse2024.in.gov

MESSAGE FROM THE FIRE MARSHAL

As Indiana State Fire Marshal, I hear a lot from across the state about the sticker shock departments face when trying to acquire a new apparatus. The current economic conditions have made it difficult for fire industry businesses to maintain fair prices and timely deliver their products. Unfortunately, even noble professionals like firefighters and EMTs are not exempt from inflation, labor shortages, supply chain issues and exponential price hikes on raw materials.

In these unprecedented times, it is essential to have a solid strategy for acquiring apparatus in today's economic climate. While the options of buying demonstrator rigs or used trucks might seem attractive, it is important to weigh the pros and cons and determine if the savings in time and money are worth the benefit of customization.

Departments today must plan far ahead when purchasing a new apparatus and lock in firm costs and delivery dates. It is the only way to ensure there are no surprises and your community is best protected. It is crucial to anticipate needs far in advance, be prepared to wait for delivery and work with the manufacturers to ensure you get what you need when you need it.

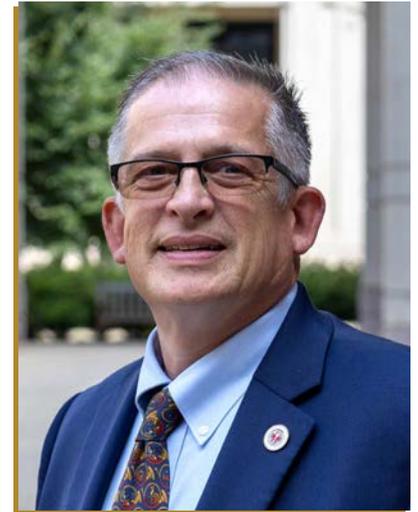
This may sound like common sense, but some departments are finding themselves impacted significantly by supply chain issues, high costs and extended lead times — all factors that ultimately impact how well they can protect and serve their community. These price hikes often outpace the ability to raise funds to meet the costs, which is especially problematic for volunteer departments already struggling with equipment and PPE shortages.

To be fair, the employees of companies that manufacture firefighting equipment are proud to serve and want to offer products at fair prices with quick and efficient delivery. They are feeling the pinch just as much. However, that is hard to understand when a department has raised funds for months or years only to learn they must wait even longer. This is happening across the nation, and buying used equipment does not always help in the long run.

At the end of the day, we move people, water and tools in the safest and most efficient way possible. We will continue to serve in this capacity as we learn to help one another through this latest challenge in the fire service. We always have. We always will.



Stephen Jones
Indiana State Fire Marshal



UPCOMING TRAININGS

JANUARY

JAN 2 - MAR 14	Fire - Academy (HMA, HMO, FFI, FF2)	CARTHAGE
JAN 22-23	MERRTT/TEPP - Radiological Transportation	HAMMOND
JAN 26-28	ICS 300 - Intermediate ICS for Expanding Incidents	JASPER

FEBRUARY

FEB 10-11	ICS 400 - Advanced ICS Command & General Staff	JASPER
FEB 12	AWR-213 - Critical Infrastructure Security and Resilience Awareness	PLAINFIELD
FEB 20-21	REP Core Concepts	LaPORTE
FEB 22	REP Post Plume	LaPORTE
FEB 24	AWR-232 - Mass Fatalities Planning & Response for Rural Communities	FOWLER

MARCH

MAR 11-13	PER-353 - Active Shooter Incident Management with Complex Incidents	WESTVILLE
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NATIONAL BLOOD DONOR MONTH

JANUARY

January marks the 54th National Blood Donor Month, emphasizing the critical need for blood and platelet donations. Blood donors play a life saving role, contributing to health care and emergency situations, making a tangible impact on countless lives.



MARTIN LUTHER
KING JR. DAY



MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. DAY

JANUARY 15

Jan. 15 marks Martin Luther King Jr. Day, which commemorates the legacy of a civil rights icon, promoting unity and equality. It serves as a reminder to actively contribute to positive social change and embrace the principles of justice and compassion. All state offices will be closed in honor of the holiday.

DATA PRIVACY DAY

JANUARY 28

In an era of increasing digital connectivity, Data Privacy Day, which is commemorated on Jan. 28, raises awareness about the importance of safeguarding personal information. It encourages individuals and organizations to prioritize privacy, fostering a secure online environment.

NATIONAL BURN AWARENESS WEEK

FEBRUARY 4-10

This week, commemorated Feb. 4-10, sheds light on preventing burn injuries and promoting safety. By educating communities about potential hazards and preventive measures, the public works toward reducing burn incidents, ensuring a safer environment for everyone.

VALENTINE'S DAY

FEBRUARY 14



*The Indiana Department of Homeland Security works 24/7
to protect the people, property and prosperity of Indiana.*



Indiana Department of Homeland Security
302 West Washington Street • Indiana Government Center South • Room E208
Indianapolis, IN 46204 • 317.232.2222 • 800.669.7362



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Please direct any questions or comments to the IDHS Office of Public Affairs at 317.234.6713 or pio@dhs.in.gov*