

THE HOOSIER RESPONDER

APRIL 2025



SEVERE STORMS & A FLOODED AFTERMATH

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE:

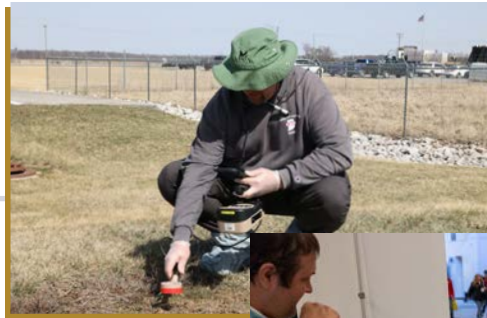
- Indiana Responders Gain Experience Exercising for a Nuclear Power Plant Emergency
- Indiana Law Enforcement Academy Hits Renovation Milestones
- Seismic Fault Lines Provide Exercise Setting for Scores of First Responders
- IDHS EMS Division Gives Trainings with Brand-New Mobile Sim Lab
- May Is Mental Health Awareness Month: Local Efforts Keep Firefighters Healthy
- Storm Spotters Offer Insight on How They Play Into Weather Forecasting



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MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

As I continue to settle in at the new Office of Public Safety and the Indiana Department of Homeland Security, I was reminded recently of the uncertainty of spring storm season in Indiana.

March/April storms and multiple tornadoes tore through large parts of northern and central Indiana and left quite a wake of damage, including the unfortunate loss of several Hoosiers. At least 35 counties were included in a state disaster declaration issued by Governor Mike Braun. It will take some time and persistence for these communities to recover.

I was onsite within 24 hours in Gary to see the impact firsthand from the March 19 tornado (along with other IDHS staff), and I was impressed by the drive and passion of Hoosiers helping other Hoosiers. I saw great resilience and fervency to rebuild and was reminded of the spirit of Hoosier hospitality as surrounding communities showed up to help. IDHS Response and Recovery staff jumped into action quickly to respond to the storms and will guide the recovery process from all these incidents. The staff works so hard behind the scenes during some of the most difficult times for storm survivors.

I also am encouraged by the way my colleagues, state leaders and other professionals have connected with me to help me better understand the needs of the Indiana fire and EMS communities, all vital first responders during weather events. I attended a recognition ceremony recently honoring more than 100 firefighters who have volunteered for the past 50 years or more to protect their communities from fire while risking their own safety. It was a powerful event and just the latest example of new bonds forming with this critical group of public servants.

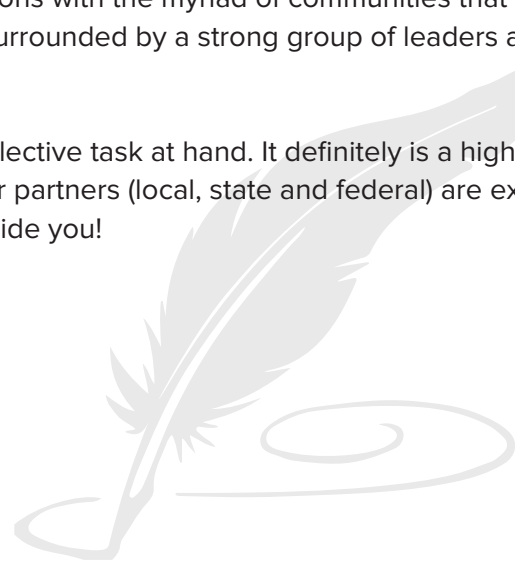
I recognize that previous IDHS leadership had strong firefighting backgrounds, but I have been impressed by the willingness of these statewide leaders to partner with me to best support fire/EMS. Additionally, my experience as a federal law enforcement officer, military-trained cyber operations officer and my extensive focus on national security have helped me to make connections with the myriad of communities that comprise the Public Safety Secretariat. That said, I am thankful to be surrounded by a strong group of leaders at IDHS to advise me on issues impacting these first responders.

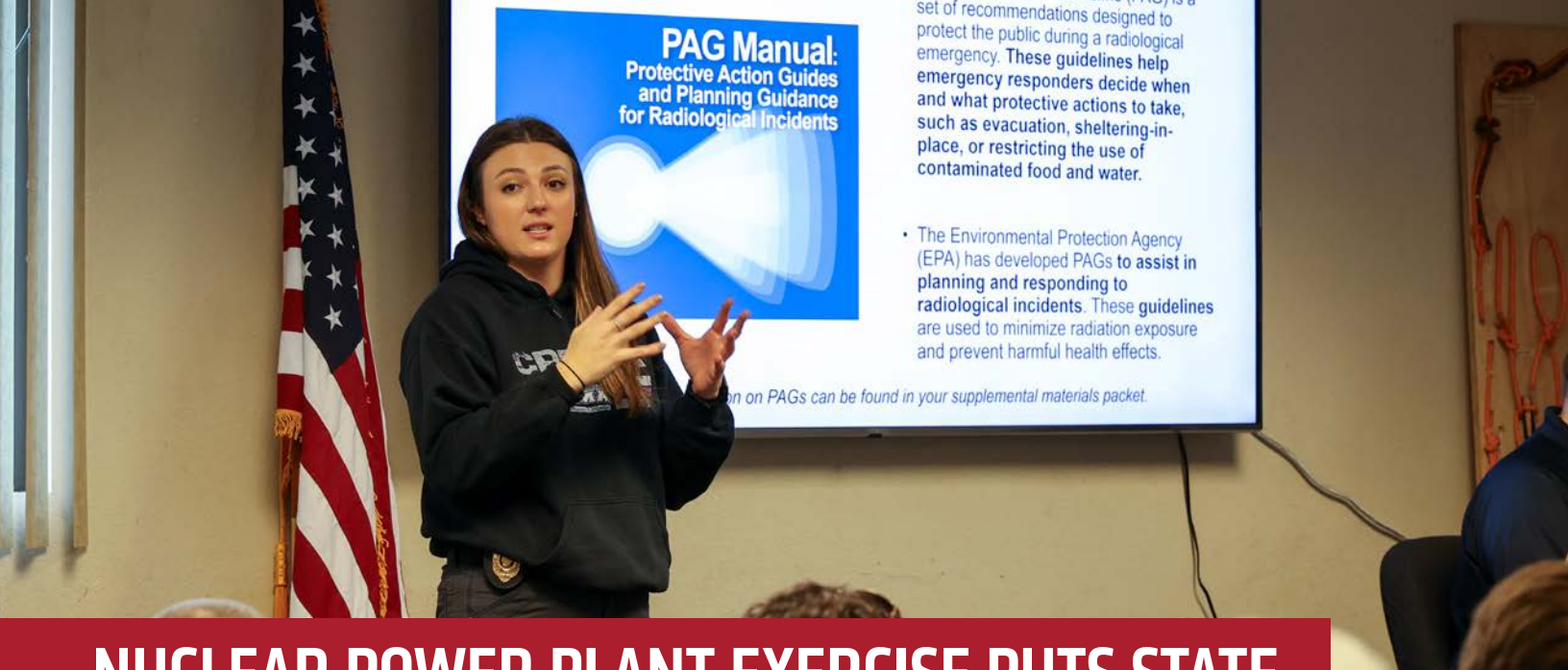
Finally, as the Indy 500 approaches, I look forward to the collective task at hand. It definitely is a high-visibility, zero-fail mission, which requires great attention to detail. Our partners (local, state and federal) are excited, and so am I. I am looking forward to delivering excellence alongside you!

Thank you for all you do!



Jennifer-Ruth Green
Secretary of Public Safety
Executive Director, IDHS





NUCLEAR POWER PLANT EXERCISE PUTS STATE, COUNTIES TO THE TEST

In mid-March, more than 3,000 participants from across the United States and Canada simulated a response during a full-scale exercise for a major nuclear power plant emergency near Detroit, Michigan. The exercise, Cobalt Magnet 25, highlighted the far-reaching effects of such an incident, including in Indiana. IDHS and other state and local agencies took advantage of the opportunity to practice their plans in three different but related exercises.

State Emergency Operations Center Tabletop *Indianapolis*

In the event of a nuclear power plant emergency, the state takes its cues from its Radiological Emergency Preparedness (REP) Ingestion Pathway Annex. The IDHS Response and Recovery sections were joined in the State Emergency Operations Center (SEOC) by a cadre of Emergency Response Function (ESF) representatives to walk through that plan.

“What can we do at the state to get the ball rolling? The federal government may not be there for the first

72 hours of the incident,” said IDHS Technological Hazards Planning Manager Felicia Wolfe.

A lot of the exercise came down to communication needs: updates from the nuclear plant itself, notifications to the right people (such as EMAs), coordinating public information releases and dealing with rumors and misinformation. The conversation also delved into what would happen if the emergency were to render some areas of the state hazardous and force many people to be evacuated or relocated, perhaps for months or years.

Learn more about the REP Program and download newly updated citizen and farmer informational booklets from the [IDHS website](#).



Local, State and Federal Partners Tabletop and Sampling Drills

DeKalb, Steuben and Allen counties

Eleven northern Indiana counties are within 50 miles of commercial nuclear power plants in Michigan and Illinois. These [Ingestion Pathway](#) counties have established procedures for emergencies at those plants. But that is not the case for counties outside the typical risk zone, so state and federal agencies met in Ashley, Indiana, with the EMA directors of Allen, DeKalb and Steuben counties as well as their local healthcare system providers, health departments and first responders to explore what could happen if the wind conditions were just right to spread radiation over their area from the plant near Detroit.

“Our three EMA offices are only a small piece of the larger support network that we share,” said Steuben County EMA Director Lee Greenamyre. “I believe that we all realize that in an event like this, that we would not be able to perform alone. We are stronger when we rely on the shared strengths and knowledge of each other.”

IDHS Radiation staff provided a just-in-time training on how to use radiation detection equipment, then sent three teams out into the counties to practice. Following instructional guidebooks, they tested milk and soil samples for radiation while they wore PPE and moved thoughtfully to minimize radiation exposure to themselves, supplies and equipment.

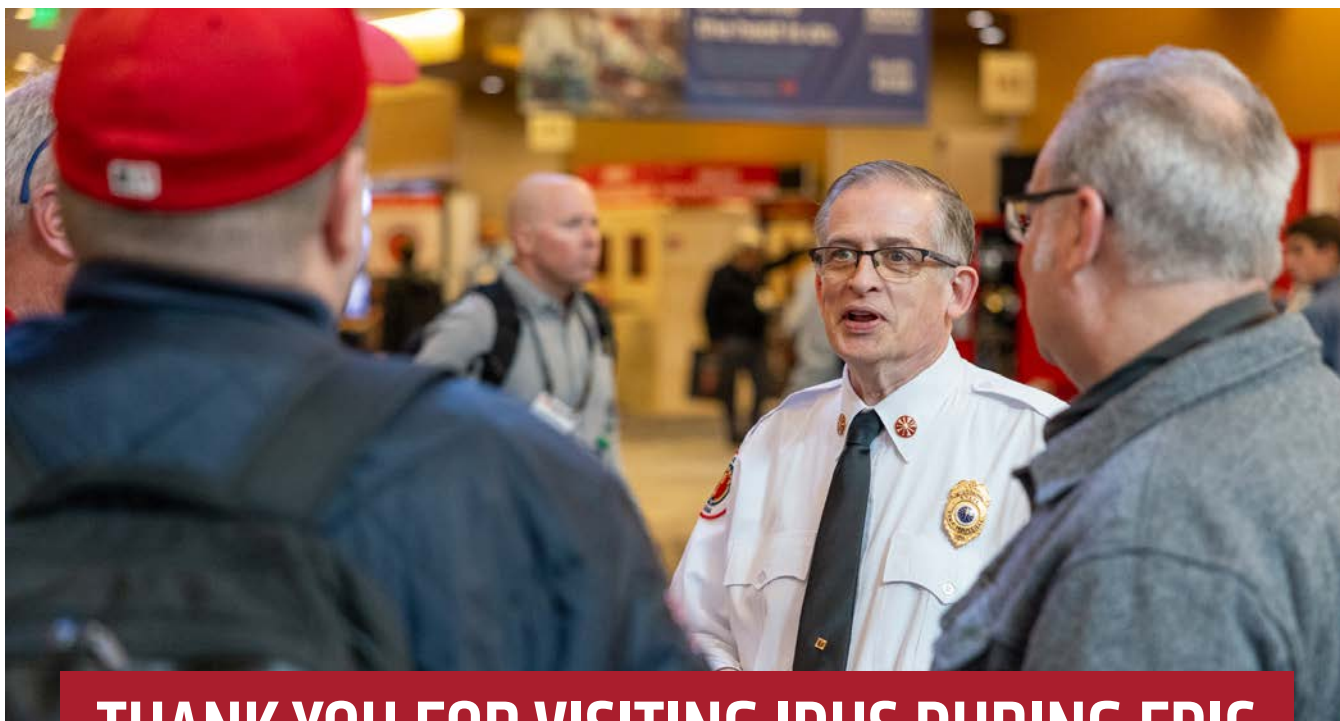
Cobalt Magnet Full-Scale Exercise

Indiana and Michigan

Indiana also sent personnel to Michigan’s SEOC to act as a liaison between the states. The liaison position was a new concept, but a successful one. Both states now plan to have an Indiana representative in the Michigan SEOC for nuclear power plant incidents.

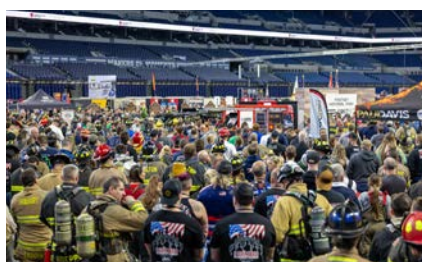
“We’ve cleared up the lines of communication, and going forward it should be great working with them,” IDHS Radiation Program Director Courtney Eckstein said. “You get so much work done when sitting together in the same room with all the agencies you’ll need. We now know better how to request anything, and it is easier than I had thought. A lot of connections were made.”





THANK YOU FOR VISITING IDHS DURING FDIC

Thank you to everyone who attended and stopped by the IDHS booth at FDIC International in Indianapolis. IDHS representatives enjoyed the many discussions and feedback from each person that grabbed a giveaway item. IDHS will see you again next year!



FDIC
INTERNATIONAL

PUBLIC SAFETY JOB POSTINGS DASHBOARD

Is your agency hiring, or are you looking for a new job opportunity?

Take advantage of the free public safety jobs dashboard offered by IDHS. It promotes available jobs around Indiana in emergency management, 911, fire and EMS. The easy-to-use map had more than 100 jobs and was viewed more than 40,000 times last year alone!

Post a new job opening for free or explore the job openings today.

VIEW THE DASHBOARD



Job Title: Paramedic/EMT Adjunct Lab Instructor

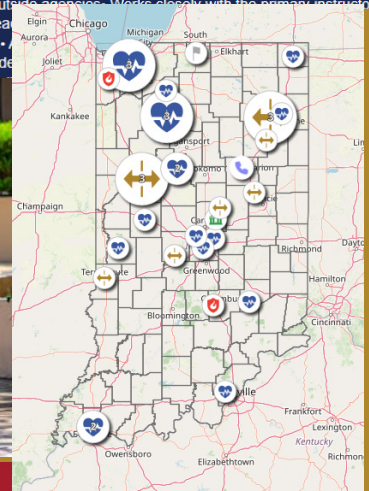
Job Type: EMS
Deadline: 6/9/2025

Company/Department:
School of EMS
Multiple locations
, Indiana
Allen County

Example job posting

Job Description/Details:

The Adjunct Lab Instructor is responsible for providing high-quality skills instruction and scenario facilitation during live sessions. MAJOR DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES: • Provides live skills and scenario instruction during lab classes. • Supports the mission vision and values of the school to outside agencies. • Works closely with the primary instructor and SOE lead. • Supports the mission vision and values of the school to outside agencies. • Works closely with the primary instructor and SOE lead. • Supports the mission vision and values of the school to outside agencies.



LISTEN TO THE IDHS PODCAST



Indiana's new Secretary of Public Safety, Jennifer-Ruth Green, brings a wealth of experience to her role overseeing IDHS and other key public safety agencies. The latest episode of the *Hoosier Homeland* podcast dives into her leadership philosophy, the importance of emotional intelligence and her plans to support first responders, enhance school safety and strengthen Indiana's cybersecurity efforts.

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





ATTENTION WEBEOC USERS:

MAJOR UPGRADE COMING SOON

Emergency managers know to utilize WebEOC for daily updates and sharing important information during incidents in Indiana. An upgrade is coming soon that will make all those processes easier.

WebEOC Nexus is a cloud-based platform that fosters a unified operating view during critical incidents. It also streamlines data and process workflows, expediting or automating routine tasks. This new cloud-based platform offers enhanced flexibility, empowering you to manage your operations and stay connected with WebEOC on your terms.

WHAT YOU NEED TO DO

As part of this transition, all WebEOC users will receive an email from Juvare introducing them to Juvare Login Services. WebEOC Nexus uses this service to provide a secure sign-in for accessing WebEOC Nexus and other Juvare products. During this transition, IDHS will provide more details about Juvare Login Services and its role in accessing WebEOC Nexus. To maintain access to WebEOC, users must watch for and act upon any emails and information sent out.

IDHS will send out additional information once WebEOC Nexus is ready for use. Until then, users should continue to use the current WebEOC for information-sharing activities.

TRAINING

Juvare provides a complementary course to familiarize users with the new user interface. This training, which includes an overview, key features and a demonstration of the four main features of WebEOC Nexus, is designed to equip you with the necessary skills. Additionally, the WebEOC team will offer further training to guide you through WebEOC Nexus.

To take this course, you must [register with the Juvare Training Center](#).

The IDHS WebEOC team is ready to support users throughout this transition. If you have any questions or need further assistance, please do not hesitate to email the WebEOC team at webec@dhs.in.gov.

SIGN UP TO



Fires, storms, earthquakes. Power outages, hazardous chemical leaks, car accidents.

Disasters happen and so do all sorts of everyday emergencies — whether you are ready for them or not!

Knowing what to do or having the right supplies at your fingertips can make all the

difference when your sense of normalcy is broken. IDHS aims to help Hoosiers like you **Get Prepared** by sharing tips to stay safe in all kinds of circumstances.

Subscribe now to the Get Prepared Indiana email list so you can receive quarterly reminders on what to get prepared for throughout the year.

SUBSCRIBE TO THE NEWSLETTER NOW!





MILESTONES FOR RENOVATION OF INDIANA'S TOP POLICE TRAINING FACILITY

Indiana’s only residential law enforcement training academy debuts new dorm rooms in the coming weeks as part of continued upgrades to better prepare police officers for real-life scenarios in an ever-changing environment.

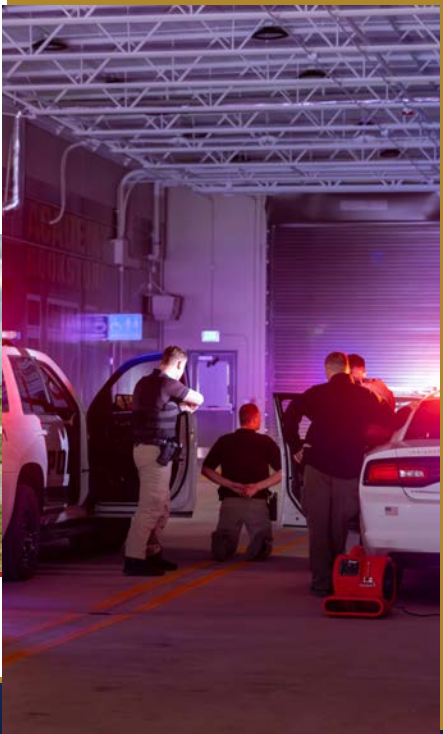
Completion of the project at the Indiana Law Enforcement Academy (ILEA) is about a year away; however, the new dorms open in the coming weeks, increasing the capacity from 300 students to 404 students. The \$96 million upgrade (\$70 million in state funds) includes four new training classrooms, a second Emergency Vehicle Operations training course and a new scenario village that simulates a strip mall with its own restaurant, liquor store, vape shop and more.

“These improvements will allow us to get students trained out of a classroom, in a more scenario-based environment that is more in line with learning models for today’s law enforcement officers,” said Tim Horty, executive director of ILEA.

A recent visit to the training grounds displayed a hotbed of activity occurring simultaneously across the more than 300 acres, including vehicle pursuit training

and de-escalation techniques for traffic stops and crimes in progress.

The scenario village also features a simulated county jail and sallyport to train officers how to properly transport and exchange arrested subjects once in custody. Sadly, Indiana has seen several





officer injuries and even deaths in recent years from transporting detainees from one location to another.

“Real-life training is essential to ensuring the safety of our law enforcement officers. They have to make split-second decisions, often in high-stakes situations. To protect both themselves and the citizens they serve, it is crucial that we provide them with top-tier training,” said Jennifer-Ruth Green, secretary of the Indiana Office of Public Safety.

“I am proud of Indiana’s investment in the training of students at ILEA, and we remain committed to ensuring every Hoosier feels safe and secure in their community,” Green added.

Once the new dorms are ready, the old dorm buildings will be removed. Additionally, a fallen police officer memorial will be constructed in the next year to

honor those Hoosier officers who paid the ultimate price.

The original building was built in 1975 for \$4 million. The academy graduates more than 600 Tier 1 and Tier 2 officers each year across three classes. Four additional regional academies utilize ILEA for specialized training not available any other place in the state. Trainees from surrounding states also utilize the training grounds.

Completion of the project is set for Spring 2026.

THE IDHS NEWSROOM

Did you know the *Hoosier Responder* is just one of many ways to stay informed about IDHS and important news relevant for first responders?

IDHS strives to keep the public and professionals like you informed about the vital work being done around Indiana to keep it safe and secure.

Check out the [IDHS Newsroom](#) to get connected to the *IDHS Blog*, email lists, social media accounts and more!





SPRING STORMS TAKE A HEAVY TOLL ON INDIANA



Indiana continues to recover from a series of severe weather events that rolled through the state in late March and early April.

The National Weather Service (NWS) confirmed at least 29 tornadoes swept through Indiana in a matter of a week. Those storms were followed by several more days of rain, causing severe and widespread flooding in central and southern Indiana. Several locations along rivers, including the East Fork White River Basin and the White River Basin, recorded flood levels within their top five highest ever, according to the NWS.

“The long-term impact for our communities is the widespread clean up and disposal of the debris. Several farmers lost substantial equipment and structures close to this year’s start of the season. The City of Anderson experienced significant damage to their electrical grid, which will be an overwhelming cost that they were not anticipating,” said Madison County EMA Director R. Lynn Edens. “The fear is we are still early in the 2025 storm season and many residents, as well as municipalities and agencies, worry what’s to come.”



The same concern is on the minds of counties in IDHS districts 8, 9 and 10. They were some of the districts hit the worst by flooding, and that cleanup and repair process will take months. On top of that, counties are also working to mitigate the effects of future weather events.

“We have observed a marked increase in the frequency of disasters within our jurisdiction. For instance, between 1950 and 2023, our county experienced 21 tornadoes. However, from 2024 to the present, we have recorded 10 tornadoes. Additionally, we have encountered two significant flooding events, a mine collapse that left many homes destroyed or damaged and an ice storm,” said Warrick County EMA Director Matthew Goebel. “This experience has been illuminating, necessitating swift adaptation to maintain alignment with directives from both state and local governments. I am proud of the efforts of my team, as we have effectively supported our residents during these trying times through demonstrations of compassion, respect and trust in local governance, which are crucial elements for success within the EMA.”

The State Emergency Operations Center elevated its activation level for 12 days to assist in the response. IDHS, the Indiana Department of Transportation, Indiana Department of Correction and Indiana National Guard all worked together in *Operation Sandcastle* to bag thousands of sandbags for counties to help hold off the worst of the floodwaters.

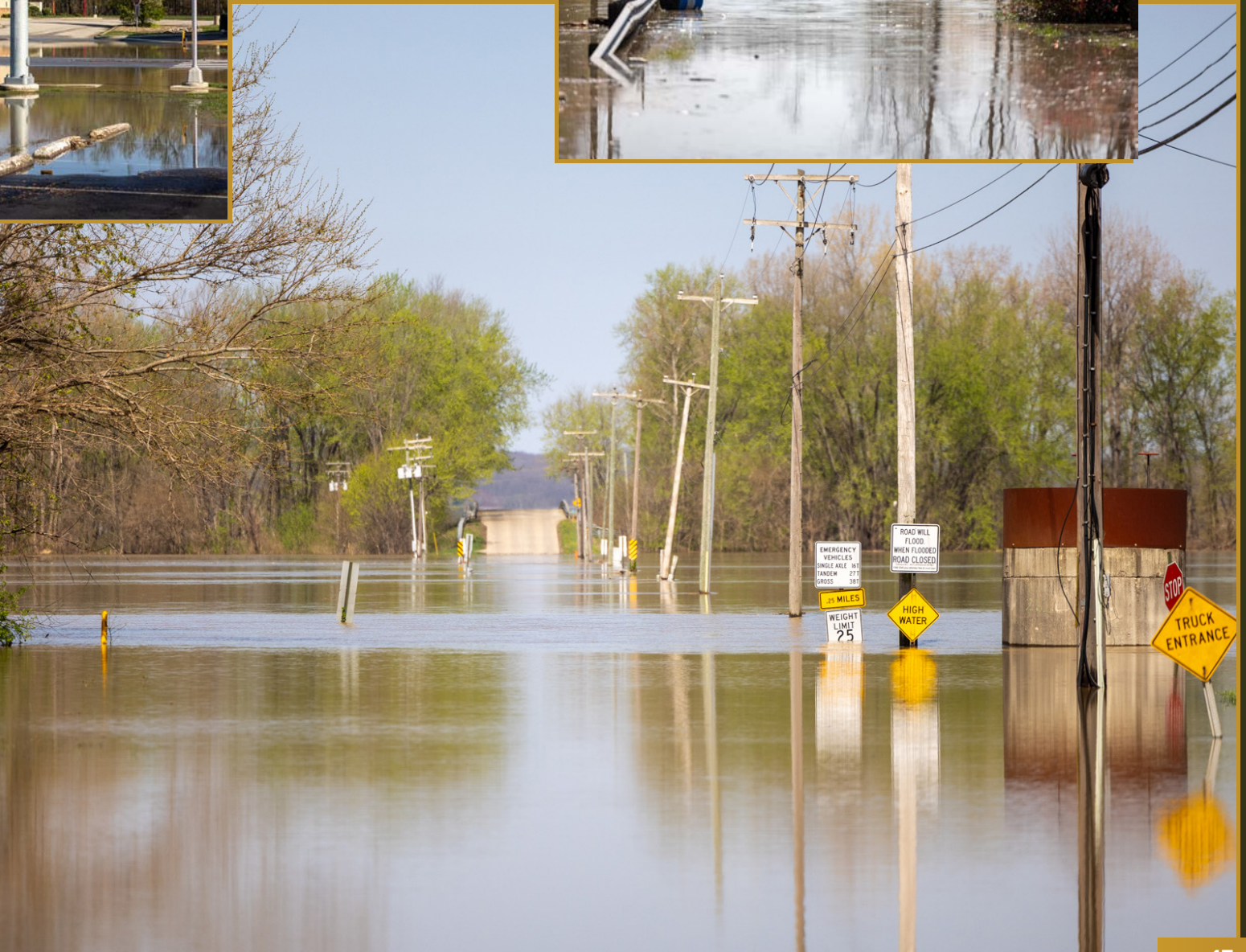


IDHS has teams spread out across the state with local emergency managers assessing damage and evaluating the eligibility of these communities for state and federal resources. Information provided to Governor Mike Braun led to a state disaster declaration. As of April 22, 35 counties were included in the declaration, but the state declaration can be amended as more information is received.

“The impact of the storms combined with days of flooding reminded me of the 2008 floods, one of the worst flooding events in Indiana history,” said IDHS Emergency Management and Preparedness Director Mary Moran. “While the final impact of these storms is still being tallied, we know that our emergency management partners have been working tirelessly to ensure their communities recover. IDHS is working with you to provide support and resources to make sure Hoosiers know they can count on the state. You are not alone.”

As part of the normal disaster response process, damage assessments are evaluated at the state level to determine eligibility for funding from the [State Disaster Relief Fund](#). Additionally, IDHS can work after a state declaration to connect Hoosiers with additional agencies to meet unmet needs. If it is determined the state cannot meet the needs of the incident, the governor may request a presidential declaration to open federal resources to aid in the recovery. As of publication date, that has not occurred in Indiana.





BY THE NUMBERS

6-10 inches of rain that fell April 2-6 across the southern half of the state

12 days the State Emergency Operations Center was activated

29 tornadoes confirmed by the National Weather Service between March 30-April 2

81 counties that reported damage March 30-April 6 from either flooding or severe weather

115 mph wind gusts recorded in Washington and Scott counties during the April 2 storms

11.82 inches of rain that was recorded in Galena (Floyd County)

194,784 the number of power outages reported from the April 2 storms



FLOOD INSURANCE

Did you know 99% of counties in the U.S. have experienced a flood? This means flood insurance is essential in your tool belt, but most standard homeowners insurance policies do not cover flood damage.

Learn more about what you can do to buy or renew flood insurance and even how to reduce its cost by visiting [in.gov/floodinsurance](https://www.in.gov/floodinsurance).

TORNADOES
FLOODING
EARTHQUAKES
HOUSE FIRES
DISASTERS
FOLLOW
NO SCHEDULE





BEFORE THE SHAKING STARTS:

AGENCIES PREPARING FOR MAJOR WABASH EARTHQUAKE EXERCISE

Think worst-case scenario: A 7.5 magnitude earthquake with its epicenter in the Wabash Valley causes catastrophic harm across much of the state, injuring tens of thousands of Hoosiers, damaging hundreds of thousands of homes and causing half of Indiana's critical infrastructure facilities to become nonfunctional.

"All community lifelines will be affected," said IDHS State Exercise Officer Ashley Baldwin. "Don't just think about damaged buildings, but aftershocks and liquefaction. There will be problems like hospital capacity, deaths, destroyed farms and displaced animals, hazmat releases, search and rescue operations, infectious and communicable diseases."

More than 100 people across dozens of public safety and partner agencies will force themselves to consider and practice such scenarios as part of the Wabash Valley full-scale exercise in June, capping the earthquake-focused series. Over the two-day period, the [State Emergency Operations Center \(SEOC\)](#) will be activated to a Level I, with the state policy group and a Joint Information Center (JIC) working on the disaster too. Indiana [IMAT](#), [I-BEAM](#), damage assessment personnel and other major players will put their responses and recovery plans to the test.

"It is going to be all-hands-on-deck," said Baldwin, noting that she is looking for county EMAs to join the exercise and submit resource requests to the SEOC. "Competing resource requests at the local, state and federal levels will be an issue we will run into."

In the state's earthquake plan updated in 2023, northeastern Indiana is expected to have the least amount of damage compared to the rest of the state, so counties there may have resources for mutual aid. But many counties there are rural and will need to handle incidents of their own.

Interested EMAs should contact exercise@dhs.in.gov for more information on how to be involved. Some gaps identified from a recent earthquake tabletop exercise in December may be tested, including WebEOC possibly being inaccessible and the coordination of teams across multiple locations around the state.

The National Weather Service (NWS) will play a vital role in the exercise. It will support first responders who are in the field doing rescue services by letting them know the expected weather conditions, which could complicate issues due to widespread power outages (no heat or air conditioning) and impairment of

communications networks (people may not be able to get weather alerts for severe storms).

As part of the exercise, the NWS will have a representative in the SEOC coordinating all six of the forecast offices that serve the state, a somewhat new practice.

“A lot of times, all the offices focus on our local areas, but for larger events — like the January winter storm — the state needs graphics and support, and it’s not practical to send representatives from all six,” said NWS Meteorologist Andrew White, explaining that the NWS offices will work together to form one state forecast, which they also did for the total solar eclipse in 2024. “It’s another opportunity for us to look and see what didn’t work those other times and see if we can improve upon them. We’re trying to create graphics that are state level and readily available beforehand, to save time, for events like this where minutes matter.”



The full-scale exercise will happen at the state fairgrounds, the SEOC in Indianapolis and remote (virtual) locations around the state. In Bloomington, there will be a special undertaking as the Indiana Geological and Water Survey (IGWS) puts its earthquake response plans to the test in an exercise for the first time and assembles a clearinghouse.

“The full-scale exercise is modeled after a New Madrid magnitude 7.5 earthquake, which triggers our clearinghouse. We will set it up with outside researchers, send a representative to the SEOC and practice our field reconnaissance team gathering data from the event and sending that data over WebEOC so we have all those kinks worked out,” said IGWS Education and Outreach Coordinator Polly Sturgeon.

In a clearinghouse situation, IGWS staff mobilize along with GIS analysts, public information officers, field researchers and others from Indiana University. Staff would go to the earthquake epicenter and rivers to model the earthquake, gathering sensitive data that could be lost during cleanup efforts.

“We would investigate, research and report on the geological natural hazards and put out information on our findings,” Sturgeon said. “This type of event does not happen to people every day. It is our job to communicate the hazards so the state is informed.”

Sturgeon said the focus on the Wabash Valley is relevant. Six earthquakes with epicenters in Indiana or Illinois have occurred since 2021. Over the past 25 years, no earthquake in the more famous New Madrid Seismic Zone has exceeded a magnitude of 4.2, while the Wabash Valley fault has produced three earthquakes of magnitude 4.6 to 5.2.

A [new map](#) by the IGWS illustrates more than 70 significant earthquakes that have occurred in the past 200 years in Indiana.

“Moderate but infrequent earthquakes occur, but this allows people to become complacent,” Sturgeon said. “That’s why it’s up to us and IDHS to raise awareness.”

Sturgeon and White noted key strengths of this exercise series have been bringing in a comprehensive range of partners and building relationships.

“Everyone knows everyone pretty well and has those personal connections. Those are so important ahead of time and help us all know what services can be provided,” White said.

MESSAGE FROM THE STATE EMS DIRECTOR

In March of this year, I reached a proud milestone in my career with IDHS: five years as State EMS Director. As I look back at the progress and impact emergency medical services made in the past five years, I am proud of what EMS has proven it can do.

Transition always brings with it stresses but the promise of further growth.

In early 2020, I was notified I would be replacing then State EMS Director Mike Garvey, who was retiring. I assumed those responsibilities on March 1, 2020.



With solid foundations in EMS, including as a clinician with three decades of experience, a leader of a successful ambulance service for a decade and state engagement in EMS education as the EMS Education Workgroup chairperson for many years, I was ready for the challenges.

An unknown virus called SARS coronavirus identified as COVID-19 dominated my first year or so in my new role. But EMS became a shining beacon in a troubling period with our strong work ethic, and our data collection helped inform pandemic response. Innovative initiatives such as the Homebound Hoosiers vaccination project saw EMS personnel delivering health care in patient's homes, a truly noteworthy project that was the first stateside mobile integrated health (MIH) initiative. We did not know that at the time, however.

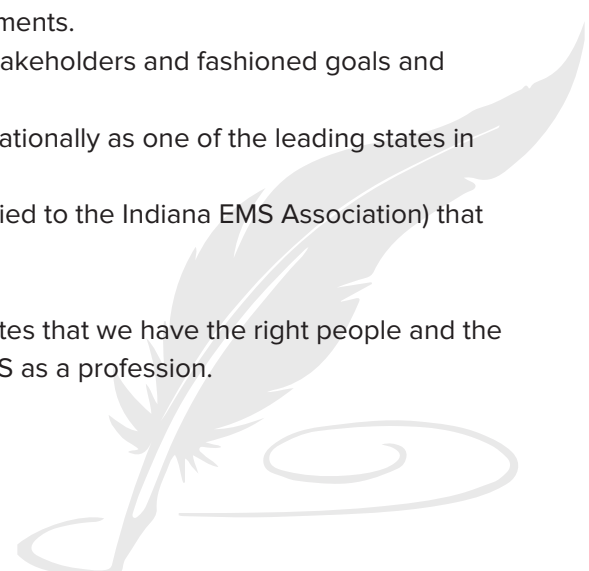
The pandemic also allowed state-level EMS to become more relevant and not just a necessary certification conduit. Our office increased communications and restored a positive working relationship with the Indiana Department of Health. Our guidance was strong and well received in the EMS community.

Major projects that have occurred during my five years as state EMS director include:

- Enacted and engaged partners in the National EMS Compact.
- Facilitated workforce initiatives that included a 2023 EMS Workforce Assessment.
- Allocated the first-ever funding at a broad scale for EMS readiness within the state budget, with roughly \$6.4 million per year in 2024 and 2025. These initiatives trained EMS clinicians and provided much-needed EMS equipment to training institutions along with other systemic improvements.
- Coordinated the Indiana EMS 2025 project, which took a group of stakeholders and fashioned goals and recommendations to improve EMS.
- Grew a statewide MIH system such that Indiana is now recognized nationally as one of the leading states in MIH development.
- Supported and informed several legislative initiatives (most directly tied to the Indiana EMS Association) that advanced payment and billing practices for EMS providers.

EMS continues to face challenges and adversity, but the past demonstrates that we have the right people and the right tools to achieve even more. We can and must achieve more for EMS as a profession.


Kraig Kinney
Indiana State EMS Director



EMS UPDATES



EMS NEWSLETTER OFFERS TIMELY UPDATES AND RESOURCES FOR PROVIDERS

The EMS Division has launched a new email newsletter to help emergency medical services professionals stay informed on the latest updates, initiatives and resources impacting prehospital care across the state. The newsletter is designed to be a consistent and reliable forum for communicating with EMS personnel, providing valuable insights into upcoming programs, system changes and legislative developments.

With major projects such as the EMS Readiness funding, education forums for primary instructors and ongoing improvements to the Acadis certification system on the horizon, 2025 is expected to be a landmark year for EMS in Indiana. The newsletter will deliver timely information directly to inboxes, helping personnel stay engaged and prepared.

SIGN UP FOR THE EMS NEWSLETTER!

NEW EMS MOBILE SIM LAB NOW AVAILABLE FOR REQUEST

The EMS Division has a brand-new Mobile Sim Lab available for request by EMS providers. It is a major improvement from the previous version and the EMS Division is eager to get it on the road to showcase its improved capabilities.

Here is how to request the Mobile Sim Lab.

- Within the Acadis Portal under “Academy Resources,” select “Browse or Request Rentable Resources,” and then scroll to and select the Mobile Sim Lab. Then select dates on the calendar to view hours of availability.
- Send an email to esimlab@dhs.in.gov.

The Sim Lab is available during standard business hours, and it may also be available weeknights or weekends, subject to request approval.

2024 ANNUAL EMS REPORT NOW AVAILABLE

The IDHS EMS Division released its [annual report for 2024](#), which highlights accomplishments and changes within the division and EMS statewide.

The report also provides valuable statistics (number of EMTs and other levels by certification, number of ambulances, run volume, etc.) that can be used to leverage EMS initiatives in local communities and in the state legislature.





WHEN THE SMOKE CLEARS

Local Initiatives to Take Care of Firefighter Brothers and Sisters

IN 2024, State Fire Marshal Steve Jones and IDHS launched the “When the Smoke Clears” series to help break the stigma surrounding asking for help to solve a mental health crisis. These discussions are not just happening at a high level. Local fire departments and unions have programs to check in on firefighters before a crisis occurs and step in to provide options when firefighters feel like they have nowhere to go.

Lieutenant Brad Morris is a peer support specialist at the Indianapolis Fire Department (IFD). He has seen the toll a first responder career can take on someone from his experience as a police officer and in his 20 years as a firefighter.

“Something at some point is going to bother everybody on this job, and some more than others,” Morris said.

He leads a team of three that supports the entire IFD.

“Our system is set up so that our firefighters have an in-person resource that we can connect that firefighter to,” Morris explained. “Whether it be for substance abuse, a difficult run that they might have had or possible family issues at home.”

Morris and his team stay completely confidential with any information or story shared. They want firefighters to know they are here to help and will be nonjudgmental about what is happening.

“We want to make them feel comfortable in reaching out. We can do that in a private way and turn them on to resources that they may not think about on their own,” said Morris. “We aren’t clinicians. We’re not counselors. We are trained peer support specialists and from our standpoint, we listen a lot.”

Morris said his team is a resource and a launching point for firefighters to come to them and explain what is going on. The team will lay out verified options for help and explain the process as firefighters take this new step.



“That’s it. Ease their mind about seeing someone and then connecting them to the appropriate resource,” Morris said.

Morris explained that the peer support team has built up the trust of IFD leaders and other firefighters. Now these leaders give the support team a heads-up when they see someone struggling.

Morris explained how he once got a call from a battalion chief about someone on his team who just had a difficult run. The firefighter was on his second shift back after becoming a new dad. The run involved a baby suffering from cardiac arrest, which shook up the firefighter. Morris reached out to the firefighter, talked about what happened and connected him with a free counseling program.

Morris has many stories like that one. Not every call is a crisis, but it is something to address before things get worse. Staying mentally healthy is a crucial part of the job to continue to serve communities effectively.

“By keeping our people mentally focused when they need to be, we have a better quality of firefighter, we have a better quality of EMT, better quality of paramedic,” said Morris.

The idea is echoed by Tim Gallagher, a peer support coordinator for Local Union 416 and the peer support network for the Professional Firefighters Union of Indiana.

“The better health, the better mental health that we have for our providers, the better service we’re going to have. They’re going to be focused on work. They’re going to be more positive at work,” said Gallagher. “That’s the kind of folks we want responding on those runs to make those critical decisions. That’s the best person to make those immediate and critical decisions.”

Gallagher’s role focuses on members of his union first, but he has also assisted firefighters outside his union’s scope. He wants to make sure firefighters,



EMS and dispatch professionals can get access to help and resources when needed.

After someone reaches out, Gallagher starts with a phone call or a meeting over coffee to get to know them to find out the extent of the stress and figure out what kind of assistance is appropriate.

“We have seen people who have been in places where they’ve been unable to work, who are fully able to come back to work,” said Gallagher. He added that he has also seen people who just needed to vent and talk. His goal is to get people to be able to function at home and work for the benefit of their families, coworkers and communities.

“That’s our job. Whether it be just the short-term help of making them feel better or getting them in a better place in the long term,” explained Gallagher.

Normalizing the conversation around mental and behavioral health has had a major effect on the number of people reaching out for help according to retired IFD captain, subject matter expert and peer support specialist Brandon Dreiman.

“This discussion about mental health is just kind of starting to really take,” said Dreiman. “I’m not going to say that it hasn’t been talked about in the past, but it really feels like all of sudden that people are listening.”

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Brandon Dreiman, Retired IFD Captain and Peer Support Specialist



Dreiman remembered that his parents’ generation did not talk about mental health. His generation started talking more openly about mental health, but it always included a sense of humor.

“Now what I see with millennials and particularly Gen Z is, it’s not just something they talk about. It’s something they expect as part of their employment packet that their mental health is going to be taken care of if they need it. Which is a good thing,” said Dreiman.

Morris and Gallagher both said their motivation to focus on this line of work started with their own past. Morris described how he was injured when a ceiling collapsed on him during a call. He was out of work for months. While he was getting physical care to recover, he realized he needed more mental health support because not being able to go back to work was extremely taxing. Gallagher also was injured and wanted to use his experience and treatment to help others who might be in a similar scenario.

Dreiman’s motivation was not the result of a physical injury. He developed a drinking problem that was escalating out of his control.

“I told myself that as long as I don’t drink on duty, I’m not an alcoholic,” explained Dreiman.

Then he was selected for a random drug screening in 2012, and his breathalyzer test was positive for alcohol.

“I didn’t expect it. My tolerance levels were so high that I wasn’t intoxicated, but I certainly had alcohol in my system,” said Dreiman.

His employer at the time, IFD, said he had two choices, be suspended long-term without pay or report to the employee assistance program. He chose the program and got sober.

“About a year after I got sober is when I decided, as part of my work through Alcoholics Anonymous, I

SELF-COPING MECHANISMS

Dr. Robert Smith is a former firefighter, psychotherapist and consultant. His experience provides a unique insight into the struggles that firefighters, EMS personnel and dispatchers go through. First responders looking to build resilience and self-coping mechanisms can visit his webpage to learn more about [building resilience when experiencing stress](#).

If a firefighter is experiencing severe distress beyond the help of self-coping mechanisms, reaching out for professional help is the best option.

wanted to give back to the community and I especially wanted to give back to my first responder community,” said Dreiman.

It is a story he wants fire departments and EMS providers to hear.

“I understand the need to discipline people. I deserved to be disciplined,” Dreiman admitted. “But at the end of the day, adding some humanity and saying you’re sick, if you want to get better, we’re going to be there with you.”

Dreiman is now a peer support trainer, and his classes are available in the Acadis Portal. Firefighters, department leaders and others can take his classes to learn more about what peer support is and how even the smallest departments can set up a support program in their area.

Gallagher’s union also has the ability to help Hoosier firefighters and EMS personnel. Peer support resources can be found on <https://i416.com/peer-support/>.

MENTAL HEALTH TRAINING CERTIFICATION

Indiana fire departments must **certify** annually that all full-time firefighters in their employment participated in mental health training (**Indiana Code 36-8-10.5-13**). The certification process is a yearly requirement and may only be submitted by the fire chief or the chief’s designee. This requirement does not apply to volunteer firefighters.



IDHS VIDEO SERIES

“When the Smoke Clears” started as a four-part video series produced by IDHS, discussing the mental health challenges faced by first responders. The complete series is available on [Facebook](#), [YouTube](#) and the [IDHS Behavioral Health webpage](#).





STORM SPOTTERS BRING EYES TO THE SKY

When severe storms strike Indiana, the National Weather Service (NWS), local and state emergency managers and everyday Hoosiers depend on more than radar and models to issue warnings. They rely on a dedicated network of storm spotters who provide real-time, ground-level observations known as SKYWARN. Behind the radios and weather reports are volunteers like Patrick McDonnell and Mark Shaffer, who turn their passion for weather into public service.

McDonnell, who serves as the Central Indiana Skywarn Net controller and Indiana Digital Ham Radio System administrator, first found himself drawn to storms as a child.

“I’ve been a weather nerd since I was a baby,” McDonnell said. “I always enjoyed watching the thunderstorms roll in across Lake Michigan as a kid in Northwest Indiana.”

Years later, amateur radio helped McDonnell discover a broader purpose for his interest.

“I was storm spotting before I even knew the concept existed. It took me getting involved with amateur radio before I realized more people than just myself could benefit from me watching the weather,” he said.

SKYWARN, a program developed by the NWS, organizes and trains spotters and amateur radio operators to report hazardous weather as it unfolds. These reports provide what meteorologists call “ground truth.” Ground truth is vital data that can confirm what radar may or may not detect, particularly in rural or radar-blind zones.



“Storm spotters fill a crucial gap in the NWS information network,” McDonnell explained. “Sometimes the only way to know there are damaging winds or a tornado forming is for a weather spotter to call in a report, and these reports can save lives.”

Training for storm spotting varies by forecast office, but most NWS offices offer free classes each spring. These sessions teach the basics of storm development, what to report and how to stay safe while spotting. Online resources are also available, including comprehensive video tutorials and advanced forecasting modules.

“You can never learn too much about the weather,” McDonnell said. “Understanding how storms form, move and behave makes your reports more accurate and your spotting days more rewarding.”

Mark Shaffer, Central Indiana Skywarn’s radio director, has been involved in amateur radio for more than 50 years. For

him, storm spotting is a natural extension of that experience.

“I have always had a curiosity for the way weather affects us and the science behind it,” Shaffer said. “The ability to help people stay safe and provide information that makes a difference is what keeps me doing this.”

During severe weather, Skywarn nets operate over amateur radio repeaters, connecting spotters with net control stations like McDonnell. These nets vary in formality depending on the storm’s severity. “Our net will typically act as a liaison between local county Skywarn nets and the NWS office in Indianapolis,” McDonnell explained.

As the net controller, McDonnell monitors developing storms, gathers reports and filters them for relevance before relaying them via the NWSChat system or phone. “We often get ‘it’s raining here’ or ‘it’s a little windy’ reports,” he said. “I make sure the information meets the NWS criteria before passing it along.”

Managing a high-volume net during a large outbreak can be challenging. “The bigger the weather event, the more reports we have to handle,” McDonnell added. “I keep a running spreadsheet of all operators checked into the net, their locations and a list of reports showing which have been relayed



along to NWS. It helps prevent confusion and missed reports.”

For Shaffer, the strength of the amateur radio network lies in its independence. “Our system works when cell towers do not,” he said. “We can operate without the need for internet or cell service, which is critical when power is out or when spotters are in rural areas.”

McDonnell agreed, noting the public can also benefit from listening to these open channels. “Since all our transmissions are in the clear, anyone can listen in and stay informed on current watches and warnings,” he said.

Despite the inherent danger in tracking storms, both men emphasized safety. McDonnell recalled the August 2020 derecho in Iowa, one of the most intense weather events he has experienced. The NWS defines a derecho as a long-lived and damaging thunderstorm. At the time, McDonnell was volunteering with emergency management in Cedar Rapids.

“I decided to head out to one of my favorite spotting locations west of town,” he described. “By the

time the storms arrived, they had formed into an intense derecho, and I was barely able to reposition my truck to avoid it rolling as I was buffeted by 100-plus mph winds. I was no longer storm-spotting, I was trying to make it home.”

In the aftermath, widespread power outages and damage underscored the storm’s severity. “Every power line was destroyed, most roads were impassable, and it would be weeks before things started getting restored,” he said.

McDonnell emphasized his scenario was unusual, but that he had a fortunate outcome. He and Shaffer encourage more Hoosiers to get involved in storm spotting safely.

“Even just a basic severe weather course is enough to get familiar with how storms behave and what you can do to protect yourself,” McDonnell said.

“Being a storm spotter helps you become more aware of your surroundings,” added Shaffer. “The information we provide has a direct impact on public safety. That is a responsibility I do not take lightly.”



LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

The 2025 Legislative Session ends April 29, 2025. IDHS is monitoring several bills that will affect IDHS stakeholders. The bills explained below are just a few of the bills that could affect fire, EMS, emergency management and their partners. The following bills are accurate as of April 21, but as the session continues, the bills could be either passed or shelved for another session.

HOUSE ENROLLED ACT 1051

Mobile Integrated Health Grants

Passed and signed into law. This bill adds counties, private EMS providers, and hospital-based EMS to the list of entities that can apply for a mobile integrated health grant.

HOUSE BILL 1113

Fire Protection Districts

Passed by both the House and Senate and awaiting Governor Braun's signature. This bill would add fire-based EMS and prevention of certain hazards to the list of purposes for which a county may establish a fire protection district.

HOUSE ENROLLED ACT 1118

Critical Incident Stress Management Debriefings

Passed and signed into law. This bill provides that a first responder recipient of critical incident stress management (CISM) services may not be compelled to testify or otherwise disclose a communication made to a CISM services provider or peer support team member relating to the recipient's CISM services in a civil, criminal or administrative proceeding.

HOUSE BILL 1637

School and Public Safety Matters

This bill covers several topics affecting IDHS stakeholders. The bill is being tweaked in a conference committee. This bill would:

- Establish the Office of School Safety within IDHS to centralize all school safety programs administered by state agencies.
- Remove the requirement that fire departments must obtain a permit from IDEM to conduct live fire training at fire training facilities.
- Make several other public safety related-changes.



MESSAGE FROM THE FIRE MARSHAL

My life has been a wild ride the last few months, one that I never expected to feel grateful to have traveled through and persevered.

As I reflect on my recent journey through kidney cancer surgery, I am overwhelmed with gratitude for the unwavering support from my family, the Indiana fire service and all the staff at the Indiana Department of Homeland Security. Your kindness and encouragement have been invaluable during my recovery, and your generosity humbles me. I am truly blessed by God and by all of you.

My experience has underscored the importance of regular check ups and cancer screenings for firefighters. Our profession exposes us to numerous carcinogens and toxins, significantly increasing our risk of developing various cancers, including kidney cancers. It is crucial that we prioritize our health through proactive measures such as annual physicals and screenings tailored to the risks we face every day. I know I am not alone. Many have fought and lost this battle to exposure cancer, but anything we can do to improve our odds is worth the effort. If not for you, do it for those who love you.

I underwent surgery to remove a kidney and tumor that was 13 cm large. That was the outcome of months of doctor's visits, discussions with loved ones and concern about what was next. The surgery was the easy part. The unknown takes a toll on your life, and the uncertainty and fear are legitimate.

Today, I am pleased to report that I am feeling great during my recovery, even better than expected. I encourage all firefighters to take advantage of available health resources, including [NFPA 1582](#) medical evaluations and specialized cancer screenings recommended by organizations such as the International Association of Firefighters (IAFF).

As your Indiana State Fire Marshal, I intend to be instrumental in promoting fire safety and health initiatives. Now that I have lived it, I have even more conviction. Firefighters are not alone in their battles, whether they are on the front lines or fighting against cancer. I am right there with you every step of the way.



Stephen Jones
Indiana State Fire Marshal



UPCOMING TRAININGS

MAY

MAY 6	Pipeline Security for Rural Communities	BOONVILLE
MAY 7-9	ICS 300: Intermediate ICS for Expanding Incidents	DYER
MAY 13-15	Individual Assistance (IA)/Public Assistance (PA) and Damage Assessment Training	MADISON
MAY 16	Basic Tracking/Trailing Techniques for K-9s	BRAZIL
MAY 17	Senior Officials Workshop for All Hazards Preparedness	CARMEL
MAY 20-21	Medical Management for CBRNE Events	CROWN POINT
MAY 22-23	ICS 400: Advanced ICS Command & General Staff	ELKHART
MAY 30	Port and Vessel Security for Public Safety and Maritime Personnel	JEFFERSONVILLE

JUNE

JUNE 11-12	Cybersecurity Vulnerability Assessment	PLAINFIELD
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BUILDING SAFETY MONTH

MAY

Safe buildings are essential for protecting Hoosiers from fires, structural failures and other hazards. This month promotes awareness of building codes and safety measures that secure homes and businesses.



MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS MONTH

MAY

Mental health is vital to public safety, especially for first responders who experience high levels of stress and trauma. This month encourages open conversations, reduces stigma and promotes mental health resources.

PASSWORD SAFETY DAY

MAY 1

Cyber threats, including threats against critical infrastructure and government operations, can compromise personal and public safety. This day reminds Hoosiers to strengthen their passwords and protect sensitive information from cyberattacks.

INTERNATIONAL FIREFIGHTERS DAY

MAY 4

Indiana's firefighters risk their lives to protect communities from fires and emergencies. This day honors their bravery, dedication and service in keeping Hoosiers safe.



UPCOMING EVENTS

ARSON AWARENESS WEEK

MAY 5-11

Arson is a leading cause of property damage and loss in Indiana, with devastating effects on communities and public safety. This week raises awareness about the consequences of arson and promotes fire prevention efforts statewide.



HOME FIRE SPRINKLER WEEK

MAY 5-11

Residential fire sprinklers significantly reduce fire deaths and property damage. This week, homeowners and policymakers are educated about the importance of installing fire sprinkler systems in new homes.



EMS WEEK **MAY 18-24**

Indiana's emergency medical services (EMS) professionals provide lifesaving care every day. This week, IDHS recognizes their dedication and highlight EMS' critical role in public health and emergency response.



BUSINESS CONTINUITY AWARENESS WEEK

MAY 19-23

Disasters and emergencies can disrupt businesses, affecting employees, customers and local economies in Indiana. This week emphasizes the importance of preparedness and planning to ensure businesses can recover quickly.

UPCOMING EVENTS

DAM SAFETY DAY MAY 31

Indiana has over 1,100 dams, many of which require regular maintenance to prevent failures that could lead to flooding. This day raises awareness about dam safety and the importance of inspections and preparedness.

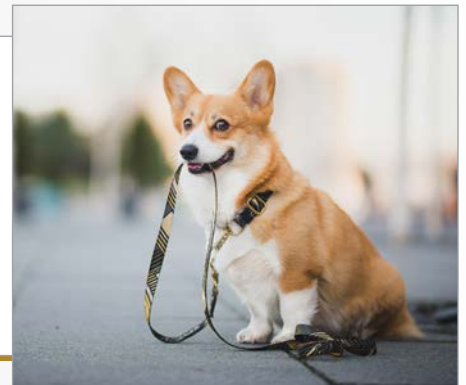


FIREWORKS SAFETY MONTH JUNE

Fireworks cause thousands of injuries and fires yearly in the United States. This campaign reminds residents to follow safety guidelines and local laws to prevent accidents and property damage.

NATIONAL PET PREPAREDNESS MONTH JUNE

Pets are part of the family and need to be included in emergency plans. This month encourages pet owners to prepare for disasters by having supplies and an evacuation plan for their animals.



CPR AND AED AWARENESS WEEK JUNE 1-7

Cardiac arrests can happen anywhere, and quick action saves lives. This week emphasizes the importance of CPR training and AED access, empowering Hoosiers to respond in emergencies.

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



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