

THE HOOSIER RESPONDER

FEBRUARY 2025



ICEBREAKER

FRIGID JANUARY EMPHASIZES IMPORTANCE OF WINTER WEATHER TRAINING

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE:

- IDHS Renews Focus on Disaster Recovery Processes with New Trainings and Toolkits
- Indiana State Board of Animal Health Launches Online Course on Animals in Disasters
- Lessons to Learn in Youth Fire Phenomenon
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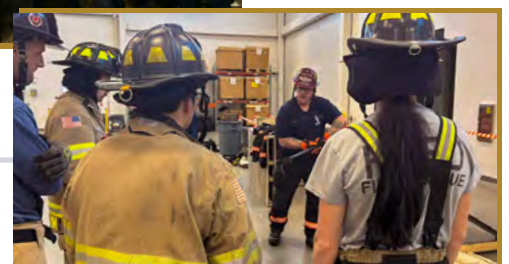
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MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

Teammates, thank you for your warm welcome to IDHS! I want to publicly thank the interim director, Jonathan Whitham, for both his service and for making my transition into this role seamless. As I have connected with our team, I have found a sense of camaraderie and a shared passion for the mission. Thank you!

To formally introduce myself, my name is Jennifer-Ruth Green: first name, Jennifer-Ruth, last name Green. I am humbled by the governor's request for me to serve on this team and as Indiana's inaugural Public Safety Secretary. I aim to bring my experience in leadership, cybersecurity, law enforcement and national defense to this role.



I graduated from the United States Air Force Academy with a bachelor's degree in Asian area studies and have earned a master's degree in ministry and a master's degree in aeronautics. I have completed Air War College, Air Command and Staff College. After graduating from the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center (FLETC) in Glynco, Georgia, I deployed to Baghdad, Iraq, in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom, where I served as a counterintelligence mission commander. After 12 years of active-duty service, I transitioned to the USAF Reserve Component, completing command as the chief information officer in Fort Wayne. Recently, I was the Air Operations Boss for the 60th Presidential Inauguration.

As a civilian, after completing a run for U.S. Congress, I founded a leadership training company, Battle-Proven Leadership, and wrote a book titled "People Don't Quit Their Jobs; They Quit Their Bosses."

I look forward to our team's work, under Gov. Braun's leadership, in which we will establish the Office of School Safety, enhance cybersecurity preparedness and support our first responders.

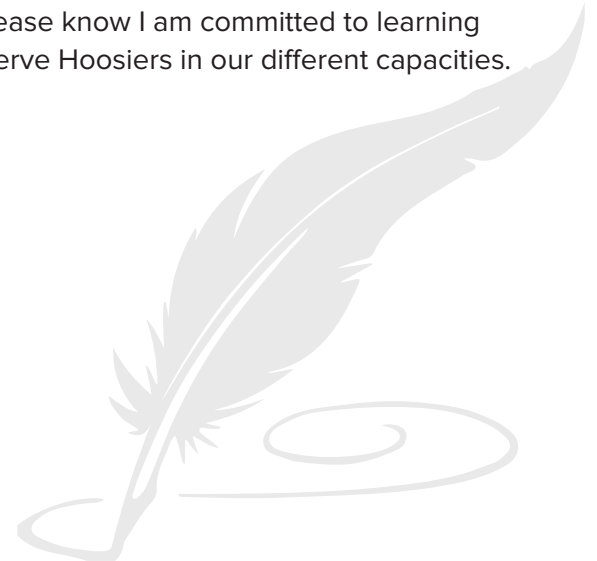
I have chosen **People First, Safety Always** as our secretariat motto. It underscores my commitment to ensure safe and secure communities for every Hoosier and prioritizes our efforts.

My role on the team is to serve you and our great state of Indiana. Please know I am committed to learning from you. I pray for wisdom, humility, integrity and protection as we serve Hoosiers in our different capacities.

At Your Service,

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jennifer-Ruth Green".

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





IDHS RENEWS FOCUS ON DISASTER RECOVERY PROCESSES

NEW TRAININGS AND TOOLKITS TO ENHANCE READINESS

Emergency managers are ready at any moment to jump into action when their communities need them. But the job does not end once the flood waters recede, the snow and ice melt and the debris is picked up.

The local EMA and IDHS shift gears fully into recovery mode, though in reality the work of recovering began at the same time as the response. From the very start, both state and local officials track all sorts of information — who and what has been impacted as well as what and where responders are working, how much the response efforts have cost and much more — in hopes that state or federal funds can be unlocked to provide financial relief to those communities affected by the disaster. The key to those

funds is a disaster declaration, which is not granted unless the county affected, in tandem with IDHS, can prove its case with compelling data gathered as the disaster unfolds.

RENEWED FOCUS

IDHS Recovery and Mitigation Director Larry Cassagne has helped communities recover for almost 20 years, and he knows how difficult it can be for EMAs to manage all the response and recovery efforts on their own. Oftentimes, IDHS district liaisons and staff members such as Cassagne go to emergency locations and offer their help to share the workload and give information to the State Emergency Operations Center. This enables the state to begin

assembling the all-important impact statement, the formal document used to request a state disaster declaration from the governor.

The last two years have been especially active on the disaster front statewide, and Cassagne and IDHS Emergency Management Director Mary Moran recognized the need to improve recovery capabilities — namely, conducting damage assessments and collecting and reporting information for Public Assistance (PA) and Individual Assistance (IA) programs.

“We realized we needed to expand our capabilities across the state by not only using IDHS staff but potentially using counties and EMAs as a force multiplier in the declaration process,” Cassagne said.

That led to IDHS Recovery staff now offering three-day courses across the state to teach the ins and outs of damage assessments, IA and PA. These classes are geared toward new and longtime emergency managers, their staffs and volunteers, but also other local personnel who may be involved in disaster response efforts, such as utility companies and streets or highway departments.

“These trainings will help you better understand the recovery processes and make it easier when a disaster does happen,” Cassagne said. “Our goal is to be able to assist locals to have a better understanding and help us help them.”

Upcoming classes will be hosted in IDHS Districts 9 and 10 in late February and early March. More may be planned in the fall as hosts in Districts 1, 3, 4 and 7 are found.

Marion County Emergency Management Deputy Director Ryan Hansome took the class to refresh his knowledge and connect with IDHS staff.

“The overview of the Individual and Public Assistance programs and the things we can do ahead of time to prepare in case we would ever need to utilize those programs is very valuable,” Hansome said. “Larry and his team do a great job of explaining everything and giving real-world examples of how the process actually goes.”

MORE PERSONNEL AND TOOLS

In addition to locals, IDHS has trained more of its own emergency management staff to be able to assist counties during disasters in emergency operations centers or by doing damage assessments in the field. They can help track activities from the beginning

of an incident to prevent the process from falling behind during response activities.

Doing response at the same time as recovery was what the IDHS Tornado Tango exercises were all about in Districts 8-10 across southern Indiana last summer. Locals practiced a late-winter tornado scenario, and the After-Action Report identified knowledge gaps regarding damage assessments and preparing the impact statement. The IDHS Exercise Section redirected some grant funding to create damage assessment toolkits that soon will be given to all 92 county EMAs and the Pokagon Tribe of the Potawatomi in northern Indiana.

Designed as go-kits for damage assessments that can be tossed in a vehicle and used right away, the kits are self-contained totes that have materials for conducting damage assessments, including newly revised flipbooks for quick reference.

“These kits may be a small piece of the puzzle to respond to disasters, but with the guidance and equipment included, there will be less on EMAs’ shoulders to have to figure out on their own,” said Southern District Exercise Program Manager Grace Ellenburg.

Exercise staff will coordinate with IDHS district liaisons to distribute the kits at upcoming district meetings.



INDIANA FIRE FATALITIES DECREASED IN 2024

The Indiana Department of Homeland Security tracked a slight decline in residential fire fatalities in 2024, with 77 deaths reported compared to 84 in 2023. Adults accounted for most of the victims, totaling 66 fatalities. At the same time, the number of juvenile deaths remained steady at 11 for the second consecutive year. January 2024 proved particularly tragic, with multiple fatal incidents, including one fire involving six juvenile deaths in a single home.

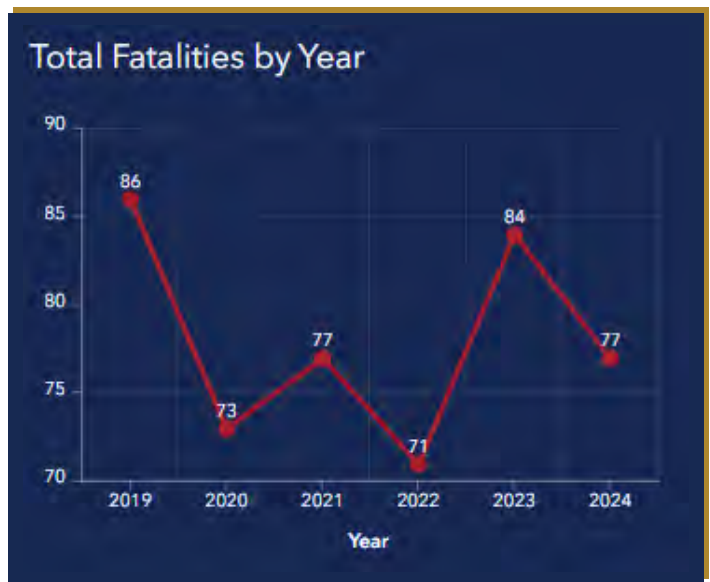
“The decrease in overall fire fatalities is a step in the right direction, but any loss of life is one too many,” said Indiana State Fire Marshal Steve Jones. “We know smoke alarms save lives, yet too often, we see homes without functioning detectors. Changing that is critical.”

Despite the challenges, the data demonstrates progress. Efforts to increase public education and outreach and to establish stronger partnerships with local fire departments are making a measurable difference according to Jones.

“The fact that we saw fewer deaths this year shows that prevention efforts are working,” Jones said. “But we cannot let up. Every Hoosier needs to take steps

to protect their families by installing smoke alarms, practicing escape plans and addressing fire hazards in their homes.”

The Office of the State Fire Marshal remains committed to reducing fire fatalities through continued community engagement and awareness campaigns, ensuring the trend toward fewer fire-related deaths becomes a long-term reality.



More than two thirds of fatal fires occur in homes with no working smoke alarms. Let's change that and **GET ALARMED.**



NEW PROCESS AIMS TO ACCELERATE THE REVIEW AND RELEASE OF BUILDING PLANS

The IDHS Plan Review Section enacted a new process to speed up the process of reviewing and releasing building plans.

As of Dec. 2, 2024, IDHS issues a design release for plans without the need for a plan review for specific types of projects. Qualifying plans include:

- Duplicate plans approved by IDHS or another governmental jurisdiction for another project
- Plans for structures that are not traditionally occupied or are classified as storage buildings
- Plans for open-air pavilions
- Plans for remodels, renovations or repairs of a structure that is not undergoing a change of use and is located in Indianapolis

These categories of qualifying projects were carefully selected by balancing the desire to reduce unnecessary construction delays without sacrificing public safety. Projects submitted before Dec. 2, 2024, are being held to the process in place before this new process began.

This new process allows the Plan Review Section to focus on projects that present a higher level of public safety concern. The

change will enable a more thorough review of those high-risk projects in less time while letting previously approved projects, which are not traditionally occupied or are reviewed by another jurisdiction, to continue forward without unnecessary delay.

Applications for a design release still must be filed for the projects that qualify for this new process. Applicants must attach a completed copy of [the request form](#) with the application for a construction design release. If IDHS finds that the project qualifies for a release without a review, IDHS will issue a design release with the below language:

“This design release has been issued without a plan review in accordance with Ind. Code § 22-15-3.2-7. In accordance with 675 Ind. Admin. Code 12-6-21, this release does not relieve a responsible party from requirement with any applicable rules of the Fire Prevention and Building Safety Commission even if items contrary to these rules are shown in the plans and specifications which have been released.”

Projects still must comply with all applicable rules of the Fire Prevention and Building Safety Commission, and all local permitting and state or local inspections will be performed to ensure compliance.



OUT IN THE FIELD: IDHS UAV SKILLS CAMP

The whirring and buzzing of drones replaced the clip-clopping of draft horses in the Champions Pavilion at the Indiana State Fairgrounds in mid-January for the fourth annual IDHS UAV Skills Camp.



Dozens of experienced and prospective drone operators and teams from public safety agencies across the state gathered for three days of drone flying, networking

and demonstrations. The IDHS Hazmat Section hosted the camp, which featured several U.S. drone vendors that offered campers the opportunity to test new drones or observe a demonstration. The Purdue UAS Data Processing Center taught a mapping workshop. An obstacle course and a National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) testing course were set up for pilots to practice their flying skills.

State agencies such as the Department of Correction and Department of Transportation brought their drone teams to show campers how their vehicles

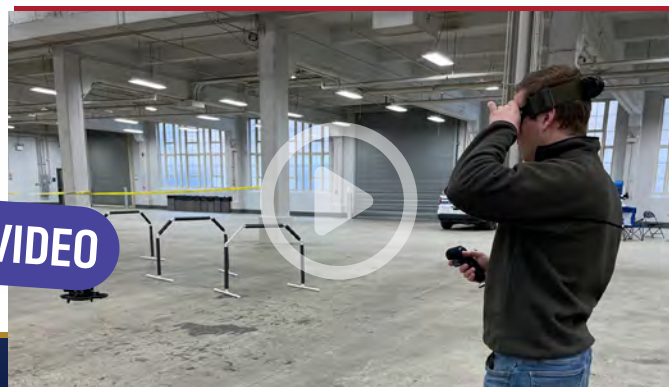
are outfitted, with custom storage compartments, multiple viewing monitors, power equipment and supplies.

Other types of high-tech equipment used in public safety — like a sphere-shaped, rollable camera and a drone-carrying robot dog — also were available.

IDHS is working on improvements for next year’s camp as well as plans for a summer skills camp in Hamilton County.

IDHS UAV Program

Watch this video from the 2023 drone skills camp to learn more!





OVER 48,000 GALLONS OF CANCER-CAUSING CHEMICALS REMOVED IN STATEWIDE CLEANUP EFFORT

IDHS and the Indiana Department of Environmental Management's program to remove cancer-causing chemicals closed after the successful collection of more than 48,000 gallons of Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl (PFAS) foam from 300 Indiana fire agencies.

The PFAS foam collection initiative first launched more than a year ago and was focused on protecting firefighters and the environment. PFAS chemicals can adhere to clothing and enter the bloodstream through continued exposure. Groundwater sources also are very susceptible to PFAS contamination.

In 2020, Indiana passed a law to restrict the use of PFAS foams for any training purposes, with a very defined exception for facilities that have implemented "appropriate measures" to prevent the chemicals from reaching the environment ([read relevant Indiana Code](#)).

During this foam collection program, the state removed and properly disposed of PFAS material from any agency that requested it. It was a free service with no additional requirements for fire agencies.



LISTEN TO THE IDHS PODCAST

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





BILLS AFFECTING IDHS STAKEHOLDERS

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 bills explained below are accurate as of Feb. 5, but as the session continues, the bills likely will change before they are either passed or shelved for another session.

SENATE BILL 505

Emergency Transport to Appropriate Facility

If passed, this bill would provide that EMS may be reimbursed if EMS transports a patient to a health care facility, mental health facility or urgent care.

HOUSE BILL 1051

Mobile Integration Healthcare Grants

If passed, this bill would add counties to the list of entities that can apply for a mobile integrated healthcare grant.

HOUSE BILL 1113

Fire Protection Districts

If passed, 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 BILL 1118

Critical Incident Stress Management Debriefings

If passed, this bill would provide 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. If passed, it would:

- Establish the Office of School Safety within IDHS to centralize all school safety programs administered by state agencies.
- Add a school resource officer, emergency medical responder and a firefighter to the Secured School Safety Board.
- Remove the requirement that fire departments must obtain a permit from IDEM to conduct live fire training at fire training facilities.

BOAH LAUNCHES ONLINE COURSE ON ANIMALS IN DISASTERS



The Indiana State Board of Animal Health (BOAH) moved its in-person class on managing animals during disasters [online](#). Doing this makes the class more accessible for communities and responders to prepare for the challenges disasters pose to animals.

Indiana's animal population underscores the importance of preparedness. The state is home to more than 20.5 million turkeys, millions of livestock and nearly 10 million pets, with two-thirds of households owning at least one animal. Additionally, zoos, wildlife and other animal facilities contribute to Indiana's economy and culture, with livestock farming alone adding \$3.7 billion annually.

The course focuses on understanding the unique needs of animals in emergencies, from tornadoes and floods to disease outbreaks. Participants learn about the impact of different disasters, preparedness opportunities, response efforts and the human and physical resources needed for effective action.

BOAH's online course empowers participants to safeguard animals and their owners, supporting public safety efforts statewide. Learn more or enroll in [BOAH's Animal Issues in Disasters Online Course](#).

MONTHLY PAYMENT OPTION NOW AVAILABLE FOR NATIONAL FLOOD INSURANCE PROGRAM

Effective in 2025, National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) policyholders have a new option to pay their flood insurance premiums in monthly installments rather than annually. The [final rule](#) was published in the [Federal Register](#) in November.

The goal is to make it easier for homeowners to purchase flood insurance. For more than 55 years,

the NFIP required payment in full at the time of application or renewal, which caused additional stress on homeowners searching for flood protection. FEMA hopes that by providing an option for monthly installments, it will expand access to flood insurance to meet the needs of the nation.

FEMA and the insurance companies offering coverage

under the NFIP are working to notify current and future policyholders of this new approach to making premium payments.

Flooding is one of the most common natural disasters in the United States. Indiana experienced [64 flooding or heavy rain events](#) in 2024 alone. Learn more about if you need to purchase flood insurance on the [IDHS Flood Insurance webpage](#).



BREAKING THE ICE

SNOW, ICE AND FREEZING RAIN REMIND FIRST RESPONDERS OF IMPORTANCE OF WINTER WEATHER TRAINING

IT is impossible to sugarcoat how 2025 started: January was frigid. Indiana saw it all from snow and sleet to freezing rain and cold temperatures.

Many counties and the state activated emergency operations centers to respond to Winter Storm Blair beginning January 5. The snow was followed by single-digit temperatures, requiring counties to work with partners to open shelters for residents struggling to stay warm.

According to the National Weather Service, these temperatures are not uncommon. It was

just last year when temperatures dipped to similar lows in Indiana. The coldest morning on record for Indiana was recorded in New Whiteland at negative 36 degrees in 1994. It was Indiana's lowest temperature ever.

Current or past, freezing weather is a challenge for Indiana's first responders. Not only are Hoosiers caught in the crosshairs of dangerous situations, but also fire crews and EMS personnel must navigate the same weather conditions while also providing lifesaving care. Those tasks become easier by training ahead of the events.

On one of January's many freezing mornings, a group of first responders in Lake County prepared to face the bitter cold. They packed on layers of clothing and wet suits to voluntarily jump into an ice-covered body of water to learn the best way to help their communities if the worst happens.



"You never know when an ice emergency is going to happen, and you don't want the emergency to teach you how hard or easy it was for you," said Crown Point Fire Department Firefighter, Paramedic and Dive Commander Josh McBurney. "This is an important training for departments to sign up for."

This was a two-day course offered for fire departments in District 1. Firefighters learned how to rescue a single victim or multiple victims and use equipment like a sled and a boat. They also learned how to rescue themselves in case they fell through the ice.

Already this year, departments across the state have been called to ice rescues with varying degrees of results. Some ended in loss of life, while others ended with the rescuers successfully getting victims to the hospital.

"Ice rescue incidents can be very taxing on a department, especially when they are not properly trained or have the proper equipment," said Capt. George Humphrey from the City of Gary Fire Department. Humphrey's city recently provided his

squad with new ice-rescue suits, and this class was a good way for all of his firefighters to learn new tactics and get familiar with their equipment.

"That's a significant benefit for the city because when something like this comes up in the city, they are going to call the squad. Now everyone who is assigned to this rig has been properly trained," added Humphrey.

On the day of the training, the ice was sturdy and about six inches thick. It gave the firefighters the confidence to learn the rescues without fear of falling through, but they know that may not be the case when they are called into action.

McBurney explained, "It depends on the weather, how much ice fluctuates. If it is really cold and then really warm, that's when more ice rescues happen."

Brianna Carter is a Griffith Fire Department firefighter and was a student in January's class. She said she is feeling more confident in her ability to respond, noting it was not like what she expected it to be, "You see rescues in shows, movies and all that, but being out in the real deal, it is a lot different."



"With all the bodies of water we have by us, I'm now prepared how to handle a situation, not just with self-awareness but to help a victim out in need," Carter added.



Students of the ice training class say whether you are located close to Lake Michigan or the Ohio River, ice training is a class to attend.

“In every town, there is some kind of body of water: big, small, lake or river. Having this background of knowing how to respond and what to do goes a long way,” said Carter.

“The Indiana Fire and Public Safety Academy encourages all first responders to take full advantage of the numerous certification and skill trainings offered across all 10 training districts,” said District 1 Training Coordinator Joe Ferrantella. “Trainings offered by the Academy are free and provide a pathway for all fire service professionals to increase their personal knowledge, which will ultimately increase the safety and well-being of our communities and our profession.”

Ice rescue training and other trainings are offered consistently throughout the state. District 1, made up of Lake, Porter, LaPorte, Newton and Jasper counties, has a very busy training schedule. On the day of the ice training course, five other courses were ongoing at the same time across three counties with 150 students.

The rest of the state’s districts also are busy offering classes. It is important to note that some classes will need to be canceled if not enough people sign up. Always check the Acadis portal to learn of classes in your area. It is extremely important to withdraw from a course if you register but are unable to attend.

Reach out to your [district training coordinator](#) and let them know you would like to host or attend a certain class. The training coordinator will work with departments to gauge interest in the classes and do the behind-the-scenes work to set up the class.



UPCOMING CLASSES FOR DISTRICT 1

Fire Officer Strategy and Tactics

- 2/13/25 – 3/6/25
- Location: MAAC
- FOST220461

Bootcamp Academy (Days)

- 2/17/25 – 5/2/2025
- Location: MAAC
- FA220431

NIMS 400

- 3/1/25 – 3/2/25
- Location: Ogden Dunes
- 20250301

Fire Instructor II

- 3/11/25 – 4/3/25
- Location: MAAC
- INST2-220111

Fire Academy (HMA, HMO, FF1, FF2)

- Various dates beginning 3/17/25
- Location: Rensselaer
- FA220453

March District 1 Fire Instructor Conference

Fire Officer I

- 4/8/25 – 5/1/25
- Location: MAAC
- FO1-220333

Rope Rescue Operations/ Technician

- Various dates beginning 3/29/25
- Location: Indiana Harbor FD
- RRO220299/RRT220260

Watch this video to learn more!

VIDEO



Photo provided by Crown Point Water Rescue

HOW TO SURVIVE A FALL THROUGH ICE

1 KEEP CALM

As soon as you realize you are falling through the ice, hold your breath so you do not take in water. Try to keep calm. Panic is your worst enemy.

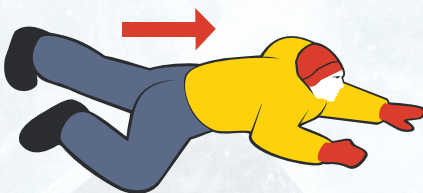
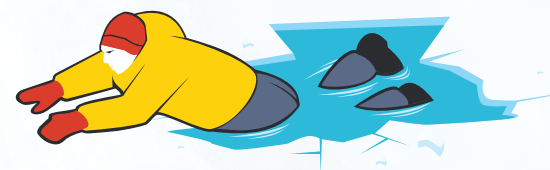


2 STAY AFLOAT

Keep your head out of the water. Get to an edge that you can reach. Snap off thin ice until you reach thicker ice.

3 PULL YOURSELF OUT

Lean forward onto the ice and kick your feet as you would if you were swimming. Use your arms and elbows to lift yourself up.

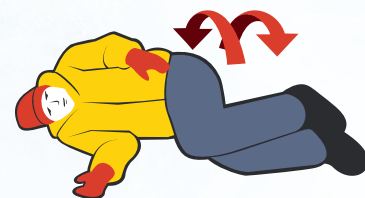


4 CRAWL FORWARD

Do not stand up right away. The ice around the hole may be weak.

5 ROLL AWAY

Roll away until you are several feet away and are certain you are out of danger.



SIGN UP TO

GET

PREPARED

getprepared.in.gov



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!



TORNADOES
FLOODING
EARTHQUAKES
HOUSE FIRES
DISASTERS
FOLLOW
NO SCHEDULE





LESSONS TO LEARN IN YOUTH FIRE PHENOMENON

Understanding risk associated with fire is an idea that is easy to teach and easy to understand.

“Stop, drop and roll.”

“Have an escape plan.”

“Test your smoke detectors.”

A major challenge for fire educators across the world, however, is understanding why fires start in the first place — especially when it involves a child sparking the flames. Deliberate or accidental, youth fire setting is a serious issue across the country, one that requires a unique perspective to begin to reduce risk and injury.

“The way we do fire prevention really needs to be revisited,” said Michael Flannigan, a National Fire Academy instructor who specializes in youth fire setting

curriculum. “About 80 percent of fires set by kids stem from simple curiosity about fire. To be able to talk and educate a child that fire is a tool and not a toy cures that curiosity more than discipline ever will.”

Nationally, children playing with fire results in about 50,000 fires a year and cause as many as 100 deaths, according to the National Fire Protection Association. Typically, unsupervised children

between the ages of 5-10 are responsible.

Flannigan, who recently taught a course at the Winter Fire School for the Indiana Fire and Public Safety Academy system, said looking for signs of that curious behavior toward fire and better understanding if it is the sign of something larger or more complex is the pivot fire educators should make today. A child may start a fire for a variety of reasons, including

How communities can address youth fire setting

- Prevent fires from starting through fire safety education
- Raise awareness in your community
- Dedicate community resources to programs
- Engage community counselors
- Educate parents and workforce that deal with children

accidentally while playing with a fire source. When there is more intent involved, is it because it was a cry for help? Was there malicious intent or were there other signs of crisis involved? Is it a simple fact of lack of supervision?

It begins with parents, Flannigan said, and how they frame discussions about fire. From the fireplace to the burn pit in the backyard, how kids are first introduced to fire (from a safety perspective) is critical. Additionally, first responders need better training to ask the right questions during fire runs. Mining run data remains a critical gap in understanding this behavior as well. The fact that there is an issue is clear; it is how and when to address it that remains the challenge.

“This is really about a comprehensive, whole community

approach,” he said. “Community Risk Reduction broadens the net by addressing what really drives the behavior. The fire may just be the end result of other underlying problems.”

Community Risk Reduction (CRR) is a process being adopted by many departments across the country to identify the impact of all risks, not just fire risks, and prioritize them to develop a strategy to reduce them.

“Fire departments today have such an opportunity to better their communities through CRR. But, it’s a different mindset. It’s breaking down silos, sharing information and focusing on real data to understand the issue. Right now, from a state perspective we don’t have a clear understanding of all those issues because the data is hard to get,” said Indiana State Fire Marshal Steve Jones.

All too often, communities begin addressing youth fire behavior after an incident and from a disciplinary perspective. The shift in thinking, according to Flannigan, requires an investment to get at root causes and address them. National statistics show that 80 percent of children who intentionally start a fire repeat the behavior if left unaddressed, according to the Burn Prevention Network. This involves first responders, schools, hospitals, child services, social services and “identifying risks outside of the fire station,” Flannigan said.

One welcomed advantage to addressing the challenge of getting data is the national rollout of the [NERIS data system](#), which replaces the NFIRS system that has existed since the mid-1970s. NERIS was launched with the idea of reducing or eliminating data mining gaps.





GOV. BRAUN SIGNS EXECUTIVE ORDER CONTINUING INDIANA'S "FIRST OF ITS KIND" CYBER COUNCIL

Here in the Hoosier State, cybersecurity remains a top priority, as evidenced by Gov. Mike Braun's decision to sign [Executive Order 25-10](#), continuing the work of the Indiana Executive Council on Cybersecurity (IECC).

Originally formed in 2016 by Gov. Mike Pence and continued in February 2017 by Gov. Eric Holcomb, the IECC is a "first of its kind" government council in the country to be focused on establishing a strategic framework of cybersecurity policies and initiatives.

Led by the Indiana Department of Homeland Security, Indiana Office of Technology, Indiana State Police and the Indiana National Guard, the council is made up of government (local, state and federal), private-sector, military, research and academic stakeholders to collaboratively stay on the forefront of a rapidly evolving cyber risk environment.

As stated in the order, continuing the council is a recognition of "the critical role that information technology plays in modern society and that state government has a responsibility to support the

prevention, protection, mitigation, response and recovery programs related to cyber threats" and that it is necessary "in order to protect the security and economy of the state" to enhance Indiana's cybersecurity.

With 35 council members and more than 250 advisory members, the IECC successfully completed a comprehensive statewide strategic plan in 2018 and, again, in 2021. Over that time, the IECC completed nearly 80 percent of its stated deliverables and objectives, an achievement that is especially noteworthy given the fact that all of the advisory members serve voluntarily.

Additionally, the council completed the [State of Cyber Report 2017-2021](#), which highlighted much of the work that was accomplished by the IECC as part of the 2018 Strategic Plan, as well as a myriad of cybersecurity achievements that were made throughout the state. An updated version, titled [State of Cyber Report 2021-2024](#), is scheduled for release in February.

SHARE THE GOOD

EMS TEAM PRAISED FOR PROFESSIONALISM AND COMPASSION

Deb from Monroe County recently shared her heartfelt gratitude for the EMS personnel from Indiana University Health Ambulance Service in Monroe County. Cody Halstead, Sara Cain and Jonathan Hawkins were recognized for their exceptional response during a critical moment in her life.

“Their response time was incredibly fast, and they quickly assessed my situation with professionalism and care. Throughout the entire experience, they treated me with dignity and respect, ensuring that I felt heard and supported during a stressful time,” said Deb. “Their compassion and expertise were evident, and I truly appreciated how they approached my care. I’m incredibly thankful for their dedication and the comfort they provided when I needed it most.”

To share your story of an exceptional first responder, visit the [Share the Good program on the IDHS website](#).



Sara Cain



Cody Halstead

KENTLAND FIREFIGHTERS EARN FIRE MARSHAL BREAKFAST

The Kentland Fire Department earned a biscuit and gravy breakfast from the Indiana State Fire Marshal’s Office by donating \$1,200 to the Indiana Volunteer Firefighters Association fundraiser for the [Hoosier Burn Camp](#).



On Dec. 14, State Fire Marshal Steve Jones put on his chef’s hat and cooked seven gallons of sausage gravy and biscuits, starting early to serve the hardworking firefighters. The breakfast celebrated the department’s generosity and dedication to its community and the Hoosier Burn Camp’s mission.



WABASH FIREFIGHTER HONORED FOR HEROIC RESCUE

The call came in just after noon on Nov. 30, 2024. Flames tear through a home, and a family screams for help as two children are stuck inside. Within minutes of the first call, Lt. Dennis Vigar of the Wabash Fire Department and his team arrived to find family members outside, desperately pleading for help.

“The family was outside screaming about their children, and I knew we had to act fast,” Vigar said.

Relying on his training and quick decision-making, he entered the home through a second-story window, despite the intense heat that initially forced his team to retreat. A good Samaritan helped find the infant in a crib, and Vigar handed the child off to paramedics before the baby was airlifted to Indianapolis for treatment. Unfortunately, the family’s 2-year-old child could not be saved despite the team’s efforts.

In January, Indiana State Fire Marshal Steve Jones awarded Vigar the Indiana Heroic Life Saving Award for his actions that day.

“This award means a lot, but I was just doing my job,” Vigar said. “It was not an individual effort. It was a team effort. I have never been prouder of my crew.”

Fire Chief Adam Oswald expressed pride in Vigar’s actions, emphasizing the professionalism of the Wabash Fire Department. “We are incredibly proud of what

Dennis accomplished, but it was a bittersweet moment. While we celebrate saving the child, we also feel the family’s pain for their loss,” Oswald said.

The mental toll of that call weighed heavily on Vigar and the Wabash Fire Department, as the joy of saving the infant’s life was tempered by the devastating loss. Recognizing the emotional strain such tragedies can bring, the department arranged for mental health professionals and chaplains to support firefighters in processing their grief.

“Calls like this stick with you,” Vigar said. “You think about what more you could have done, even when you know you did everything possible. Having mental health resources available helped us work through those emotions as a team.”

The tragedy also has strengthened the bond within the department.



“We came out of this closer than ever,” Vigar added. “It reminded all of us how much we rely on each other, not just during the fire but in the days and weeks that follow. We are more committed than ever to supporting one another.”

A fire of this magnitude was rare for the Wabash Fire Department.

“In smaller departments like ours, saves like this do not happen every day,” Vigar said. “This has motivated all of us to reinforce our training and grow as a team.”

He credited his colleagues for their role in the successful rescue and noted the department’s commitment to continued improvement. “We have all come together to ensure we are ready for whatever comes next. It is humbling to receive this recognition, but this was a team effort from start to finish,” Vigar said.

“This award is not given lightly,” State Fire Marshal Steve Jones said. “Lt. Vigar’s bravery and quick thinking saved a life that

day, and his actions represent the best of the fire service. It is an honor to recognize him for this incredible effort.”

Jones also stressed how preparation made the rescue possible.

“Lt. Vigar’s story shows the power of training and teamwork,” Jones said. “He did not hesitate when faced with danger because he was ready. That readiness is why this child is alive today.”

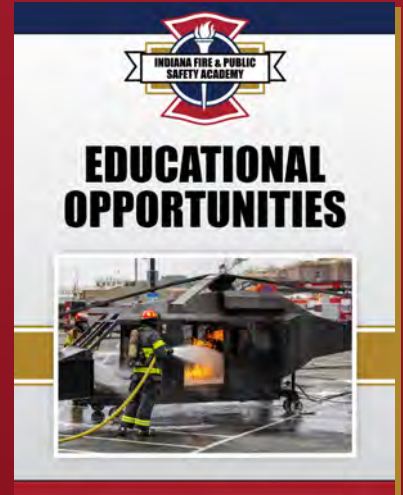
The award ceremony on Jan. 10 brought together firefighters, community members and state officials. The Wabash Fire Department expressed gratitude for the support it has received from the public.

“We are truly fortunate to serve a community that values and supports its first responders,” Oswalt said.

Mental Health Resources for First Responders



THE LATEST EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES



Learn about the [latest educational opportunities](#) across Indiana by signing up for the “Academy Training/ Education” subscription list. IDHS sends out an “Educational Opportunities” newsletter at least once a month, highlighting some of the trainings, courses and conferences happening in Indiana.

Please be advised that the non-state-sponsored educational opportunities shared by the Academy do not necessarily imply IDHS endorsement or approval. Always remember to notify the Academy if you register and are unable to attend a course.



2025 WINTER FIRE SCHOOL

The 2025 Winter Fire School was a major success! The Indiana Fire and Public Safety Academy hosted the annual weekend-long training opportunity free of charge for Hoosier firefighters and EMS.

By the numbers:

- 454 students attended over three days
- 160 agencies represented
- 81 career-combination fire and EMS agencies represented
- 67 volunteer fire agencies represented
- 8 emergency management and state agencies represented
- 4 law enforcement agencies represented
- 61 of Indiana's 92 counties represented



Thank you to everyone who spent their weekend with the Academy. A special thank you goes to the Monroe Fire Protection District for sending the most students from one department.

NOMINATE A HERO FOR THE INDIANA HOMELAND MEDAL OF MERIT

The Indiana Homeland Medal of Merit honors exceptional conduct and the performance of outstanding services to Hoosiers to support the safety, security and resilience of Indiana.

This award will be given to any hero who goes above and beyond the job to ensure Hoosiers are protected. Nominations are being collected now. Visit the [Special Recognition webpage](#) to submit a nomination. An IDHS team will review all submissions.





WHEN THE SMOKE CLEARS

An IDHS Video Series on First Responder Mental Health

“When the Smoke Clears” is a four-part video series produced by the Indiana Department of Homeland Security (IDHS), discussing the mental health challenges faced by first responders. It provides valuable insights into identifying signs of depression, PTSD and substance abuse within the firefighting community. The videos, led by a panel of experts, promote open conversations about mental health and offer guidance on when to step in and seek professional help.

Departments, leadership and first responders play crucial roles in fostering a supportive environment and prioritizing mental wellness. All public safety personnel are encouraged to watch and share the “When the Smoke Clears” series. Now is an ideal time to focus on the well-being of those who serve on the front lines. The complete series is available on [Facebook](#), [YouTube](#) and the [IDHS Behavioral Health webpage](#).

To submit a topic idea, please email pio@dhs.in.gov.



MESSAGE FROM THE FIRE MARSHAL

As many of you may have heard, I recently learned I am now part of a larger group of firefighters facing the ultimate test in our profession: cancer. My kidney cancer diagnosis came as a shock, but the prognosis is good for recovery following surgery and treatment.

I have always enjoyed the camaraderie with firefighters and the entire first responder community, but this is one group I would have been happy not to have joined. I have lost many friends and colleagues to cancer throughout my nearly 40 years on the job. Each year at the annual firefighter memorial service we add names to the wall, many of whom died of occupational cancer. I have presented flags and medals at memorial services and continue to use those tragedies to encourage regular health checkups and for you to make your health a priority, if not for you then for your family.

This is a challenging time for my family and team at IDHS, but their unwavering support has been inspiring, to say the least. I am not sure how a person could endure the fear and constant worry if he or she did not have a strong faith and support system. For me, it has made all the difference in the world and helped give me perspective about the things that are important in life.

Beyond my family and friends, the thing that is most important to me is the comfort of knowing that I do everything I can to help firefighters go home healthy at the end of the day. I do not take my position for granted. I have the good fortune to speak and encourage firefighters across the state, and it truly is my greatest honor as your State Fire Marshal.

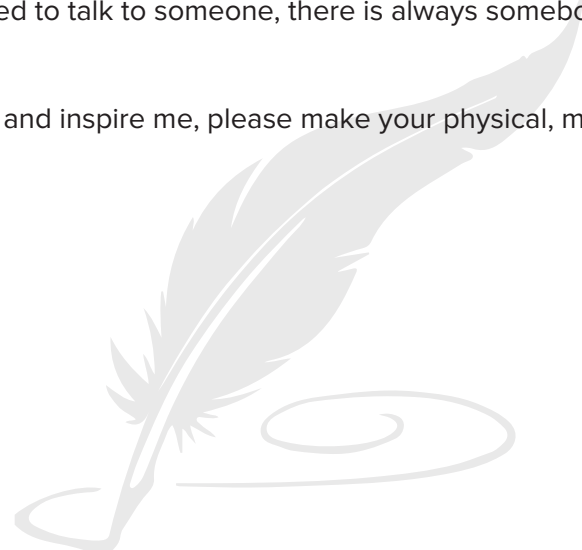
We face risks every day. It is built into our DNA. It is just what we do, but we must remember the risks that we cannot see ahead of us. Three out of every four line-of-duty deaths among firefighters last year were due to occupational cancer. We have a 14 percent higher risk of dying due to cancer than civilians.

Our profession is making strides to make firefighting safer, but it is critical that we focus on our health and get regular checkups. If something is off, find out why. If you need to talk to someone, there is always somebody willing to listen.

I am confident I will pull through this OK. If you want to help and inspire me, please make your physical, mental and spiritual health a top priority.



Stephen Jones
Indiana State Fire Marshal



Watch [this video](#) to hear directly from Marshal Jones about his health and future.

UPCOMING TRAININGS

MARCH

MAR 1 - APR 5	EMS - Emergency Medical Responder	LaPAZ
MAR 3-5	ICS 300: Intermediate ICS for Expanding Incidents	PLAINFIELD
MAR 4-5	Business Continuity Planning	ONLINE
MAR 6-7	ICS 400: Advanced ICS Command & General Staff	PLAINFIELD
MAR 6-7	Medical Management for CBRNE Events	INDIANAPOLIS
MAR 8-9	Intermediate Cadaver Search Techniques for K-9s	BRAZIL
MAR 8-16	Fire - Driver/Operator General	LOGANSPORT
MAR 18-20	Active Shooter Incident Management with Complex Incidents	LaPORTE

APRIL

APR 15-17	Active Threat Integrated Response Course	KOKOMO
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UPCOMING EVENTS

NATIONAL CANNED FOOD MONTH FEBRUARY

Celebrated throughout the month, this highlights the importance of canned foods for stocking emergency kits, a critical step in disaster preparedness for Indiana families.



EARTHQUAKE AWARENESS MONTH FEBRUARY

Earthquake Awareness Month raises awareness about earthquake risks and promotes preparedness strategies. Indiana residents, particularly in the southern region, are encouraged to prepare due to the state's proximity to the New Madrid and Wabash Valley seismic zones.

DAYLIGHT SAVING TIME MARCH 9

Hoosiers set their clocks forward one hour on March 9, 2025, for Daylight Saving Time, which also serves as a reminder to check smoke and carbon monoxide detectors for working batteries.



SEVERE WEATHER PREPAREDNESS WEEK MARCH 9-15

This week encourages Indiana residents to create emergency plans and participate in statewide tornado drills, helping reduce risks during spring storms.

ST. PATRICK'S DAY MARCH 17



NATIONAL PUPPY DAY MARCH 23

National Puppy Day celebrates dogs as beloved family members and crucial partners in disaster response, search-and-rescue operations and emotional support during emergencies.

NATIONAL DISTRACTED DRIVING AWARENESS MONTH

APRIL

April is National Distracted Driving Awareness Month, which raises awareness about the dangers of distracted driving. Indiana uses this time to reinforce safe driving practices and reduce road accidents.



FIRE DEPARTMENT INSTRUCTORS CONFERENCE INTERNATIONAL

APRIL 7-12

The Fire Department Instructors Conference International (FDIC) brings together thousands of fire service professionals for training and networking. This event strengthens Indiana's emergency response capabilities by equipping firefighters with the latest techniques and tools.

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



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The Hoosier Responder is a publication of The Indiana Department of Homeland Security.
Please direct any questions or comments to the IDHS Office of Public Affairs at 317.234.6713 or pio@dhs.in.gov