

IAEM Bulletin

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IAEM-USA Participates in Congressional Hearing on Future of FEMA and Wildfire Policy Roundtable

On March 4, Carrie Speranza, CEM, IAEM-USA president, testified before the House Committee on Homeland Security’s Subcommittee on Emergency Management and Technology, in the hearing entitled “Future of FEMA: Perspectives from the Emergency Management Community.” Also testifying were Jeff

and Timothy Manning, former deputy administrator for protection and national preparedness at the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

Agreeing that reform of federal disaster programs is overdue, Carrie’s testimony highlighted FEMA programs that must be sustained through the process. FEMA must



Ready to testify in the hearing on the Future of FEMA left to right are Alabama EMA Director, Jeff Smitherman, IAEM-USA President Carrie Speranza, CEM, former FEMA Deputy Administrator for Resilience Dan Kaniewski, and Former FEMA Deputy Administrator for Protection and National Preparedness Tim Manning.

Smitherman, director of the Alabama Emergency Management Agency; Daniel Kaniewski, managing director of public sector at Marsh McLennan;

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Get to Know Your IAEM Leadership

IAEM-USA Region 3 President

**Sara Ruch, CEM, Deputy Coordinator of Emergency Management,
James City County, Virginia**

In an effort to introduce the IAEM leadership to members and recognize their hard work for the organization, the IAEM Bulletin will be providing profiles on the current IAEM leadership throughout the year. A heartfelt thanks to our volunteers whose hard work makes IAEM successful.

Sara currently resides in James City County, Virginia, and has been an IAEM member for 18 years. You can connect with Sara on [LinkedIn](#) or email her at USARegion3President@iaem.com.

■ **Biographical sketch:** Sara holds a Bachelor of Arts from Concordia College in Moorhead, Minnesota, and a Masters of Science from North Dakota State University. Sara has 19 years in emergency management and holds her CEM and CFM, and is also a FEMA Advanced and Executive Academy Graduate. She is the past president of the Virginia Emergency Management Association and also a past member of FEMA's Region 3 Advisory Group. She is the current chair of the Hampton Roads All Hazards Advisory Committee which houses the area's Urban Area Security Initiative. In her day job, Sara is a local emergency manager for a suburban/rural jurisdiction with a population of 81,000. Sara's jurisdiction is situated in coastal Virginia in the historic triangle. Sara's jurisdiction contains some big city attractions like a major theme park. It really is a great jurisdiction with a little bit of everything and a small town feel.

■ **What professional accomplishment or experience are you most proud of and/or learned the most from?**

Being a member of FEMA's Comprehensive Preparedness Guide Working Group and member of FEMA's Presidential Policy Directive.

■ **What are you hoping to get out of being a part of the IAEM leadership team?**

I am hoping to provide more opportunities for Region 3 members to interact and learn from one another.

■ **How did you get your start in emergency management?**

I volunteered in high school to help with the 1997 Grand Forks Flood.

■ **What is the most valuable thing you receive from being a part of the association?**

Meeting different emergency managers and learning from their experiences.

■ **What country do you really want to visit?**

India.

■ **What are your favorite sports teams and what, if any, logo items or memorabilia do you have?**

Any Minnesota professional team and NDSU Bison. One year at IAEM's conference I won NDSU's basket and it had the Bison hat with horns on it. That's probably the most interesting item.

■ **What's your superpower?**

Positivity.

■ **What would people be surprised to learn about your background?**

I always wanted to be an emergency manager.

■ **Tell us about one of your best experiences working in emergency management:**

President Trump came to James City County for the 400th Anniver-



*Sara Ruch, CEM,
IAEM-USA Region 3 president*

sary of the first legislative session in North America. It was great working with state and federal partners that I normally don't get to work with in a non-disaster event.

■ **What is the hardest thing you've ever done?**

Talking to disaster survivors and hearing of their experiences. It reminds me of why I got into emergency management, which was seeing my friends lose everything in the 1997 flood. Ranging from losing their entire bedrooms to losing their home, to having their parents lose their jobs and had to move. So when I learn of emergency management in 1997 I had the idealistic notion that if I worked hard to plan, train, and exercise maybe other jurisdictions and people will not have to go

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Get to Know Your IAEM Leadership—Region 3
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through such trauma. So talking to disaster survivors reminds me of my first disaster that shaped my life.

■ **If you could say one thing to all IAEM members, what would it be?**

We operate in a world of hope. We prepare and plan for the worst with the hope that if a day comes when our communities need us they will be better prepared than if we were not there. We are often the ones after a disaster who provide hope for our communities. Remember when things get tough there is always hope.

■ **Is there any advice or knowledge you would like to share with emerging professionals in the field?**

Step out of your comfort zone and volunteer for as many opportunities as possible. Even if it is as simple as taking the notes for a meeting or reporting out for a group in class. These are great easy opportunities to get your name out there and meet new people.

■ **What is your favorite way to relax?**

Floating in a pool in the summer reading a book.

■ **What motto do you live by?**

Leave the world better than you found it.

■ **What is your favorite restaurant?**

Italian. ♦

Bulletin Editor: [John Osborne](#), QAS

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[Elizabeth B. Armstrong](#), MAM, CAE

The *IAEM Bulletin* is published monthly by IAEM to keep members abreast of association news, government actions affecting emergency management, research, and information sources.

The publication also is intended to serve as a way for emergency managers to exchange information on programs and ideas. Past issues are available in the members-only [IAEM Bulletin Archives](#).

Publishing an article in the *IAEM Bulletin* may help you to meet IAEM's certification requirements. Check out the [author's guidelines](#).

Articles should be submitted to Bulletin Editor John Osborne via email at john@iaem.com.

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The image is a promotional banner for the IAEM 2025 Annual Conference & EMEX poster showcase. At the top, it features the IAEM logo and the text '2025 Annual Conference & EMEX' with a location tag 'Nashville, TN'. Below this, the words 'POSTER SHOWCASE' are written in large, bold, yellow and white letters. The middle section contains two photographs: the top one shows a woman in a blue sweater pointing at a poster titled 'HAZMAT Technician Radiological Incident Response Readiness: Assessing Mental Model Gaps', and the bottom one shows a wide view of a poster session with many posters on easels. At the bottom of the banner, the slogan 'Where Innovation Meets Inspiration' is written in white on a blue background, followed by a yellow box containing the text 'DEADLINE: APRIL 11'.

Advocacy Efforts

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maintain its role in driving change through its preparedness programs as they serve as the foundation for all local and state emergency management capabilities. Sustaining FEMA's hazard mitigation programs is essential to drive long-term change by helping communities safeguard against future risk.

"To serve our communities effectively, disaster management must be federally supported, state-administered, and locally executed," said Carrie. "Together with private industry, this multi-sector approach is a necessary partnership, particularly when disasters overwhelm local and state resources."

Carrie presented opportunities for change. First, reform must prioritize building a disaster-resistant America by incentivizing and rewarding "smart decision-making" and fiscal responsibility at the local and state levels. A second opportunity involves minimizing long-term recovery costs by adjusting the disaster declaration process and establishing a federal long-term recovery exit strategy.

"The International Association of Emergency Managers fully supports a comprehensive review and reform of FEMA," Carrie affirmed. "Reform will ultimately help the people of America, and that is what emergency managers do. We help people before, during, and after disasters."

Wildfire Policy Roundtable

IAEM also supported discussion during the March 4 Capitol Hill roundtable "Burning Issues: Navigating the Future of Wildfire Policy." The roundtable discussed the future of wildfire policy. Jeff DuVall (Sonoma County, CA) represented IAEM. ♦



IAEM-USA President Carrie Speranza, CEM, and Alabama EMA Director Jeff Smitherman pose for a photo following the March 4 testimony.



On March 4, Congressman Jeff Stanton (D-AZ-4) convened a roundtable discussion on Capitol Hill to discuss the future of wildfire policy. Jeff DuVall (Sonoma County, California) represented IAEM. Pictured L-R: Patrice Horstman; Justin Green; Congressman Greg Stanton; Dr. Lori Moore-Morrell; Jeff DuVall.

IAEM in Action



Shirl Garcia, the official "conference mom" and Valerie Lucus-McEwen, CEM, CBCP, president IAEM-USA Region 8, pose for a photo at the Colorado Emergency Management Association conference in Loveland, Colorado, on Feb. 12.



Kevin R. Klein, Division for the Colorado Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Management; Valerie Lucus-McEwen, CEM, CBCP, president IAEM-USA Region 8; and Mike Gavin, lifetime IAEM member snap a photo at the Colorado Emergency Management Association conference in Loveland, Colorado, on Feb. 12.



IAEM was well represented at the annual meeting of the National Association of Counties, held March 1-4, 2025, in Washington, D.C.. (L-R): Keith Barnett (Elmore County, AL); Chris Kelley (Boone County, MO); Thad Huguley (IAEM Director of Government Affairs); Judd Freed (Ramsey County, MN); Nick Crossley (Hamilton County, OH); Alex McCarthy (Delaware County, OH); Wike Graham (Charlotte-Mecklenburg County, NC); Jeff DuVall (Sonoma County, CA)

[View the photos of the 2024 IAEM Annual Conference](#)

IAEM News to Know

Certification

■ **Plan Ahead:** Individuals interested in receiving their AEM®/CEM® Certificate at the IAEM Annual Conference in Louisville, Kentucky, on Nov. 19, 2025, should note the important deadline dates posted on the [IAEM website](#). Review months, submission deadlines and notification dates are listed for the entire year as well.

Conference News

■ **IAEM Speaking Opportunities Now Open**

- The Poster Showcase Call for Speakers is open till **Friday, April 11, 2025**.
- **Opening Soon:** The EMvision Talks® Call for Speakers opens on Monday, April 7 and closes on **Friday, May 9, 2025**.

- Find out more information on our conference website under the [speaker pages](#).

■ **Exhibit booths now available:** The 2025 IAEM Annual Conference & EMEX will be held in Louisville, Kentucky; EMEX booth sales are now open. To view the floor plan, download a contract, read our quick facts, and review the exhibitor prospectus, [visit our website](#).

IAEM Plugged In

■ **Register Now for IAEM Plugged In 2025:** IAEM Plugged In returns this year on Friday, May 9. This one-day virtual conference promises attendees the chance to learn from some of the most informative speakers in emergency management. Attendees will also receive updates on the latest government affairs impacting the emergency management industry. This year, IAEM student members are eligible for a free registration. Federal emergency managers recently laid off can also attend this event for free. Impacted federal EMs can email IAEMhelp@iaem.com for a special code. Explore the [event program](#) to start planning your digital experience. Don't miss out on this event. [Register now](#).

IAEM Awards Program Update

■ **2025 IAEM-USA Top 40 under 40 Recognition Program:** The IAEM Awards program 40 under 40 program timeline has been officially released. Visit the [IAEM website](#) to learn about the process and how to nominate deserving individuals by March 31, 2025. ◆

Q REGISTER TODAY!

IAEM
PLUGGED
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May 9, 2025

Stay ahead of the curve with this one-day virtual learning experience designed for today's emergency managers, like you.

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Submit an Article for the IAEM Bulletin

The IAEM Editorial Committee is currently accepting submissions for future editions of the IAEM Bulletin. Refer to the [Author Guidelines](#) for tips and techniques for successfully submitting your article for publication.

The primary focus of the IAEM Bulletin is local. We are looking for articles that provide information and insights useful to other practitioners, in government and private sectors, who are educated and trained professionals. Appropriate topics include: new research results, unique applications, successful programs, real experiences with disasters and/or exercises, reviews of new publications, and viewpoints on important issues facing emergency management. Refer to the [Author Guidelines](#) for tips and techniques for successfully submitting your article for publication.

- **Article Format:** Word or text format (not PDF).
- **Word length:** 750 to 1,500 words.
- **Photos/graphics:** Image format (png, jpg).
- **Email article, photos, and graphics to:** [John Osborne](#).

Contribute to the IAEM Member Calendar

IAEM members stay connected through their participation in the [IAEMconnect Community](#). The community includes a robust calendar to keep members informed of events, IAEM meetings (committees, caucuses, commissions, Boards), webinars, exhibits, upcoming deadlines important to emergency managers, and more.

GET CERTIFIED IN 2025!

Ready to take your skills to the next level?
The 2025 Credential Review dates are now available on the IAEM website.

Building Preparedness for Disaster Response: Empowering Volunteers

By Tom Beveridge, CD, Graduate Student in Disaster and Emergency Management, Royal Roads University

If you've ever tried to convince a friend to join a community clean-up event, you know that engaging volunteers can feel like asking someone to run a marathon without shoes. Now imagine asking them to help in a disaster response—it's no easy feat. Yet, volunteerism remains a cornerstone of disaster management, and Canada's ability to respond effectively to crises depends on empowering individuals to step forward.

Strengthening individual preparedness, enhancing local-to-provincial collaboration, and addressing barriers to volunteer engagement are critical to reducing reliance on federal disaster response assistance and building a resilient, community-centered emergency management system in Canada.

In 2021, Public Safety Canada introduced the Humanitarian Workforce (HWF) program to mitigate the increasing strain on first responders during disasters (Public Safety Canada, 2024). The program leverages the expertise of trained volunteers from established non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to create a surge capacity mechanism, enhancing disaster response effectiveness. The five NGOs involved—Canadian Red Cross, St. John Ambulance Canada, The Salvation Army, the Search and Rescue Volunteer Association of Canada, and Team Rubicon Canada—bring extensive volunteer experience, as evidenced in their recent contributions to flood and wildfire events (Glass & MacDonald, 2023; Armstrong, 2024; Shokeir, 2024). The program facilitates structured collaboration between volunteers and professional responders within

the Incident Command System (ICS) framework (Parker, 2024).

The HWF operates within a broader disaster management system constrained by the Emergency Management Act (SC 2007, c 15), which assigns provinces and territories primary responsibility for disaster response. The federal government response is limited unless the provinces request assistance. However, local and provincial capacity gaps often lead to reliance on the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) for non-military disaster support (Craig, 2025). Agrawal argues the need for alternatives to CAF deployment, advocating for enhanced local and provincial preparedness (Craig, 2025). Compounding this challenge, the HWF program's sustainability remains uncertain, with federal funding set to expire in March 2026. Provinces like Ontario and Nova Scotia have initiated efforts to establish provincial volunteer disaster response organizations, referred to as provincial guards, consisting of skilled civilian volunteers (Government of Nova Scotia, 2024; Government of Ontario, 2024). At the same time, other provinces are pursuing local CERT training for municipalities (Bestland, 2024; Flint & Stevenson, 2010). Nevertheless, Agrawal stresses that the lack of integration between local and provincial resources undermines the efficiency of disaster response systems (Craig, 2025). Recent findings by Beveridge (2025) emphasize Canadians' willingness to volunteer in disaster response, with 32% of survey respondents (n=38) expressing interest. This figure is based on online survey data collected from 120 participants. The survey also revealed the main barriers

limiting volunteer engagement with NGOs in the HWF program. These barriers include time constraints, additional training requirements, and restrictive human resource policies within NGOs that prevent broader volunteer participation. An additional 6% of respondents noted they would not return to volunteer work under current conditions. Findings indicate that survey respondents' perceptions of NGOs remain divided, with 40% viewing them positively and 39% negatively (Beveridge, 2025). Addressing these barriers and rebuilding trust in NGOs is essential to sustaining the HWF program and fostering a community-centered disaster response framework.

By integrating efforts to promote personal preparedness, improve local-to-provincial collaboration, and reduce barriers to volunteer engagement, Canada can reduce reliance on federal assistance and the CAF while creating a resilient and sustainable disaster management system. This approach will empower communities, strengthen provincial capacities, and ensure a long-term, scalable framework for effective disaster response.

Engaging a Local Response System

Inclusivity in volunteerism is essential for a disaster response system that reflects the diversity of Canadian communities. Lishok and Donaldson (2024) discuss how tailored approaches to engaging underrepresented groups—such as Indigenous communities, persons with disabilities, and newcom-

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Empowering Volunteers

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ers—can empower people to take an active role in emergency preparedness. They argue that barriers, including cultural disconnects and limited access to resources, prevent many from participating in disaster response efforts. Agrawal (Craig, 2025) builds on this by emphasizing the importance of integrating Indigenous knowledge and practices into disaster planning frameworks to improve cultural relevance and trust.

Beveridge (2025) supports these perspectives by revealing that while many Canadians are willing to volunteer, barriers such as restrictive human resource policies and a lack of accessible opportunities disproportionately affect underrepresented groups. Resolving these challenges is not merely a moral imperative but a practical necessity to enhance surge capacity and community resilience.

Practical solutions include NGO policies adjusting to reduce exclusionary practices and implementing outreach programs for diverse groups. Beveridge's (2025) recommendation to design inclusive branding and awareness campaigns supports this approach, addressing the disconnect many respondents reported in finding accessible volunteering opportunities.

Mentorship and Training

Mentorship and training programs equip volunteers with the skills and confidence necessary for disaster response. Donaldson (2024) emphasizes that mentorship builds social capital, a key factor in creating resilient communities. He notes that pairing experienced volunteers with recruits fosters knowledge transfer, encourages collaboration,

and creates a support network that enhances retention. Agrawal echoes this sentiment, in order to prepare the next generation of emergency management leaders (Craig, 2025). Both perspectives stress that disaster preparedness should rely not solely on technical skills but also on interpersonal and community-building capabilities.

Beveridge's (2025) findings reveal that training accessibility is another barrier to volunteer engagement, with 39% of respondents identifying rigid schedules and high costs of volunteering as obstacles. This issue disproportionately affects individuals with limited time, such as rural residents. Suggestions received in Beveridge's (2025) study include the use of modular and flexible training programs, including remote learning options that allow volunteers to learn at their own pace.

Mentorship programs can complement formal training by providing practical, hands-on guidance. This dual approach ensures that volunteers are not only well-prepared but also feel supported and valued, increasing retention and strengthening the HWF program's capacity.

Emergency managers and disaster response practitioners play a pivotal role in addressing these barriers to volunteer engagement. They can advocate for more inclusive recruitment strategies that focus on outreach to underrepresented groups, collaborate with NGOs to simplify human resource policies and improve transparency, and push for the development of accessible training programs tailored to diverse volunteer needs, including episodic volunteers. By taking these steps, practitioners can increase volunteer engagement, foster community resilience, and ensure that Canada's disaster response framework is adaptable to future challenges.

Conclusion

Inclusivity and mentorship are pivotal to addressing the barriers that hinder volunteer engagement in Canada's disaster response system. Lishok and Donaldson (2024) emphasize the importance of empowering diverse groups and fostering mentorship to build resilient, community-centered networks. Agrawal (Craig, 2025) advocates integrating Indigenous and local knowledge to create more culturally relevant approaches, while Beveridge (2025) provides evidence-based recommendations for improving training accessibility and outreach to meet diverse volunteer needs. The Humanitarian Workforce (HWF) program stands as a critical tool to address these challenges, expand its volunteer base, and reduce reliance on federal assistance, particularly on the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF). By adopting an inclusive and supportive framework, the HWF can strengthen local capacities, foster equity, and position Canada's disaster response system as a sustainable and adaptable model for the future. ◆

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Preparing to Care for Your Community After an MCI

Brent Burnette, Physical Security Specialist, Office of Emergency Management, Charlottesville, Virginia

Unfortunately, mass-casualty incidents (MCI) are part of our reality, whether they are caused by natural disasters, such as hurricanes, wildfires, or tornadoes, or man-made, such as active shooters or vehicle-based attacks, just to name a few. These incidents can be devastating to a community, but proper planning and exercising led by emergency management professionals can be of great benefit in preparing for the road to recovery.

When disaster strikes, the community will typically be looking to the local government (Start Local, End Local) for guidance, answers, and services to get them through what has happened. Planning is essential, and it starts by asking several questions: What needs will your community have? What are the capabilities of your organization? Who are your partners? What additional resources will you need? Are agreements in place to activate those resources? Does everyone know what is expected of them? Can everyone perform the duties that are expected of them? How will you deliver your services? Where will you deliver your services?

This last question brings us to a tried and proven system—the assistance center. Many know this by terms like family assistance center or family reunification center. While having an area dedicated to reunification is appropriate, I would discourage the use of the word “reunification” in the title of the center. Experience has taught me that it sets certain expectations for family members of victims that may not be met. In my organization, we call it a community assistance center. Call yours whatever you think is appropriate.

The community assistance center is the management and flexible organizational framework to handle those impacted by an incident of mass casualties; it is not a shelter designed to house people, nor is it a respite designed to provide relief from the weather. It provides a centralized location where a seamless service delivery system built on multi-agency coordination can result in the effective dissemination of information and assistance to all impacted people.

You must think about the services you want to deliver—both those your organization can provide and the services your partners can provide. This may include things like reunification, family briefings, grief counseling, spiritual care, patient tracking, and death notifications. A quick note about patient tracking—make sure you work with your local hospitals and medical providers, including Emergency Medical Services, to establish policies and training on any HIPAA implications. As you can see, just these few primary services can require significant resources. The good news is that you don’t have to do this alone. Here is an unexhausted list of likely partners: the department of social services, department of human services, the police department, the fire department, your local community services board, the American Red Cross, your local prosecutor’s office particularly if they employ a victim advocate, your office of communications, your local health department, the office of the chief medical examiner, your local hospitals, your state department of emergency management, and other state departments. Again, this is not an exhaustive list. The availability of these partners serves as force

multipliers by helping to shoulder the burden, which is extremely helpful, particularly for smaller organizations that do not have the bench depth to deliver all of the services on their own.

Once you have identified your partners and the services you want to deliver, it is time to hold some collaboration sessions where your partners meet with you to discuss expectations and agree to certain responsibilities. This is critical. It is also the time to determine if you will need any formal agreements in place to activate these resources.

Next, you need to develop a plan that everyone agrees to follow when activated. This will be born out of your collaboration sessions and should have significant input from all partners. This could take some time to develop as each partner reviews and revises their responsibilities, but it is important to have an end-product to which everyone agrees.

Here is more good news—there are numerous training offerings to help you develop your plan. Focused on case studies, these offerings review successful and “less-than-successful” assistance center activations with an emphasis on lessons learned.

After the plan has been developed, it is time to make sure everyone is properly trained on their responsibilities. This may seem like an unnecessary redundancy, but you may find that organizations that agree to perform certain tasks may not know how to execute those tasks. For example, do the people who will staff your reception/intake area know how to process people? Do they know what information to

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Community After an MCI

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capture? Do they know which forms to use? Do forms need to be developed? Do they know how to access communication capabilities that exist for non-English speakers? These are just a few of the things we often do not think about until we run through operating an assistance center, from activation to demobilization.

Now it is time to drill and test your assistance center plan. We were very fortunate in Charlottesville to conduct a tabletop exercise with the help of our partners at the Virginia Department of Emergency Management. We invited all of our partners who we would call in the event of a community assistance center activation – roughly twenty different departments and agencies. The day-long exercise did exactly what it was supposed to do—it exposed our gaps. Now, we are working on a remediation plan to close those gaps. Do not worry; this will likely happen to you as well. Embrace it. Once you take the steps to close the gaps, you will have finished your first loop. Congratulations! Now repeat.

It is my opinion that the importance of being able to effectively operate a comprehensive assistance center cannot be overstated. The ability to quickly activate and successfully execute an assistance center not only provides the needed services to those affected by the disaster, but just as importantly demonstrates that your organization is in control and capable of handling the tragedy, thus, providing trust in your organization from your community. Your community will need you to guide them through recovery. They deserve it, and it is one of the reasons we have taken on the responsibility. ◆

Empowering Volunteers

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Empowering Youth for Emergencies

By Ethan Beaty, Eagle Scout, Scouting America; Student, Tennessee Technological University

Being prepared for emergencies is a crucial skill for anyone, but it is particularly vital for young people, who are among the most vulnerable. For well over a century, Scouting has addressed that need by equipping youth with experience and skills. The overlap between the goals of Scouting and IAEM is anything but small, seeing as they both reflect a shared dedication to building resilient communities. “Be Prepared” has long been the motto of Scouting, and I have had the privilege of carrying on that tradition as an Eagle Scout and leader of my own readiness programs. In 2022 and 2024 I led events for the Elk River District and Middle Tennessee Council respectively, both with the same goal in mind—to share my passion for preparedness with hundreds of Scouts and enable them to navigate real-world emergencies. Many members of IAEM likely share this same passion and are eager to empower the next generation, ensuring that they too become active,

informed contributors to community resilience. However, making preparedness both accessible and compelling for young audiences can be a challenge, particularly for those who have never taught it before.

Properly communicating and engaging with younger generations so that they not only take an interest in but become passionate about emergency preparedness is no small feat. If you feel that this is a need in your community, or if an opportunity arises for you to offer your skills to help others better prepare themselves, then I encourage you to take action. Local initiatives that focus on youth involvement create a multiplier



Scouts wearing ACU combat uniforms that were donated by a local Sheriff's department, enhancing the "apocalypse" theme of the event.

effect, empowering broader emergency management efforts. When emergency managers partner with schools, community organizations, and volunteer groups to deliver targeted, action-oriented training, they not only prepare the next generation of responders but also foster a culture of readiness among all age groups. Once

you have committed, you are ready to start planning.

I have found that the theme is the foundation of any youth-centered event. A strong theme is essential to garnering interest and participation before an event, as well as capturing and maintaining attention during it. The theme provides a framework that makes lessons more engaging and memorable while reinforcing key concepts in a way that feels immersive rather than instructional. This is especially important in the case of a preparedness program, given that most youth have already been through their fair share of fire alarms and tornado drills. In my experience, the most effective themes are those that not only entertain but also instill a sense of urgency and relevance. Both of the events I led were built around an "apocalypse" theme, which naturally lent itself to discussions on survival skills and emergency response. This approach didn't just make preparedness feel



Individual preparedness class, showcasing important tools and equipment for emergency readiness.

Once you have committed, you are ready to start planning.

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exciting—it also helped participants visualize real-world applications by immersing them in a scenario where their skills could genuinely make a difference.

Drawing inspiration from popular media is a great way to connect with participants, as many of the biggest movies, TV shows, and video games at any given time revolve around emergencies, survival, and apocalyptic settings. Tapping into these familiar narratives can make preparedness training feel more relevant and engaging. Last year, for example, the *Fallout* TV series was widely popular, and I incorporated elements of its aesthetic into my event, from music selections to themed decorations. While these depictions may not always be realistic, they can enable you to help participants bridge the gap between fictionalized disaster scenarios and the real-world skills

you will help them develop.

After you have a theme, crafting a balanced schedule should be your next focus. Starting with energetic, hands-on activities not only captures attention but also builds a positive foundation for learning. Scheduled breaks, such as lunch or a quick refreshment pause, offer participants the chance to recharge and naturally transition the group from physical activities to more focused discussions and demonstrations. This shift is especially effective once participants have settled, making it easier to convey detailed information. Weather and time of day should be factored into your planning as well. Outdoor, active sessions work best in the morning when temperatures are lower, while indoor or shaded environments provide comfort and focus during hotter periods.

Entertaining activities and games are the backbone of engaging training sessions, especially when working with youth. They infuse energy into the program and create a dynamic environment where participants can experience emergency preparedness

firsthand. Exercises and skill-building games not only provide a physical outlet but can also offer opportunities for the practical application of emergency training. That being said, your activities do not always have to yield tangible skills, and it is fine if they simply set the stage for the rest of your program.

Be sure to make the most of all the resources (material and human) that you have access to, and don't be afraid to think outside of the box. Activities that I have found success with range from archery and homemade escape rooms to scavenger hunts and zombie-tag. I have also had participants play bingo using boards comprised of hazard symbols and jeopardy that quizzed participants on preparedness topics, then awarded prizes such as first-aid kits, headlamps, or walkie-talkies. Remember that activities should be tailored to specific age groups, as what captivates younger children may not hold the interest of teenagers, and vice versa.

Once the initial energy has been harnessed through active participation, structured lessons become essential for reinforcing key concepts. Demonstrations offer a chance to showcase techniques with greater detail, allowing for step-by-step instruction and clarification. Discussions further enhance retention by prompting participants to reflect on their experiences, ask questions, and consider how they would apply what they've learned in different emergency situations. This is your opportunity to drive home the fundamental lessons you believe are valuable for the youth in your community.

Similarly to activities, you should also be sure to capitalize on any resources you have available to offer the best possible learning experience during your demonstrations



Signals detection course, teaching basics of radio communication and signal triangulation.

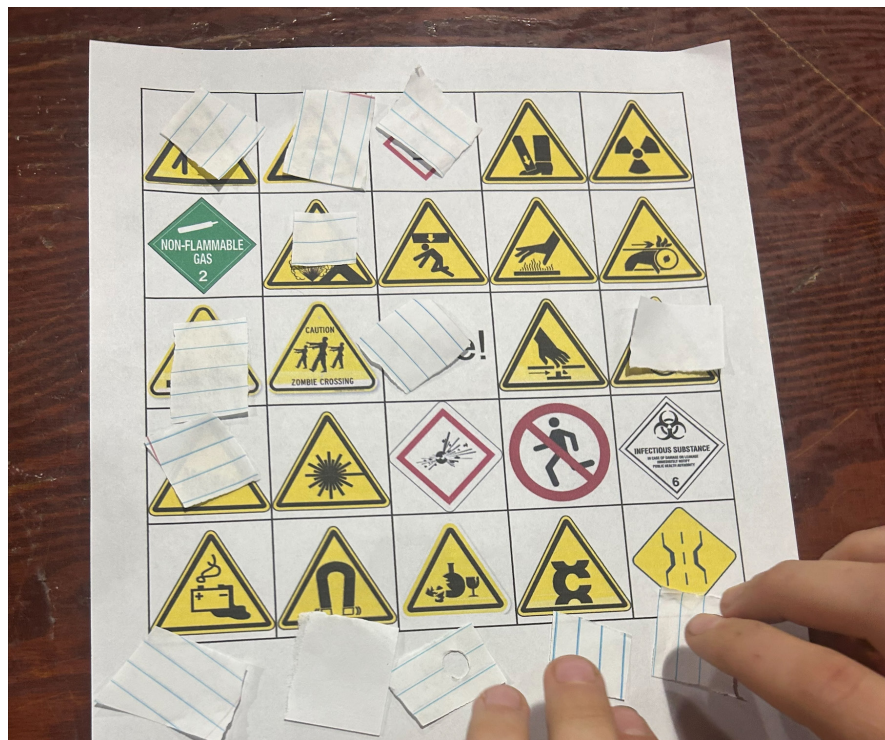
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and discussions. More often than not, experts who love what they do welcome the chance to share their knowledge, and depending on the scope of your program, you may consider collaborating with some. I have had the pleasure of meeting and working with my local Air Evac crew, SWAT team, and amateur radio club, all of whom added a level of quality and experience to my program far beyond what I could have achieved on my own. If you have connections with other emergency management experts, be sure to reach out and see if they would be willing to lend a hand.

If you nail these components of your program, then you are on track to create an experience that not only educates but inspires the next generation to take emergency preparedness seriously. Whether you have an hour with a kindergarten classroom, a full day with an entire high school, or in my case, a weekend with hundreds of Scouts, the above principles will apply across the board. If you are enthusiastic about bringing preparedness to the youth of your community, then take the first step. Identify opportunities, connect with local organizations, and begin crafting a program that will leave a lasting impact. The skills they gain today could make all the difference in the challenges they face tomorrow. ◆



Threat Identification Drill, or Bingo comprised of various hazard symbols.



Trailblazers of Tomorrow

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EM Calendar

March 26	Extreme Weather Events and Their Impact on Utility Operations Partners in Emergency Preparedness
March 27	2025 Lehigh Valley Emergency Services Conference
March 27	Overview of the Three Centers Often Created in the Aftermath of Mass Violence Incidents National Mass Violence Center
April 7-11	26th New Jersey Emergency Preparedness Conference Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Atlantic City, New Jersey
April 14-17	2025 National Hurricane Conference Hilton New Orleans Riverside Hotel New Orleans, Louisiana



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