

ANNUAL REPORT 2023

www.hcready.org





Mission

Provide effective coordination & collaboration to create a culture of preparedness that builds & sustains a disaster resistant and resilient community in Hamilton County

Vision

A safer future through effective whole community partnerships of local government, emergency services, private sector, volunteer agencies & the residents of Hamilton County to save lives, protect property, & reduce the effects of disasters



Ault Park, Cincinnati, OH
Photo by Alli Ferreri



Nisbet Park, Loveland, OH
Photo by City of Loveland

Our Values



Glenwood Gardens, Woodlawn, OH
Photo by Great Parks of Hamilton County

Community We will strive to understand all communities & cultures within Hamilton County. We will engage & empower our residents & partners through inclusive practices that cultivate trust & continued engagement.

Leadership We will be forerunners in the industry of emergency management & take an active role in leading the profession. We will influence & guide all entities of Hamilton County during each disaster phase.

Integrity We will be transparent in our workings with all partners & community members. We will hold ourselves accountable to the highest standard of ethical behavior & organizational excellence & be responsible fiscal stewards with all available resources.

Equity We will work diligently to understand the interrelated elements that systematically affect our communities during all phases of a disaster. We will be impartial & fair in the services we offer & strive for equitable outcomes for all.

Collaboration We will embrace the Whole Community approach, involving all levels of government & working with stakeholders from the public, private, & non-profit sectors. We will work cohesively & utilize the talents, knowledge, & ingenuity of all our partners.

Professionalism We will always appear, speak, & interact with others in a professional manner. We will invest in a skilled workforce through constant training & professional development.

Innovation We will be proactive in seeking opportunities to move the field of emergency management forward. We will always look for new & better ways to improve upon the services we offer to Hamilton County ensuring that we are providing the highest quality products.

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Director's Note

Dear Community Members,

As we reflect on the past year, it's clear that our commitment to disaster preparedness and response has never been more critical. I'm pleased to present our annual report, highlighting the successful plans, exercises and other activities conducted in 2023. These endeavors underscore our unwavering dedication to safeguarding our county against all types of disasters and hazards.

In the face of evolving threats, our agency conducted numerous drills and exercises designed to test our readiness and enhance our capabilities. From tabletop exercises simulating complex emergencies to drills involving multiple agencies, we spared no effort in ensuring that our responders are well-equipped and trained to handle any scenario that may arise. One notable achievement was the successful implementation of our updated disaster response plans. These comprehensive documents outline clear protocols for coordinating with local, state, and federal agencies and resources, as well as community partners and volunteers. They also outline how we will engage in short- and long-term disaster recovery. By refining these plans and conducting regular training exercises, we've enhanced our ability to mount a swift and effective response when disaster strikes.

Additionally, our agency prioritized community outreach and education initiatives aimed at empowering our communities and residents to take an active role in their own preparedness. Through workshops, seminars, and social media campaigns, we provided valuable resources and guidance on developing emergency plans, assembling disaster kits, and staying informed during crises.

However, despite our achievements, we recognize that the work is far from over. As we confront an environment increasingly characterized by uncertainty and volatility, the need for community and individual preparedness has never been more urgent. Disasters can strike at any time and in any form, from natural catastrophes like tornados and floods to pandemics and cyberattacks. That's why I urge each member of our community to take proactive steps to prepare for emergencies and disasters. Whether it's creating a family communication plan, participating in training exercises, or volunteering with local response organizations, everyone has a role to play in building a more resilient community.

In closing, I want to express my sincere gratitude to our agency's Executive Committee, dedicated staff, partner agencies, volunteers, community members and county leadership for their unwavering support and commitment to our shared mission. Together, we will continue to strengthen our preparedness efforts and ensure the safety and well-being of all who call our community home.

Sincerely,

Nick Crossley, CEM
Director

2023

Executive Committee

Hamilton County Emergency Management & Homeland Security Agency (EMHSA) is set up under an executive committee (per the Ohio Revised Code 5502.26).

The executive committee, which meets quarterly, consists of all three Hamilton County Commissioners, five elected and appointed officials representing the municipalities and townships within Hamilton County, a representative from the City of Cincinnati, a representative from the Hamilton County Police Association, a representative from the Hamilton County Fire Chief's Association, and a non-elected representative.



From L to R Honorable Hamilton County Commissioner Stephanie Summerow Dumas, EMHSA Director Nick Crossley, the Honorable Commissioner Denise Driehaus, and the Honorable Commissioner Alicia Reece, following the declaration of Severe Weather Awareness Week for Hamilton County.

Honorable Alicia Reece, Chair

Hamilton County Commissioner

Honorable Denise Driehaus, Vice Chair

Hamilton County Commissioner

Honorable Stephanie Summerow Dumas

Hamilton County Commissioner

Chief Jeff Bronson

Village of Fairfax

Honorable Triffon Callos

Green Township

Mike Donohue

Citizen at Large

Assistant Chief Matthew Flagler

City of Cincinnati

Honorable Ryan Grubbs

City of Harrison

Honorable Craig Margolis

City of Montgomery

Chief Dennis Meador II

Deer Park-Silverton Joint Fire District

Honorable Cheryl Sieve

Delhi Township

Honorable Thomas Weidman

Sycamore Township

2022–2026 Strategic Plan

Hamilton County Emergency Management & Homeland Security Agency (EMHSA) created a multi-year strategic plan in order to define the key aspects of our agency's operation and outline how to reach specific and measurable goals. Outlining our goals helps direct day-to-day decision making and gives criteria for evaluating progress and changing approaches moving forward. Agency staff strive to reach our goals through the various ways we work internally and with the community, with the ultimate aim of building and sustaining a disaster resistant and resilient community in Hamilton County. You can read the complete Strategic Plan on our website [here](#).

EMHSA Strategic Goals

Goal #1 – Strengthen community engagement efforts through programs and initiatives to develop a “Culture of Preparedness” in Hamilton County

Goal #2 – Create a system that supports equitable mass care efforts for all residents of Hamilton County

Goal #3 – Revise and implement hazard mitigation strategies driven by input from community partners and residents across Hamilton County

Goal #4 – Reinforce planning efforts by focusing on improved plan integration and ensuring the inclusion of additional partners in planning activities

Goal #5 – Coordinate a multi-hazards training and exercise program to evaluate all aspects of the emergency management system

Goal #6 – Maintain Hamilton County's Local Emergency Planning Committee (LEPC) Program

Goal #7 – Ensure Hamilton County's ability to support multi-faceted response through enhanced facilities, technology, and well-documented procedures

Goal #8 – Enhance capabilities for prevention including resource acquisition and intelligence and information sharing activities

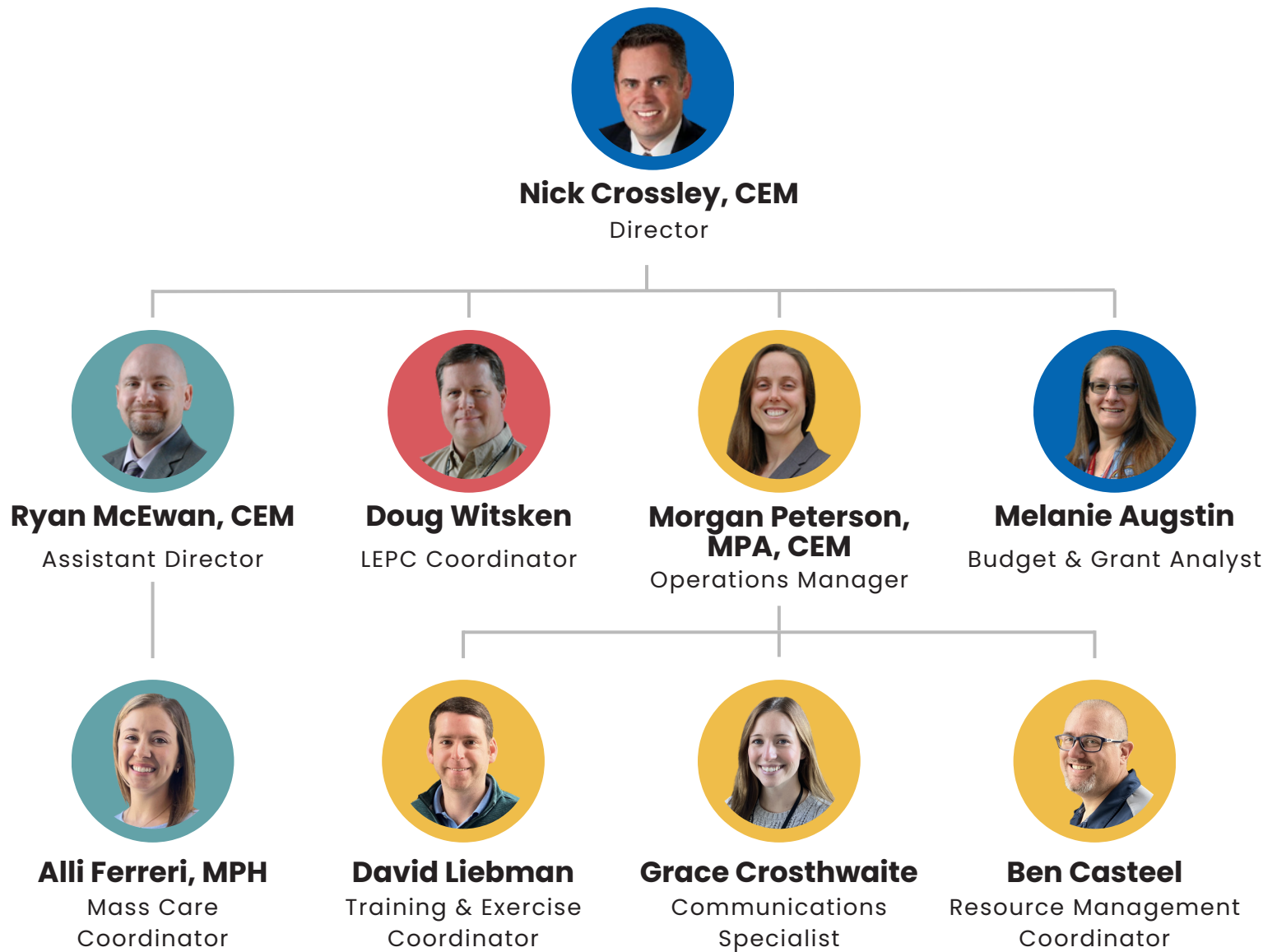
Goal #9 – Achieve EMAP Reaccreditation

Throughout this report, refer here to see which Strategic Plan Goals the activities and updates relate to.



Our Team

Hamilton County EMHSA has a team of dedicated emergency management professionals working year-round on disaster preparedness, mitigation, response, and recovery priorities. The team is divided into 4 divisions: Administration, LEPC, Preparedness, and Operations. Each group has its own area of focus, but all staff work collaboratively on overarching agency goals and activities.



-  Administration
-  Preparedness Division
-  LEPC Division
-  Operations Division

New Staff Spotlight

Hamilton County was pleased to welcome two new staff members to the Operations Division in 2023, David Liebman and Grace Crosthwaite. David is the Training & Exercise Coordinator and is responsible for coordinating and sharing information regarding trainings, designing and facilitating exercises, and supporting local training and exercise efforts. Grace is the Communications Specialist and is responsible for coordinating our public alerting system, Alert HC, and other forms of collaborative communication with the public.

David Liebman

Training & Exercise Coordinator



David Liebman joined Hamilton County EMHSA in the position of Training & Exercise Coordinator in January 2023. Prior to coming to Hamilton County, David spent 8 years working with the Emergency Management Accreditation Program (EMAP), where he provided assistance and standard guidance to state, local and international emergency management programs. David worked with upwards of 60 emergency management programs. Before that, David spent two years with Kentucky Emergency Management developing a statewide training course for hazard mitigation, and jointly managing a disaster case management program with the Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services. David graduated from the University of Kentucky in 2012 with a Bachelor of Business Administration in Management. In his spare time, David enjoys spending time and traveling with his wife, Sammie, and rooting on the Bengals, Reds, and University of Kentucky basketball and football.

Grace Crosthwaite

Communications Specialist



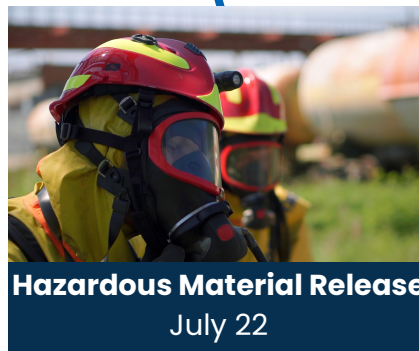
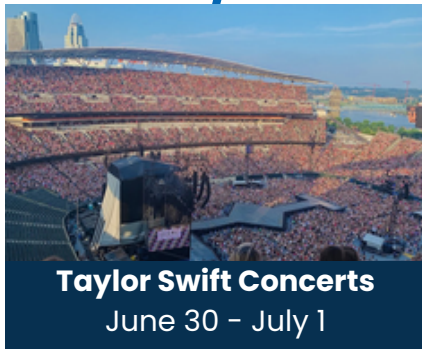
Grace Crosthwaite joined Hamilton County EMHSA in the position of Communications Specialist in November 2023. A Northern Kentucky native, Grace graduated from Eastern Kentucky University with a degree in Homeland Security and is currently pursuing her Master's of Public Administration with a focus in nonprofit management at ECU. Grace has experience working with various local nonprofit organizations both as a volunteer and through her work with nonprofit management companies before beginning at the agency. Grace was previously an intern at Hamilton County EMHSA in 2021, where she worked on exercises, reports, and supported ongoing work of the agency during the COVID-19 pandemic. When not at work, Grace likes to attend FC Cincinnati games as a season ticket holder, cheer on the Bengals, read, do yoga, and hang out with her family. She is excited to be able to return to EMHSA and play a role in communicating disaster preparedness, response, and recovery information with the whole community.



Duty Officer Events of Note

One of the Agency's most important functions is the ability to routinely monitor the county for threats and hazards. EMHSA has two staff members on call at all times (24/7/365) who maintain situational awareness of events and hazards with the potential to impact our community and its residents. Goals #7 and #8 of the Strategic Plan highlight the importance of prevention and response efforts, and Duty Officers are constantly monitoring these incidents and sharing essential information with partners to facilitate response actions.

2023 was another eventful year for our duty officers. This year, duty officers reported approximately 30 different events or issues that arose beyond routine monitoring, some of which are listed above.



A high-profile train derailment and fire occurred in East Palestine, OH, in February. While EMHSA Duty Officers did not respond to the incident itself, they played a key role in disseminating verified, factual incident information with the public in coordination with local and state counterparts and monitoring the fallout of the event.

Duty Officers had multiple severe weather events throughout the year, including storms that prompted the activation of the EMHSA Warning Room five different times. Wildfires in Canada greatly impacted air quality in Southwest Ohio in the summer, prompting duty officers sent 12 air quality alerts.

Beyond hazard monitoring, EMHSA duty officers supported the City of Cincinnati through several activations for major events, including Opening Day, two Taylor Swift concerts, Riverfest, large professional sporting events, and more.

EMHSA staff are comprehensively trained prior to being assigned as Duty Officer, and continue to routinely train throughout the year.

In 2023, all active duty officers completed drills simulating the most emergent situations for which a Duty Officer may be called, including:

- Using outdoor warning sirens
- Public notification
- Support hazardous materials incident response

Public Outreach & Notification



Outdoor Warning Sirens

There are 189 strategically-placed outdoor warning sirens in Hamilton County that serve as an early warning device to alert citizens to take shelter indoors and seek additional information. The sirens are tested at 12:00 p.m. (noon) on the first Wednesday of each month unless there is inclement weather. These tests are conducted to ensure the equipment is functioning properly so they are ready in case of an emergency.

The siren system is also maintained on a scheduled basis as detailed in Objective 7.3 of the Strategic Plan. In 2023, Hamilton County EMHSA partnered with Hamilton County Facilities to provide maintenance on the outdoor warning sirens. This partnership supports needed maintenance and work on the sirens to keep them as operational as possible. This year, 17 of the 189 outdoor warning sirens received preventive maintenance. Preventative maintenance occurs on a three-year cycle. Facilities investigated and fixed 19 issues which were identified through regular testing performed by EMHSA.

Alert Hamilton County & Smart 911



One ongoing task for the EMHSA team (Strategic Plan Task 1.3.3) is to increase participation in Alert Hamilton County (Alert HC) which allows residents to receive timely and important information about hazards that may impact their safety. Alert HC is promoted online, on social media, and in person by sharing pamphlets at local agencies and community outreach events. In 2023, an Alert HC message could reach:



27,916 Opt-in Users





189,329 Loaded Landlines


Community members can opt in to Alert HC notifications at AlertHC.org. Users can choose from 40+ alerts to receive and can edit their alerting preferences at any time. Alert HC is paired with Smart911, which is an optional system that allows users to preemptively share information with first responders. More information on Alert HC and Smart 911 can be found at AlertHC.org.


Social Media


Hamilton County EMSHA maintains a social media presence and regularly posts on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram. EMHSA also uses Nextdoor to notify the public of outdoor warning siren system tests and emergencies. In 2023, EMHSA's social media engagement results are as follows:


1,252,567
Total impressions
from EMHSA social
media posts

 **253,373 Impressions**
7,403 Followers

 **90,528 Impressions**
7,568 Followers

 **1,875 Impressions**
638 Followers

 **906,791 Impressions**
247,430 households

Community Outreach

Beyond frequent meetings with our network of community partners, EMHSA attends community outreach events to share information with local agencies and at community outreach events. In 2023, EMHSA attended outreach events in the following jurisdictions:

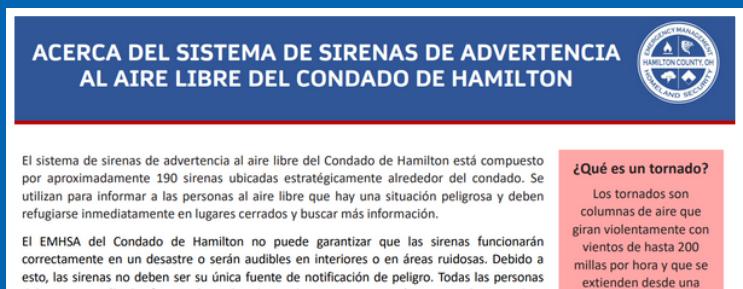
- Anderson Township
- Blue Ash
- Cincinnati
- Columbia Township
- Harrison
- Norwood
- St. Bernard
- Springfield Township



Morgan Peterson promotes Alert HC and disaster preparedness at a community event in Harrison.

Translated Outreach Materials

In 2023, several partner organizations that work with people with limited English proficiency told EMHSA staff that the outdoor warning siren tests were scary and confusing to new community members. In recognition of the need for better communication materials (Strategic Plan Task 1.1.3), EMHSA staff worked with a local translation service to develop a document that described the basics of the siren tests and what to do in tornadoes. It also included 5 recommendations for basic disaster preparedness. These were translated into the top non-English languages in Hamilton County, Spanish, Spanish, French, Arabic, and Nepali. They can be accessed on our website at hcready.org.



Partners in Preparedness

September 8, 2023 | Sharonville Convention Center

In September, Hamilton County EMHSA hosted the 7th Annual Partners in Preparedness Event at the Sharonville Convention Center. This event is held each year in support of Strategic Plan Task 1.2.1. 2023 was the best attended event of its kind yet, with 137 attendees representing local jurisdictions, county agencies, elected officials, community organizations, and regional and state partners.

The theme of this year's event was *Disaster Recovery*. EMHSA selected this theme to underscore the importance of preparing for recovery as well as response to all the stakeholders in attendance. To demonstrate the importance of preparing for disaster response and recovery, the discussions at Partners in Preparedness were centered around how Hamilton County might handle a major hazardous materials release. This was chosen both because hazmat received much attention in 2023 and also because it is a major hazard to which many communities in Hamilton County are vulnerable.

The Honorable County Commissioner Alicia Reece kicked off the event, followed by Ohio Emergency Management Agency Director Sima

Merick. LEPC Coordinator Doug Witsken presented on the risks of hazardous materials and detailed the county's preparedness efforts. Then, EMHSA Operations Manager Morgan Peterson led meeting attendees through a recovery exercise and discussion.

Attendees were assigned to tables based on their region of the county, and then individualized exercise scenarios were distributed to each table based on actual hazardous materials that are transported or stored in that part of the county. Creating a realistic local scenario helped emphasize the importance of disaster preparedness and recovery planning, and many productive discussions and resources were shared.

The goal of the event was to make attendees more aware of the county's capacity to respond to hazardous materials releases, the challenges of disaster recovery, and the importance of taking action to prepare now. Director Crossley closed out the event emphasizing all of these things and sharing the ways EMHSA can support local preparedness efforts in order to best protect our communities.



Director Nick Crossley gives closing remarks at Partners in Preparedness.

Preparedness Activities

StormReady Renewal

Hamilton County has once again successfully renewed its “StormReady Community” status through the National Weather Service. The program, run by the NWS, evaluates communities on specific criteria related to their ability to receive, manage, and disseminate information related to severe weather and to mitigate and respond to severe weather events. Key items supporting Hamilton County’s storm readiness include our 24/7 duty officer program, emergency operations center, multiple public notification mechanisms, hazardous weather response planning and exercises, and ongoing community outreach and awareness-raising efforts.



Emergency Operations Plan Updates

The Hamilton County Emergency Operations Plan (EOP) describes how the county will manage responses to the 21 natural, technological and human-caused hazards. Supported by fifteen emergency support functions (ESFs) and one hazard-specific annex, the EOP details the different response components and outlines the organizations and assignments of responsibility for each. In 2023, EMHSA worked on four ESFs and two other plans that supplement the EOP:

- ESF #3 – Public Works
- ESF #4 – Fire & EMS
- ESF #10 – Hazardous Materials
- ESF #13 – Law Enforcement
- Donations Management Plan
- Family Assistance Center Plan



Though Hamilton County achieved EMAP Accreditation in 2021, it is an ongoing process to maintain the many plans, policies and procedures necessary to attain re-accreditation in 2026. The Preparedness Division ensures each document produced by the Agency is compliant with EMAP’s 73 standards.

Continuity of Government

The Hamilton County Continuity of Government (COG) Plan is written to ensure that the county’s governing body and its identified responsibilities and essential functions will be preserved, maintained, and reconstituted if disasters cause a disruption. The plan describes the authorities needed and orders of succession that may occur to ensure continuity. In 2023, the Preparedness Division worked with the Board of County Commissioners and County Administration to update the county’s COG Plan.

Planning Spotlight: 2023 Multi-Hazard Mitigation Plan

In 2023, EMHSA completed a major planning effort: completing the 2023 Multi-Hazard Mitigation Plan (MHMP). The plan identifies areas of risk and assesses the potential cost and magnitude, establishes strategies and priorities to mitigate risk from natural and technological hazards, identifies specific mitigation actions for each identified hazard, and establishes eligibility for future mitigation program funds. This project supports Strategic Plan Goals #3, #4, and #9.

The 2023 MHMP update includes a complete profile of Hamilton County with demographics, social and economic data, and land use plans. The MHMP documents historical hazards impacting Hamilton County and disaster trends over the last 50 years, then assesses the risk and potential consequences each of the 21 hazards poses to the county and its jurisdictions. The MHMP creates a hazard profile for all 48 participating jurisdictions and analyzes the risks each community faces. The plan then identifies mitigation actions that can be taken to address each identified hazard.

In order to qualify for federal mitigation funding, jurisdictions must adopt this plan at the local level. Through advocacy and outreach from EHMSA staff, all jurisdictions in Hamilton County passed resolutions to adopt the MHMP by December of 2023. Developing such a comprehensive plan was a monumental effort by EMHSA staff and participating jurisdictions, and we are excited to see the many mitigation projects identified through this process be addressed to make Hamilton County a more disaster-resistant and resilient community.

Mitigation Planning by the Numbers

4 Public meetings held

16 Planning meetings with jurisdictions

119 New mitigation actions identified

340 Total mitigation actions identified

1,102 Responses to the public mitigation survey



Asst. Director McEwan discusses hazard assessment at a mitigation meeting in Miami Twp.

Training & Exercise

Trainings

David Liebman, the new Training & Exercise Coordinator with Hamilton County EMHSA, has continued expansion of EMHSA's training and exercise programs. In addition to promoting all available regional trainings through the monthly regional training bulletin, EMHSA facilitated the training of 271 individuals from emergency management, fire, and law enforcement in a wide range of emergency preparedness and response course offerings. These included incident command system (ICS) courses and offerings in the FEMA Professional Development and Advanced Professional Development Training Series.

Exercises

The county held its first recovery exercise engaging all key partners identified in the recently updated Disaster Recovery Framework. At the local level, EMHSA supported exercises in Colerain Township, the City of Blue Ash, and the City of Wyoming. These exercises tested coordination and response to active threats in schools, severe storms, and extreme winter weather. In each instance, EMHSA staff evaluated the exercise, providing identified strengths, lessons learned, and potential corrective actions.

Tabletop Exercise Toolkits

To further support jurisdictions and other local partners with the development of their own disaster exercises, Hamilton County EMHSA developed tabletop exercise (TTX) toolkits which can be utilized by local jurisdictions, neighboring counties, and other emergency management partners in the region. Each of the toolkits, which range in complexity from low to high, outline a specific hazard scenario, and include the resources and materials necessary for exercise conduct. These toolkits have received positive feedback from partners, and several have already been used to support partner agency exercises. EMHSA plans to continue expanding toolkit offerings over the next several years.

Toolkit Topics:



High Wind
Event



Severe Winter
Weather



Flash Flood
Event

Training & Exercise by the Numbers

18 Courses held

918 Recipients of monthly
regional training bulletin

12 Duty officer trainings
per staff member

48 Attendees at NWS
Storm Spotter training

4 County-led or county-
supported exercises

126 Exercise participants

271 Students trained through
course offerings



Participants City of Wyoming's severe winter weather TTX.



The Hamilton County Spotter Training, led by NWS meteorologist Brandon Peloquin.

Planning & Exercise Spotlight: Disaster Recovery

In 2023, EMHSA made a concerted effort to focus on disaster recovery while addressing Goal #4 and Goal #5 of the Strategic Plan. In a collaborative year-long effort, the Preparedness and Operations Divisions followed the emergency management Preparedness Cycle to evaluate the effectiveness of the county's Disaster Recovery Framework.

Utilizing best practices and lessons learned from other communities, the EMHSA team updated the county's Framework, met with the Recovery Task Force, conducted a recovery-focused Tabletop Exercise and integrated the exercise findings into the final version of the Framework.

Timeline of 2023 Recovery Capacity-Building Efforts

January

Recovery Framework update began; partner input solicited

March

First draft of Recovery Framework completed

May

Recovery Task Force convened to discuss Framework and exercise

July

Recovery Tabletop Exercise (TTX) conducted

August

Recovery Framework shared for public comment

October

TTX findings shared with Recovery Task Force

November

Final Recovery Framework signed and published



The Recovery Task Force convenes for the Recovery TTX in July 2023

The Disaster Recovery Framework and Task Force address 6 core areas of priority:

- Operational & Community Coordination
- Economic Recovery
- Housing
- Infrastructure
- Public Health & Social Services
- Natural & Cultural Resource Recovery

Representatives from each sector and county leadership are represented on the Task Force and contributed to the plan development as subject matter experts. The final plan is available at hcready.org.

Mass Care



Hamilton County expanded mass care planning and preparedness in 2023 in support of Strategic Plan Goal #2. This was done through routine partner engagement, disaster response plan updates, and community mass care assessments and education.

Mass Care Supplies

EMHSA secured Urban Area Security Initiative (UASI) and American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) grant funding to build a cache of mass care and pet sheltering supplies that can be deployed in a local emergency. This opportunity will exponentially increase Hamilton County's mass care capacity. To ensure that the supplies were chosen in consideration of the Whole Community, EMHSA Mass Care Coordinator, Alli Ferreri, met with local representatives of older adults, people with disabilities, animal welfare experts, and licensed caretaking professionals and included their input in the decision-making process. EMHSA will acquire supplies in early 2024.

County Disaster Worker Program Expansion

In June 2023, the Hamilton County Commissioners approved an updated resolution that allows county employees under the Board to be paid to work a disaster response if needed in a declared emergency or disaster in Hamilton County. The program supports Strategic Plan Goals #2 and #7. Many of the anticipated roles for employee disaster workers are related to mass care, and this resolution has vastly improved Hamilton County's resilience and ability to care for ourselves in a crisis. It will take time for regional or national resources to arrive after a major disaster, so ensuring our capacity to respond as a county is essential.

All employee disaster workers will be trained when they are activated to work a disaster, but EMHSA has also developed a set of four trainings for employees looking to learn more about disaster work now. EMHSA has been promoting these trainings with county departments and is looking to get any interested staff registered and trained for volunteering.

The trainings, which take approximately an hour to complete and are available for county employees to view on YouTube, cover a variety of important disaster work topics. The first training explains the basics of the resolution approving employee disaster work, the criteria for employees being activated, and the basics of how disaster responses work in Hamilton County. It reviews the roles volunteers may be asked to take, explains the challenges and opportunities of working with people affected by disaster, and ends by encouraging all employees to take steps to prepare their households for a disaster.

Hamilton County Disaster Worker Program Overview



14:01

Potential Disaster Volunteering Roles

Hamilton County Disaster Volunteer Program



24:32

Caring for People During a Disaster

Hamilton County Disaster Volunteer Program



10:21

Personal Preparedness Recommendations

Hamilton County Disaster Volunteer Program



9:04

New Collaborative Initiative: Hamilton County COAD



Community Organizations Active in Disaster

The Hamilton County Community Organizations Active in Disaster (COAD) was officially launched in 2023 in support of Strategic Plan Goals #1 and #2. This is a collaborative group of organizations that want to help our community before, during, and after disasters. Similar groups exist across the U.S. and play an important role in local disaster response and recovery. The COAD was formed in order support response and recovery efforts.

Centered on the core values of communication, collaboration, cooperation, and coordination, the COAD meets regularly so that if disaster strikes, organizations already have a framework for working together effectively. The COAD met twice in 2023, with 20+ organizations represented in each meeting. COAD members decided to meet twice annually in person in the spring and the fall, and to communicate updates and information via newsletter in the winter and summer.

COAD members represent many groups and sectors, including:

- Disaster responders
- Healthcare
- Insurance
- People with disabilities
- Older adults
- Refugees/immigrants
- People experiencing homelessness
- Household pets
- Vulnerable population care
- Transportation
- Feeding
- Education
- Faith communities
- Nonprofits



EMHSA Mass Care Coordinator Alli Ferreri, left, meets with community partners at an outreach event to promote the COAD and general disaster preparedness.

The COAD continues to grow and is an exciting aspect of Hamilton County's emergency preparedness and resilience initiatives. Organizations interested in joining can learn more at hcready.org.

Facilities, Assets, & Operations



New EMHSA Assets

In 2023 Hamilton County EMA, acquired several new assets to enhance our emergency response support capabilities, as outlined in Strategic Plan Goal #7. These resources include:

- Sprinter van to be retrofitted for special events
- 20 Foot Enclosed Trailer to support mass care efforts
- Mass Casualty Unit with a F750 tractor and 40-ft. trailer

EOC Team

The Operations Division continued to maintain the Hamilton County Emergency Operations Center (EOC) Team throughout 2023 through ongoing engagement. Engagement included holding an annual EOC Team meeting and conducting monthly EOC team notification drills. As partner meetings occurred throughout the year, the Operations Division verified EOC team membership and onboarded new team members as identified.



67 EOC Team Members



39 EOC Positions



12 EOC Team Drills

EMHSA Offices

Plans for a joint EMHSA/Hamilton County Communications Center building in Springdale (at 111 Tri-County Parkway, Springdale, OH) continue to move forward. In 2023, a communications tower was installed at the site and the renovations package was approved by the Board of County Commissioners and put forth for bid in December. The current expected time until the move is Fall 2025.

Until then, EMHSA continues to operate out of the Regional Operations Center (ROC) in Price Hill (at 2000 Radcliff Drive, Cincinnati, OH). The Operations Division keeps the facility functioning in partnership with other building residents, including the City of Cincinnati Communications Center, Greater Cincinnati Fusion Center, Cincinnati Fire, Cincinnati SWAT, and others.

Public Safety Warehouse

The COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent supply distribution efforts underscored the importance of having a dedicated space for the county to house emergency response and recovery resources. While county PPE distribution from the temporarily- leased warehouse in Blue Ash ended, the need for a more permanent warehousing solution remained.

In 2023, Hamilton County signed a lease for a new 40,000 square foot public safety warehouse in Forest Park. Resource Management Coordinator Ben Casteel managed the successful transition from Blue Ash to Forest Park. Over the course of 3 days, movers moved 160 pallets from Blue Ash to Forest Park - approximately ten 53' semi-trailer loads.



Ben Casteel prepares for the transition to the new warehouse.

Updates to the new facility are being made in two phases in order to best support emergency supplies and assets. Phase 1 is focused on getting the warehouse space operational to store vehicles and other assets, which is slated to be completed in early 2024. Phase 2 will involve renovations to existing office space at front of the warehouse. The second floor office space will provide offices and a small training location for EMA and its partners. Additionally, the first floor will serve as a satellite location for another County department.

Warehouse Partners:

- 513 Relief Bus
- Hamilton County Facilities (siren maintenance supply storage)
- Hamilton County Public Health
- Hamilton County Coroner's Office
- Hamilton County Fire Chiefs' Urban Search & Rescue Team
- Hamilton County Police Chief's Dive Team
- Hamilton County Police Chief's Civil Response Team
- Hamilton County Soil & Water Conservation District
- American Red Cross (anticipated 2024)



The new Hamilton County Public Safety Warehouse in Forest Park.
Photo by Ben Casteel

Local Emergency Planning Committee



The Greater Cincinnati Harbor & Maritime Cooperative exercises a boom deployment on the Ohio River with many LEPC partners in attendance.

The Local Emergency Planning Committee (LEPC) is tasked with monitoring the use, storage, production, and release of hazardous materials in Hamilton County. The Hamilton County LEPC, which supports Strategic Plan Goal #6, is an active group with representatives from many sectors, including first responders, health professionals, environmental protection, transportation and rail, elected officials, and community stakeholders.

The LEPC accomplished many things in 2023, including the successful planning and facilitation of a TTX in May. This exercise tested the county's Hazardous Materials Response Plan. A total of 41 people participated in the exercise, representing many of the agencies that would work together in a hazardous materials emergency. The LEPC continued to support our two regional hazardous materials response teams, both through facilitating trainings and by using LEPC funds to provide them with advanced hazardous materials incident management software known as PEAC-WMD. This software is a valuable chemical research tool and chemical release modeling tool.



Doug Witsken leads partners through the LEPC TTX in May.

LEPC by the Numbers

- 655** Facilities reporting hazardous chemical inventory (Tier II Reports) to the LEPC
- 73** Hazardous materials spills and releases reported to the LEPC
- 37** Records requests processed
- 14** Hazardous materials trainings provided by the LEPC
- 456** Students attending LEPC-provided hazardous materials trainings

The LEPC had a change in leadership in October of 2023. Chairperson Charles Lewis, an executive with Michelman Chemical, stepped down from the role, in which he had served for the past 8 years. Charles was deeply committed to the mission of the LEPC during his tenure. Thankfully, Charles will continue as a member of the LEPC.

The new Chairperson for the Hamilton County LEPC is Sloane Weber, an attorney with Frost Brown Todd specializing in environmental law. Sloane has been involved with the LEPC for 6 years and brings both experience from the chemical industry and legal expertise to our organization.

"We are very excited to have her as our new Chairperson and look forward to her leadership in coming years," said Doug Witsken. Witsken continues to lead the LEPC and engage new and existing partners alongside Chairperson Weber.



Outgoing Chairperson Charles Lewis, left, is recognized for his service by new Chairperson Sloane Weber, right.

Aerial photo of East Palestine train derailment and fire
Photo by Gene J. Puskar/Associated Press

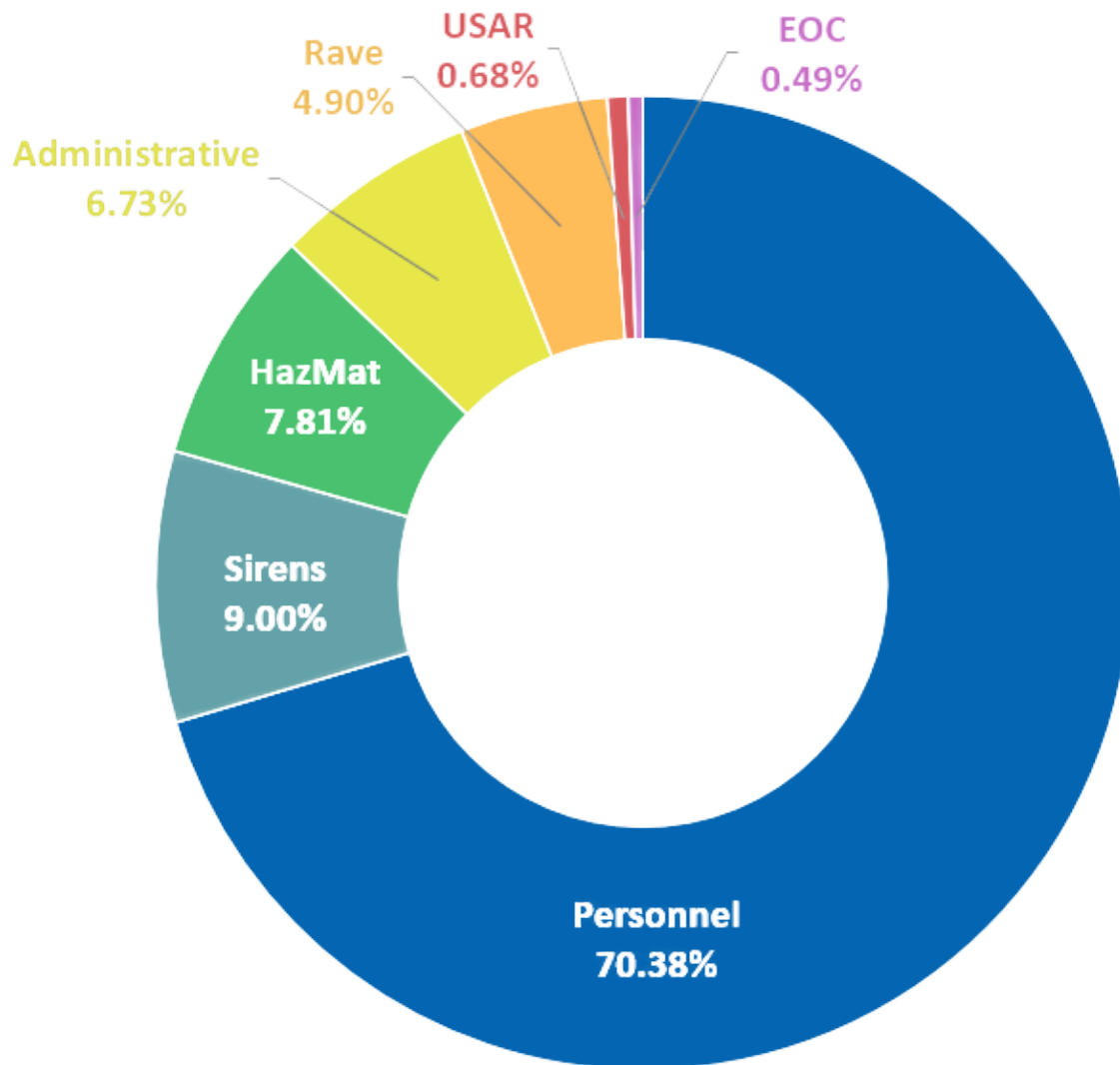


Impact of East Palestine Derailment & Fire

On February 3, 2023, a train carrying hazardous materials derailed near the town of East Palestine, OH. The subsequent fire and chemical release prompted evacuations and garnered national attention as local residents feared for their safety. The incident and response put a new spotlight on the work of LEPCs across the country, especially here in Hamilton County where multiple rail lines converge. Hamilton County's LEPC Coordinator, Doug Witsken, provided information to all major local media outlets in the area and conducted several interviews explaining local hazardous materials preparedness following the incident. The LEPC supports first responders and has provided training on tank car fire responses, hazardous materials releases, and first receiver procedures for years. The LEPC maintains a positive working relationship with our local rail companies and is vigilant in preparing our first responders for such events and mitigating risks.

2023 Budget & Grants

Total EMHSA Operating Budget
\$1,309,172.12



Grants Managed by EMHSA:

- Hazardous Materials Emergency Preparedness Grant
- Hazard Mitigation Grant Program
- State Homeland Security Grant
- Public Utilities Commission of Ohio Grant
- Urban Area Security Initiative Grant
- Duke Energy Foundation Grant
- State Emergency Response Grant
- Emergency Management Performance Grant



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