

FY 2024 ANNUAL REPORT



WALTON COUNTY EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

75 South Davis Lane

DeFuniak Springs, FL 32435

(850) 892 - 8065 | WaltonCountyEM.org



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OUR MISSION AND VISION

MISSION

Prevent, mitigate, prepare for, respond to, and recover from all hazards, emergencies, and disasters, using a whole community approach.

VISION

Continue to be a recognized leader in Emergency Management by building strategic community partnerships and effective public education.

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Regional visit from FDEM Director, Kevin Guthrie



August 2024, CERT Final Training / Exercise



Employee onboarding in Tallahassee, Florida

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MEET OUR TEAM



Jeff Goldberg, FPEM, FMI
Director



Donna Free, FPEM, FMI
Deputy Director



Catie Feeney, MS, FAEM
Operations Coordinator

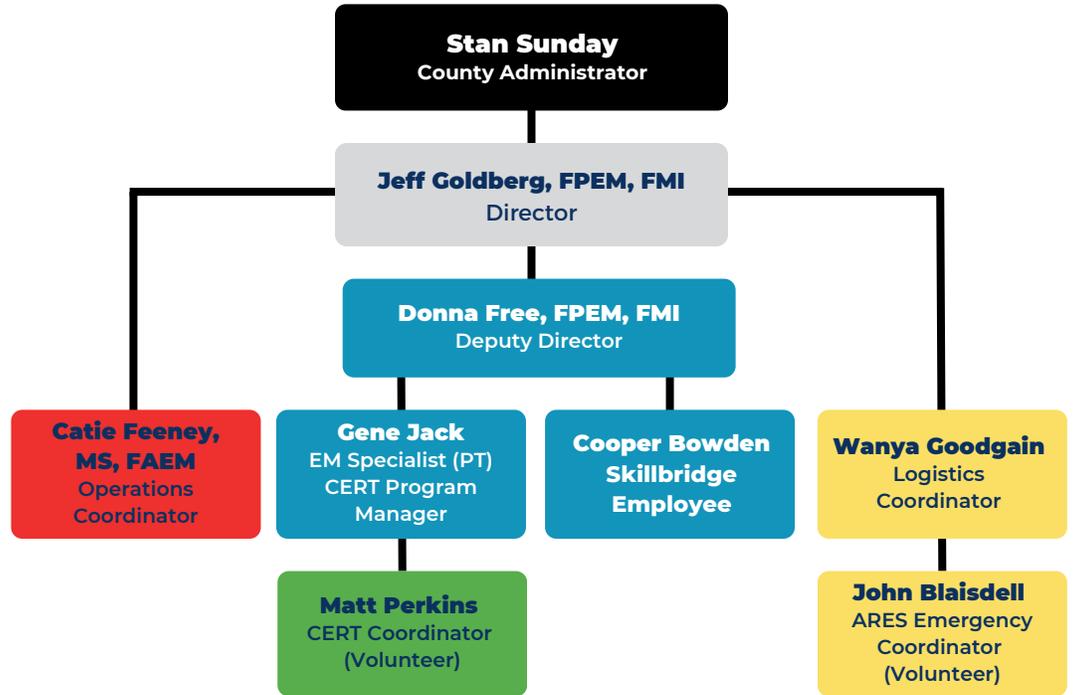


Wanya Goodgain
Logistics Coordinator



Gene Jack, FAEM
EM Specialist

DEPARTMENTAL STRUCTURE



FY 2024 STAFF HIGHLIGHTS

- Florida Associate Emergency Manager (FAEM) - *Gene Jack*
- Credentialed Type III Planning Section Chief - *Donna Free*
- Credentialed Type III Operations Section Chief - *Catie Feeney*
- Florida Emergency Preparedness Association Area 1 Governor - *Catie Feeney*
- Florida Emergency Preparedness Association Executive Board Secretary - *Jeff Goldberg*



Governor's Hurricane Conference (GHC) presentation with Suwannee County EM



Gene Jack receiving his FAEM

OPERATIONS



23-24 ACTIVATIONS

30A SONGWRITER'S FESTIVAL

January 11 -15, 2024

Remote Event Support

- WCEM activated its Command Trailer in support of the 30A Songwriter's Festival in Grand Boulevard.
- Served as the Incident Command Post (ICP) and coordinated public safety resources and communications throughout the event.
- Trained 10 volunteers on activation process including documentation and communications.

EMERGENCY COLD WEATHER SHELTERING

October 2023 - March 2024 | Level 2
Activation (Partial), 29 nights

- 29 in-person sheltering evenings in DeFuniak Springs Community Center.
- 15 in-person sheltering evenings in South Walton.
- Matrix C.O.C served 93 clients over the a five-month period through cold weather assistance.

JANUARY SEVERE WEATHER

January 9, 2024 | Level 2 Activation (Partial)

- Three EF 1 tornados made landfall in the early morning hours across Walton County.
- The strongest EF 1 reached peak wind speeds of 110mph, 11 mile path from Santa Rosa Beach to DeFuniak Springs.
- EF 1 over the DeFuniak Springs Airport had an estimated peak wind of 90mph, 0.4 mile path, and width of 200 yards.
- EF 1 over the Eucheeanna area with an estimated peak wind speed of 95mph, 0.8 mile path, and width of 160 yards.
- Conducted preliminary damage assessments, provided water and tarps and coordinated with American Red Cross Disaster Assistance Teams (DAT) to support affected residents.

SOUTH WALTON SHARK ATTACKS

June 7, 2024 | Level 2 Activation (Partial) Scene Support

- Three separate shark bite incidents within one hour period occurred in WaterColor and Seagrove Beach.
- WCEM provided remote support to South Walton Fire District and Walton County Sheriff's Office for documentation and public information management.
- Receiving national media coverage with aggregate readership at **19,138,392,104**.



Chief Ryan Crawford, SWFD during shark attack press conference; SWFD rescue of bite survivor in WaterSound



HURRICANE HELENE

September 24 - 30, 2024 | Level 2 Activation (Partial)

- Portions of the county were under Tropical Storm Warnings, triggering a partial activation. Thankfully, Walton County was unscathed by the storm. Read more about Hurricane Helene response in the *Mutual Aid* section.

PROGRAMS

DUTY OFFICER PROGRAM

WCEM staff members participate in a two-week rotation to provide after-hours emergency response, as needed. This year, there were 123 calls to the 24-hour on call number, with field response provided to 32 scenes for supplies and coordination. Field responses included two tornado touchdowns, shark attacks, a wildfire, and multiple motor vehicle crashes involving hydrocarbon or other hazardous materials.

HAZARD MATERIALS SITE ASSESSMENT PROGRAM

The Hazardous Materials Site Assessment Program, led by the Florida Division of Emergency Management (FDEM), provides response agencies in the County and the public with updated, hazard-specific planning information and data. These assessments provide first responders with facility information within their jurisdiction that house hazardous materials. Our team inspected and reported on 31 chemical facilities, in accordance with State contract.

MITIGATION PROGRAM

As defined by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), mitigation is the effort to reduce loss of life and property by lessening the impact of disasters. The Walton County Local Mitigation Strategy (LMS) Working Group is coordinated by WCEM. The LMS Working Group is comprised of County, municipal, private sector, community partners, and the general public. For more information, visit waltoncountym.org

EVACUATION ZONE CERTIFICATION PROGRAM

WCEM helps manage and plan for the growth of commercial and residential building by assisting the Planning Department in evacuation zone certifications. This data is used to assist with evacuation clearance time and traffic impact studies. Last year, WCEM provided 199 evacuation zone certifications to the Planning Department to support development.

HEALTHCARE COMPREHENSIVE EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT PLAN (CEMP) REVIEW PROGRAM

State law requires that the Agency for Health Care Administration (AHCA) develop and adopt minimum criteria for certain healthcare agency CEMPs, as well as plans for emergency power generation. The law also requires that the CEMPs and emergency power plans be reviewed and approved by WCEM for compliance. This year, our team reviewed 32 healthcare CEMPs.



Press interview for January tornadoes



Fuel leak response in Freeport Industrial Park



Submerged vehicle response in Choctaw Beach



2024 Volunteer Appreciation Event, Stronghold Solutions



Teresa Jack, CERT volunteer in State EOC press room



Mullet Festival outreach booth in DeFuniak Springs



Adopt a Highway cleanup, US 331 South



COMMUNITY EMERGENCY RESPONSE TEAM

BUILDING RESILIENCY & GIVING BACK.

The WCEM Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) is a community-based organization comprised of civic-minded residents who learn how to safely take emergency response actions until professional responders arrive. The curriculum of the CERT course focuses on skills such as disaster preparedness, disaster medical operations, light search and rescue, the incident command structure (ICS), disaster psychology, and more. The CERT members meet monthly, where they host a variety of trainings to expand their preparedness knowledge.

Walton County CERT is heavily involved within our community by participating in dozens of community outreach events, providing services to non-profit organizations, and supporting the EOC in both blue and gray skies. This year, our team took a trip to the State's Capital, Tallahassee, where volunteers had the opportunity to meet with FDEM Executive Director, Kevin Guthrie at the State Emergency Operations Center, National Weather Service Tallahassee, and the Digital Information Analysis Lab (DIAL) program at Florida State University. And, if the over one hundred community events wasn't enough to give back, the team "Adopted a Highway" in Freeport. This two-mile stretch of US 331 is maintained quarterly by our volunteers.

In gray skies, several members had the opportunity to put their skills to the test and deployed to Taylor County following Hurricane Helene. Members served residents in need through managing their donations warehouse space and prioritized goods to affected areas. Not only does this give our volunteers the opportunity to help others, but gain valuable knowledge for upcoming disasters.

\$127,999

**IN-KIND
CONTRIBUTIONS**

Monetary value of service to Walton County

3,822 190

VOLUNTEER HOURS VOLUNTEERED EVENTS



MUTUAL AID

HURRICANE DEBBY, HELENE, AND MILTON

Walton County is all too familiar with natural disasters, including wildfires, tornadoes, and hurricanes. Fortunately, our County was unscathed by major impacts. Our team was fortunate enough to be able help our EM community in their local response.



Donation management site for Hurricane Helene, Taylor County

When a major disaster strikes, it often overwhelms local resources and, in the State of Florida, every jurisdiction is a signatory on the Statewide Mutual Aid Agreement. This process allows one jurisdiction to send resources (people and equipment) to another to aid response and recovery from major disasters.

Walton County has had the privilege to serve our sister counties in recent years for a variety of storms. The opportunity to serve impacted counties not only helps our partners in their time of need, but also allows our staff to apply our training and better prepare for future disaster in Walton County.

This year, we had the opportunity to serve in both a chaotic and controlled environment, participating in Gulf Coast Air Show in Bay County, as well as back-to-back deployments in the Florida Big Bend.

GULF COAST AIR SHOW BAY COUNTY, FL

May 3 - 4, 2024

Provided mutual aid planning to the inaugural Gulf Coast Air Show. Donna Free and Catie Feeney served as planning support for Panama City Beach Fire, Police, Tyndall Air Force Base and Bay County Sheriff's Office. Additionally, staff supported Bay County EM in event pre-planning and assisted the facilitation of the tabletop exercise to prepare for the event.

HURRICANE DEBBY SUWANNEE COUNTY, FL

August 4 - August 23, 2024

Staff members Catie Feeney and Donna Free returned to Suwannee County for Hurricane Debby, a Category 1 Hurricane with a peak intensity of 80 mph and over 11 inches and catastrophic riverine flooding. A total 58,650 CY of debris removal and an estimated \$263.2 million in overall agricultural economic loss.

- Catie Feeney: Deputy Incident Command
- Donna Free: Planning Section Chief, Recovery



Gulf Coast Air Show, PCB



Operations Briefing, Gulf Coast Air Show



"Passing the torch" in Suwannee County



Suwannee County EOC



Mutual Aid for Hurricane Debby, Suwannee County

HURRICANE HELENE & HURRICANE MILTON WAKULLA, SUWANNEE, LAFAYETTE, TAYLOR & MANATEE COUNTY, FL

September 24 - October 10, 2024

Activated internally to a Level 2 (Partial) to support mutual aid for Category 4 Hurricane Helene. WCEM staff and CERT volunteers staggered their deployment windows to allow for ample response and recovery support efforts throughout the state. This event caused wind damage to the Florida Big Bend and catastrophic surge to the Peninsula of Florida. Just 12 days later, Category 3 Hurricane Milton made landfall in Manatee County, reverting all recovery operations back to response.

- Catie Feeney, Planning Section (Wakulla County)
- Catie Feeney: Deputy Incident Command (Suwannee County)
- Jeff Goldberg: Incident Command (Lafayette County)
- Donna Free: Planning Section Chief (Manatee County)
- Wanya Goodgain: Logistics Section Chief (Manatee County)
- CERT Volunteers: Dave Wilderzman, Michael Pinkham, Rick Royston, Matt Perkins, Karla Padilla (Taylor County)



Donation management site for Hurricane Helene, Taylor County



IC Strategy Meeting, Suwannee County



Manatee County Mutual Aid



Lafayette County Mutual Aid



Florida Guard in Suwannee County

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

SERVING WITH PURPOSE, LEADING BY EXAMPLE.

Community involvement is the key to building trust with the residents and visitors. We value building relationships with our community and its partners, while providing valuable preparedness information.



Community outreach is the practice of conducting local public awareness activities in Walton County communities. WCEM's outreach program utilizes our website, social media, presentations by WCEM staff and CERT volunteers, and numerous other activities.

There were 32 in-person community outreach events that reached over 20,000 people. Some of those events encompassed preparedness booths, including the Walton County Fair, Freeport Farmer's Market, CHELCO Safety Day, Senior Center Safety Fairs, and the Walton Workforce and Wellness Expo. While Walton County was not able to host our yearly HERRricane Girl's summer camp, Catie and Donna had the opportunity to assist Escambia County EM kick off their first offering in June!

Emergency Management provides both local and statewide presentations on preparedness and best practices, including guest lecture for the Florida State University Emergency Management and Homeland Security Program, Walton County Rotary Club, Walton County Garden Club, and Preparedness Town Hall meetings.

Team members Catie Feeny and Jeff Goldberg provided professional presentations at the Florida Emergency Preparedness Association (FEPA) Annual Meeting in January. Feeny also presented at the Governor's Hurricane Conference (GHC) discussing her experience as mutual aid resource during Hurricane Idalia.

32

**COMMUNITY
OUTREACH EVENTS**

20,000

**RESIDENTS AND
VISITORS REACHED**



Hurricane Town Hall Meeting, Santa Rosa Beach

SOCIAL MEDIA CHANNELS

WCEM maintains and manages three social media platforms to notify and engage the public during blue skies as well as grey skies: Facebook, Twitter (X), and now LinkedIn. Channels have seen an increase in key analytic measurements, including followers, likes, and content engagement. Total page reach has increased across all platforms.

4,414
TWITTER (X)
FOLLOWERS



47,395
FACEBOOK
FOLLOWERS

ALERT NOTIFICATION SYSTEM

The key to connecting with our community is our alert and notification system. We use a multi-prong approach to this employing social media, press releases, and the Everbridge® /AlertWalton system.

Since the inception of the program, we have seen a yearly increase in user groups, notifications, and contacts. Federal Executive Order 1340 ensures we have an effective, reliable, integrated, and comprehensive alert system. IPAWS, or the Integrated Public Alert Warning System allows local jurisdictions to deliver messages simultaneously through multiple sources. In blue skies, the system is used for community updates and in gray skies, the system is used to share life-saving messaging including safety messaging, Point of Distribution (POD) locations, sheltering options, and more.

This fiscal year's total internal contact path count was 121,616, with 23,860 total unique opt-ins. 265 total notifications were distributed from this system last year. Partnering agencies, including Walton County Sheriff's Office, School District, South Walton Mosquito District, and our municipal partners also utilize this platform to communicate with their residents and employees.



121,616
TOTAL ALERTWALTON
CONTACT PATHS

265
TOTAL
NOTIFICATIONS

DEPARTMENTAL BUDGET

Every year, county emergency management agencies in the State of Florida receive two grants to support efforts to build and sustain core capabilities across the Prevention, Protection, Mitigation, Response, and Recovery mission areas. WCEM continuously looks for additional grant funding opportunities to increase the number and quality of programs we deliver as well as to continually upgrade our technology and capabilities.

- Emergency Management Preparedness and Assistance (EMPA) grant comes from the Florida Catastrophic Trust Fund and is funded through home and business insurance surcharges. The **EMPA grant award is \$105,806, annually.**
- Emergency Management Performance Grant (EMPG) annual award is based on population and distributed from FEMA. **The EMPG grant award for the fiscal year was \$63,933.**
- Through Volunteer Florida, our department has the opportunity to apply yearly for the Citizen Corp grant, which improves our Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) and Amateur Radio Emergency Support (ARES) programs. **\$10,000 was award to purchase equipment and materials to support the CERT program and train members of our community to respond to emergencies and disasters within their local communities.**
- One-time capital purchases included two Ford F-250s (\$170,000), a 100kW Generator (\$115,000), and light tower trailer (\$20,000).

The department's operating budget for FY 24 was \$920,446, with WCEM receiving \$750,707 in general revenue funding (\$440,707 after capital outlay).

MEMORANDA OF UNDERSTANDING (MOU) & INTERLOCAL AGREEMENTS & CONTRACTS

MOUs and interlocal agreements in blue skies are the key to successful operations in gray skies:

- Renewal of contract with DRC Emergency Services for debris management and logistics support services.
- Awarded TetraTech the debris monitoring and recovery support contract.
- Signed the Statewide Mutual Aid Agreement (SMAA) with the Florida Division of Emergency Management (FDEM), which allows assets to be deployed throughout the state.



\$920,446

**TOTAL FY 24
OPERATING BUDGET**

TRAINING

In Walton County, we understand the importance of providing year-round training to the emergency management professionals and stakeholders in our area. Serving as the center point for the region, our department is dedicated to hosting unique curricula for the Florida Panhandle. Included this year's curriculum is the EOC 101 training, customized for Walton County staff and partners to better understand their expectations and processes when we activate the EOC. This course incorporates training resources for their specific roles, as well as leadership and team building exercises.

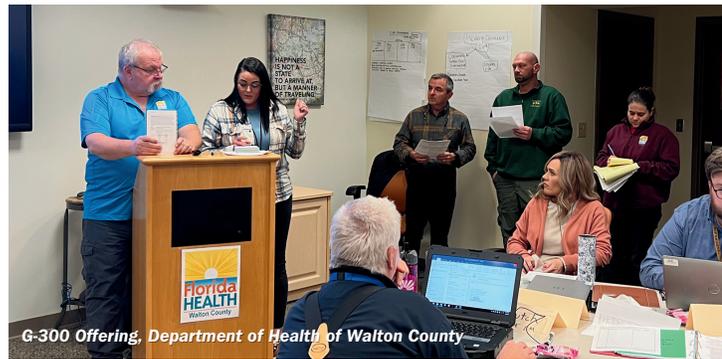
In addition to our traditional emergency management curriculum, Director Jeff Goldberg and Deputy Director, Donna Free began the Certified Public Manager® (CPM) program this year. Through Florida State University, this program is nationally recognized for training and developing public managers and supervisors and its primary goals are to professionalize public management and improve organizational efficiency. Free and Goldberg will graduate in Summer 2025.



CPM Training Class



FL-600 Series, Disaster Recovery



G-300 Offering, Department of Health of Walton County

TRAINING STATISTICS January 2017 - September 2024



EXERCISES

OPERATION: SLEIGH BELLS RING

Donations Management Functional Exercise

In addition to providing support to the Matrix COC's Community Christmas program, this exercise tested our ability to manage donation operations. Participants created a process to sort the thousands of donated resources as well as to fulfill resource requests from a pre-vetted list.



Toy Sorting Exercise, Walton County Fairgrounds

OPERATION: WHAT'S MY ZONE?

Public Information and Warning Functional Exercise

This exercise was designed to test the County's external notification process and system, AlertWalton. An informational message was sent to the database on the first day of Hurricane Season, sharing the contact's specific evacuation zone and a link to our website for more preparedness material.

ANNUAL EOC EXERCISE

Flooding Functional Exercise

Developed and delivered by WCEM staff the county's activation staff and partners participated in this discussion-based functional exercise and walked through potential issues in a non-tropical and catastrophic flooding event. Participants of this exercise included over 90 activation staff, community partners, and Walton County leadership. It is a priority of WCEM to provide exercises outside of the normal hazards, such as hurricanes. This allows participants apply the process to different hazards and think "outside of the box" in their response tactics.



Annual EOC Exercise

ACTIVE ASSAILANT

Active Assailant Full Scale Exercise

This four-hour full scale exercise focused on information/intelligence sharing, coordination of resources, and command/coordination in an active shooter incident at South Walton High School. The collaborative efforts of Walton County School District, Walton County Sheriff's Office, Walton County Fire Rescue, and WCEM led to the exercise's successful development and delivery. Stakeholders and county partners came together earlier in the year for a tabletop discussion, and were given the opportunity to test their skills in-person.

Donna Free and Jeff Goldberg served as exercise evaluators and Catie Feeny acted as on-scene Unified Command alongside Walton County Sheriff's Office and South Walton Fire District. Together, they coordinated response requirements, funneled key information, and established scene priorities.



Discussion with School District and Unified Command

LEGISLATIVE UPDATES

In early 2024, Florida legislators proposed changes to Florida State Statute 252.38 1(b)1 advocating for statewide minimum qualifications for emergency management directors. The proposed legislation included recommendations of a bachelor's degree to be required for current and future directors, with a provision that all current directors obtain their bachelor's degree within two years. Existing verbiage would've disproportionately affected the rural counties in our state. Director Jeff Goldberg and Deputy Director, Donna Free worked with legislators to craft substitute legislation and travelled to Tallahassee to represent the county directors and the Florida Emergency Preparedness Association (FEPA), to advocate for inclusive yet effective criteria for EM directors. The substitute legislation was passed.



EM Day at the Capitol, Rep. Shane Abbott



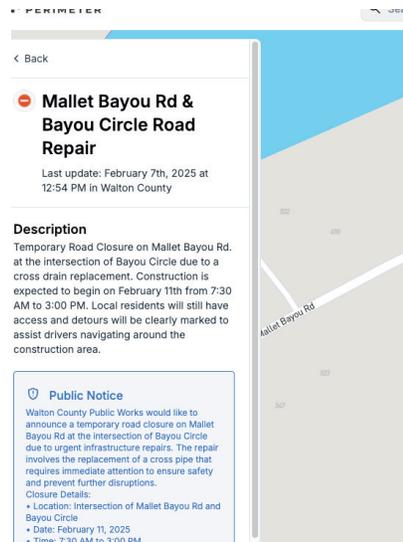
EM Day at the Capitol, State's EM Directors



Presentation to Florida Legislature

PURCHASE OF PERIMETER MAPPING PROGRAM

In an effort to find a mapping interface solution for county residents and visitors to advising road closures and hazards, WCEM was introduced to the Perimeter®, which was designed to share critical road closure and evacuation information in a disaster. Designed by the daughter of a California firefighter and native well-versed in wildfire evacuations, Perimeter has created user-friendly platform where EM, Public Works, and Dispatch staff can quickly notify the public in real-time of hazards on roadways.



View of Perimeter Platform; Perimeter team visit to Walton County EOC



APPROVAL OF CEMP

WCEM completed a full revision of the Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan (CEMP) to enhance preparedness, coordination, and resilience in disaster situations. This updated plan reflects the latest best practices, lessons learned from past incidents, and input from key stakeholders to ensure a more effective and efficient response and recovery. The revision strengthens interagency collaboration, clarifies roles and responsibilities, and integrates new strategies for mitigating and responding to emergencies. By modernizing the plan, Walton County aims to better protect its residents, infrastructure, and natural resources in the face of future disasters.



WEST FLORIDA AREA
EMERGENCY

