



COLORADO

Division of Homeland Security & Emergency Management

Department of Public Safety

September 23, 2023

Dear Colorado Emergency Managers;

This has been another busy year for all of us across a broad range of incidents and events. While “unprecedented” became the most overused term of the last few years, I characterize 2023-2024 as a bellwether year. Our emergency management enterprise dealt with things ranging from Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) to cyber attacks to traditional flooding and tornados. The enterprise also adapted migration from the Southwest Border and disruption in the state’s fuel supply. It is also not lost on us that for the third consecutive year, Colorado received a presidentially declared major disaster declaration under the Stafford Act (not including COVID). Our future is clear: Colorado is a disaster prone state. Our responsibility to prepare the communities we serve is greater now than ever before. With that in mind, preparedness is the theme of this year’s letter.

Preparedness is a vast topic but this letter provides some focus for this phase of emergency management. Evaluating our aggregate Colorado Emergency Preparedness Assessment (CEPA) data, reviewing our after action reviews and considering Colorado’s evolving environment, I am focusing on three areas: integrated preparedness planning, recovery preparedness and alert, warning and evacuation preparedness. I also continue to focus on mitigation as I have for the past several years.

Integrated preparedness planning is the next step after the CEPA. It is the prioritized action plan or the “now what” once we have identified our gaps and areas to improve. Grant guidance will come from DHSEM with the requirements for Integrated Preparedness Plans (IPP), but I encourage you all to think of the IPP as much more than a grant requirement. Use the IPP as a way to bring your partners together and a methodology to address tough challenges. Last year, seven all-hazards regions and 19 counties did IPPs. Some were more meaningful than others. Whether you choose to do a county, multi-county or regional IPP, take the time this year to start early, bring your stakeholders together and develop a product that gives you the focus you need to close the gaps in your communities. It is also a tool you can take to your commissioners, county managers and others to advocate for resources to execute your plan. As always, our Office of

Emergency Management (OEM) Integrated Preparedness Specialists are ready to guide you through this process and facilitate your IPP workshops.

Recovery preparedness was a focus last year and remains so this year. We have improved, but it is a challenging mission with many stakeholders. Like last year, I encourage you to engage with your recovery partners in a deliberate effort to identify roles and responsibilities, authorities, and develop a recovery playbook so that your jurisdiction has a solid starting point to begin the recovery journey from. Leverage your IPP process to bring the right people from the recovery support functions together to tackle recovery. Capture your recovery gaps and needs identified in your CEPA in the Planning, Organizing, Equipping, Training and Exercising (POETE) structure of the IPP. This will help provide a structured approach to improving recovery preparedness in Colorado. This year, the OEM Recovery Team began rolling out the Recovery Education and Outreach Program to improve recovery preparedness by providing recovery education and sharing lessons from our recovery experiences throughout the state. Reach out to your Regional Field Manager to ask them to come to your county.

Expanding on last year's focus on emergency operations plans, this year we focus on our alert and warning plans. Each of your communities has diverse populations and unique environments that shape how you do alert and warning, nonetheless, it is imperative that we warn all our community members of imminent dangers and threats with timely and accurate information written in a detailed manner that everyone can understand. Once warned, we must have effective evacuation plans that get people out of harm's way. This is hard. It will take deliberate effort to develop whole community alert and warning plans that integrate multiple systems and find ways to test them responsibly. To assist with the effort, OEM Field Operations will deliver an alert and warning plan evaluation tool similar to the emergency operations plan tool you saw last year.

We are doing important work in mitigation and I am pleased with the direction we are going. Nonetheless, it is too important to take our eye off the ball so, as it has since 2019, mitigation remains one of my focus areas. Today, one Tribe and 58 counties have hazard mitigation plans (HMP) in place, up 5.3 percent from last year. You all completed 17 mitigation projects worth \$12.9M and received 11 awards worth \$4M for new projects. You also have another 33 projects at FEMA for review worth \$113.9M. This is great! But there is still work to do. Eleven HMPs are expired or will expire in the next 12 months and a significant amount of federal funding is still available. This is another area where emergency managers can leverage the IPP to bring together the right stakeholders and use the POETE structure to prioritize mitigation work and drive your mitigation projects applications.

I continue to be proud to serve in Colorado's emergency management enterprise and am humbled by the opportunity to work alongside all of you. We have made great strides in

growing our emergency management capacity in Colorado, but the changing environment demands more. We are the people our communities will look to on their toughest days. Let's make sure we are prepared.

See you out there,
Mike

Michael Willis
Director, Colorado Office of Emergency Management