

## Franklin County Regional Emergency Management Committee

March 28, 2024

Virtual Meeting Notes

**Attendance:** Micah Genzlinger (Fairfax FD), Julie Benedict (VEM), Sharon Bousquet (Highgate EMD), Harry Shoppmann (VEM), Shaun Coleman (NRPC), Zachary Borst (Maple Run SU), Reg Beliveau (Swanton Village/Town EMD, VTDFS), William Sheets (Swanton Village Manager).

Shaun began the meeting at 9:00 am followed by roll call. There was no quorum.

**Adjustments to the Agenda:** None.

**Minutes Approval:** Tabled.

### **Vermont July Flooding After Action Report – Julie Benedict, VEM**

Julie provided a presentation on strengths, lessons learned and areas of improvement regarding the July and August flooding that impacted many parts of the state. VEM is presenting the AAR to all areas of the state even those that were not affected in an attempt to improve state support. A survey was sent out to municipalities (18% responded) and the results were used for the report.

Areas of strength included use of technology for municipal outreach, responsiveness to needs of local responders, statewide briefings were valuable to communities. Dam personnel remained overnight and kept EMDs informed. Most respondents agreed state was flexible on evolving needs and pleased with state support during the response.

Areas of improvement included communication on debris management, clarification on what was billable under declaration, expanding mutual aid groups between towns and a disconnect between local EMDs and schools was noted. Coordination between Army Corps of Engineers and EMDs with response could be improved. A quicker transition from response to recovery was noted but Julie acknowledged this has more to do with politics. A high number of FEMA agents in the state led to mixed messaging. Efforts will be made to improve communication regarding damaged homes and buyouts, and using town meetings for outreach. There are challenges with the current use of the SEOC phone number and 211 data. There are a lack of generator grants generally to meet the high demand. The state is looking for alternative to improve information flow.

Sharon provided input on damages sustained at the Highgate landfill site during the rain events. The Town's appeal to FEMA to be added to declaration was denied. The Town is also still waiting on FEMA to approve their mitigation grant extension for a landfill slide project. The FEMA delays have been problematic for the town in that they have contractors and equipment ready to go since last year. The project has taken years due continuous FEMA delays.

Micah discussed the response and recovery efforts in Fairfax during the rain events. Overall, the damages and impact were minimal and confined to a few properties on Lamoille Street and Goose Pond Road. There were some minor road washouts. Town officials and NRPC met with FEMA and SBA damage assessment team to inspect damages and there were not enough to warrant an individual assistance request. Shaun added they also toured St. Albans City and Town for some residents who reported damage but nothing to the scale needed to warrant an individual assistance declaration.

Shaun and Reg discussed the Missisquoi River ice jam flooding event that occurred in 2018 and lessons learned. Julie asked for them to send comments about the response and recovery efforts to her.

#### **VT Fire Academy, Fire Safety and Community Risk – Reg Beliveau Jr.**

Reg reviewed the CRR program and provided an overview of the educational outreach efforts by DFS. This section of DFS provides support services, technical assistance, educational equipment and resources to help fire departments, fire and life safety educators, and other community organizations address and reduce the fire problems in their communities. DFS recommends that establishing CRR partnerships so that the whole community is involved in the solutions. CRR become part of the local “all hazards response” mindset.

The presentation included an overview of fire statistics statewide, and it noted that in the last 10 years, 70.6% of Vermont’s fire deaths have been over the age of 50. The elderly and young children are still the most vulnerable populations. Vermont has one of the largest number of firefighters and fire departments per capita. It ranks first in the nation for its per-capita use of wood for heat, with at least one in six Vermont households now using wood products as their primary heating source. CRR concepts include identifying risk, prioritizing risks, developing strategies and tactics to minimize risks, preparing and implementing a CRR plan, and monitoring, evaluating and modifying the CRR plan. CRR will help with justifying local fire budgets, addresses changes in community demographics, improves fire safety and occupational health and improves community relations. More information can be found here: <http://www.strategicfire.org> and here: <https://www.nfpa.org/News-and-Research/Resources/Community-Risk-Reduction>.

Reg also reviewed the Fire Safe 802 Program. This is a statewide community risk reduction and rural home fire safety improvement project developed by DFS. It builds on past fire prevention efforts and works to enhance the safety of most at risk rural residents. He noted that home safety visits have been singled out under CRR as one of the more effective measures that the fire service can take to improve public safety. The home safety survey is a key part of the Fire Safe 802 program. He concluded with a review of the NFPA’s *Steps to Safety (STS) - Prevent Fire and Falls at Home* program. STS pairs fire and EMS professionals with community partners to educate older adults about home fire and fall safety through group presentations, home visits, and the creation of a local resource network. STS resources and information may be found here: <https://www.nfpa.org/education-and-research/home-fire-safety/older-adults/steps-to-safety>.

There was a brief discussion following the presentation.

#### **VEM Updates – Harry Shoppmann, VEM**

- Harry provided an overview of state EOC support for the upcoming April 8 eclipse. The SEOC will be activated during the weekend and through Monday. State’s role is supporting towns with any resource needs. Anticipating traffic impacts and travel delays due to high volume of visitors.
- Local Emergency Management Plans are due May 1. Harry and/or Shaun can help if needed.
- The State preparedness conference will be held on September 10 and 11 at Lake Morey in Fairlee. A free room is available to one voting member of the REMC. Send Shaun an email if interested.

#### **NWVT Medical Reserve Corps - Jacquie Kelley, VDH**

Jacque was unable to attend. Shaun noted that the team is starting preparations for spring and summer events. They will be providing a first aid station at the Maple Festival in St. Albans in April. The Team will also begin their summer preparedness campaign which includes providing public education at state parks on staying safe from heat/sun, ticks, poison ivy, poison oak and other pests. They are also wrapping up their student educational safety program called Bright Lights at Night campaign in some area schools. Helen Short continues to provide foot care at Tim's Samaritan House in St. Albans. There is a high demand for foot care there.

**Officers (Chair, Vice Chair) & Committee Reps**

Tabled.

**Other Business**

There was a brief discussion on final preparations for the April 8 Eclipse. The path of totality stretches from St. Albans to Richford. Many communities in the county have various community events planned. There have been a series of public safety meetings with local officials since last fall regarding operational planning for fire, rescue, law enforcement and municipalities including traffic safety plans, mutual aid resource staging including marine units, and communications.

**Public Comment**

No comment.

The meeting ended at approximately 10:15 a.m.