**STATE EMERGENCY RESPONSE COMMISSION**

**BUSINESS MEETING**

**April 21, 2023**

**1:00 P.M. to 4:00 p.m.**

**Egan Convention Center**

**Anchorage, Alaska**

**MINUTES**

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT:

State Department Members

Bryan Fisher Department of Military and Veteran Affairs

Present Department of Environmental Conservation - present

Absent Department of Commerce, Community, Economic Development

Absent Department of Fish & Game

Absent Department of Health

Adam Weinert Department of Labor & Workforce Development

Absent Department of Natural Resources

Bryan Barlow Department of Public Safety

Mike Tunley Department of Transportation & Public Facilities

Public Members

George Vakalis SERC/LEPC/URBAN - Anchorage

Simon Brown SERC/LEPC/URBAN - Wasilla

Absent SERC/LEPC/RURAL - Sitka

Michael Paschall SERC/LEPC/RURAL - Delta Junction

Casey Cook Local Government - MatSu Borough

Vacant Local Government -

Absent Public Member-At-Large

Ex-Officio Members

Absent Department of Administration

Absent Department of Education and Early Development

Paul Valley FEMA Alaska Area Officer

George Tolt Alaska Command

Jeff Hoggin U.S. Coast Guard

Mary Goolie U.S. EPA - Alaska Operations Office

**I. CALL TO ORDER**

Co-Chair Commissioner Torrence Saxe called the meeting to order at 1:00 p.m.

**A. Roll Call**

Mr. Dave Reilly, SERC Coordinator, took roll call.

**B. Quorum Determination**

A quorum is present to conduct business.

**C. Administrative Announcements**

Mr. Reilly made announcements concerning participants by phone or zoom, how to make public comment, and meeting documents will be on the website.

**II. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS**

Co-Chair Saxe welcomed his Co-Chair Commissioner Jason Brune and members of the panel. He commented that over the past four years residents and agencies from the State of Alaska have dealt with over 30 disasters--including earthquakes, the typhoon in Western Alaska, wildfires, and flooding. And we still have spring break-up to get through this year.

Colonel Matt Kirby of the Air National Guard will provide a brief on the typhoon response. This was the biggest off the road response in over 40 years. He then invited Commissioner Brune to make his comments.

Co-Chair Commissioner Brune thanked everyone for attending today’s meeting. He noted that FEMSA will provide a presentation on electric vehicles and lithium-ion batteries to the commission.

LEPCs have had questions and concerns in the past about hazardous materials traveling through their communities. We recently saw a derailment in Ohio, which validates their concerns. Our Alaska Railroad is celebrating 100 years in operation, and we’ll have a presentation to the commission about their operation and how they transport toxic materials in Alaska, so we don’t have an incident similar to Ohio.

There have been announcements about the toxic release inventory (TRI) report. We had a press release at DEC about two communities that show as two of the top five of the most toxic communities in the United States based on toxic release inventory. He has issues with the TRI report because it shows that when you move a rock, for example, at the Red Dog Mine from point A to point B, which shows as a toxic release. However, an incident like the derailment in Ohio doesn’t even make the list. He’s been discussing with EPA the need to differentiate between a release that impacts the environment and human health and an event in permitted facilities like mines.

Our written brief includes a number of things. Recent oil spills that have occurred. Our oil spill contingency plan regs that we’ve been talking about for four years have been finalized since our last meeting. We’ve had staffing changes. We now have an online spill reporting tool that’s easy to use to report spills so we can quickly respond.

We have an open comment period for micro-reactors. U.S. military is very interested in a test case at Eielson for using a micro-reactor. Governor Dunleavy is interested in it as well, as an opportunity to de-carbonize Alaska villages. So, folks can weigh in on locations for these micro-reactors. We welcome your comments.

We met recently with staff from military, EPA, Department of Interior, and others on the statement of cooperation group dealing specifically with contaminated sites. There are nearly a thousand sites, and the State has sued on those issues. EPA has been a great partner on that to bring in funding to clean up those sites. A lot of your communities have potential impacts from those contaminated sites, and we want to hold the federal government accountable in getting those sites cleaned up.

Commissioner Brune thanked everyone for their efforts with respect to SERC and LEPCs. Co-Chair Saxe added his thanks and acknowledged federal partners, state partners, and local communities in the room for today’s meeting.

**II. APPROVL OF PREVIOUS MEETING MINUTES**

Co-Chair Saxe asked for a motion to approve the previous minutes.

**MOTION**: George Vakalis moved to approve the SERC meeting minutes from October 14, 2022.

Michael Paschall **SECONDED** the motion.

Motion was **APPROVED** unanimously.

**IV. PUBLIC COMMENT**

Co-Chair Commissioner Saxe stated that no one had signed in to make a comment, so he opened it up to the floor for public comment. Hearing no response, he moved on to the next item.

**V. CONSENT AGENDA**

**A. Approval of Agenda**

Co-Chair Saxe asked if there were any changes to the agenda. Hearing none, it is approved.

**B. Local Emergency Planning Committee (LEPC) Appointments**

Co-Chair Saxe asked for a motion to approve the appointments.

**MOTION**: George Vakalis moved to approve the Local Emergency Planning Committee Appointments as presented.

Michael Paschall **SECONDED** the motion.

Motion was **APPROVED** unanimously.

**C. SERC Meeting Dates**

Co-Chair Saxe stated that we have a **suggested date of Friday, October 13, 2023**, for the fall meeting. More information will be shared as we get closer to October. Please let us know if you have a scheduling conflict with that date so we can work it out.

**VI. STATE AGENCY REPORTS**

**A. DHS&EM Updates - Bryan Fisher, Director**

Mr. Bryan Fisher stated that while his department did provide a written report, they wanted to take the opportunity to provide a verbal update of his team’s accomplishments since last October.

We continue with an unprecedented amount of disaster declarations in the State. We’ve had about 30 declared disasters in the last two years. Twenty-three of those declarations were made by Governor Dunleavy and seven of those also became presidential disasters. Our agency is motivated, but they’re tired. We continue to respond not only to these “new” disasters in the last two years, but we also continue to follow-up on disasters that were declared prior to Covid, which includes the 2018 earthquake. He doesn’t anticipate this changing, as the number of issues we see around both urban and rural Alaska, continue to grow. Below are some highlights.

**September 2022 - Western Alaska -** remnants of Typhoon Merbok hit about 1,200 miles of our islands and coastline in western Alaska. It became both a state and federally declared disaster, which we responded to. We’ll hear from Colonel Kirby about the assistance from the Alaska Militia for this recovery effort. That work continues to go on.

For Typhoon Merbok, the President quickly declared this event a federal disaster and Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) came in with their individual assistance program to help our residents to repair their homes, replace lost or damaged personal property in record time. To date they have distributed about $6.5 million directly into the hands and bank accounts of our residents. Since we were heading into winter, this was critical help.

Through this event, we discovered a limitation to FEMA’s program concerning subsistence camps. While they could replace nets, fishing gear, boats and boat motors, rifles and ammunition, those kinds of things, they could not replace fish camp structures. So, at the instruction of the Governor, State of Alaska stepped in to help with that through the Disaster Relief Fund. Bryan thinks this is the way of the future. So, until policy changes, where FEMA can, they will; and where FEMA can’t, the State will.

**October 2022 -** **Chukchi Sea -** we declared a disaster for a storm in the Chukchi Sea. We’re continuing to respond to that.

**February 2023 - City of Anderson -** we had a couple of utility issues around the state, which became state declared disasters. One of those was in the City of Anderson in the Denali Borough. There was a failure of the wastewater and sewage system in the community. So, we worked hand-in-hand with Commissioner Brune’s staff, the Division of Water and the Village Safe Water Program, and the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium to provide support in response to that.

The wastewater system in the City of Anderson was designed when the water table was different. Over the years, there have been significant changes to the aquafer and the water table in the community. Each year they continued to see more and more water infiltration into their system until this last winter, water is infiltrating and freezing all the way up the utility to the homes, as well as lift stations and underground utilities. So, very much a public health concern. Denali Borough worked with us hand-in-hand to get the work done. Forest Shreeve, Emergency Manager for Denali Borough, is in the room. He wanted to pass on his personal thanks for the support provided and Mayor Walker’s thanks to all of you, particularly the Department of Environmental Conservation for the assistance in responding to that incident. It’s a good example of what we’re going to see in the future.

**Tuluksak -** we had a water system disruption in the community of Tuluksak in Southeast Alaska. They had significant challenges a couple of years ago when their washeteria and water treatment plant burned down. They have a temporary system in place from that disaster while they’re building a brand new plant with funding from EPA and the State. This winter they had severe freezing of the water lines that brought water to the school, which is where the community got their water, and we need to have water for the kids and meal programs.

**Long-term Infrastructure Projects -** while there are long-term projects across the state to rebuild infrastructure, whether it’s a water treatment plant or washateria or wastewater system, to address the changes in the environment, they are not going to happen tomorrow. In the interim, we are prepared to respond, with our partners, to emergency situations that may arise until these infrastructure projects are completed.

**Northwest Arctic Borough -** most recent declared disaster was for severe winter storms impacting the City of Kotzebue and other communities within the Northwest Arctic Borough. Governor Dunleavy declared a disaster for that to assist with dealing with the record snow in the area. Billy Lee from Northwest Arctic Borough spoke about that to the LEPC this morning. There is still concern about snow melt flooding in addition to the river flooding this spring.

**Cybersecurity -** we are all hands on deck with department and division partnering with Office of Information Technology at the Department of Administration and the Cyber Security and Infrastructure Security Agency on elevating the resilience posture for all of our communities with respect to cyber security. We have some federal grant programs as a result of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act that we’ll be administering this year. We’re developing our first ever statewide strategic cyber security plan for all of us and then get resources out the door over the next four years to improve our resilience to the ever-increasing threat from cyber-attacks from bad actors. However, the amount of funding is nowhere near enough to address of the cyber security concerns we have in the state. For example, this first year of funding being administered through FEMA is about $2.5 million for every jurisdiction in the state. This is not enough to respond to many of the mandates that are out there.

Our goal is a state and local cyber security grant program that we’re administering with Department of Administration to at least get us all on the same page, so we identify those gaps wholistically--whether it’s with a water utility, wastewater, or electrical utility with broadband, with government services.

Commissioner Brune added that he was recently in D.C. for a meeting with his fellow state commissioners where they learned that for cyber security purposes, there’s a recent directive from the EPA about water systems around the state and cyber security threats. However, this is a mandate without funding. He and his fellow commissioners are wondering how we’re going to pay for it and how the communities that have these water systems are going to be able to afford these mandated evaluations. More to come on this item.

**Funding Gap Analysis -** Michael Paschall commented that looking at the gap that was filled by the state during the typhoon response, similar items exist across the state, especially in the unorganized boroughs.

He asked if there is a way where we can begin some type of gap analysis to identify what significant items aren’t addressed at the federal level that should be addressed at the state level. Is there a way we can do this analysis for educational purposes so we can develop some type of policy, subject to the Governor’s decision, on how to spend disaster relief money.

Michael raised this point in 2021 when our winter storms were a declared disaster. We experienced the same situation with some items not covered by the federal declared disaster, and the state provided recovery funds.

Bryan responded that yes, we can do that. The 2021 storms affected residents from Fairbanks, Nenana, Healy around Fairbanks down to Delta Greeley, Copper River and then were followed by the windstorm that hit Matanuska-Susitna Borough. He noted that FEMA has a very strange policy when it comes to snow removal. You have to demonstrate hard data, record or near record snowfall, with respect to a severe winter storm to get those costs covered. We made a valiant attempt to get that funded under debris removal, as it wasn’t snow, so much as ice.

Bryan would like to hear from all the members around the state about this policy on snow removal so he can go to FEMA and try to get them to change their policies. The current snow removal policy is not very effective for State of Alaska. Whether its cybersecurity or mitigation funding from FEMA, gaps are out there. FEMA has heard from us that their policies aren’t very effective for Alaska.

**Take Action -** provide your comments to Bryan and they are happy to take those back to DC to work with FEMA and Homeland Security to get that changed. In turn, we can address the gaps that won’t be covered with state funds.

Commissioner Brune added that concerning the gap between federal and state, that is a very good point. At the state level, we’re taking a look at the 100 biggest critical nodes within the state. We also need to look at what the federal provides, the state provides, and the local governments provide.

He would like to bring this up at the October meeting. Have a brief on the top 100 we are taking a look at. And then based on that, determine what would be FEMA, state, and local funding. Very good to take a look at this item.

**Public Rights of Way/Public Access -** Michael appreciates the work done on the gap analysis. He raised another issue. In his area there are public rights-of-ways that do not have public roads on them. So, it’s a public access or roadway not maintained by the department of transportation.

Is this public access considered a public asset and should it be covered for public assistance that’s available.

This question is a big issue for his unincorporated area, and he thinks for many parts of Alaska as well. Much of the infrastructure in this state is provided by individuals, not by government organizations.

**Cyber Security Language in Stafford Act -** Casey Cook asked if there had been any movement on our ability to declare a cyber security disaster according to the Stafford Act in the state of Alaska.

Bryan Fisher responded by providing some background on this question. A few years ago, there was a cyber-attack within Alaska. The state government had a difficult time trying to determine if, legally, we could declare a state disaster emergency in response to a cyber attack or a credible imminent threat of a cyber-attack. Through the work of the Alaska legislature and all of us, House Bill 3 passed a couple of years ago that added cyber attack or the imminent credible threat of a cyber attack to the definition of a disaster in Alaska Statute 26.23.900, which defines what a disaster is and isn’t.

On the federal side, they have a long way to go to look at the Stafford Act, the law that governs disasters in the nation and implementing regulations in 44 CFR to make that adjustment to address this issue. Still a lot of work to do there.

**Typhoon Merbok Response –** Bryan invited Colonel Kirby to give a briefing on the Alaska Organized Militia’s response to the remnants of Typhoon Merbok. He stated that it was incredible. It was amazing to see what the organized militia was able to do. The folks that live and work out there to be mobilized immediately. Like Commissioner Saxe said, it was the most significant off-road system, domestic response to one of our disasters by the organized militia that we’ve seen.

Commissioner Saxe explained that the organized militia consists of the Army National Guard, the Air National Guard, the State Defense Force, and also Naval Militia. About 4,200 strong. It was a big response and he thanked members for their kind comments.

Colonel Matthew Kirby stated that he is in charge of operations for the Alaska National Guard. He believes in Alaskans helping fellow Alaskans. With Operation Merbok Response that he participated in with this team and a lot of teammates in the room today, he got to see the incredible power of Team Alaska coming together in responding to one of the worst days we could have and then see all the goodness that came out of that and how we took care of our community. In true military fashion, he brought slides to share on how it went. We learned and grew a lot from this experience so we can make our responses in the future even better.

September 13, 2022, an extremely low pressure system called Typhoon Merbok was making its way up towards the west coast of Alaska. He was told that it was the lowest pressures we’ve ever seen in the history of the planet earth. If this were in the lower-48, it would be national news. So, just because it happens in Alaska, and it wasn’t going to hit a high population center, it didn’t get a lot of press. But that doesn’t mean it’s not a huge deal.

It hit on September 17th. We started to get word that there was a lot of damage. On Sunday, the 18th, we worked with Commissioner Saxe and realized that we needed to get guardsmen mobilized so we could have the entire organized Alaska Militia able to respond to this rapidly. This would take a lot of work for our communities to rebuild and recover.

Guardsmen came in and started working around the clock to prepare and then to send our Alaska Organized Militia to respond. We used a hub and spoke model to send folks out to a hub community and then spoke out from there to assist. The organized militia can provide the infrastructure and logistics to do that rapidly. We used our C17s and C130s, which are large cargo aircraft, to move our organized militia members to Bethel and Nome.

For Bethel, we created Task Force Bethel, with 73 members, and for Nome, we had Task Force Nome, with 38 members. We were able to push them out from there to other communities. The scope and scale of Alaska is so significant. It was 2,400 miles up and down the coast of Alaska. We flew over 15,000 miles just in rotary wing aircraft, not including the fixed wing aircraft. That was 157 hours flown.

We were able to get guardsmen out to over 32 communities to work with the people, with FEMA, with a lot of people in this room, to partner and work to bring hope, to bring repairs, to bring just normalcy to those communities and to start cleanup process. For example, in Golovin they had a front-end loader available, but it wasn’t working. One of our guardsmen happens to be a mechanic by day, so he was able to get the machine up and running and then operate it. They removed over 50,000 pounds of debris from the community.

In Koyuk, guardsmen worked next to community members filling sandbags to protect buildings from further flooding. Guardsmen interacted with the children and residents in the community. For example, one guardsman was picking up trash. He took a break and had kids climbing on his back and then helping him pick up trash.

For Task Force Bethel, the community was so excited for guardsmen to be there, they came in and did a dance for the guardsmen and taught them how to do a local dance in the evening, which again, brings normalcy. You need to decompress at times, to have hope, that it is going to recover, and be better than it was before.

He has a list of all the things that they did. And several stories to go along with that list about all the groups and teams that came together such as nonprofits and different government agencies who were able to remove thousands of pounds of debris, repair, reinforce structures, get communities ready for winter. And have a blast doing it. Many forged bonds of friendship that will last for years to come. Some of our guardsmen were from these communities. They were the first ones to raise their hands. First ones to go back to these communities. First ones out there helping their aunt clean up her home and then clean up their home community. He heard the stories and how we were making a big impact. It was exactly what we signed up to do.

We learned a lot through this experience. But there’s a lot we want to do better in the future. He asked if anyone had any questions.

Commissioner Saxe thanked the colonel for his brief. He complimented the Colonel and the team for a job well done. This is something we don’t do every day. First time in about 40 years that we have been off the road system for this amount of people. It wasn’t just organized militia; it was also our active-duty partners. It was Team Alaska in action.

He wanted to mention that, as Colonel Kirby stated, things in Alaska are different because of our locale, our weather, and our geographical distance. In particular, when something doesn’t make sense, he’s calling FEMA. And he encourages others in the room to do so as well. He extended his hearty thanks to FEMA because they’re still working the response in Alaska.

**B. DEC Division of Spill Prevention and Response (SPAR) - Tiffany Larson**

Did not discuss this item.

**VII. LOCAL EMERGENCY PLANNING COMMITTEE ASSOCIATION (LEPCA)**

**A. Status Report**

Tom Vaden, Co-Chair of the LEPCA reported that the LEPCA met this morning. Two substantial items came out of our meeting. First of all, we voted to start making our LEPC comments and updates written so it will be easier to copy and include in the minutes. They will still have verbal reports and are able to ask questions on what was written. We’ll have a better record of our activities, especially for folks that are just starting to come in and learn things. What’s new in LEPCs and how to do the work.

We also came up with a couple of ideas that we will be presenting to DMVA through the LEPCA. If everybody starts acting in concert instead of just talking in meetings, we’ll get a little more idea of the issues we’re facing.

We had a good conversation with Community Emergency Response Teams or CERT. While it’s not a funded event, people are interested in looking for funding for it. It’s a training need in rural Alaska because the people within the community are often the first ones to respond to an emergency situation. They’re there before EMS, before Fire, they’re there doing stuff. As diverse as our rural communities are, it would be a good idea to expand that program out to them. He asked if anyone has any questions. Hearing none, he concluded his presentation.

**B. LEPCA Agenda**

Written copy provided.

**C. LEPCA Previous Meeting Minutes**

Written copy provided.

**VIII. LOCAL EMERGENCY PLANNING COMMITTEE STATUS REPORTS**

Co-Chair Saxe asked if there were any status reports. Hearing none, he moved on to the next agenda item.

**XI. OLD BUSINESS**

Co-Chair Saxe went through the committee reports to give each committee chairperson a chance to discuss their report or other issues or concerns they may have.

**Committee Reports (written reports provided in meeting packet)**

**A. Finance Committee - Mr. George Vakalis, Chairperson**

George Vakalis stated that he had nothing to add to his written report. But he wanted to ask how the Commission was doing on getting additional funding for the LEPCs since it has not been in the state budget for the last several years.

Co-Chair Saxe responded that it didn’t make it through the budget this year as well because the Governor has his priorities. They intend to see what we can do next.

**B. Work Plan Committee - Open Chair**

**C. Interoperable Communications Committee - Mr. John Rockwell, Chairperson**

**D. Citizen Corps Committee - Michelle Torres, Chairperson**

**E. All-Hazards Plan Review Committee - Mr. Richard Hildreth, Chairperson**

Mr. Hildreth stated that he submitted a written report. The All-Hazards Plan Review Committee is generally working to complete the Small Community Emergency Response Plans (SCERPs) for a number of communities around the state. He pointed out that they are available to review large plans such as Emergency Operations Plans, COOP plans or evacuation plans from any jurisdiction around the state. Since there is no mechanism to make the committee aware of what plans are in process, he will stay in contact with committee members and extend an open invitation for jurisdictions to have their larger plans reviewed by the committee and to provide feedback to them that may improve or support their initiatives.

One reason why they’re not aware of the various plan development may be because of a different funding stream, not associated with FEMA grant funding. The community does their independent plan development without coordination through our office. So, we will keep the lines open for them to solicit input from our committee specialists.

**F. Training Committee - Mr. Jeff Lafferty, Chairperson**

Mr. Lafferty stated that his written report is within your packets. But he will speak to training that’s occurred over the past months and he is happy to answer any questions. State training officer, Jeff McKenzie has been extremely busy. Scheduling and delivering training events across the state. While at the same time supporting the other division sections, planning, exercise, and grants. They’ve been working closely with leadership to prepare and conduct the Inter-related Preparedness Planning Workshop. The outcome of that is that we established new program priorities for the year 2026 and this will be the start of an update of our 3-year multi-year training and exercise plan.

He discussed the reasons why they chose to use FEMA’s OneResponder system for the national qualifications required to maintain the EMPG grants. One reason is that our current system is a state program while OneResponder is national and will make it easier to communicate with other states.

Mr. Lafferty stated that while they have 27,000 people in their database, approximately 1,100 are active portal users. Training is very difficult across the state. Sometimes it’s hard to get people in the seats. For example, we have a commitment of the minimum 25 people to train, we get the trainer here from the east coast, and only eight people show up. It makes it harder for the next training to get an instructor to come to Alaska. We have seen an increase in virtual training, which is good. But it doesn’t replace the benefits of face-to-face training. So, we’re doing a mix of virtual and face-to-face. We continue to conduct outreach and push for training throughout the state.

Co-Chair Brune responded that this is a common issue within Alaska. DEC has dealt with that as well. Residents don’t necessarily like coming to a hub, they want us to come to them. But it’s challenging. Accountability for those communities is spot on. If they say they’re going to give you 25 participants and they only give you eight, we remember that. And we need to hold folks accountable. While he doesn’t know what the solution is, he appreciates that it’s an issue many of us deal with.

Mr. Lafferty added that while there is a big push for diversity, inclusion, equity when they look at our stats, we’re told you’re not hitting the underserved populations. Yes, we are. We’ve got our advocates at FEMA, at the Emergency Management Institute, at Region who understand the difficulties we have up here with remoteness, communications, connectivity, travel and so on. Often times the microscope is put on us from people back east, and the beltway. And that’s when we get negative press. We do our job as best we can.

**G. Disaster Search and Rescue Committee — Lt. Ben Endres, Chairperson**

**H. Statewide Mutual Aid Compact — Casey Cook, Chairperson**

Casey Cook stated that going back to when Co-Chair Saxe took over the SERC, he stated that this would be a working committee to get stuff done. While he appreciates the work group report, as the chair, they didn’t have a meeting. There was a report generated, however there wasn’t any work done on that portion of it. It falls to a couple of other department commissioners in the room as well.

The new thing that’s come up is about the Emergency Management Performance Grant (EMPG) qualification implementation. For all of us that received EMPG funds, that pays for half of our salaries. We have to do this qualification system. For example, Division of Forestry’s wild land fire, they have to go through a qualification system to do all the positions in their response organization. Fire Departments, EMS, same type of thing. It ties into our emergency management assistance compact to be able to go and help other states or to bring other states up to help us. It’s a national thing as well and a new requirement from FEMA. We have four years to put this qualification system in place. He’s been on the committee for several years now, and we haven’t moved forward on this. We need to come up with that umbrella committee to make sure this qualification system is implemented and monitored with those different departments that are here at the table today because it doesn’t seem like there is any movement forward.

Fours years will come by pretty quickly. If that EMPG funding goes away, my local government won’t be able to sustain my position or my team’s positions because that’s what pays for us. He knows he’s not the only one affected by this. More needs to be done and he’s looking for direction through his department, through DEC’s department, through DNR, how do we get all those players together to come up with what this is going to look like, who’s going to be on that committee to oversee it. There has to be someone willing to step up to the table from this committee with DHS in the end to say this is how firefighters, DOF firefighters, emergency managers and so on are going to come together to be qualified, to be deployable underneath the interstate mutual aid compact. This affects both boots on the ground and administratively.

Bryan Fisher provided some additional background. The Commission does have an intrastate mutual aid system committee that Mr. Cook referred to. Our agency, the Division, is a player in trying to figure that out. We did a lot of work in 2012 when the law got passed that our intrastate mutual aid system legislation was put into law in the Alaska Disaster Act. There is a new federal requirement that’s coming down the road that Mr. Cook was referring to. To participate in the national qualification system.

As Mr. Cook said that if, within four years, that system is not put into place and documented and we can get our local and state responders into that system, then there’s a potential that the funding will go away. Bryan stated that he takes responsibility that they didn’t meet in the past six months. It’s important that we continue that work. In order to keep that critical baseline funding that we get from FEMA through the emergency management performance grant, it has to be out there. We’ve done a little bit of work internally. We researched whether we should build our own training platform or use the free one provided by FEMA. We decided to use the technology platform provided by FEMA called OneResponder to get our folks qualified and credentialed. There is a lot of work that needs to be done now.

Casey added that as we keep having more disasters, it’s people like him that the EMPG grant funds. They’re the boots on the ground that help the state deal with those disasters, the recovery and response. If we go away, whose job’s going to get harder. It won’t be his because he won’t have one anymore. It’s Bryan’s folks and then it comes down to you guys. So, there’s the big play. Groups on this commission identified to lead that committee and to oversee these types of things.

Co-Chair Saxe stated great points. What he’d like to do, because DHS has a lot on their plate right now, is to have someone on the military staff take this on to get it going and then when it’s at an operating level, give it back to DHS. If no one on the commission objects, he will get his staff going on this and have an update on our progress at the October meeting. No one had any objections to his plan. So, they will move forward.

**X. NEW BUSINESS**

1. **DEC: Railroad Transportation Presentation**

Matt Kelzenberg is the Manager of Environmental Operations with the Alaska Railroad. He has been with the railroad for 21 years and has spent most of his time involved with spill response and hazardous materials transportation. His presentation is about the railroad—who we are, what we do, and what we haul, as far as hazardous materials. He has heard contingency plan mentioned a few times. He just submitted their contingency plan for renewal this week under the new regulations.

The Alaska Railroad Corporation is an independent corporation owned by the State of Alaska. He is not a state employee. We’re managed by a seven-member board of directors appointed by the Governor. They are mandated to be self-sustaining. We do not take anything from the Alaska budget, nor do we contribute anything. We have 600 miles of track. Freight cars and passenger cars. In 2022 we hauled just over half a million passengers and 3.7 million tons of freight. The railroad has 571 full-time employees with 70% of them unionized.

We have interstate service with trains that go all the way to the Port of Seattle from the Port of Whittier. It is the longest rail haul in North America. The largest interline service would be from Florida to Fairbanks.

The railroad hauls up to 600 passengers at a time through very remote parts of Alaska, which are not accessible by road. So, for him, it’s scarier to think about an incident out there with a passenger train compared to a hazmat incident.

When he started 21 years ago, almost 40% of the freight the railroad hauled was hazardous. In 2022, we hauled a little over 57.5 thousand non-regulated railcars. We hauled 7,600 hazardous material rail cars. While these may not be big numbers for the railroad compared to the past, he recognizes that they are big numbers to a small community.

Over the past few months, he’s been getting phone calls about what materials AKRR hauls. During 2022 in Alaska, we didn’t haul vinyl chloride, which was hauled on the train in Palestine, Ohio, that derailed. But that was because we were not asked to. We are a common carrier, so if we were contracted or asked to carry that material, we would.

DEC has put together a website, Area Plan References and Tools. He highly recommends the website to anyone doing any type of response. It’s broken down by subject and by ICS position. When there’s a response, there’s a lot of permitting involved. This site has made this a lot easier for everyone. He then went over the equipment that’s staged along the railroad for responding to a spill.

Mr. Kelzenberg asked if there were any questions or comments.

Co-Chair Commissioner Brune commented about Alaska’s lack of a Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA) facility. He has heard from Senator Murkowski and Senator Sullivan and from the regulating community their frustration that we don’t have a RCRA approved facility. So, they put stuff on the railroad and then on barges and then it’s sent to Idaho or Oregon. The cost is significant for getting rid of that contaminated soil or contaminated items. The carbon footprint is significant, so we’re looking at. Can you talk about contaminated soils you bring down to Oregon. What is the predominant contamination.

Mr. Kelzenberg responded that the big contamination is lead. The whole RCRA facility has been an issue in Alaska. Before he joined the railroad, he worked in shipping of hazardous waste and materials for disposal. They tried to start one down by the railroad. But it had such a public backlash that it never got off the ground. It’s been known to be a problem. He doesn’t know if there hasn’t been a will to follow through or what.

The railroad is contracted to haul waste. Most of it ends up going to regulated landfills in Idaho and Utah. Some stuff has to be burned and it ends up going to either Utah or Texas. It is a long way to haul to get rid of stuff. We don’t seem to have a lack of space up here. So, it could be something not look at. He asked if there were any other questions.

Mr. Kelzenberg stated that they are regulated by many agencies. They have a C-Plan because it’s required. And they respond to oil discharges. In the late 90’s, they had a couple of derailments. We dumped 160,000 gallons in one incident and then a few months later we dumped 120,000 gallons. At that point, DEC said stop. What are you doing. So, they added us to the C-Plan regulations.

Now, the FRA said a few years ago that all railroads in the lower-48 will have a C-Plan. It is very similar to ours because they based it on the Alaska Regs. If a railroad has high hazard flammable train, we have to provide information to each state’s Emergency Response Commission, to our SERC. We do that in Alaska.

He walked members through the sections of the railroad’s C-Plan, which, as stated, is based on regulations and pretty standard.

The plan is meant to assist in an emergency. If you give him a milepost, we know where the incident is located. You can go into their plan and know the geographic spill section and know the receiving environment. You can start your planning before anyone gets there. So, it’s a useful tool for response. Mr. Kelzenberg asked if there were any questions or comments. Hearing none, he concluded his presentation.

**B. DEC: Pipeline Hazard Materials Safety Administration**

Liz LaDow with the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA) introduced herself to the commission by stating they are the second smallest agency under the Department of Transportation’s umbrella. Many departments help regulate lots of different things under DOT jurisdiction. So, PHMSA has two branches, the office of Hazardous Material Safety and the Office of Pipeline Safety. We separated them out because of the expertise required for the pipeline safety. There are five regional offices. Liz comes from the Atlanta regional office. She will be Alaska’s point of contact until her duties are transitioned to Ms. Evelyn Yang, who just recently joined them.

Our primary office for hazardous materials is in California. We do have pipeline investigators based in Alaska. Our mission is essentially your safety when it comes to hazardous materials being moved in our transportation system and commerce. It doesn’t matter if it’s through highways, the air, on a vessel, on railways or in a pipe. Anything that classified as hazardous material, we regulate. We do have partnership agreements with U.S. Coast Guard, Federal Rail, and FAA because we have a small staff of 500 across the United States and we could not do this work without their assistance.

Ms. LaDow shared information about the pipeline department. There are grants available for pipeline safety. National pipeline mapping system is a service provided by pipeline safety staff, which you may need in response to an incident. If you use the shape files, she recommends annual updates of the files in case anything has changed. She went through the rest of the slides and stated that this slide deck will be available to commission members.

For the Office of Hazardous Material Safety, we regulate every hazardous material listed in the table, including the marine pollutants. They regulate the packaging to make sure it’s fit to transport those hazardous materials under normal shipping conditions. Hazmat begins in transportation when a package is filled and closed. It can sit in a warehouse for one or two months. But once it’s filled and closed, it’s considered in transportation. It doesn’t come out of transportation until it’s delivered and offloaded. So, if you wonder whose responsibility it is, it’s ours.

Her department regulates placards, labels, markings and so on for hazardous materials. They publish the *Emergency Response Guidebook* (ERG) to provide emergency assistance to first responders during the first 15 minutes after they roll up on an incident involving hazmat. The ERG will help them figure out what their safe distances are until they get their hazmat crews there. We will soon publish the 2024 version, which will include lithium batteries.

Another resource share is that we offer free webinars, free trainings. We try to do them in small chunks of 1 hour. Access this training through our website.

She discussed HazMat grants. In 2022 they awarded $24 million in hazardous material, emergency preparedness money. They’re looking at raising our registration fees for hazmat shippers to increase the funds available for this grant.

She works with permits for emergency response especially stay of enforcement to make sure that we’re protecting our communities and that we are all aware of what’s moving, when it’s moving, how it’s getting and when it’s going to be done. She provided an email address for assistance and her contact information.

She then went on to discuss lithium batteries as Alaska moves into electric vehicles on the road. In 2017, they started to have serious discussions about lithium batteries. She shared photos and stories of several incidents that occurred because batteries on their way to be recycled or destroyed were not properly packaged for transport, which then caused fires or meltdowns through shipping containers. In addition, there weren’t any marking or placards on the packaging to tell people what was in the containers.

Even though Alaska doesn’t have hurricanes, you have high winds. The Florida SERC started looking at the charging stations for vehicles in houses. While people got out of the house during the hurricane, they didn’t unplug their charging vehicle. Responders had to wait for water to recede because due to faulty wiring or whatever, the water became electrified causing other problems. For about two months post-event, electric vehicles would go into thermal runaway both in people’s homes and out. So, the solution that they came up with in Florida was if they could get the vehicles outside of the buildings where the air could mitigate the gases that are toxic to us, to simply let them burn.

They’ve tried using water, but because there is no access to the actual heat source, they would go through 20,000 to 30,000 gallons of water while also responding to other emergencies caused by the hurricane. Something else to consider. A colleague of hers had a friend who purchased some of the vehicles from Florida that had been deemed okay, not damaged, and defective. He bought 17, kept two on his farm in Wisconsin and shipped the rest to Russia. The two that he kept, the day after delivery, they were in flames. They had damaged batteries, and they don’t like the extreme cold in Wisconsin. So, that’s something to be mindful of with these damaged and defective batteries. Some you may know about, but some you may not know about.

She showed photos of a lithium battery which is pretty small. She stated that one by itself may not be an issue, but they weld hundreds of these together. So, when one sparks you have a thermal runaway. We’re still working on how to de-energize the battery and how to get quick access during a fire to put it out. So far, as Florida discovered, the only solution is to let them burn.

Things to think about:

* + Poor handling and use.
  + Collection and storage of end-of-life batteries.
  + Poor handling and packaging methods in transportation.
  + At risk shipments that are occurring because there’s no way to see the damage on the outside. Physical evidence or lack of evidence that you can see with your naked eye.
  + End of life battery handling by industry is inconsistent.

The only car dealer that has incorporated any emergency devices on their electric batteries is Renault, which is not sold in the United States. They’re the only one that has included a fireman’s access.

She brought a resource guide on shipping lithium batteries. We think it will help you be more successful.

Concerning grants, in fiscal years 16, 17, and 18, PHMSA gave Alaska roughly $450,000. These grants were used for LEPC hazmat workshop, fire symposium, hazardous material incident management courses, a commodity flow study, and we trained 25 new hazmat technicians. In 2019 we authorized $563,000 to Alaska. Unfortunately, we had to deal with covid, and those funds weren’t used. Then we have 2020 and 2021 and we are in the process of getting the grants back up and running. Kathy Shea and Alicia are points of contacts. She also spoke to the LEPCs to start creating wish lists. Do you want to do a commodity flow study or a tabletop exercise within your local community and you need money for the materials. Available grants can be found in their grant resource book. She asked if anyone had any questions.

Co-Chair Commissioner Brune asked if more information from the electric vehicle cold weather thermal meltdown could be shared with us. Because, obviously, we are cold as well, and it would be good for us to see how that could be applicable for us, whether it’s for ongoing operation of vehicles or for handling of spent batteries. Ms. LaDow will see what she can do to make that connection happen.

Michael Paschall stated that he hears more and more about transportation of materials, but there’s no registration process for that. For example, with his LEPC, we have more issues or challenges of transporting hazardous materials vs. storage. There’s no data available and why isn’t DOT pursuing an avenue to collect data on the movement of hazardous materials as they’re being moved.

Ms. LaDow responded that they do have required registration. That’s how we fund our grants from the Office of Hazardous Material safety side. If you’re going to ship hazardous material, we have a registration requirement, including explosives. We have data on our website.

Michael encouraged DOT to look into the tracking of hazardous materials. He knows what’s stored in a plant, what he doesn’t know is what’s on the road going to and from that plant at any given moment. This is a much higher risk than what’s being stored.

She will take this information back and present it to their associate administrator. And she can provide Michael with his contact information also.

Liz Gooley, from EPA, commented that we have great participation from Dave Mulligan from our Alaska Regional Response Team, for both Region 10 and Alaska. In addition, our local, Dave Hansa comes to our team and coordinates with us, EPA, Coast Guard, DEC on our inspections. Great partnership.

With no further questions, Ms. LaDow concluded her presentation.

**C. DHS&EM: Work Plan Committee Revitalization**

Mr. Dave Reilly, SERC Coordinator, stated that the last work plan committee meeting that we had wrote a work plan for SERC in 2018, which expired in 2020. So, we need a chair from the SERC level to pick up that work plan committee so we can move forward with what the SERC will be working on. He referred members to Tab 12, page 4, where it outlines the team. The SERC coordinator is on the committee in a technical assistance type role to help coordinate functions. But we do need a chair from the SERC level to take that on.

Michael Paschall stated that he did reach out to the Division a few months ago, took a look at past plans and information and volunteers to chair that group.

Co-Chair Commissioner Saxe thanked Michael for stepping up.

**XI. OTHER STATE AGENCY AND EX-OFFICIO REPORTS**

Co-Chair Commissioner Saxe asked if there were any reports to share. Hearing none, he moved on to the next agenda item.

**XII. INFORMATIONAL ITEMS (provided as reference material)**

A. SERC Policies and Procedures Manual

B. SERC Bylaws

C. State Homeland Security Grant allocations 2022

**XIII. PUBLIC COMMENT**

None.

**XIV. Commission Member Closing Comments and Adjournment**

Co-Chair Commissioner Brune thanked everyone for their attendance and contributions.

Co-Chair Commissioner Saxe extended his thanks as well. He then summarized the do-outs from today’s meeting.

* Establish a military point of contact to help with some of the bigger loads and will reach out accordingly.
* Recommendation to identify funding gaps from federal, state, and local governments. He understands that those gaps may depend on where you’re located within the state. For the next meeting, plan to discuss where these gaps exist based on region. The information is out there but bring it together for a more focused discussion.
* Military side is working on 100 critical nodes within the state and to tie it all together would be a good way to go forward and to show where the gaps are based on the critical nodes.
* Recommend that we have a cyber security update. He would like to see something on the state side and also have the military come in and show this is what would happen during a cyber event and just walk the state through it. It is the reality that we live in, and we have to be prepared for that.
* Look at our bylaws to see if anything needs to be updated. We can look at frequency of meetings or if something needs to be in there and that currently is not. He welcomes input from members.
* We should have a representative here from Department of Transportation to show what we need to go forward. It’s identifying the problem, but then the work has to be done. He talks with Commissioner Anderson quite a bit. But good to have him or somebody from DOT to speak to that.

Simon Brown brought up a potential concern for LEPCs and SERC. During 2024 spring break, the Arctic Winter Games will come to the Mat-Su Valley. There will be a large influx of people from different countries in the area. So, this is something for LEPCs and for SERC to be aware of and prepare for.

Co-Chair Saxe thanked everyone here, federal partners, state partners, and especially the volunteers at the local level. He cannot thank you enough for what you do.

He asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Michael Paschall moved to adjourn the meeting. Simon Brown seconded.

Co-Chair Commissioner Saxe adjourned the meeting at 3:26 p.m.

**NEXT MEETING DATE**

**Friday, October 13, 2023, in Anchorage**