**STATE EMERGENCY PLANNING RESPONSE COMMISSION (SERC)**

**REGULAR MEETING**

**April 12, 2024, 1:00 p.m.**

Summit Room, Egan Center

Anchorage, Alaska

**COMMISSIONERS PRESENT:**

Co-Chairs

Craig Christenson, Deputy Commissioner

Megan Kohler, Department of Environmental Conservation

State Department Members

Absent Department of Environmental Conservation

Absent Department of Commerce

Rick Green Department of Fish and Game

Eugene Wiseman Department of Health (Virtual)

Adam Weinert Department of Labor and Workforce Development

Absent Department of Natural Resources

Lieutenant Ben Endres Department of Public Safety

John Clendenin Department of Transportation

Public Members

George Vakalis SERC/LEPC/URBAN - Anchorage

Simon Brown SERC/LEPC/URBAN - Wasilla

Absent SERC/LEPC/RURAL - Delta Junction

Absent SERC/LEPC/RURAL - Sitka

Casey Cook Local Government - Mat-Su Borough

Jason Bauer Local Government - Wasilla

Benjamin Knowles Local Government - Dutch Harbor

Ex-Officio Members

Absent Department of Administration

Absent Department of Education and Early Development

Paul Valley Federal Emergency Management Agency

George Tolar Alaskan Command

Captain Chris Culpepper U.S. Coast Guard

Absent Environmental Protection Agency

**I. CALL TO ORDER: CO-CHAIR MEGAN KOHLER, ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION (ADEC)**

Co-Chair Megan Kohler called the meeting to order at 1:00 p.m.

1. **Roll Call - State Emergency Response Commission (SERC) Coordinator**

 Dave Reilly, SERC Coordinator, took the roll call.

1. **Quorum Determination - SERC Coordinator**

A quorum was present to conduct business.

1. **Administrative Announcements - SERC Coordinator**

 Dave Reilly pointed out the nearest fire exits and made other housekeeping announcements.

**II. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS - MEMBERSHIP LIST - TAB 2**

1. **Opening Comments by Co-Chairpersons - Megan Kohler, ADEC, and Commissioner Saxe, DMVA, and Co-Chair Craig Christenson, DMVA**

Co-Chair Megan Kohler said she was the new co-chair designated by Commissioner Pokon. After a few briefings, an All-Hazards report from DEC will be provided.

Co-Chair Craig Christenson, Deputy Commissioner at DMVA, said he was sitting in for co-chair Commissioner Saxe and welcomed everyone to the meeting.

1. **Membership Introductions - Commissioner Saxe, DMVA**

**V. CONSENT AGENDA - Tab 1 (taken out of order)**

1. **Approval Of, And Changes To, the Agenda (by item)**

**Motion**: George Vakalis moved to approve the SERC agenda.

***Discussion:***

John Clendenin, DOT, said the written report from DOT was not listed under Section 11, Other State Agency and Ex-Officio Reports.

Simon Brown seconded the motion as amended. A voice vote was taken. Motion was **APPROVED** unanimously.

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

Co-chair Megan Kohler noted the LEPC appointments up for confirmation as follows. Nome: Miranda Musich, William Crockett, Teresa Trigg, Andrew McCann, and Hunter C.J. Bellamy. Aleutian Pribilof Island: Heidi Lucking and Cameron Dean.

**Motion**: George Vakalis moved to approve the LEPC appointments. Rick Green **seconded the motion**. A voice vote was taken. Motion was **APPROVED** unanimously.

1. **SERC Meeting Dates**

**IV. PUBLIC COMMENTS - FIVE (5) MINUTES PER SPEAKER - TAB 4
 (taken out of order)**

Liza Sanden said she was with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Office of Response and Restoration, as a Scientific Support Coordinator and Regional Preparedness Coordinator and wanted to start making connections. She also serves as a Science Advisor to the Coast Guard for pollution response. The Regional Preparedness Coordinator position is new to Alaska. It grew out of NOAA’s Hurricane Response Program, but it is an all-hazards position. She is trying to figure out how the program will look in Alaska and wanted to introduce herself and the NOAA Office of Response and Restoration as a new partner.

**V. CONSENT AGENDA - TAB 5 (continued)**

1. **Approval Of, And Changes To, The Agenda (by item)
(This item was also addressed earlier in the meeting.)**

**Motion**: Rick Green moved to approve the agenda. George Vakalis **seconded the motion**. A voice vote was taken. Motion **APPROVED** unanimously.

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

This item was addressed earlier in the meeting.

1. **SERC Meeting Dates**

Co-chair Megan Kohler reviewed the SERC meeting dates. The spring meeting will be held later in the day. The recommended date for the next meeting will be October 11, 2024.

**VI. STATE AGENCY REPORTS - TAB 6**

1. **DHS&EM Updates, Mr. Bryan Fisher, Director (written report provided)**

Bryan Fisher, Director of DHS&EM, noted there was a written report in the binder under Tab 6. The 2024 Spring Alaska Emergency Management Conference was conducted at the Egan Center this week. He thanked all of the agencies and participants who attended. It was a great workshop with several speakers. We continue to respond to widespread disasters across the state. Two days ago, Governor Dunleavy declared a disaster for Kivalina in the Northwest Arctic Borough as the result of a fire that caused damage and/or loss of buildings and impacted the electrical utility in the middle of the winter.

We received the first tribal disaster declaration from President Biden for the Wrangell Cooperative Association. We had extensive meetings last night with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) leadership from the region. State representatives and FEMA will be in Wrangell next week to work directly with the Wrangell Cooperative Association, the federally recognized tribe in Wrangell. A fatal landslide occurred in the fall resulting in Alaska’s first tribal direct presidential disaster declaration, and only the fourth time in FEMA’s history of a tribal direct disaster declaration that includes the Individual Assistance Program. Between the Governor’s declaration, the President’s declaration for infrastructure, and the Individual Assistance Deck for the tribe, we will make sure to get this right because there will probably be many more to come. We have 229 federally recognized tribes in Alaska, and they have the sovereign right to go directly to the President to request a federal disaster declaration. More information will be provided at the fall meeting on the implementation of that program.

Many of us have been spending a lot of time on homeland defense. The threat from China and other nation states is real and continuing to grow. Chinese advanced persistent threat actors are in our infrastructure systems. They are lying dormant and living off the land. It has been verified that they have the capability to do destructive things in our water, wastewater, electrical, natural gas, and utilities systems. We are doing everything we can from the state and federal levels to identify these actors and eradicate them from our systems, but the fact is they are there. China’s president suggested that 2027 may be the date the Communist Party of China and the PLA looks at retaking Taiwan, so we are looking at that situation. We are working extensively with the Alaskan Command and DHS to further refine our critical infrastructure asset lists to ensure we are ready with respect to homeland defense. We are talking about this nationally as going back to the old civil defense days. There is a significant threat. It will take all of us, particularly at the state, local and private sector levels to take care of ourselves in the homeland if the Department of Defense is forced to go west. There are also significant challenges in terms of classified information that we are working through. We will continue to work on this because the threat is not going away as far as we can tell.

1. **DEC Division of Spill Prevention and Response (SPAR), Acting SPAR Director Teresa Melville**

Teresa Melville, Acting Director for SPAR, said she was with the division for about three years as the Administrative Operations Manager before taking on the role as Acting Director, so she is familiar with the activities of spill prevention and response. This is her first SERC meeting. There is a written ADEC report in the binder. We are in the process of hiring three new Environmental Program Specialist IVs on our Spill Prevention and Response Team, one each for the southcentral region, the central region, and the northern region. Our exercise season is getting ready to kick off. We have oversight responsibilities for environmental protection. By statute, we also have the responsibility and legal authority to evaluate industry oil spill response capabilities and preparedness. Our tool for this is the approved Oil Discharge Prevention and Contingency Plan or Streamlined Plan for Regulated Facilities to ensure that the owners or operators have the resources, training, and experience needed to establish a timely and effective response should there be an oil spill. By reviewing these plans and actively participating in various exercises throughout the year, our Oil Spill Response Exercise Program plays a vital role in our mission to ensure the preparedness and response capabilities of regulated communities, including one scheduled with Hilcorp next week. The early inspection season has begun with inspections scheduled in Kodiak, Seward, Homer, Valdez, Anchorage, Sand Point, King Cove, Cold Bay, Saint Paul, and a few others.

1. **ADEC All-Hazards SERC Update**

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

1. **Status Report**

Tom Vaden, Co-chair of the LEPCA, said they met this morning. One of the main topics discussed was LEPC funding. We asked LEPC members to write individual letters and then the LEPCA will draft a letter requesting funding. We are keeping SERC and DHS&EM informed, but they are not funding entities for the LEPC. We will also have an online discussion with the members, and DMVA will come up with a checklist of possible funding sources. We also discussed the fact that we are consistently hearing from the LEPCs that they are rebuilding and trying to get their members back together. It does not take a lot of money to run an LEPC, but it does take some. The LEPCs that have a tax base seem to be doing well, but the others are floundering. He thanked Michelle Brown, who was retiring from the Juneau LEPC after 16 years, for her service.

Casey Cook, co-chair of the LEPCA, referenced an eloquent presentation made by Peter from the Aleutian Pribilof Islands at the LEPC meeting about the challenges of rebuilding an LEPC without any financial support. They are trying to meet a State regulation to provide Local Emergency Planning Committee activities without any financial support. The LEPCA is writing a letter, but it will not have as much weight as department commissioners saying we need to support the LEPCs. My request of the board and commissioners who serve on the Executive Committee is to help us get funding for the LEPCs. There is only so much we can do at the lower level, and we need assistance from the SERC.

1. **LEPCA Agenda (written copy provided)**

The LEPCA agenda is in the binder under Tab 7.

1. **LEPCA Previous Meeting Minutes**

The LEPCA meeting minutes for October 13, 2023, are in the binder under Tab 7.

**VIII. LOCAL EMERGENCY PLANNING COMMITTEE STATUS REPORTS -
TAB 8**

**IX. OLD BUSINESS - TAB 9**

 **Committee Reports (Written reports provided where available)**

1. **Finance Committee - George Vakalis, Chairperson**

George Vakalis, Chair of the Finance Committee, emphasized the need to fund the LEPCs. The SERC has given the LEPCs a mission. When you give someone a mission, you should be willing to fund them. If the LEPCs do what is recommended then they can make a good case for funding, especially the communities without a tax base. I strongly urge when the report comes forward that it be seriously taken into consideration by the SERC, and we act on it.

1. **Work Plan Committee - Michael Paschall**

Co-Chair Craig Christenson requested a motion to place Erin Leaders on the Work Plan Committee.

**Motion**: Rick Green moved to place Erin Leaders on the Work Plan Committee. George Vakalis **seconded the motion.** A voice vote was taken. Motion was **APPROVED** unanimously.

1. **Interoperable Communications Committee - John Rockwell, Chairperson**
2. **Citizen Corps Committee - Michelle Torres, Chairperson**
3. **All-Hazards Plan Review Committee - Richard Hildreth, Chairperson**
4. **Training Committee - Jeff Lafferty, Chairperson**
5. **Disaster Search and Rescue Committee - Lt. Ben Endres, Chairperson**
6. **Statewide Mutual Aid Compact - Casey Cook, Chairperson**

**X. NEW BUSINESS - TAB 10**

1. **Alaska Victim Assistance Partnership (AVAP) Presentation - Erin Terry**

Tom Koloski of the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency introduced himself. As the Protective Security Advisor for the State of Alaska, his duties include training, planning for mitigation, prevention and/or response to active shooter situations. After the Bend, Oregon, mass shooting, one of our private sector stakeholders reached out for information on recovery responses to mass casualty incident. Federal and State responders from Region 10 put together a webinar series on lessons learned from emergency managers at incidents like the Orlando Pulse Nightclub shooting, the harvest festival massacre in Las Vegas, and the Boston Marathon bombing. After reviewing the webinar, we started thinking about how responses were done in Alaska. We have an organization here that has been informally working on this for years, but they have been directed to pull back from this area. This response capability does not fit neatly within any State departments, so we are looking for a home within our State government, supported by federal partners, to formalize this capability in Alaska. Erin Terry and Kaeli Snyder are victim advocates for the FBI in Alaska and have been running the AVAP Program.

Kaeli Snyder and Erin Terry gave a presentation on the Alaska Victim Assistance Partnership (AVAP). We work with victims of any type of federal crime. The FBI investigates terrorism, cybercrimes, counterintelligence, civil rights, public corruption, organized crime, violent crime, weapons of mass destruction, and white collar crimes. A victim specialist’s primary role is to assist victims of all federal crimes, assess psychosocial needs of victims and next-of-kin and connect them with services, coordinate interviews and ongoing collaboration with domestic and international victims, and ensure victim’s rights are initiated and compliance is ongoing through the investigations. Alaska does not see as many mass casualty events as the Lower 48, but we need to have a plan in place. We do a needs assessment and ensure there are no gaps in what the victims need, including counseling and financial assistance. We cover a variety of cases in Alaska, the Lower 48, and internationally. Whether it is an American who harms a child overseas or a person who harms an American overseas, we orchestrate the services and make sure we have that liaison occurring with both the FBI and the U.S. Attorney’s Office. In addition to direct services for victims, we also do networking, outreach, education, and speaking engagements. We partner, train, and work with groups from school nurses to organizations like the SERC.

We have been tasked with helping headquarters prepare to assist communities in cases where there is an active shooter event. After providing victim services for almost 20 years and working with victims of interpersonal violence, sexual assault, children harmed by sexual abuse, trafficking, and homicide, we are now expanding into victims of mass violence. When we received this assignment, we went to our State partners to see what plans were in place, but there were none. Responders are great at preparing for natural disasters and meeting the immediate and short-term needs of communities during things like earthquakes, tsunamis, and fires. Law enforcement is great at neutralizing threats, recovering evidence, and conducting interview and investigations. What is missing is the recovery services. Communities do not recover from something like a school shooting in a day or even months. After years, we are still hearing from survivors about how their lives changed because of what they experienced. We need to think about the fallout that we anticipate occurring within a community following such an event.

While working in Bend, Oregon, I saw what happens in a mass violence incident when I responded to the Umpqua Community College shooting where there were nine deceased victims and eight injured victims who survived. In that type of incident, the spider web of harm and victimization goes far beyond the primary victims to include next of kin, family members, other students who were traumatized by the incident, and all the way out to the community. We started AVAP to create a support network and response in Alaska because there were no victim assistance programs in place.

Financial assistance is an issue because a school shooting event can affect people of all ages, as well as foreign exchange students whose parents live overseas and may not speak English. Family members may need to be flown in from other states or overseas. We may need interpreters and other things. On top of that, we may also need to maintain and catalog evidence; clean, preserve, and return personal items back to families; as well as doing death notifications. While law enforcement is proficient at doing death notifications, we try to abide by a trauma-informed notification model and victim-centered approach to ensure notifications are done with the least harm and trauma inflicted on the families.

There is so much that needs to happen, and we need to know who can assist in such a massive effort. And not just because it is the right thing to do, but because it is mandated by state and federal laws. After law enforcement identifies a crime victim, certain rights kick in immediately and expenses begin occurring for things like medical treatments, transporting of family members, and so much more. We want to ensure that our communities are not financially burdened during a mass violence event. Many of the victim’s rights are ongoing throughout the investigation and well into the prosecution phase. Even if a person is not prosecuted for the crime, the victims still have the right to access services. We need to have people attached to these families who can provide ongoing support on an individual basis. We need to understand who can support a community like Kaktovik if that entire community is affected. We need to have a plan, know who can provide services, and who can push the button to have those services provided.

The formation of AVAP in 2018 was reviewed. In 2019, our progress was measured and tested with tabletop exercises. In 2020 and 2021, national guidance was used to obtain a clear focus. In 2022, we developed a three tier mission, an AVAP Online Toolkit, and long-term commitments. The three tiers of the mission are outreach and recruitment, training and practice, and the development of the AVAP Toolkit.

We realized that we needed to do outreach and recruit. In other states, there is a supply of victim service professionals. In Alaska, our victim service professionals are focused on domestic and sexual violence. They have not had the time or capacity to expand to support victims of mass violence. We need to recruit from other professions like mental health, emergency manager, or medical professionals, who are the people who would show up to help at a mass violence event anyway. We want to train them on interacting with victims of crimes. We started that process by coordinating a statewide team. We met quarterly. We started cross training. We created webinars and a newsletter. We wanted to enhance people’s awareness of what it looks like to work with victims. We want to educate people on what resources are available so they can be prepared. We worked with people to understand what it looks like to liaison with a medical examiner’s office, transitioning to a funeral home, expenses that can be expected, and much more.

When we started doing annual conferences, we realized that the people participating in AVAP webinars or conferences were the same people who would show up during a mass violence event because they felt they could provide crisis intervention and/or trauma responses. However, if they have not learned how to work with the other agencies, they may not be helpful even though they have the best of intentions. AVAP is a way to organize and let everyone know how to best utilize the other agencies.

We want this group to be organized, trained, and know how to effectively communicate with whoever is in command, but not be at the command post. We need coordination to happen off site so we can start taking care of the victims and their families while you guys do your jobs. We collected materials and created a prototype called the AVAP Toolkit, which can be found online at [www.avptoolkit.org](http://www.avptoolkit.org). The toolkit is modeled from the Department of Public Safety’s Office of Victim’s Rights in Colorado but tailored to Alaska. The toolkit is meant for professionals responding to an incident, not the victims. The toolkit covers things like starting the organization process, anticipating upcoming needs, and setting up notification centers for families. It walks through the steps of an incident in progress, post incident, and the recovery phase. It also provides links to organizations that people responding to an incident will likely need. In certain instances, we have also included PDFs or links to specific applications used for mass violence incidents and other important documents.

There are many good things about the AVAP Toolkit. It is complete, although it is a living document that will need updates. AVAP is a successful network and there is continued interest and need. The templates are ready. And the AVAP Toolkit is adaptable to other emergencies. There are also bad things about the AVAP Toolkit. It is difficult to find online. It is built and hosted on a GoDaddy platform, which may be blocked by many systems. It is a prototype and difficult to find online. The payment for hosting conference and the website is unsustainable. The FBI cannot take donations to continue to run this because it is unethical, and so it is time for us to step away and hope that a partner is willing to take it over. We do not care what this turns into as long as the information remains available.

We are asking that the AVAP Toolkit be imbedded in multiple State websites; that local and State leadership take an active role in continuing this networking, training, and conducting exercises; that there be long-term goals to create MOUs and SOPs for mass violence incidents; and that the AVAP Toolkit be kept alive. The floor was open to questions and/or comments.

Jason Bauer said people in emergency management say a lot of natural incidents begin and end locally, whereas man-made incidents start at the federal level and work their way down, and those gaps need to be closed. He offered to talk to the presenters offline about how that could be accomplished.

1. **Genius Star XI Response - Captain Christopher Culpepper, COTP, and
Bernie Nowicki, SOSC**

Captain Chris Culpepper introduced himself and gave a slide presentation on the Genius Star XI response. He acknowledged Dutch Harbor Fire Chief Ben Knowles and the City of Unalaska for their assistance.

This incident occurred in Dutch Harbor and the Aleutian Chain, Western Alaska, the North Slope, and the outer continental shelf, which fell under the jurisdiction of the Captain of the Port Zone and our four Interior State On-scene Coordinators.

Christmas night, we received a notification via the marine exchange in Juneau. When a vessel crosses over the digital thresholds, there is a requirement for a live watch standard to engage with the vessel master. When contacted, the vessel master said they had a fire. Notification came to the Coast Guard Rescue Coordinator Center, which is how we got involved. We gathered information on the vessel and started thinking through an oil spill response. We opened the Oil Spill Liability Trust Fund and started mobilizing resources. As we continued to assess the situation, the marine exchange in Alaska got another notification that the vessel had further deviated from its previous course. After communicating with the vessel master, we were notified that they had a second fire. They were heading north and trying to find a port of refuge. English was not the vessel master’s first language, so there were some communication barriers. We started ramping up because the vessel was moving through the island chain to the northern edge of the Aleutian Island towards Dutch Harbor, which was the closest port.

We start to assemble an incident and command team. The qualified individual was Gallagher Marine who would have the responsibility to act from a shipboard marine firefighting aspect. Gallagher Marine pulled together their incident response team. We shared information with federal and state entities, as well as the Alaska Regional Response Team. We learned that the first fire had been extinguished, and the shipboard firefighting system’s CO2 had been completely exhausted. When the second fire was reported, there was nothing they could do to deplete the oxygen, so the shipboard team used water hoses where they could access the exterior portion of the cargo hold. The ship had two cargo holds, both of which had experienced a fire. There was no way to determine if the fires were totally out because the cargo hold could not be accessed until it was properly vented. All we had was the manifest information that vessels are required to supply in the normal trade route of commerce. We read that the cargo contained 193 energy segments, totaling roughly four million pounds of lithium-ion batteries. However, we would not know what we were dealing with until we got eyes on the cargo holds, so we were working with a lot of unknowns.

The vessel initiated their response plan three days after the initial fire, so there a delay in the process, possibly due to a misunderstanding of the master’s responsibilities. The qualified individual from the salvage marine firefighting aspect evolved into being the responsible party under the emergency response phase of it being a significant threat to the environment and human life. As the Federal On-scene Coordinators, we maintained consistency by keeping the Oil Spill Liability Trust Fund open, which afforded us the opportunity to mobilize the Pacific Strike Team from California. We sent them to Dutch Harbor, and they started mobilizing resources and sent a team out to the vessel.

The ship began making its way towards Dutch Harbor and was loitering north of Unalaska. I issued an order to the Captain of the Port to keep the vessel out of the port while we tried to figure out what was going on. We began mobilizing teams and creating an incident management system, but we still did not know exactly what we were dealing with. Four or five more days went by before we finally got some traction. The team took a pilot boat out to the vessel, and we started working through the plan. Meanwhile, we communicated with the stakeholders and the City of Unalaska to determine the next best course of action because there was a massive weather system bearing down on the Aleutians. We had technical experts coming out of the woodwork and offering advice. We devise a plan to utilize a Technical Expert Advisory Group comprised of the technical experts and volunteers. We decided we could not keep the ship loitering north of the Aleutian Islands because there were concerns from the standpoint of ecology, fisheries management, and pollution. At the other end of the spectrum, the vessel could be a massive bomb ready to explode at any time. With federal, state, and local partners, we discussed the best course of action. The general agreement was to just let it burn because of the lithium-ion batteries, but we were not sure what would happen with the lithium-ion batteries.

As we did more research and spent time with the technical experts, we started thinking in a deliberate fashion. We had conducted air monitoring from the beginning. The shipboard Marine Firefighting Team that embarked on the vessel started monitoring the air that they could access near the cargo hold and the flammability of the air inside the cargo holds. The Pacific Area Strike Team started doing some community air monitoring. All these efforts were to try to identify what was being emitted from the vessel and whether the air quality was changing. The experts said one of the major gases from a lithium-ion battery fire was hydrogen, which was highly flammable, and hydrogen sulfide, which was highly toxic.

As we started to work back from the worst-case scenarios, we determined that any built up hydrogen gas would go to the top of the cargo hold, which was vented. The first 10 days of this response was spent gaining access to where the fire occurred and deciding what to do in various scenarios. In the meantime, we engaged with the City of Unalaska personnel about their concerns. We were operating from an incident command post in Anchorage, which was 900 miles away. We experienced some disconnect in routine communications, so we sent some Coast Guard people there to ensure communication was flowing freely. We also decided to incorporate more local knowledge.

Dutch Harbor is a busy port. There is limited access for a vessel of this size, and we were still uncertain what we were dealing with. Due to the incoming weather, we started working on how to get the vessel into the port. We worked through the State DEC to find places of potential refuge, and there happened to be one emergency mooring buoy at the City of Unalaska owned, but there was no tackle to secure the vessel. The State said they had an emergency towing system pre-positioned in Dutch Harbor, so all we had to do was get the emergency towing system from Dutch Harbor out to the ship, have a tugboat escort the vessel in, and rig it to the emergency mooring buoy.

After we got the vessel in, we started the salvage operations, while still unsure if the vessel would catch on fire again. We started by regaining compliance with safety of life at sea requirements under the International Maritime Organization by refilling all 153 of the CO2 bottles, which was a logistical nightmare.

We had to work through what to do about the 19 foreign nationals, an entirely Vietnamese crews, with customs, infrastructure, and lodging concerns. Lodging in Dutch Harbor was full because the season opener was happening simultaneously. Putting them in a tent city was not a good idea because there was a storm approaching. We decided remaining aboard their vessel was the best bet with us providing provisions, potable water, and things of that nature. We also had to consider the safety of the vessel and ensure that the cargo holds stayed in a non-flammable status. An inert gas generator was sourced from the Lower 48 but had to stay in Anchorage for days due to the weather. The effort involved multiple agencies including the EPA; DOT’s Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration; the Coast Guard; Hazmat Directorate; Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives; and the FBI. There was federal, state, and local engagement, as well as support from academia, experts, and even the battery manufacturers. Contacting the battery manufacturers is now one of our best practices because the safety datasheets have a lot of gaps in them.

It had been two weeks, and we still had not seen inside the cargo holds. We worked on how to circulate air passively, then actively, and finally to get to the point where we could open the cargo holds so we could start. We imposed a safety zone around the vessel, which caused a few problems with the traffic flow. We conducted several ongoing air quality assessments until we determined it was safe to open the cargo hatches.

The primary concern in the cargo holds were the lithium-ion batteries. It turned out that each of the 192 energy segments had a box that was 10 feet tall, 8 feet deep, and 4 feet wide. We thought we could just rearrange the boxes and let the vessel be on its way to San Diego. However, it turned out that each box had a cabinet that weighed 20,000 pounds and contained 84 individual lithium-ion batteries. We ended up having to find another way to move the boxes, which took another couple of weeks. Each one of the batteries had to be inspected and there is only one organization in the world, according to the manufacturers, that is authorized to inspect the batteries. When the inspectors arrived, they had to wear level-four protection suits, and we had to supply the other people with special personal protection equipment. We triaged the batteries based on the amount of damage, and they began analyzing the batteries. The cargo in the lower cargo hold was for a separate customer who was building a power plant, and we let them know that their cargo would not be released until it was rendered safe. The power plant was a multimillion dollar project, and this equipment was a critical path requirement to keep the project on track. Work continued to ensure the batteries were safe and/or placed in 55-gallon drums. We also continued monitoring air quality.

Best practices were reviewed. All emergency management processes face air and surface logistic challenges, so pre-planning and pre-positioning is important. In our case, using the barge and container ships ended up being faster than using airplanes due to weather issues. Communication is always an issue between federal, state, and local entities, as well as community leaders and community members. Media press releases were done on a regular basis. Despite our best efforts to put out factual information, there were still people telling their version of the story, which caused some backlash about what was really happening. Best practices is to get the message out early and often with accuracy. We kept the Oil Spill Liability Trust Fund open, which allowed us the flexibility to maintain partnerships through the incident command. Gaining evidence, access to imagery, and details necessary for the investigative process is a unique challenge when an incident is so remote.

The Coast Guard retains the lead in the investigation, which is ongoing. After 49 days of incident response, the vessel passed a Port State Control Exam with zero issues. The hazmat complied with International Maritime Dangerous Goods Code and 49 CFR Hazmat regulations, and the vessel left with the cargo safer than when it arrived. The vessel made its way safely to San Diego and offloaded its cargo. This vessel was the second in a “train” of six vessels traveling across the Pacific Ocean. The first vessel made it safely. After this vessel experienced problems, the other four took a more southern route and arrived in San Diego safely.

Ben Knowles asked if there was an estimate of the total response cost.

Captain Chris Culpepper said there was not yet an estimate of the total cost of the response, but it would be a staggering number. As of the day we concluded the incident management phase, the cost was about $34 million. The vessel owners could have abandoned the boat and collected from their insurance company, but leaving the vessel in Dutch Harbor was not an option for us and our intention was to get the vessel out of Dutch Harbor as fast as possible. The response took 49 days, a tremendous amount of patience, and we have gratitude for the team in Dutch Harbor.

An unidentified speaker asked about the four subsequent vessels and whether they contained the same type of cargo and used the same type of lashing.

Captain Chris Culpepper said once they started learning more about this vessel, they contacted their counterparts along the entire western seaboard to give them a heads up. With that information, they were able to get ahead of a couple of vessels that had not yet departed. Imagery was sent, and the port of San Diego was proactive in ensuring that lashings and stowage plans were well reviewed and vetted. For whatever reason, this particular vessel used lashing straps that are like the ones we would use to secure a load in a pickup truck. When we secured the cargo, we doubled those and used two and a half miles of chain to make it safer.

1. **Western State SERC Meeting Update - Dave Reilly, Kathy Shea**

**XI. OTHER STATE AGENCY AND EX-OFFICIO REPORTS - TAB 11**

1. **FEMA Region 10 Ex-Officio Report (written report provided)**

Paul Valley, Manager of the Alaska Area Office for FEMA Region 10, provided an update on FEMA’s activities and staffing. We have added five people to the Alaska area office, two mitigation specialists, a recovery specialist who deals specifically with public assistance issues and helping the state close out some of the older disasters, and an IT specialist, bringing our total personnel to nine. We are projected to add more personnel in the next few years in functional and programmatic areas, mitigation, recovery, grants, and tribal relation specialists. We have one tribal relations specialist who works out of our External Affairs Office at Region 10, and we are looking to add three more. Those tribal liaisons will be in direct support of communities in Bethel, Nome, Fairbanks, and Juneau.

We have had a lot of activity in our Joint Field Office, which we operate in coordination with the State of Alaska, has had active operations since the 2018 earthquake. There have been nonstop storms and spring flooding events. Our office is currently working on recovery operations for four ongoing disasters. Our office is located adjacent to our Anchorage Area Office in the Federal Building Annex. We look forward to further coordination with the State, our ESF partners, and our emergency support function partners as we move forward.

**XII. INFORMATIONAL ITEMS (provided only as reference material) - TAB 12**

1. **SERC Policies and Procedures Manual 2018
(Includes Ethics Information for Members of Boards and Commissions)**
2. **SERC Bylaws**
3. **State Homeland Security Grant Allocations 2023**

**XIII. PUBLIC COMMENTS - FIVE (5) MINUTES PER SPEAKER - TAB 13**

**XIV. COMMISSION MEMBERS CLOSING COMMENTS AND ADJOURNMENT -**

 **TAB 14**

Dave Reilly acknowledge Roy English, the DHS&EM member who puts together the meeting binders, for his four years of service. He will be stepping aside to go to exercise.

**Motion**: George Vakalis moved to adjourn the meeting. Rick Green **seconded the motion.**

A voice vote was taken. Motion was **APPROVED** unanimously.

The meeting adjourned at 2:56 p.m.

***Next meeting: Recommended date Friday, October 11, 2024, Anchorage***