

From the Mayor...

October 7, 2022

The hurricane disaster that impacted Florida and the Carolinas this past week was a major catastrophic event. Hurricane Ian disrupted thousands of lives and created billions of dollars of property damage. Hundreds of communities endured torrential rains, a devastating storm surge, and catastrophic sustained winds. Cleanup and rebuilding will take years to complete. Our hearts are certainly with the families that lost loved ones and all of those residents and businesses that have been disrupted by this deadly storm.

For the most part, we have been very fortunate to avoid disaster in our community. The recent hurricane in Florida reminds us of the vulnerability to disaster and the need to be prepared.

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS), through the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), is responsible for enhancing the local community's capabilities to respond and recover from "all-hazard" incidents. FEMA's National Incident Management System (NIMS) training formalizes incident management procedures that range in scope from a single incident to a full-fledged disaster for local officials and emergency responders. It also establishes the leadership protocol for a single unit responding or one that involves multiple jurisdictions.

The Indiana Department of Homeland Security (IDHS) is responsible to coordinate the states emergency planning and operations. It facilitates federal funding that supports emergency management operations. IDHS also supports first responders and communities as they prepare for and respond to disasters. To encourage regional cooperation and teamwork, Indiana has been divided into ten Homeland Security Districts. By utilizing district planning and resource sharing, the effectiveness of response is greatly enhanced. Kosciusko County and six other surrounding counties make up District #2.

Locally, our emergency management planning and operations services are overseen by the Kosciusko County Emergency Management Agency. Our local police, fire, and ambulance services all provide the response that we come to expect in an emergency. They plan and train at both the local and district level. They also maintain local emergency resources such as the emergency communications network and tornado sirens.

Kosciusko County is putting the finishing touches on three brand new emergency radio towers that maintain and support multiple emergency band radio frequencies. When completed, this will dramatically improve communication amongst different jurisdictions and agencies. Pending the final testing of the system, it should be operational this November.

The utilization of NIMS as the standard for emergency management over the past fifteen years has vastly improved coordination of state and federal resources, improving preparedness and response. For example, the federal (FEMA) and state (Florida Department of Emergency Management) responses to Hurricane Ian were being executed well in advance of its landfall.

Florida had 42,000 electric linemen and 3.5 million meals staged for deployment and distribution before the Hurricane Ian hit.

In summary, the alphabet soup of federal and state emergency management agencies and their programs are often confusing. But, make no mistake, the response to disaster is far more efficient than it used to be. As Mayor, it certainly gives some assurance that we will be as prepared as we can be if it becomes our time.