

# THE HOOSIER RESPONDER

FEBRUARY 2021

## An Eye On the Flame Fire Investigators Combine Science and Hard-nosed Law Enforcement Work

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- First Responders Experience COVID-19 Firsthand
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# MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

With so much focus on COVID-19, many Hoosiers may forget we are approaching that time of the year when flooding becomes an issue for some Indiana communities.

It was just three years ago that huge portions of northern and southern Indiana were underwater, resulting in a national disaster declaration and millions of dollars in flood damage. From every tragedy comes opportunity, and I know our mitigation teams have been hard at work since then to address many concerns of Indiana residents, guide them through the recovery process and better plan to protect them in the future.



Amid the pandemic, our teams this year will be doing double duty: continuing to process hundreds of claims for reimbursement for COVID-19 costs through the [Public Assistance Grant Program](#) while also monitoring flood conditions and responding when necessary. IDHS and its emergency response capabilities do not stop for one emergency when another could be around the corner. This all-hazards approach is essential to Indiana and IDHS being ready when disaster strikes.

The 2021 Indiana Severe Weather Preparedness Week is scheduled for March 14-20, with a statewide tornado drill planned for 10 a.m. on March 16. It is never too early, however, to start planning for weather and preparing yourself and your family for weather risks. [GetPrepared.in.gov](#) is a wonderful resource for family planning and can help keep you and your property better protected. FEMA and the National Weather Service also invest considerable outreach and education each spring to flooding risks.

The [National Flood Insurance Program](#) is a critical tool to help protect residents who live in a known floodplain. It can provide peace of mind and safety to the unpredictable nature of Indiana floods.

Weather predictions indicate the potential for above-normal precipitation levels ([see Hoosier Responder December edition, page 10](#)) in the Midwest for the rest of the winter into spring. This could spell trouble for flood-prone areas, so residents should watch closely the levels of rivers and waterways near their homes. For Indiana, flooding is more of a “when” than “if.”

Disaster response is not a one-and-done process. Teams work year-round to mitigate the impact of disasters, respond when disasters hit and sometimes work for months to make communities whole again. Indiana is better prepared with IDHS on the watch, standing as a partner with communities across the state.

Stay safe,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Steve Cox'. The signature is fluid and cursive, written over a light gray background that features a faint, stylized feather graphic.

Steve Cox  
Executive Director



## NEW HANDS-ON TRAINING GROUNDS TO BE BUILT

On Dec. 14, the Indiana Fire and Public Safety Academy signed a 10-year agreement with the Indiana Department of Correction for a 7-acre plot of land in Plainfield, the future location for a new, hands-on live fire and public safety training grounds.

This location, which sits adjacent to the Indiana Law Enforcement Academy, will focus on upper-level training opportunities, such as technical rescues and advanced firefighter/public safety courses.

“This is an exciting time in the Academy’s history, as we have been looking for a centrally located home that is modified to fit current industry standards in firefighter and public safety education,” said Wade Walling, director of the Indiana Fire and Public Safety Academy. “It will allow us to improve both live fire training and fire service leadership training opportunities in Indiana.”

The new training ground is the second half of a strategic decision to develop a new Academy central location that can adapt as it continues to develop. It will complement the MADE@Plainfield project, a newly constructed higher education center that features 100,000 square feet of classroom, labs and flexible training spaces for the Plainfield Community School Corporation and a host of state partners.

Both locations bring a large majority of firefighter and public safety training opportunities to

the town of Plainfield. Once construction is completed on MADE@Plainfield, the Academy will host training in the new classroom space as early as the fall of 2021. The live fire training ground is expected to be ready for use beginning in 2022.

All future trainings will be posted for registration in the [Acadis Portal](#).







# AMATEUR RADIO OPERATORS SERVE AS EMERGENCY MANAGERS' EYES AND EARS IN THE FIELD

Radar is limited. The farther it is from a storm, the less the system knows what is happening low in the clouds. This is where amateur radio operators, or hams, often come in. Volunteers set up all around a storm to observe what it is doing close to the ground and report back to emergency managers about rain, hail, funnel clouds and tornadoes, damage and more. Their reports inform local, county, state and even federal officials.

“When I know there’s bad weather, I let them know,” said Johnson County EMA Director Stephanie Sichtung. “In storms, they go in vehicles and watch the skies. In the severe flooding in 2008, we knew the city of Franklin was flooded because our office is here, but they went out and told me about other areas, about road closures and towns with flooding.

“Almost every town and city had flooding, and I knew even before their town officials knew,” she added.

There are about 16,000 amateur radio operators with active licenses across Indiana and about 300 amateur radio clubs spread throughout. The American Radio Relay League (ARRL) is the national association for amateur radio, and about 800 of its Indiana members serve in the association’s Amateur Radio for Emergency Services (ARES) efforts.

Currently, 53 counties in Indiana have an ARES coordinator leading teams in providing emergency communications to EMAs, organizations like the American Red Cross or Salvation Army, hospitals and CERT teams. ARES members train using National Incident Management System courses, similar to other emergency response and first responders.

“The hams that choose to join ARES are wanting to use the hobby to give back to their communities. In addition to emergency communications,

many are also involved in supporting community events such as marathons, charity walks, siren tests and so on,” said ARRL Indiana ARES Section Emergency Coordinator Jim Moehring.

DeKalb County’s radio resources were somewhat dormant before DeKalb County Homeland Security Deputy Director Gabe Creech arrived. He is a firefighter and an ARES emergency coordinator for a local radio club that the county now uses for storm spotting and emergency support communications. As an emergency coordinator, Creech manages the team and develops training sessions and exercises to get the team ready. What started as a hobby now helps his emergency management career.

“Volunteers can supplement the emergency operations. If we were to lose all communications in the county, our amateur radio operators could help first responders and the local hospital,” Creech said.

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Radio Amateur Civil Emergency Service (RACES) is another form of amateur radio emergency assistance. Unlike ARES, groups are not activated before emergencies, and their activity ends when an emergency ends. Teams are used when government emergency management offices need communications support, such as in the event of an infrastructure failure. Even if voice capabilities are not possible, hams can still transmit data like emails, spreadsheets, photos and video.

The IDHS RACES team helps pass along information, like supply needs, from county EMAs to the State Emergency Operations Center (SEOC). It is activated when communications systems experience shortfalls or become overloaded, which do not happen often, but the team is there watching weather and current events, standing ready.

Recent IDHS RACES activations have included supporting communications during an ice storm while an Elkhart emergency operations center relocated and enabling the SEOC to receive photos of damage due to a Howard County tornado when other methods had failed. In 2008, the team responded to severe flooding in Bartholomew County that disabled power to a communications tower. The team devised a plan to get a portable radio repeater to Camp Atterbury, which reestablished communication between Columbus officials and the SEOC.

“Hams can pull the rabbit out of the hat when everything hits the fan,” said Steve Wendt, a 21-year veteran of IDHS RACES.

Gary Paschke has been the IDHS RACES officer for about five years. He coordinates meetings, works with the IDHS Communications Director Lewis Hartman on deployments and recruits new members around the state. Paschke said the IDHS RACES team has lost members in recent years and would like to double its numbers. Qualifications include a willingness to serve, experience practicing the hobby and a general license (at least). A background check and in-person meeting with members of the team help determine acceptance on the team.

The team also is trying to reestablish communication with different counties to see who can be available in emergencies, such as an earthquake. With two major seismic zones in or near Indiana, Paschke said southern counties’ power grids and cell phone systems could be knocked out in a major quake. Radio operators could be critical to communicate directly with the state or coordinate with hams in the multistate region to relay needs like materials, personnel and medical supplies and where they need to go.

ARRL Indiana Section Manager Jimmy Merry oversees 73 clubs in Indiana. This participation

has risen in recent years, although COVID-19 has affected growth due to the inability to meet regularly. Merry said major population centers, like Fort Wayne, Indianapolis and Bloomington, have large numbers of hams, and many hams have helped operations during emergency responses such as the 2012 Henryville tornado, an Ellettsville tornado in 2002 and a plane crash in Bloomington.

“Any county that has them, they’re a big asset,” said Sichtung. “Even if they only have one or two amateur radio members, the county needs to work with them.”

## WANT TO SERVE?

Those able and interested in serving with the IDHS RACES team should email Lewis Hartman at [lhartman@dhs.in.gov](mailto:lhartman@dhs.in.gov).

Those interested should also complete the [Amateur Radio Emergency Services Interest Form](#).

Counties interested in reaching out to hams in their area can email Jimmy Merry ([kc9rpx@gmail.com](mailto:kc9rpx@gmail.com)) at the ARRL for club contact information.

Those interested in becoming a ham should find an active local club and talk to operators.



# FIRST RESPONDERS EXPERIENCE COVID-19 FIRSTHAND

In the last year, COVID-19 touched all people in some way, whether by contracting the illness or knowing someone who has. Emergency medical service professionals and firefighters are no exceptions. They risk exposure daily, and many responders have fallen ill. Like other Hoosiers, they experienced a wide range of symptoms.

## Danny

**Basham**, a paramedic and training officer with Scott County EMS, does not know how he caught COVID-19. He accompanied his wife when her doctor recommended she be tested for the virus. She came back negative, but he was positive for COVID-19. Luckily, he remained completely asymptomatic during his 10-day quarantine. Contact tracing went quickly for him.



“We social distance to begin with, so there were maybe four people that I’d had close contact with,” said Basham. “The most upsetting part was that I’d been around my 3-year-old grandkid.” Thankfully, neither his

grandchild or any other close contacts were infected.

That wasn’t the end of it for Basham, however. Near the end of the year, he landed in the emergency room with chest pain, shortness of breath, fever and lethargy. After several hours and numerous tests, it was determined the “long-hauler” version of COVID-19 was the culprit. He continues to experience headaches and fatigue, making daily tasks difficult.

In northern Indiana, Angola

## T.R. Hagerty

stepped into his current position in March, just before the pandemic began. The department, which employs 14 full-time and 10 part-time staff, remained relatively unscathed until November, when 15 of its firefighters fell ill over a three-week period. Hagerty went for a test when he realized he could no longer smell scented candles in his home, and the results came back COVID-positive.



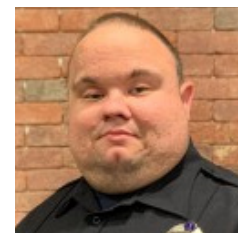
“The first few days it was mostly

the loss of taste and smell,” said Hagerty. “Day four got scary. That’s when the COVID brain fog hit. I couldn’t concentrate or think.”

He also dealt with crippling fatigue, needing to rest even after doing something as simple as getting a drink of water. It was almost a month before he felt like he could function normally. Hagerty knows several people who have been hospitalized and placed on a ventilator, adding, “I feel very lucky with the minor symptoms that I had. We were very fortunate that all of the department is now back to work and mostly healthy.”

## For Justin

**Yannotti**, a paramedic with Morgan County EMS and TransCare in



Indianapolis, his least favorite part of the pandemic has been taking the time to make sure he is dressed properly in personal protective equipment (PPE).

“I can’t just jump off the truck and run to the patient, like I have for the last 15 years,” said

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Yannotti. “We’ve all had to figure out ways to remember to take masks in with us. I’ve gotten to the point where I have masks in almost every pocket, just in case.”

Even with all the PPE, his exposure on Christmas Eve eventually took hold. He struggled with a temperature and exhaustion but continued to hydrate, as well as remain moving to avoid pneumonia. On day five, he received an antibody infusion at the recommendation of his doctor and felt like it was the turning point. Weeks later, the weakness still comes and goes, but he is thankful to be recovering.

“When you get something like COVID, there’s so many pathways it can take, so you just have to ride it out,” Yannotti said.

Medical experts have learned the effects of COVID-19 can be long-term and affect multiple organs. [The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#) notes symptoms will last for weeks, even months, for some individuals, past when the acute illness resolves. Potential long-term symptoms include fatigue, shortness of breath, cough and joint or chest pain. Less common are mental fog, depression, muscle pain, headache, intermittent fever and heart palpitations. Rare, but still reported, include more serious heart, lung, kidney and neurological issues.

The three responders all agree personal protection steps have been significant in the fight against COVID-19. “We have to follow the science,” said Basham. “Out of the 20

people at work, I’m the only one who tested positive. It’s a testament to our people, who are taking the recommended precautions. They’re doing their due diligence.”

Yannotti is now waiting for his 90-day window to pass so he can get his first vaccine shot. He is thankful for the numerous scientific advancements that allowed scientists to develop the vaccine so quickly. Hagerty just received his second COVID-19 vaccine dose and trusts it will help life return to normal.

“I’ll take the sore arm and a little more fatigue knowing that for a while, I’m okay,” Hagerty said. “That’s what we’ve got to do if we want to get anywhere near back to normalcy. We have to trust the people with the expertise.”

## COVID-19 UPDATE FOR FIRST RESPONDERS

### GETTING A VACCINE

The Indiana Department of Health is housing all important vaccine updates online at [ourshot.in.gov](http://ourshot.in.gov). Visit the page to learn more about who is currently eligible for a vaccine, view the COVID-19 vaccine dashboard and access answers to frequently asked questions.

### VACCINE RESOURCE

IDHS State EMS Medical Director Michael Kaufmann has developed a [COVID-19 Vaccinations presentation](#), which helps answer questions about the vaccines currently available and how they work. This version has been edited slightly for the public and may be shared.

Public safety personnel are encouraged to view the presentation via the [Acadis Portal](#) to receive the appropriate credit. The course is titled "COVID -19 Vaccines 101: A Basic Understanding."

### GUIDANCE DOCUMENTATION

EMS providers can continue to find updates and information on the [IDHS EMS webpage](#), including the COVID-19 EMS Manual and other important documentation.

Government organizations looking for more information on the Public Assistance Program, including guidelines on eligible applicants and assistance, can learn more on the [IDHS Public Assistance webpage](#).

### NEW VARIANTS

Beginning in the fall, several new variants to SARS-CoV-2 were identified, and at least one (the B.1.1.7 lineage) has made its way to the [Hoosier State](#). Learn more about the variants and view current spread across the country on the [CDC website](#).



CROSS

FIRE LINE DO NOT CROSS

FIRE L

## AN EYE ON THE FLAME

### FIRE INVESTIGATORS COMBINE SCIENCE AND HARD-NOSED LAW ENFORCEMENT WORK

An overloaded power strip sparks in the middle of the night. A towel gets too close to the stove while cooking a meal. A natural gas leak leads to an unexpected explosion. Fires are unpredictable and can occur with little to no warning.

Determining the cause and origin of a fire is not always cut and dry. Trained fire investigators utilize scientific reasoning and law enforcement training to determine, when

possible, what happened and if it could have been avoided. These are not easy cases, as fire behavior sometimes replaces witness testimony or other evidence typical in investigations.

Tasked to support local fire and police departments across the state, the Indiana Department of Homeland Security (IDHS) has a team of investigators ready at a moment's notice to respond to a fire scene. An investigator

is assigned to each of the 10 public safety districts.

“Our investigators are highly trained to look at the science of a scene to determine where and how a fire started,” said Clayton Kinder, IDHS Fire Investigations Section chief. “It’s important for them to continually advance their skills so that we can be as great of a resource to local fire departments as possible.”

Before ever responding to a scene, fire investigators must go through extensive training and certification processes. Each of the IDHS fire investigators is certified by the National Association of Fire Investigators and the International Association of Arson Investigators, both of which require passing an initial exam and continuing education, testing and training.

Once called to the scene, coordination between all



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investigative parties is essential. Depending on the situation, this could include the local departments, private insurance companies and other state or federal partners. Information is shared about what happened the day of, leading up to and after the fire. This is a crucial step to help investigators narrow down potential evidence during their scene examination.

After going over initial details, investigators typically then walk the perimeter to get a 360-degree view of the scene and take initial photos before changing and gathering their equipment.

“In addition to hand tools and equipment in their vehicles, our team is very fortunate to partner with our Hazmat Section, which has several drones to bring out,” said Indiana State Fire Marshal Joel Thacker. “We are also able to utilize our search and rescue team with accelerant detection and cadaver K-9s.”



Geared up, the scene examination is ready to begin. During the scene examination, two investigations take place. The origin of the fire must be identified first. Investigators use fire pattern analysis, along with information gathered from witnesses, to accurately determine where the fire ignited. Once the origin of the fire is narrowed down, all potential ignition sources within that area of origin are examined to determine if they were the cause of the fire or not.

Working hand-in-hand with local, state and private entities is a benefit for all involved, as theories and evidence can be bounced back and forth. Each brings specific expertise to the scene and shares the same goal: figuring out what happened.

“Sometimes I need another set of eyes and a different perspective from someone who wasn’t there for the initial fire response,” said David Shickel, Jr., deputy chief of Tri-Township Fire Protection District in Sellersburg. “We feel like we have a support network. Even though a lot of us are able to investigate our own fires, it’s nice to know the state wants to stand with us for anything we need.”



While on-scene, investigators collect several different types of evidence. Lighters, matches or torches found near an area of origin could indicate a crime was committed, and the fire was intentionally set. Burnt electrical cords, outlets or appliances discovered near

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the area of origin could help investigators determine the fire was accidental. Carpeting, wood flooring, furnishings and other types of evidence also can be analyzed for ignitable liquid residue to help determine if a fire was intentionally set.

IDHS fire investigators work with the Indiana State Police laboratory and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives laboratory to examine and test evidence.

After the scene examination and any additional necessary follow-up, the cause of the fire is determined. If a fire is determined to be intentionally set, investigators can assist with additional investigations or make arrests if necessary. IDHS

fire investigators are certified law enforcement officers and must graduate from the Indiana Law Enforcement Academy.

But not all fires are intentionally set. Accidental fires are a common occurrence, especially during winter months when alternative heating sources are used. Sometimes the cause of a fire can't be determined. This may be due to not having enough data or evidence to identify a cause to an acceptable level of certainty. Each scene is different, and determining a cause depends on the amount of information and evidence available, whether it's physical, eyewitness or video evidence.

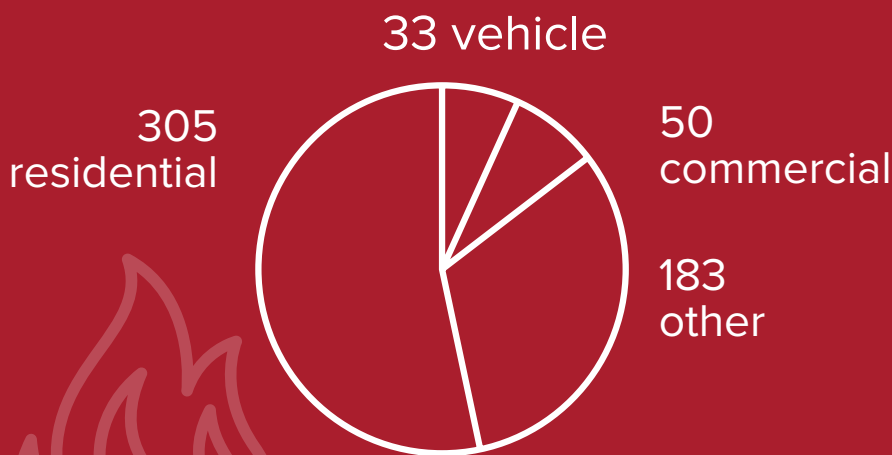
Investigators will assist in any investigation, whether expected to be intentionally set or not. A primary goal of fire investigations is to prevent future fires from occurring.

“At the end of the day, investigating fires is about identifying what happened in hopes of preventing it from happening again,” Thacker said. “Once we identify what happened, we can try to make positive changes in the community.”

One of the best ways to protect yourself from tragedy is to ensure you maintain working smoke alarms on all levels of your house. For more information and tips, visit [GetAlarmed.in.gov](http://GetAlarmed.in.gov).

## 2020 IDHS FIRE INVESTIGATIONS YEAR-END REPORT

571 investigations



74 residential fatalities



47 arrests

 [See IDHS Investigators in Action](#)





# EMS CONTINUES TO ANSWER THE CALL



Indiana EMS provider agencies have been front and center since the very beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic.

While 911 call volume, PPE and staffing levels have been variable over the last nine months, most EMS provider agencies continue to respond to all daily calls for assistance. Likewise, EMS data has helped public health officials make informed, strategic decisions throughout the state. Whether it be COVID-19-related, PPE levels or encounters with patients that ultimately tested positive for COVID-19, EMS data has helped shape the [dashboards](#) that continue to provide valuable information to Hoosiers and municipal leaders all over the state.

In recent weeks, the pandemic response rapidly has evolved from prevention to vaccination. As frontline health care providers, EMS personnel have once again found themselves on the forefront of not only receiving the vaccine, but also in giving it to those in need. EMS providers were included in Phase 1A of the vaccination rollout plan, making them eligible for vaccination. EMS is fully engaged in the delivery of vaccine to Hoosiers across Indiana, including utilizing certified and licensed EMS professionals to effectively improve the pace of vaccinations in Indiana.

EMS is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, to give intramuscular injections (with the appropriate training). Also, EMS personnel can monitor and treat any potential adverse reactions on-site. Likewise, EMS is embedded within every community across our state, either through a standalone third-party service or as part of the fire industry. This makes EMS the perfect partner in widespread mass vaccination delivery, which Governor Holcomb and the Indiana EMS Commission both authorized recently. That adds an additional pool of roughly 15,000 certified EMTs to help deliver the COVID-19 vaccine.

Currently, EMS is involved in several initiatives to help expand vaccine deliveries:

EMS provider agencies can register with the Indiana Department of Health as primary vaccinating agencies, helping to deliver COVID-19, influenza and other vaccinations.

EMS participated in mobile vaccination teams at Department of Correction facilities. While vaccination units (MVUs) have utilized EMS professionals to give vaccine and monitor recipients. Likewise, MVUs are being deployed to long-term-care facilities in each of the 10 regional IDHS preparedness districts to get vaccine to those at high risk in those congregate settings.

Homebound or immobile seniors represent a significant challenge to vaccine delivery. For this population, EMS is working closely with the Family and Social Services Administration and the various Area Associations on Aging organizations to coordinate, deliver and administer vaccine to this high-risk population.

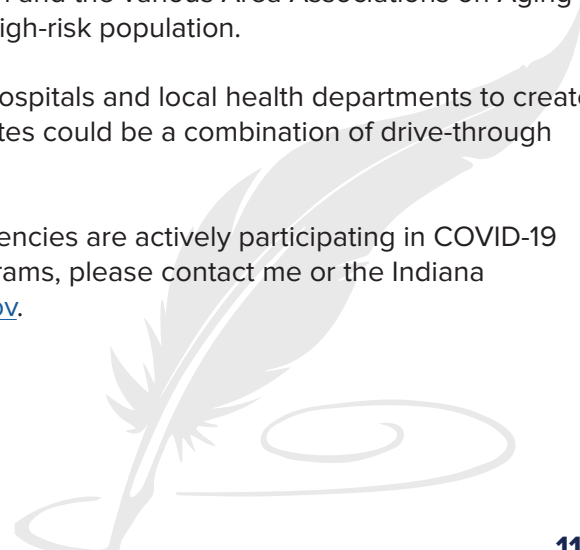
Lastly, EMS and fire have been tapped to create partnerships with hospitals and local health departments to create novel and unique community-wide, mass vaccination sites. These sites could be a combination of drive-through and/or fixed-site vaccination delivery operations.

These are but a few examples of the ways Indiana EMS provider agencies are actively participating in COVID-19 vaccine delivery. For more information on any of these unique programs, please contact me or the Indiana Department of Homeland Security at 317-232-2222 or visit [dhs.in.gov](https://dhs.in.gov).

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael Kaufmann".

Michael Kaufmann, M.D.  
Medical Director  
Indiana EMS Section





# FIRST RESPONDERS PROVIDE SAFE HAVENS FOR SURRENDERED BABIES

Fire and EMS personnel throughout Indiana installed an additional 20 devices designed to receive surrendered newborn babies during 2020, and more are in the works.

The devices, called baby boxes, were established in Indiana by former Woodburn Volunteer Fire Department firefighter/AEMT Monica Kelsey. She founded the nonprofit Safe Haven Baby Boxes in 2015 to provide a safe, anonymous way for parents to surrender children under the state's Safe Haven law, which states a person may give up an unwanted infant anonymously, without fear of arrest or prosecution, as long as the baby shows no signs of intentional abuse. After the baby is examined and given medical treatment, the Indiana Department of Child Services (DCS) takes custody and

works to place the child with a caregiver.

Baby boxes are installed on an exterior wall of fire or EMS stations. After a baby is placed in the container, which is temperature-controlled, it locks from the outside and sounds multiple alarms to alert emergency dispatchers and in-house staff that a baby has been received.

"The boxes needed to be places where women could trust to give their baby, and women trust firefighters. I also knew I wanted the boxes at fire stations because firefighters have medical capabilities, and a baby could be in distress," Kelsey said.

State EMS Director Kraig Kinney said the baby box concept is a great prevention technique.

It reduces the odds of an EMS call and helps prevent situations where babies could be abandoned and undiscovered for a long time, leading to medical issues.

"All EMS responders have education on childbirth, the delivery process and assessing a newborn, so even if one is deposited with a baby box, EMS responders are able to care for that baby," said Kinney.

According to DCS, 53 newborns have been surrendered under Indiana's Safe Haven law since it was enacted in 2000. Since the first baby box was established in 2016, 10 babies have been received through the boxes. There are now 50 baby boxes available in Indiana.

All six of the babies surrendered to baby boxes in 2020 had

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been born at home, Kelsey said. A baby surrendered in Seymour in January 2020 was only 30 minutes old when dropped off.

## PUBLIC SAFETY AGENCIES SAVING LIVES

Seymour Fire Department Chief Brad Lucas was in his office when he heard there was a baby in the box at one of his stations. He immediately went to make sure all was going according to plan, and it was. Firefighters were in the station when the baby was dropped off, received the alarm and retrieved the child within a minute. By the time Lucas arrived, an ambulance was already there and the baby, who was in good condition, was being prepared for transport to the hospital. Several members of the department followed the baby to the hospital to be sure all went as planned.



“There were three on duty that day, and they remembered their training. They knew what to do and took charge of the infant until the EMTs and paramedics got there,” Lucas said. “It was a great feeling to know the system worked flawlessly, like it’s supposed to and how we’re trained to do.”

Many fire departments look to install baby boxes because there has been an abandoned baby in their area in the past, and they want to be proactive for future cases, Kelsey said.

“If Coolspring Township Volunteer Fire Department in Michigan City tells another department, they’ll want one,” she said, explaining that the department has already received two babies. There were seven abandoned babies that died in the area in the years before Coolspring Township

installed its baby box, and Kelsey said there have been no similar local cases since that baby box was installed.

“Fire departments know they need equipment that is not used every day, but will need eventually,” Kelsey said. “It’s the same with a baby box.”

Decatur Township Fire Department in Marion County received a baby in-person in 2018 before its baby box was ready. In October 2020, a second baby was received, this time via the baby box overnight when crews were away on runs. The dispatcher who received the alarm from the box called the battalion chief, who quickly responded, as did a nearby department’s fire engine and ambulance. Upon arrival, the battalion chief thought it could have been a false alarm, until he peeked inside.

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“Oh my, there is a baby in the box!” he said, according to Decatur Township Fire Chief Pascal Arnes. The baby appeared healthy, and it was transported to a local hospital per protocol. Arnes said if any of his firefighters had not understood the purpose of the baby box before, they are 100 percent on-board and back the program now, after receiving two babies.

“It’s a great feeling to know we saved a life,” he said.

Putnam County EMS Chief Kelly Russ said baby-boxes prevent crews from going on the run that we all dread in our career: a dead infant.

“We have all heard the stories about a first responder that walked away from the industry because of a run like this, and as a chief of EMS, I wanted to try to do anything I could to prevent that. Having this resource available to mothers in the area, even if it is only used one time, could be life- and career-changing.”



## A CAUSE WORTH SUPPORTING

To help fire departments pay for the boxes, Kelsey organized Safe Haven Baby Boxes as a nonprofit and partners in fundraising efforts to pay for installation. The organization also leases the boxes to departments for \$200 a year to cover any maintenance they may need; if repairs exceed the amount, Safe Haven Baby Boxes covers the rest. Kelsey said this setup is so fire departments never have to worry about extra costs, with funding through private donations.

Putnam County EMS completed initial fundraising for its baby box in January. Donations came in from individuals, businesses and organizations like the local rotary club that have areas of focus like maternal and children’s health.

“Our hope is that, for babies who may have grown up in a bad situation or would have been subject to other alternatives a mother may take, this gives them a chance to live in a home through adoption and be part of a family and community that can share its love with the child,” said Jim Jackson, president of the Mary Allison Children’s Trust, which found the baby box program a perfect match for its mission, as a former orphanage.

In addition to baby boxes, Safe Haven Baby Boxes offers free trainings about the Safe Haven law to departments. The classes, taught by firefighters and medics in-house or remotely, instruct departments on how to respond to a newborn being surrendered — baby box or not — in accordance with state law.





# 2021 SESSION BILL WATCH

**Please note:** The information on legislation is current as of Feb. 3, 2021. Bills may change at any time before the legislative session is scheduled to adjourn in April. Once the session concludes for the year, the *Hoosier Responder* will provide an overview of bills that passed and their anticipated impact on first responders in Indiana.

**HB 1033** – Residency of Police Officers and Firefighters – Removes the requirement that a police officer or firefighter cannot live more than 50 miles away from the county in which the police department or fire department is located.

**HB 1044** – Line of Duty Death Benefit – Adds public safety telecommunicators to the public safety personnel eligible for a special death benefit.

**HB 1057** – EMS Immunity – Provides that a certified emergency medical technician who provides certain emergency medical services (EMS) to an emergency patient is not liable for an act or omission in providing those services unless the act or omission constitutes gross negligence or willful misconduct.

**HB 1425** – Liability for Emergency Medical Services – Changes the emergency medical services civil liability standard to gross negligence. Provides emergency vehicle operators civil immunity for an act or omission committed by the operator while operating an emergency vehicle.

**HB 1259** – Interim Trauma Care Study – Urges the legislative council to assign the study of Indiana's trauma care system to a study committee during the 2021 legislative interim.

**HB 1270** – Department of Homeland Security – Establishes a fire chief executive training program to provide training to newly appointed fire chiefs.

**HB 1454** – Non-Emergency Ambulance Service and Physician Order – Prohibits a health carrier, the office of the secretary of family and social services and contractors of the office from denying payments for non-emergency ambulance services under certain circumstances. Prohibits a health carrier from requiring a covered individual to make greater cost-sharing payments for ambulance services that were provided by an out-of-network ambulance provider. Allows an out-of-network provider of ambulance services to directly bill a health carrier and specifies determination of reimbursement amount.

**SB 226** – Fire Marshals and Fire Investigators – Establishes a person employed as a fire marshal or fire investigator by a political subdivision is recognized as an Indiana first responder, eligible for a line-of-duty death benefit from the state special death benefit fund, and recognizes a disease related to exposure to a known carcinogen or an adverse substance or condition as a disability in the line of duty.

**SB 232** – Exposure Risk Diseases – Adds any variant of severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS), including coronavirus disease (COVID-19), to the list of diseases considered an exposure risk disease for purposes of emergency and public safety employee death and disability presumed in the line of duty.

**Track Bills with the  
Online Bill Tracker**



## BEN'S BLUE BAGS PROGRAM TEACHES FIRST RESPONDERS HOW TO BETTER SERVE PATIENTS WITH AUTISM

Six-year-old Ben Kodicek of Crown Point is making waves in both the Indiana autism and first responder communities; he's the inspiration behind Ben's Blue Bags, a sensory bag training program designed to show first responders how to provide better services to individuals on the autism spectrum.

Matt Kodicek, Ben's father, is a lieutenant with Crown Point Fire Rescue and the architect behind the program's creation. After Ben was diagnosed with autism at age 5 and began receiving occupational therapy, Matt learned about sensory training and how it benefits special needs individuals on the autism spectrum.

Shortly thereafter, he came across the concept of first responder sensory bags: special kits that contain sensory items that can help patients with autism reduce stress levels and improve communication.

"I read a news article about an Ohio paramedic-firefighter creating and distributing these bags to his fire station, and decided it was something I wanted to do at Crown Point Fire Rescue," Kodicek said. "I wanted to create a reliable resource my colleagues could use to improve their encounters with individuals with autism."

Each bag, which Kodicek

assembles himself, is roughly the size of a gym duffel bag and contains numerous types of sensory toys first responders can use during emergency runs. Kodicek chose blue, Ben's favorite color, to help distinguish it from other types of equipment carried by fire and EMS personnel.

Rather than just giving his colleagues the sensory bags, however, he wanted to take it one step further.

"I wanted to teach the 'why' to first responders," Kodicek said. "I wanted to show them why they should use these bags, why it is important to become better trained to work with individuals with autism.

*(continued on next page)*



Essentially, the ‘why’ is so they understand how an autistic brain thinks and sees the world.”

On Dec. 9, 2019, Kodicek held his first Ben’s Blue Bags training class with his colleagues at Crown Point Fire Rescue. The class, which is approximately two hours long, teaches first responders about the autism disorder, appropriate ways to interact with individuals with autism and real-life scenarios between first responders and patients with autism.

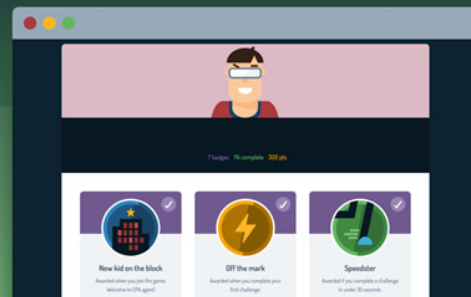
Shortly after the first class, a Crown Point family made an anonymous \$20,000 donation in support of continuing the Ben’s Blue Bags training initiative within IDHS District 1. Since then, Kodicek has taught more than 400 students at 60 different fire, EMS and law enforcement agencies across northwestern Indiana.

Moving forward, Kodicek plans to implement the Ben’s Blue

Bags program into [Acadis](#) (Indiana’s public safety training portal) and make it widely available to all first responder agencies in Indiana.

“Finding the best way to interact with individuals with disabilities is important, especially when it comes to providing them emergency medical attention or rescue services,” said Kylee Hope, director of the Division of Disability and Rehabilitative Services at the Family and Social Services Administration. “First responders taking the time to learn more about individuals on the autism spectrum is an excellent way to begin improving the quality of care toward Hoosiers with disabilities.”

First responder agencies interested in scheduling a Ben’s Blue Bags training session can contact Matt Kodicek at [mkodicek@crownpoin.in.gov](mailto:mkodicek@crownpoin.in.gov) or 219-808-4230 for more information.



## CYBERSTART AMERICA REGISTRATION CLOSING SOON

Hoosier high schoolers have until Feb. 28 to register for CyberStart America, a cybersecurity skills-based competition designed to help students understand the many learning and career opportunities in cyber fields.

Students in grades 9-12 are eligible to participate for free. Participating students and their teachers do not need knowledge or experience in information technology or cybersecurity to take part. Everything they need can be learned in the game.

Students can register at [cyberstartamerica.org](https://cyberstartamerica.org).





## NWS WORKS TO GET COMMUNITIES STORMREADY

Storms hit day or night, and those in charge of protecting Hoosiers from dangerous weather recognize the need to be prepared at all times. For the past two decades, the National Weather Service (NWS) has offered the StormReady program to help communities strengthen their local safety programs.

“We see StormReady as a way to increase interaction with our partners as we move into an information-technology world, even more so in this pandemic world with people stuck inside,” said Mike Ryan, the NWS warning coordination meteorologist for Central Indiana, covering 39 counties. “StormReady helps streamline information and is a way to

minimize challenges when weather comes. We know we cannot avoid it, but we can be the best prepared as possible.”

According to the NWS, 98 percent of all presidentially declared disasters are weather-related, and, across the past six years, weather events have caused more than \$122 billion dollars a year in damages and costs. More than 20 billion-dollar events occurred nationwide in 2020, and four of them happened in Indiana. These included severe storms in the spring and the derecho in August.

Counties, municipalities, universities and businesses can receive StormReady designation by completing an

application with the NWS. The criteria differ depending on the type of applicant but involve demonstrating capabilities to prepare and manage severe weather situations. Contrary to the past, the program does not require municipalities to have tornado sirens to qualify.

“Early on, sirens were important, and they still are. But nowadays, there are a lot of ways to get information to citizens,” Ryan said. “The application process is very easy. A lot of emergency management agency offices are sophisticated already, and it is just a matter of organizing it in a certain way so we can interact with each other better.”

During floods, being StormReady may involve

*(continued on next page)*





monitoring river levels, which allows for advanced planning. For severe storms, it may mean utilizing storm spotters and alert systems. One of the program's criteria — a formal hazardous weather plan — helps event venues make important safety decisions.

“What do you do if there is a 60–70-mph line of winds coming, and how do you keep people safe?” said Ryan, adding that the NWS is transitioning to offering decision-support services.

Taking advantage of this assistance is Purdue University Northwest (Hammond and Westville campuses), which renewed its StormReady designation in December. Director of Public Safety Brian Miller utilizes the NWS' online signup for event planning updates in the days leading up to outdoor events. The updates are very accurate, he said, and have come in handy. For an outdoor concert where rain was forecasted, the university moved the event indoors and heavy rain arrived just minutes before the NWS had said it would.

“That's what you need to make your planning,” Miller said. “If you get 10 minutes to prepare for an event, you can do a lot. But if it's only one minute, you can't do much except maybe take a selfie. The notice makes you much more prepared than watching the weather or the news yourself.”

Benton County is one of 47 Indiana counties and 69 Indiana sites overall designated as StormReady. Benton County Department of Homeland Security Director Jason Fisher applied when he became the new director, because he believed weather coordination is key and is a great way to illustrate the efforts of the county to protect the public. As part of the program, the county gave out 100 weather radios to residents, schools, daycares and other businesses. Now, when the county puts out severe weather info and tests its systems, he said there is good community engagement.



“We have had some messages come in to us during our monthly siren and CodeRED tests saying their radio is working and they have gotten our message,” he said, adding that he also uses social media to promote the tests and encourage residents to think of their own emergency plan.

Ryan credits being StormReady for streamlining the communication for Madison County EMA's response when an EF2 tornado came

through Pendleton in 2019. The EMA was one of the early StormReady adopters and had plans in place that allowed the staff to be in direct communication with the NWS overnight when the tornado struck. The quick, initial conversations about storm damage accelerated the NWS meteorologists' deployment to survey the affected area the next morning.

StormReady application steps include establishing a 24-hour warning point and promoting the importance of public readiness through seminars. The NWS makes a visit to an applicant's site to confirm setup and after approval can arrange for a recognition ceremony. One of the last steps for Purdue University Northwest was touring the region's NWS weather center, where Miller was shown how the forecasting equipment works.

“It's fascinating. You get a good sense of how accurate they are,” Miller said. “The best part is you make friends with the weather forecasters and can call them and ask questions.”

StormReady recognition is valid for three to five years, depending on the entity, and can be renewed. Communities that receive the designation may be eligible for rate reductions through the National Flood Insurance Program. Visit [weather.gov/stormready](https://www.weather.gov/stormready) to apply.



## STATE K-9 WORKSHOP A BARKING SUCCESS

Anyone who has observed a well-trained K-9 team performing their duties would agree there isn't a more valuable locating tool than a K-9. Whether K-9s are used to locate narcotics, explosives, evidence, missing people, fleeing or hiding suspects, there is no human or machine that can duplicate the services K-9s can perform. K-9s can also be a de-escalation tool with their presence preventing injury to officers, suspects and the public.

Montgomery County United Police Canine Association (MUPCA) recently hosted the 2020 North American Police Work Dog Association (NAPWDA) Indiana State Workshop. The workshop was a chance for nearly 40 K-9 teams from Indiana and surrounding states to test for necessary annual certifications in front

of NAPWDA master trainers. These certifications ensure these K-9 teams possess the minimum required skills in the areas of obedience, area search, article search, narcotics search (in rooms, lockers and vehicles), aggression control and tracking. Certification standards for NAPWDA must be proven annually, but teams also complete a minimum of 16 hours per month of continuing training.

Teams in attendance also experienced scenario training in various environments. Additional classes in advanced tracking principles and confined space deployments were offered by master trainers. This experience improves communication between the dog and handler and maximizes the potential of each K-9 in the field by pushing the envelope of training in a controlled environment.

*(continued on next page)*



Shoulder carry for attic deployment





Alert for controlled substance



Getting rewarded for alert

The Montgomery United Police Canine Association (MUPCA) was created by K-9 officers from the Montgomery County Sheriff’s Department and Crawfordsville Police Department, and is a 501(c) (3) solely focused on K-9 support, training, facilities and equipment to support both agencies. Local stakeholders also participate, with Montgomery County Emergency Management helping to orchestrate, organize, plan and execute the state workshop.

“The outpouring of community support for the program has been nothing short of incredible,” says Shari Harrington, Montgomery County EMA director. “Considering the challenging economic times for many during the COVID-19 crisis, the support was truly humbling. MUPCA received many financial and in-kind donations which not only enhanced the experience, but helped improve facilities and

training for years to come.” The new facilities serve multiple community purposes in an efficient use of space. K-9 handlers expressed gratitude to the mayor of Crawfordsville for allowing them to incorporate elements in the facilities that enhance K-9 training. The areas do not just serve K-9, but also benefit emergency management, CERT, SWAT, fire services, the coroner’s office, street department and other local groups.

MUPCA is planning to adapt facilities, expand training

equipment and offer more training courses to enhance training benefiting all K-9 units in this region. More information regarding future law enforcement K-9 training courses will be announced through MUPCA and on NAPWDA’s [website](#). Anyone interested in making a tax deductible donation can send it to MUPCA located at 1201 E. Elmore Street, Crawfordsville, IN, 47933.

*Written by Michael Plant, police officer for the city of Crawfordsville, Ind.*



Vehicle narcotic sniff



# ANNUAL EMSC PERFORMANCE MEASURE SURVEY NOW AVAILABLE FOR REGISTERED INDIANA EMS AGENCIES

On Jan. 6, 2021, the Emergency Medical Services for Children (EMSC) program sent a survey to registered Indiana EMS agency directors. The survey objective is to assess the methods and frequency of skill-checking on pediatric equipment offered at EMS agencies, as well as how pediatric emergency care is coordinated at different EMS agencies.

The Indiana Emergency Medical Services for Children (iEMSC) Program focuses on improving the quality of emergency care for children with serious injury and illness by integrating children's interests into the existing hospital and EMS

system. iEMSC represents the unique needs of children within the health care community throughout the state, working to ensure that all children everywhere in Indiana have timely access to appropriate emergency medical care.

In 2020, more than 8,500 EMS agencies across the U.S. completed the survey. The response rate in Indiana for the 2020 EMSC Performance Measure Survey was 89.2 percent. Funding from the Health Resources and Services Administration supports EMSC programs and requires each state and U.S. territory to obtain an 80-percent response rate.

## Indiana EMS for Children Program

### 2020 EMS Agency Survey Results

#### Indiana Data Collection Numbers:

**Number of Respondents: 667**

**Number Surveyed: 748**

**Response Rate: 89.2%**

EMS agencies will receive an email from the National Emergency Medical Services for Children Data Analysis Resource Center (NEDARC) via [emsc@hsc.utah.edu](mailto:emsc@hsc.utah.edu) asking the agency to complete the survey. The survey should take no more than 10 minutes to complete. The assessment is conducted on a secure web-based system. A paper version of the assessment can be downloaded at [emscsurveys.org](http://emscsurveys.org).

Please help iEMSC strengthen Hoosier EMS care for pediatric patients. Information gathered from the survey will help iEMSC provide education and resource workshops for the pre-hospital-based PECC. The information will also assist in the development of upcoming resource documents on PECC roles and responsibilities, including quality improvement and assurance.



# HAZMAT HAPPENINGS

The Indiana Emergency Response Commission (IERC) has extended the COVID-19 adjustments for the 2021 Local Emergency Planning Committee (LEPC) requirements. The IERC will not withhold funding for LEPCs that cannot meet their exercise or meeting requirements for 2021. However, the IERC still encourages LEPCs to complete regular LEPC activities by conducting meetings and exercises virtually or in-person with social distancing protocols.

LEPCs also should make note of 2021 due dates for compliance tasks and documents. For more information on these due dates, visit the [IDHS calendar system](#).

# RECOVERY RECKONINGS

## HAZARD MITIGATION

The IDHS Mitigation Section recently applied for more than \$60 million in mitigation under FEMA's new Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) program.

In 2020, BRIC replaced and expanded upon FEMA's existing Pre-Disaster Mitigation program. While the projects and policies of the previous program are applicable under BRIC, communities now can pursue activities such as building code projects and project scoping. FEMA will notify each state of the project applications selected for pre-award in June 2021.

Communities interested in applying for the 2021 BRIC grant cycle should reach out to the Mitigation Section at [mitigation@dhs.in.gov](mailto:mitigation@dhs.in.gov).

## PUBLIC ASSISTANCE

FEMA is still accepting submissions for project applications associated with the COVID-19 disaster declaration, also known as DR4515.

Organizations that have not yet registered for potential public assistance may do so through the [FEMA Grants Portal website](#). No deadline exists at this point for the submission of a request for public assistance (RPA).

For questions specific to the Public Assistance program, or specific to the DR4515 event, please contact IDHS Public Assistance staff at [pa@dhs.in.gov](mailto:pa@dhs.in.gov). Additional programmatic resources can also be found on the [IDHS Public Assistance webpage](#).

# HAZARDOUS SPILL REPORTING

Time is a critical factor when responding to a spill, and addressing it quickly can decrease cleanup costs, damage to the environment and the risk to responders. The Indiana Department of Environmental Management (IDEM) has updated its Emergency Response website to assist parties responsible for hazmat spills find an environmental cleanup company and properly respond to a hazmat incident.

Under the Indiana Spill Rule (327 IAC 2-6.1), those responsible for spills are required to report the event within two hours, immediately contain the spill, and undertake or cause others to undertake a spill response. Unfortunately, small or out-of-state transporters may be unaware of these requirements and/or how to contact a local cleanup company to timely address spills.

IDEM's [updated website](#) is designed to assist both facilities and transporters in pre-planning for spills and, in the event of an incident, locate a nearby environmental cleanup company. Information about selecting and locating a spill contractor can be found on [IDEM's Emergency Response website](#). In addition to responsible parties, first responders and witnesses are also encouraged to report spills to IDEM's 24-Hour Emergency Spill Line at (888) 233-7745.



# COVID-19 VACCINE SOCIAL MEDIA BEST PRACTICES

With the rollout of Indiana’s COVID-19 vaccination plan continuing to expand, social media also has seen a growing amount of false information about vaccine safety and guidance. The public safety community plays a critical role in sharing fact-based details to increase public trust in vaccines.

With the speed of consumption on social media, people often only read headlines and rarely fact-check sources. This lack of fact-checking contributes to misinformation spreading like wildfire at the simple click of a button.

The best way to combat this is for trustworthy agencies with social media accounts (public health, public safety, etc.) to share reliable, fact-

checked information regularly from consistent sources, such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The Indiana Department of Health (IDOH) recently launched [ourshot.in.gov](https://ourshot.in.gov) featuring the most up-to-date vaccine information for Indiana. IDOH also regularly posts updates about the vaccine on its [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) accounts.

Federal agencies also have toolkits and resources available for social media. The information, graphics and resources in these toolkits remain vital resources, despite some public apprehension toward federal agencies sharing COVID-19 information.

## FEDERAL RESOURCES

- [CDC facts about COVID-19 vaccine](#)
- [CDC COVID-19 vaccination toolkits](#)
- [FDA COVID-19 social media toolkit](#)



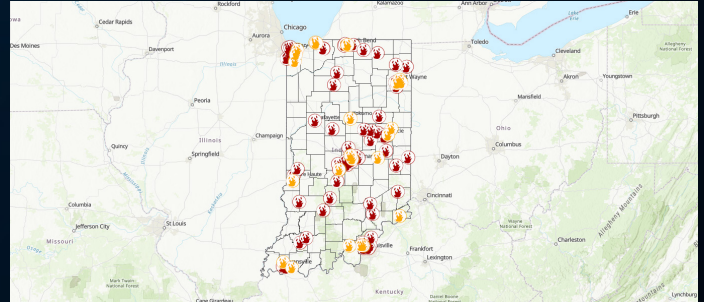
Everyone plays a part in reducing the spread of misinformation. If your agency needs assistance with social media surrounding COVID-19, feel free to reach out to IDHS Public Affairs at [pio@dhs.in.gov](mailto:pio@dhs.in.gov).



# IDHS IT SECTION: NEWS YOU CAN USE

## FIRE FATALITIES DASHBOARD

The IDHS Fire Investigations Section investigates approximately 600 fires and explosions each year. A [residential fire fatalities dashboard](#) is available on the IDHS website to help local entities view the location of fatalities and improve targeted fire education, and it includes other helpful resources.



## CONTACT INFORMATION

The new year is an ideal time to review and update published information for contacting various jurisdictions. Emergency management agencies are asked to review the [IDHS Contact Us map](#) and relay any requested corrections to the IDHS Public Affairs Section at [pio@dhs.in.gov](mailto:pio@dhs.in.gov). Fire departments and EMS providers should check to see if their information is current within the various reporting systems. Organizations interested in verifying their subscription to the IDHS mailing lists should reach out to [pio@dhs.in.gov](mailto:pio@dhs.in.gov).

## GRANT PLANNING FOR THE NEW YEAR

The IDHS Grants Management Section encourages Indiana emergency management and first responder organizations to begin planning their State Homeland Security Program (SHSP) grant applications for 2021 and to reach out to area nonprofits about applying for the 2021 Nonprofit Security Grant Program (NSGP). Now is the time to begin choosing projects, establishing collaborative relationships and considering vulnerability assessments.

The beginning of the year also is a good time to update Indiana bidder and vendor numbers and verify that federal DUNS and SAM registrations are current. For more information, visit the [Grants Management webpage](#).

## YOUTH PEPAEDNESS COUNCIL APPLICATIONS OPEN

The FEMA [Individual and Community Preparedness Division](#) is currently accepting applications for the [Youth Preparedness Council](#). The online application process closes at 2:59 a.m. EST on March 8.

FEMA is looking for self-motivated, preparedness-minded students between eighth and 11th grade who reflect the diverse makeup of the nation. The council offers young leaders who are interested in supporting disaster preparedness efforts the opportunity to lead and champion causes that make a difference in their communities.

Local preparedness officials can help expand the applicant pool by broadcasting information about the application period to youth, community members and partner organizations and encouraging interested teens to apply. Students who are eligible can apply online at [Ready.gov](#).



# INDIANA RECOGNIZES COUNTY EMAs DURING EMA APPRECIATION WEEK

Indiana's second annual EMA Appreciation Week, Feb. 21-27, recognizes the hard work and dedication emergency management personnel exhibit daily to keep Hoosiers safe. This year's theme, "Unified in Emergency Response," highlights the important roles emergency managers have in coordinating emergency response efforts across the state, especially this past year during COVID-19.

Indiana EMAs have played a crucial role in coordinating and distributing personal

protective equipment (PPE) for first responders. As the State Emergency Operations Center received PPE from the Federal Emergency Management Agency, county EMAs were utilized to help gather public safety agency needs and coordinate delivery. This coordination kept Hoosier frontline responders safe throughout the pandemic.

Emergency management goes beyond responding to active disasters. Emergency managers help draft disaster response plans, organize

trainings that include first responders and other community partners to practice response plans and work with state and federal agencies on assistive programs and find the most effective methods of disaster recovery.

Help recognize this hardworking group of Hoosiers Feb. 21-27 by checking in with IDHS social media and the [IDHS website](#). If you have a submission of how a local EMA went beyond the call of duty, please send the information to [pio@dhs.in.gov](mailto:pio@dhs.in.gov).

## EMA APPRECIATION WEEK - FEBRUARY 21-27

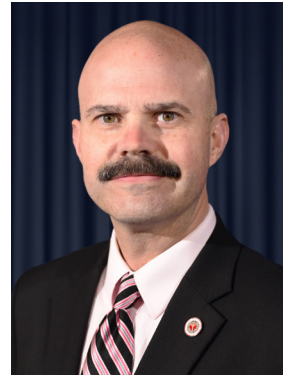




# MESSAGE FROM THE FIRE MARSHAL

With the vaccine distribution rollout continuing to gain steam, I am happy to know many of our first responders took advantage of early access to vaccines.

IDHS and our fire and public safety partners worked extensively to include first responders among the initial groups vaccinated in Indiana. Thankfully, the Indiana Department of Health and Governor Holcomb saw this need as well. Some states placed a lower priority on this group, but Hoosiers understand the important role of fire and EMS play in this fight against COVID-19. Without healthy first responders, our communities will never be fully protected from the virus or other risks.



A feature in this edition of the *Hoosier Responder* shares the experience of some first responders who contracted COVID-19 last year. It moved me to think about how these Hoosiers felt (and how their families felt) knowing they were exposed while protecting others — a clear example of the selfless sacrifice these public servants give every day. Thankfully, only a handful of these Hoosier heroes lost their lives due to this exposure. Many frontline healthcare workers suffered through similar fates, and we will never be able to thank them enough for what they have given our state.

Some EMS personnel stepped up to help at-risk populations, including staff in our jails and prisons. This filled a critical gap for our Department of Correction partners, and we all benefit from the plan to contain the virus this way. Again, many EMS personnel answered the call to contribute to the greater good here.

The future will include even more contributions from the fire and EMS communities. With the vaccine supply increasing, first responders are being tapped to help administer shots to the growing list of eligible Hoosiers. Our people are trained to give these vaccinations and eager to help our state move forward. Plans are underway for mass vaccination initiatives involving first responders, and this effort is being supported from many fire chiefs, union representatives and public safety leadership across Indiana.

When you see a brave rescue on the news or hear of an EMT saving a child in distress, understanding the role of public safety personnel is easy. For those of us in the job, we simply see this as what we are trained to do. But, it's those efforts behind the scenes — stepping out of your comfort zone to put the health of others before you or educating people about the importance and safety of vaccines — that display the true commitment to the job.

Thank you for all you do.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Joel Thacker'. The signature is fluid and cursive, written over a light gray feather graphic that extends across the page.

Joel Thacker  
Indiana State Fire Marshal



# UPCOMING EVENTS

## NATIONAL BURN AWARENESS WEEK

**OBSERVED: FEBRUARY 7–13, 2021**

The annual National Burn Awareness Week offers safety personnel the opportunity to share education about burn safety. This year's theme of "Electrical Safety from Amps to Zap (A to Z)!" spreads information about the injuries home appliances, electrical cords and batteries can cause.

For more information regarding National Burn Awareness Week, visit [ameriburn.org](http://ameriburn.org).

## VALENTINE'S DAY

**OBSERVED: FEBRUARY 14, 2021**

Cooking a loved one's favorite meal, a candlelit dinner and cuddling by the fire are just a few of the common ways Hoosiers celebrate Valentine's Day. However, any of these romantic activities can lead to a visit from the local fire department. To help prevent any fire-related emergencies this holiday, share some fire and cooking safety tips with community members.

For fire and cooking safety tips, visit [GetPrepared.in.gov](http://GetPrepared.in.gov).

## RADIATION AWARENESS WEEK

**OBSERVED: FEBRUARY 14–20, 2021**

Although radiation is naturally present in our environment, it can have either beneficial or harmful effects, depending on its use and control. Radiation Awareness Week is the opportunity to learn more about the effects of radiation, its uses in everyday life and how to stay safe during radiological emergency situations.

For more information on radiation awareness, visit <https://www.in.gov/dhs/hazmat-section/radiation-awareness/>.

## EMA APPRECIATION WEEK

**OBSERVED: FEBRUARY 21–27, 2021**

Indiana's EMA Appreciation Week honors the tireless dedication emergency management personnel have for keeping their communities safe. The week's theme of "Unified in Emergency Response" will highlight the responsibilities and actions of emergency managers collaborating with one another and with other first responders to safeguard Hoosier communities during the COVID-19 pandemic. Check in on the IDHS social media and website for content regarding these hardworking professionals.



# UPCOMING EVENTS

## SEVERE WEATHER PREPAREDNESS AND FLOOD PREPAREDNESS WEEK

**OBSERVED: MARCH 14–20, 2021**

Severe weather and Indiana go together like thunder and lightning. Every year Severe Weather Preparedness and Flood Preparedness Week offers Hoosiers a great opportunity to create/restock emergency kits, practice evacuation plans and so much more. One way to participate is by sharing information on quick and simple ways to prepare for emergencies.

Visit [GetPrepared.in.gov](https://www.getprepared.in.gov) for more severe weather safety tips.

## ST. PATRICK'S DAY

**OBSERVED: MARCH 17, 2021**

St. Patrick's Day is one of the biggest alcohol drinking nights of the year, which unfortunately means more drunk drivers are likely to appear on the roadways too. Remind community members to celebrate responsibly and not leave the safety of others to the luck of the Irish this holiday.

More St. Patrick's Day safety tips can be found at [GetPrepared.in.gov](https://www.getprepared.in.gov).

## ALTERNATIVE-HEATING SAFETY

**OBSERVED: ALL WINTER SEASON**

Spring is almost here, but chilly February temperatures are still here. Alternative-heating sources, such as space heaters, heat lamps and fireplaces, should always be used as a last option to warm up a residence. For situations where they are necessary, it is important for individuals to be knowledgeable of proper alternative-heating safety usage.

For a list of alternative-heating safety tips, visit [GetPrepared.in.gov](https://www.getprepared.in.gov).

# TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

## CISA Virtual Instructor-led Training Opportunities

The Cybersecurity & Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) [Office for Bombing Prevention](https://www.cisa.gov/bombing-prevention) is offering a number of virtual, instructor-led trainings during February. Topics include improvised explosive devices, response to suspicious behavior and protective measures awareness, among others.

## IS-36.a Preparedness for Child Care Providers

Public safety agencies are asked to promote a new self-study course that provides child care providers, in a variety of settings, with the information needed to identify, assess and plan for hazards at child care sites. The class is available on-demand on the [FEMA website](https://www.fema.gov).

*The Indiana Department of Homeland Security works 24/7  
to protect the people, property and prosperity of Indiana.*



*The Hoosier Responder is a publication of  
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Please direct any questions or comments to the  
IDHS Office of Public Affairs at 317.234.6713 or [pio@dhs.in.gov](mailto:pio@dhs.in.gov)*

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