2024 January Winter Weather (DR-4768) After-Action Review

Oregon Department of Emergency Management

November 2024

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This After-Action Review (AAR) focuses on the efforts of the virtual State Emergency Coordination Center (ECC) in preparing, monitoring, and responding to the 2024 January Winter Weather (DR-4768). On January 9, the State ECC activated to Level 3 (Regional Response) and by January 12 it escalated to Level 2 (Partial ECC Activation). From January 12 – 24 arctic air impacted northern Oregon causing the coldest temperatures so far that season. State agencies and local emergency partners responded and supported extreme hazardous weather-related issues, including but not limited to:

- Access to EMPower data (medically fragile individuals in need of assistance)
- Activation of 211
- Shelter assistance (staffing, funding, supplies)
- Transportation support
- Operational communications access
- Distribution of potable water
- Fuel and generator distribution
- Snow and debris removal

Consumer-owned impacts

Beginning January 12, 2024, Oregon declared a statewide state of emergency due to the severe winter storm that brought cold temperatures, snow, freezing rain, high winds, flooding, landslides and avalanches at various locations throughout the state, causing power outages and transportation disruption.

Power outages continued across the state with Benton, Clackamas, Clatsop, Hood River, Lane, Lincoln, Linn, Multnomah, Tillamook, and Washington counties experiencing the brunt of the interruptions. Widespread damage and outages to commercial cellular, wireline, VoIP, broadband, and other telecommunications services caused significant impacts on the public's ability to communicate and access the Internet, including engaging with online government, telehealth, financial, e-commerce, and other critical services. A loss of services for 911 and first responder communications networks in multiple areas increased the threat to life safety.

Jurisdictions on the central and northern coasts and in the Willamette Valley, Cascades, and central and eastern Oregon suffered the heaviest impacts of the storm. More than 70 missions for state assistance were coordinated through the State Emergency Coordination Center. 211info registered more than 160 warming shelters and weather respite centers statewide and received more than 3,200 calls across 25 counties for weather respite and transportation needs.

The Oregon Department of Emergency Management (OEM) coordinated access to and use of personnel and equipment of all state agencies necessary to assess, alleviate, respond to, mitigate or recover from conditions caused by this emergency. OEM coordinated all essential protective measures supporting identified disaster areas to protect lives, property and the environment. The Oregon Department of Administrative Services (DAS), Oregon Health Authority (OHA), Oregon Public Utility Commission (OPUC), Oregon State Police (OSP), and other State agencies are directed to provide any assistance as requested by OEM that is deemed necessary to assist in the response to this emergency and to provide all necessary support to statewide response, recovery and mitigation efforts.

The voluntary agencies played a crucial role in helping those affected by the disaster. In addition to county shelters, three (3) shelters were set up across the affected areas through the American Red Cross, and eight (8) warming shelters primarily serving Oregon's homeless population were activated by local request and supported by the Oregon Department of Human Services (ODHS). They accommodated peak populations of forty-four (44) individuals per site. These shelters provided a total of three-hundred and sixty-one (361) overnight stays before closing their doors on January 29, 2024. Voluntary agencies also actively engaged in providing health support, making eight (8) medical visits with four (4) nurses activated through Oregon Serves, a medical-based volunteer program. The American Red Cross was instrumental in managing cases, with sixty-eight (68) cases opened and closed during the response efforts. Additionally, 6,731 meals were served through shelters and 1,600 food boxes were delivered to address immediate food needs. The level of operation was at its peak as voluntary agencies worked tirelessly to support and uplift the affected communities during this challenging time.

A strong and persistent storm track directed through the Pacific Northwest, delivering a 12-day period of severe winter weather, windstorms, extreme cold, and atmospheric rivers across Oregon State. This resulted in a continuous series of overlapping significant weather across the state with impacts compounding with each storm. The active storm track began having weather impacts on Oregon on January 10 with blizzard conditions across the Cascades and along Interstate 84. This was followed by a cold upper low that moved south from Canada producing widespread extreme cold, winter precipitation, and wind from January 11-19. The cold slowly retreated January 20-22 resulting in flooding and thaw damage in western Oregon and continued winter weather impacts east of the Cascades.

The many impacts of this severe winter storm included extensive and long-lasting power outages, many road closures including major highways, the closure of educational facilities, and the need to provide shelter for many people whose power was out, some for weeks. The damage and impacts from this event pose a significant challenge to the state, its communities, and public utility providers.

Investor-owned impacts

Due to the severe winter storm, 1,355 small businesses responded as suffering substantial economic losses due to the harsh weather conditions totaling an estimated loss of $165,331,014. These losses stemmed from a combination of factors, including lost wages and revenue decline, as the icy conditions disrupted normal business operations and hindered customer access and traffic. The impact of the storm on these small businesses highlights stress on the community's economic infrastructure as well as the loss of wages to individuals.

Impacts region-wide included downed trees and power lines, localized road closures, and associated infrastructure damage. At the peak of power outage impacts, more than 238,900 Oregonians were without power, and some areas were without power for over 13 days. Power outages affected many jurisdictions during this event, including significant impacts to the following consumer-owned utilities:

- Consumers Power Inc.
- Central Lincoln People's Utility District
- Eugene Water and Electric Board

- Lane Electric Cooperative
- Tillamook People's Utility District

The extensive damage to consumer-owned utilities will result in a rate increase to members for the cost of immediate and permanent repairs.

Investor-owned utilities were greatly impacted, including outages reported by Pacific Power and Portland General Electric. At its peak, Portland General Electric had customer outages over nine days totaling 524,000 with the peak at 165,000 customers without power, and Pacific Power had approximately 45,300 customers without power.

The purpose of this AAR is to summarize key findings and provide recommended actions related to the preparedness and response planning for and implementation of core capability elements for future weather-related events in Oregon. The AAR identifies areas of success and opportunities for improvement for the OEM and the state to take proactive action in helping the agency better prepare and respond to weather resiliency.

The information collected for this report was derived from individuals and organizations that were identified as partners through OEM, partner agencies and affected jurisdictions. This is an evaluation of the virtual state ECC systems and their coordination effectiveness, not an evaluation of partners' decisions and actions. Documentation related to the preparedness and initial response capabilities for this event was reviewed, including Situation Reports (SitReps), daily briefing emails, Incident Action Plans (IAP) and other forms.

OVERVIEW

The AAR aims to comprehensively evaluate the activities of the Oregon Response Emergency System (OERS), as outlined in the Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan (CEMP), to the Statewide Winter Weather event that occurred in January 2024. The focus will be on assessing the effectiveness of emergency management procedures, coordination efforts, and the overall response and recovery to extreme weather conditions. This AAR will specifically address pre-planning and preparation, interagency coordination and response, demobilization and transitions, before and during the event. The discussion involved key partners, including ECC staff members, FEMA Liaison, Local Emergency Management Jurisdictions, Tribal Partners, State Agency Partners, and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) involved with the event.

Primary objectives -

- Evaluate the coordination of the OERS Council Agencies in responding to winter weather storms.
- Identify strengths and weaknesses in the existing emergency management protocols.
- Enhance the preparedness and response capabilities of OERS Council for winter weather events.

Secondary objectives -

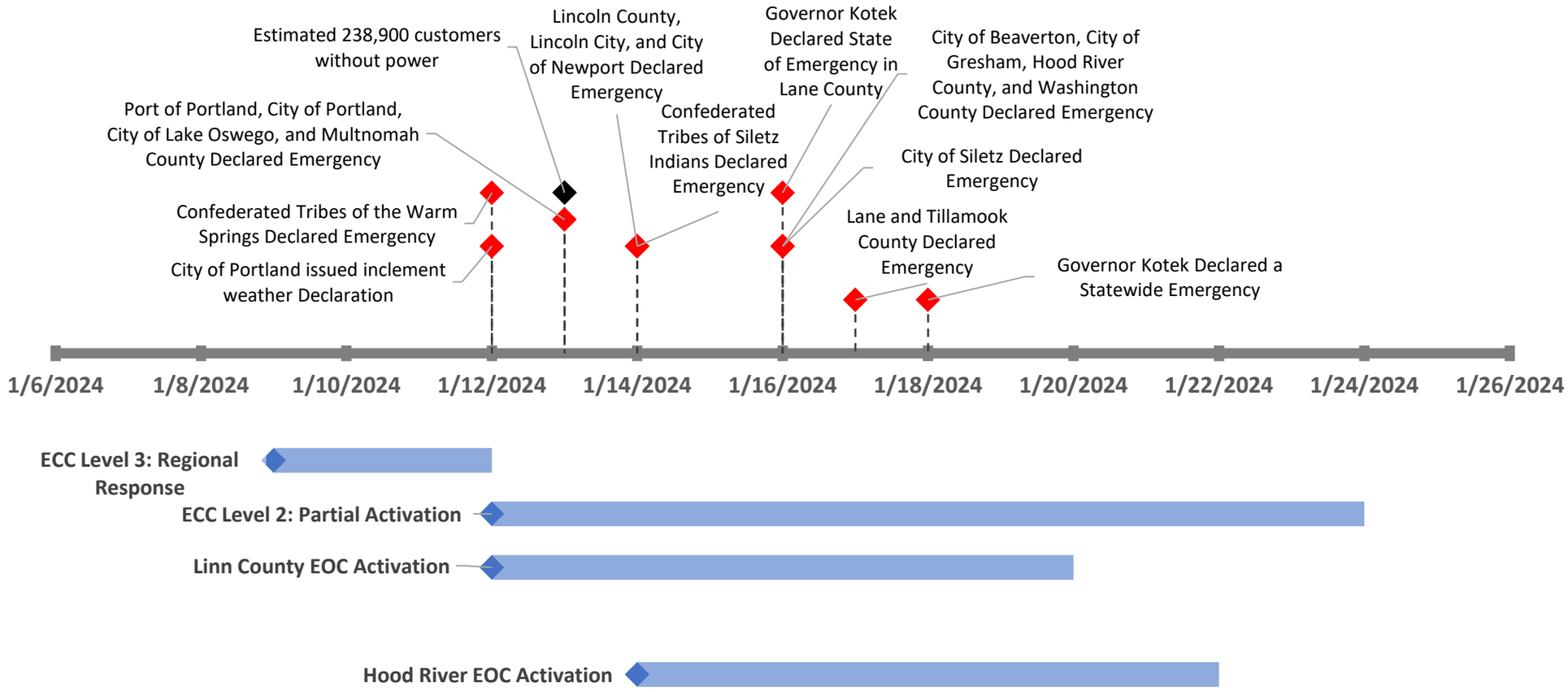
- Assess the communication strategies employed during the storm.
- Examine the utilization of available resources in managing future weather events.
- Provide recommendations for improving inter-agency collaboration.

Internal partners –

- ECC Staff

External partners –

- Local Emergency Management Jurisdictions (Counties and Cities)
- Tribal Partners
- Federal Agencies
- Emergency Support Functions (ESF)
- State Recovery Functions (SRFs)
- NGOs



2024 statewide winter weather timeline

Key findings

OEM identified 20 findings within the Operational Coordination, Operational Communication, Planning, and Situational Assessment core capabilities. The National Preparedness Goal describes five mission areas: Prevention, protection, response, recovery and mitigation; and 32 activities called core capabilities that address risk to the state.

Effective communication was a key factor in the success of the Operational Coordination, Planning, and Situational Assessment for the 2024 January Winter Weather (DR-4768). Regional Coordinators (RCs) proactively engaged with local jurisdictions and participated in coordination calls, demonstrating a commitment to enhancing customer service and fostering productive relationships with external partners. The proactive involvement of Regional Coordinators in local initiatives further strengthened interagency collaboration and facilitated a coordinated response to emerging needs. All partners were kept informed of progress and any changes that occurred. Communication was timely, clear, and concise, which helped to prevent misunderstanding and confusion. Furthermore, the use of the Geographic Information System (GIS) Winter Weather Portfolio and other GIS tools facilitated the sharing of situational awareness information effectively. These GIS tools enhanced the organization's ability to share critical information and improve situational awareness among partners. Continued use and refinement of GIS tools, including the GIS Portfolio, enhances situational awareness sharing and coordination during incident response leading up to an effective operational planning cycle. The operation planning cycle for this incident involved a situation update in the morning, a tactics meeting, and a coordination briefing later in the afternoon, with the implementation of a command & general staff policy-level meeting. The structured planning cycle ensured that key meetings were held at specific times of the day to facilitate efficient coordination and decision-making. By adhering to a consistent planning cycle, partners were able to participate in relevant discussions and receive updates in a timely manner, optimizing the allocation of resources and response efforts. A maintained planning cycle created an effective coordination and decision-making battle rhythm during the emergency response operations.

While there were numerous successes, there were also areas of improvement identified within Operational Coordination, Operational Communication, Planning, and Situational Assessment core capabilities. The lack of tools and processes for simplified information collection and sharing created challenges for partners to provide consistent information elements needed to create SitReps for Situational Assessment. As well as the need for a Spot Report (SpotRep) process for timely intelligence or status change regarding events that could have immediate and/or significant effects on current or future operations. With that in mind, as the event prolonged and partners started to have less activity in their jurisdictions, the meeting calls needed to focus on the main affected areas for efficient collaboration. The OEM Cooperators Calls were provided as a platform for partners to provide a situation update, unfortunately many were not present or did not provide valuable information that could be actionable. Additionally, integrating and ensuring that recovery personnel are engaged early in the response and that recovery activities are deliberately planned and incorporated into the virtual ECC from the beginning for recovery operations.

Areas of strengths

Area of strength 1.1.1: At the onset of the incident, ECC staffing needs for planning were promptly identified and fulfilled, ensuring adequate support for emergency response operations.

- Analysis: Upon initiation of the incident response, there was a proactive approach to assessing ECC staffing requirements for planning functions. This timely identification allowed for the allocation of necessary personnel to support planning activities effectively. By promptly addressing staffing needs, the organization demonstrated foresight and readiness to manage the incident efficiently. Such preparedness likely contributed to smoother coordination and execution of response efforts, minimizing delays and enhancing overall effectiveness.

- Core capability: Planning

Area of strength 1.1.2: The decision-making process regarding increasing ECC activation levels from level 3 to level 2 within the ECC Command Structure was swift.

- Analysis: Email briefings fed by the National Weather Service (NWS) and RCs facilitated the timely sharing of important information and smoothed the transition from ECC Activation Level 3 to Level 2. When faced with the need to escalate activation levels within the ECC Command Structure, decision-makers acted promptly, ensuring timely adjustments to response strategies. The agility demonstrated in this decision-making process enabled a seamless transition to heightened levels of activation, allowing for the allocation of additional resources and intensification of response efforts as needed. Despite the pivot in activation levels, internal communication channels such as the Winter Weather Teams Channel and the ESF 5 Teams Channel facilitated efficient dissemination of information, ensuring all relevant partners were informed promptly. This proactive approach to decision-making and communication minimized the risk of delays or disruptions in response operations, thereby enhancing the organization's ability to effectively manage the incident.

- Core capability: Operational coordination

Area of strength 1.1.3: Teamwork and flexibility was evident in the response effort, characterized by RCs providing cross-regional support and demonstrating proactive customer service.

- Analysis: Throughout the response effort, RCs exhibited a commendable level of teamwork and flexibility by extending support beyond their designated regions to assist the Cascades, Portland Metro, Willamette Valley, Western and Eastern regions. This collaborative approach fostered a sense of solidarity and mutual assistance, enabling resources to be efficiently allocated where needed most. Furthermore, the regular communication from RCs and prompt responses from the Office of Regional Emergency Management (OREM) contributed to effective information sharing and decision-making during and after ~~the~~ Warming Center operations. This responsiveness and knowledge sharing enhanced the overall effectiveness of the response effort, ensuring timely resolution of requests and addressing issues in a proactive manner.

- Core Capability: Operational coordination

Area of strength 1.1.4: The development of relationships and communication with ESF partners was outstanding, fostering consistent engagement, proactive coordination, and effective execution of emergency response activities.

- Analysis: Throughout the emergency response, there was a notable emphasis on cultivating strong relationships and maintaining open lines of communication with ESF partners. This commitment to collaboration was evident in consistent engagement with ESF 5 members and response partners statewide. Communication always remained respectful and transparent, facilitating effective information exchange and decision-making processes. Moreover, the ECC team demonstrated a willingness to adapt and pivot tactics based on feedback received from OEM leadership and partner agencies, underscoring a culture of flexibility and responsiveness. The proactive outreach and communication efforts exhibited during the ECC activation represented a marked improvement compared to previous instances, indicating organizational growth and maturation in coordination practices. Leveraging pre-established ESF leads to further streamlined communication channels and enhanced coordination efforts, contributing to a more efficient and cohesive response. Overall, effective communication among ESF response partners emerged as a cornerstone of successful emergency response activities, with notable strengths observed before and during the 2024 January Winter Weather (DR-4768).

- Core capability: Operational coordination

Area of strength 1.1.5: Teamwork among OEM Public Information Officers (PIOs) rotating as ESF-15 was evident and characterized by ongoing communication and effective shift change briefs.

- Analysis: Throughout the response effort, the teamwork among OEM PIOs rotating as ESF-15 demonstrated a high level of coordination and collaboration. Despite the rotating nature of roles, there was consistent and effective communication among the PIOs, ensuring seamless transitions during shift changes. This continuity of communication enabled the ESF-15 team to maintain a unified approach to public information dissemination, enhancing consistency and reliability in messaging. Moreover, the implementation of shift change briefs facilitated the transfer of critical information and updates, ensuring that incoming PIOs were briefed comprehensively on ongoing activities and emerging issues. This coordinated teamwork contributed to the overall effectiveness of public information management during the response, fostering clarity, consistency, and responsiveness in addressing public inquiries and disseminating essential information.

- Core capability: Public information and warning

Area of strength 1.1.6: The engagement of seven new staff members in the virtual ECC facilitated the building of staff experience, contributing to operational effectiveness and organizational resilience.

- Analysis: The involvement of seven new staff members in the ECC represents an opportunity to enrich the organization's talent pool and cultivate a diverse range of skills and experiences within the emergency management team. By actively engaging new personnel in ECC operations, the organization demonstrates a commitment to nurturing and developing talent, thereby bolstering its capacity to respond effectively to emergencies. The integration of new staff members not only expands the ECC's manpower but also infuses fresh perspectives and ideas, fostering innovation and adaptability in response strategies. Moreover, the hands-on experience gained by these individuals during their involvement in ECC activities serves as a valuable learning opportunity, allowing them to familiarize themselves with emergency response protocols, procedures, and technologies. This exposure not only enhances their individual skill sets but also contributes to the overall resilience of the organization by broadening the pool of capable personnel available to support emergency response efforts.

- Core capability: Operational coordination

Area of strength 1.1.7: The ECC planning cycle involved maintaining coordination briefings in the afternoon and sending SitReps out in the morning.

- Analysis: Consistent coordination of briefings and SitReps dissemination facilitated communication and situational awareness within the ECC. Distributing the SitRep in the morning allowed for more time to engage with ESFs to collect updates while featuring impressive knowledge sharing and information exchange, fostering cross-collaborative engagement. These practices ensured that relevant information was communicated promptly, allowing for informed decision-making, and coordinated response efforts.

- Core capability: Situational assessment

Area of strength 1.1.8: Implementation of a new formalized policy-level meeting and policy briefings facilitated the gathering of information throughout the day to address specific elements and meet the Governor’s office needs.

- Analysis: The establishment of a policy level meeting allowed for the systematic collection of pertinent information and addressed key requirements outlined by the Governor's office. The level of policy coordination improved through policy briefings. Policy Briefs were provided in a written format and in virtual meetings as necessary to inform Policy Level Decision makers and seek direction where appropriate. Also, in sharing with Department Directors ListServ and OERS council partners. This initiative enhanced the organization's ability to respond effectively to policy-related matters by providing a structured platform for information gathering and dissemination. Continually incorporating policy briefings into the ECC Operational and Planning Cycle maintained clarity on expectations from the Governor’s Office and sustained effective policy coordination within the enterprise.

- Core capability: Planning

Area of strength 1.1.9: The Winter Weather GIS portfolio served as a detailed resource, enabling the verification of information and an effective tool that was updated with additional documents that provided situational awareness to the enterprise.

- Analysis: The Winter Weather GIS portfolio provided a comprehensive resource for verifying information related to the incident. By utilizing the portfolio, the enterprise enhanced its ability to access accurate and detailed information, contributing to effective decision-making and response efforts. The continued leveraging of the portfolio tool assisted in a centralized repository that updated information, fostered collaboration, and provided incident updates as incident levels changed, ensuring partners remained informed and prepared.

- Core capability: Situational assessment

Area of strength 1.1.10: Communication inquiring about Tribal declaration was effective, demonstrating proactive engagement with Tribal entities.

- Analysis: Inquiring about Tribal declaration showcased proactive communication efforts aimed at addressing Tribal concerns and ensuring inclusivity in emergency response efforts. By actively engaging with Tribal entities and addressing their inquiries, the ECC demonstrated a commitment to effective communication and partnership building, fostering trust and collaboration.

- Core capability: Operational coordination

Areas for improvement

Area for improvement 1.2.1: Need for improvement in ESFs development, coordination, and understanding of ESFs roles and processes.

- Core capability: Operational coordination

- Analysis: Challenges in understanding the role of ESFs, request processes, mission assignment updates, and overall ECC structure. Insufficient understanding of ESFs roles, processes, and coordination principles may hinder effective emergency response and coordination efforts. Enhancing ESF development, coordination, and understanding through a clear definition of roles, responsibilities, and tasks, as well as improved communication and training are needed.

- Recommendation: Establish clear and comprehensive training/exercise sessions for ESF personnel, focusing on role definitions, request processes, and coordination protocols.

Area for improvement 1.2.2: The lack of formal documentation for ESF 5 Standard Operating Guidelines (SOG) and unit-level procedures creates inconsistencies in the planning and operational processes, particularly regarding critical documentation such as meeting agendas, SitReps, and IAPs.

Core capability: Planning

- Analysis: The ECC currently operates without formal, documented procedures for ESF 5. This can lead to inconsistencies in the development and use of critical planning documents such as SitReps, IAPs, and meeting agendas. By framing these procedures within the Incident Command Structure (ICS) framework, we can ensure that ESF 5 adheres to national standards, improving both efficiency and coherence across operations. Developing formal SOGs based on ICS principles will provide a standardized approach to planning and documentation, reducing errors and enhancing coordination among ECC personnel.

- Recommendation: Task the Planning Section with developing and implementing ESF 5 SOGs that align with the ICS framework. These guidelines should cover all critical processes, including the creation of SitReps, IAPs, meeting notes, and other operational documents, ensuring consistency and standardization in ECC activities.

Area for improvement 1.2.3: Recovery activities should be integrated into ECC operations from the onset of an incident to ensure a seamless transition from response to recovery.

- Core capability: Planning

- Analysis: During the response to the January winter storm, recovery personnel were brought in too late, leading to delays in damage assessment data and the submission of requests for state or federal declarations. Early engagement of recovery staff in ECC operations would have facilitated a smoother transition to recovery and improved overall coordination. A structured recovery planning process, clearly documented and incorporated into ECC procedures, is essential to ensure timely data collection and decision-making. Including recovery planning at the onset of Level 2 activation would help define clear expectations for the response-to-recovery transition process.

- Recommendation: Assign the Recovery and Mitigation Section to develop a formal, documented recovery planning process for early integration into ECC operations. This framework should ensure that recovery personnel are involved from the beginning of incidents and that recovery activities are systematically incorporated into the response phase. Coordination with ECC command staff and recovery personnel is essential to standardize this process.

Area for improvement 1.2.4: Inconsistent reporting practices and unclear expectations hinder effective situational awareness and information flow.

- Core capability: Situational assessment

- Analysis: Lack of standardization in Essential Elements of Information (EEIs) and information consistency. The absence of EEIs leads to an unclear understanding of important information, reporting requirements, and expectations of local jurisdictions. Standardizing EEIs and establishing clear expectations for reporting will ensure consistency in lists and formats. An assessment/revision of the "Planning P" cycle for the State ECC and how/when/what deliverables are received will improve this too.

- Recommendation: Develop and distribute standardized reporting templates and EEIs across all jurisdictions. The Planning Section should lead this effort, with implementation.

Area for improvement 1.2.5: Not having an SOG for a Spot Report (SpotRep) limits the efficiency of information collection, sharing, and dissemination, particularly to data tracked in OpsCenter.

- Core capability: Situational assessment

- Analysis: The lack of a standardized SpotRep SOG has impacted the ability to determine when critical information, such as shelter data (e.g., warming shelters), should be shared with the ECC. Moreover, the existing situation reporting capability within OpsCenter has limitations, which lack information flow during emergencies. By developing streamlined tools for data collection, such as surveys, and implementing a SpotRep SOG, the accuracy and efficiency of situational awareness reports will improve. Future enhancements of the OpsCenter can address these limitations to strengthen situational reporting for larger-scale events.

- Recommendation: ESF #5 can develop a SpotRep SOG to standardize the collection and sharing of critical information. Additionally, future upgrades to OpsCenter reporting capabilities should be explored to enhance situational awareness and data sharing across OERS.

Area for improvement 1.2.6: Ambiguity in ESF activation criteria and communication protocols hinders effective resource allocation and coordination.

- Core capability: Planning

- Analysis: No pre-established trigger for ESF activation creates uncertainty and delays in response. The absence of proactive notification regarding ESF activation causes communication gaps. Lack of clarity on the threshold for ESF activation, throughout the incident, led to inconsistent sharing of activities/updates by ESF partners. Developing pre-established triggers in coordination with our ESFs partners for ESF activation, defining clear criteria for ESF activation, and consistent reporting mechanisms for ESF partners to ensure transparency and collaboration. This may also be implemented proactive communication protocols to notify relevant parties about ESF activations promptly.

- Recommendation: The ECC Operations Section should establish clear criteria for ESF activation and develop a communication protocol to notify relevant parties promptly. Developing pre-established triggers for ESF activation and defining clear criteria for ESF activation creates a consistent reporting mechanism for ESF partners to ensure transparency and collaboration. This may also implement proactive communication protocols to notify relevant parties about ESF activations promptly.

Area for improvement 1.2.7: Policy briefs sent to the governor's office often proceed without adequate ESF input or awareness, leading to potential misalignment in messaging and coordination between state agencies and decision-makers during emergency events.

- Core capability: Operational coordination

- Analysis: While policy briefs serve as a key mechanism for providing updates on high-priority issues to the governor, they are often framed through the lens of the Policy Advisory, which may not fully align with the perspectives of ESF partners. This lack of input can result in inconsistent messaging, which may affect the timeliness and cohesion of statewide declarations and resource allocation. Ensuring that SitReps and policy briefs are synced across decision-making levels is essential for consistent communication. Creating a structured review process, where ESF partners and relevant agencies can provide input to ensure that the governor’s office receives a well-rounded view of the situation.

- Recommendation: Establish a more specific, structured coordination process with Directors and Deputy Directors across the state enterprise to improve information sharing and data collection for policy briefs. This approach will help align the Policy Advisory's perspective with those of ESF partners and ensure that statewide messaging remains consistent and effective throughout emergency response efforts.

Area for improvement 1.2.8: Improve coordination by establishing thresholds to stand-up a Joint Information Center (JIC) and enhancing public-facing resources for PIOs are essential for ensuring effective communication and timely dissemination of critical information during emergencies.

- Core capability: Public information and warning

- Analysis: There were no indications of what would trigger a JIC being stood up. Using a JIC early can coordinate PIOs from various response entities can enable the delivery of unified and timely life safety messaging to the public. Ensuring the consistent provision of meeting links in communications and materials can improve accessibility and participation in essential meetings and briefings. Furthermore, creating incident-specific public-facing webpages can enhance the accessibility of updated resources and information for the public and media, improving overall transparency and engagement.

- Recommendation: Establish clear triggers/thresholds to warrant activating the JIC, including clear communication strategies, public-facing resources, and standardized protocols. To achieve these improvements, it is recommended to develop clear protocols for looping in regional coordinators in the public inquiry response process, create standardized talking points, establish incident-specific public-facing webpages, address privacy concerns, foster early coordination among PIOs and incorporate PIOs into ECC exercise.

Area for improvement 1.2.9: It has been identified that the current AAR/IP tracking mechanisms are insufficient.

- Core capability: Planning

- Analysis: The current AAR/IP tracking system has led to recurring issues during these events, which have not been effectively mitigated. This repetition of problems underscores the need for a more robust tracking and addressing process to enhance overall event management and response capabilities.

- Recommendation: Upgrade the AAR/IP tracking system to improve the identification and mitigation of recurring issues. Task the Continuous Improvement Working Group (CIWG) with implementation.

Area for improvement 1.2.10: Coordination with the Governor's office to obtain an Emergency Declaration (ED) lacked clarity, particularly regarding the thresholds for requesting a declaration, leading to delays in informing state leadership of available tools and resources.

- Core capability: Operational coordination

- Analysis: The lack of clear guidelines and communication regarding the thresholds for requesting an ED created confusion and delays during the storm response. This gap in understanding hindered the timely activation of state-level resources, as there was uncertainty among ECC personnel about what constituted the need for an ED and the legal and policy implications associated with it. Proactively improving our knowledge of ED criteria and ensuring that this information is communicated effectively during "blue sky" days (non-emergency periods) will prevent delays during "grey sky" (emergency) operations. Establishing a formal policy that details the ED process, including legal and policy considerations, will ensure smoother coordination with the Governor's office and accelerate decision-making.

- Recommendation: Develop and implement a formal policy outlining the Emergency Declaration process, including clear criteria and thresholds for when a declaration is needed. This policy should also include detailed information on the legal and policy implications of a state ED and ensure that relevant ECC personnel and state leadership are trained on these procedures to improve preparedness during emergency events.

Next steps

The 2024 January Winter Weather (DR-4768) AAR will be used to identify improvements for future weather-related incident operations within planning, response, mitigation and recovery for communities in Oregon.

ANALYSIS OF CORE CAPABILITIES

Aligning observations and core capabilities provides a consistent taxonomy for evaluation that transcends individual incidents to support preparedness reporting and trend analysis. **Table 1** includes the observations, aligned core capabilities, and performance ratings for each core capability as observed during the incident and determined by the evaluation team.

Table 1: Summary of core capability performance

Objectives	Primary Core Capability	Performed without Challenges (P)	Performed with Some Challenges (S)	Performed with Major Challenges (M)	Unable to be Performed (U)
Coordinate the dissemination of situational awareness information to Tribal, state, local and federal partners, and other partners.	Operational Coordination		**S**		
Communicate and coordinate with Tribal, local, statewide, and federal partners to identify emergent resource and capability gaps.	Operational Communication		**S**		
Identify resources available to fulfill potential resource requests.	Planning		**S**		
Provide technical assistance and subject matter expertise to empower Tribal and local jurisdictions to respond to needs in their communities and recover from emergent impacts.	Operational Coordination		**S**		
Coordinate the collection of damage assessment and cost information to inform potential declaration processes.	Situational Assessment		**S**		

Performed without challenges (P): The targets and critical tasks associated with the core capability were completed and did not negatively impact the performance of other activities. Performance of this activity did not contribute to additional health and/or safety risks for the public or for emergency workers, and it was conducted in accordance with applicable plans, policies, procedures, regulations, and laws.

Performed with some challenges (S): The targets and critical tasks associated with the core capability were completed and did not negatively impact the performance of other activities. Performance of this activity did not contribute to additional health and/or safety risks for the public or for emergency workers, and it was conducted in accordance with applicable plans, policies, procedures, regulations, and laws. However, opportunities to enhance effectiveness and/or efficiency were identified.

Performed with major challenges (M): The targets and critical tasks associated with the core capability were completed but some or all of the following were observed: demonstrated performance had a negative impact on the performance of other activities; contributed to additional health and/or safety risks for the public or for emergency workers; and/or was not conducted in accordance with applicable plans, policies, procedures, regulations, and laws.

Unable to be performed (U): The targets and critical tasks associated with the core capability were not performed.

DATA SCOPE & METHODOLOGY

This AAR includes information collected from individuals and organizations that were identified as partners through OEM, partner agencies and local emergency management organizations. This AAR is an evaluation of systems and operational effectiveness regarding statewide preparedness and response plans and procedures, not an evaluation of individuals or agencies. The information was gathered through interviews held virtually through discussion workshops, meeting notes and status briefings. Documentation related to the preparedness and response for this event was reviewed, including SitReps, daily briefing emails, IAPs, and other documents.

Data collection

From January 24 – February 23, 2024, the OEM Evaluation and Assessment Analyst collected data to support the development of an AAR. The collection methods included hotwashes with State Partners, ECC personnel, local jurisdictions, and NGOs who participated during the ECC activation. Three hotwashes were performed with OERS Council, ESF-5, and ECC Command and General Staff. Additionally, two surveys focused on the State ECC performance were sent to local partners (Counties, Cities and Federally recognized Indian Tribes) and State Partners that were affected directly and indirectly by the incident. Lastly, incident documentation was reviewed including IAPs, SitReps, and other guiding documents to support further analysis.

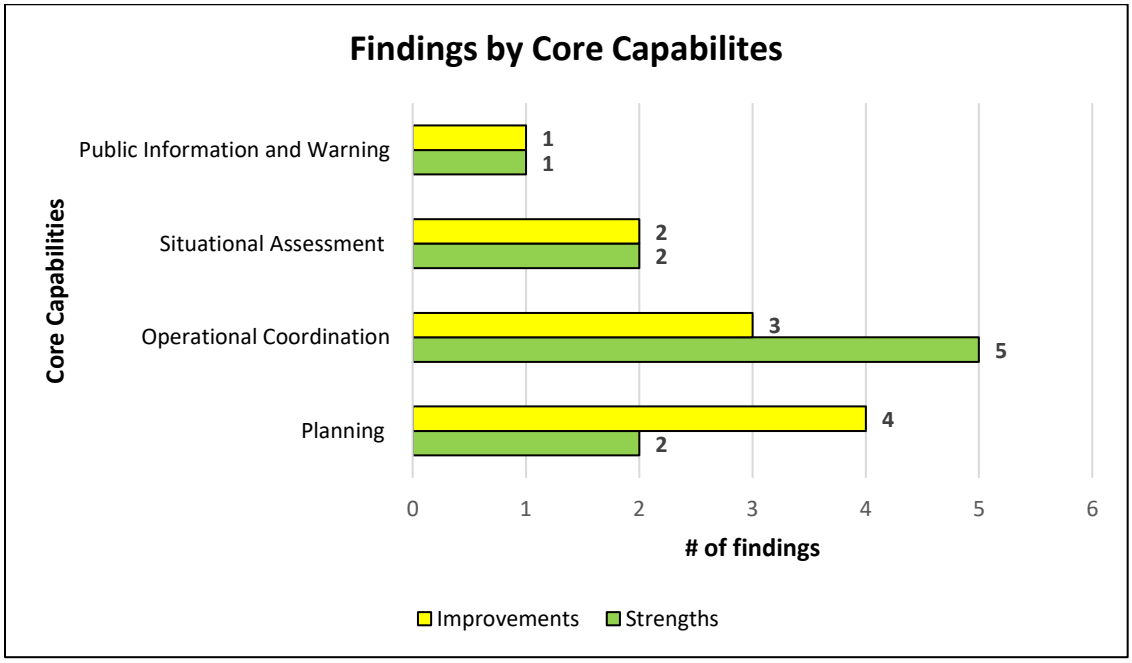
Table 2: Data collection metrics

Hot Washes	Survey Responses	Focus Groups	Feedback Forms
3	40	49	3

Table 3: Collection objectives

Incident Collection Objectives
I. Evaluate the efficiency and coordination of OERS in responding to winter weather storm.
II. Identify strengths and weaknesses in the existing emergency management protocols.
III. Enhance the preparedness and response capabilities of OERS for future winter weather events.
IV. Assess the communication strategies employed during the storm.
V. Examine the utilization of available resources in managing future weather events.
VI. Provide recommendations for improving inter-agency collaboration.

Figure 1: Total findings categozired by core capbailites



CONCLUSION

The AAR of the emergency response and recovery efforts before and during the 2024 January Winter Weather (DR-4768) provided valuable insights into both the successes and areas for improvement in ECC coordination and communication strategies.

Key strengths identified during the review included proactive staffing assessments, swift decision-making processes, effective teamwork and communication among response partners, and the utilization of resources like the Winter Weather GIS portfolio for situational awareness. These strengths exemplify the dedication and resilience of our emergency management team in navigating challenging circumstances.

The AAR also highlighted several areas for improvement, including the need for clearer communication protocols, standardized procedures for ESF activation, and enhanced coordination with marginalized communities. Additionally, early engagement of recovery personnel, streamlined reporting processes, and the establishment of a JIC were identified as critical steps to optimize future response efforts.

Moving forward, it is imperative that Oregon address these areas for improvement through the implementation of standardized protocols, enhanced training, and improved communication mechanisms. The CIWG under the OERS Council will be responsible for overseeing the development and implementation of corrective actions, with specific attention to:

- Clarifying ESF activation criteria and communication protocols
- Establishing standardized communication protocols and mechanisms for regional coordinators
- Developing clear guidelines for the necessity and operationalization of a JIC
- Enhancing inclusivity and safety measures for marginalized communities
- Improving coordination with recovery personnel and integrating recovery planning into ECC operations

The completion date of each corrective action will be tracked in the Corrective Action Tracker, with regular evaluations conducted to assess their effectiveness in achieving specified goals. By addressing these areas for improvement and building upon our strengths, we will be better prepared to respond effectively to future emergencies, ensuring the safety and well-being of our communities.

APPENDIX A: ACRONYM LIST

AAR	After-Action Review
AFI	Area for Improvement
CEMP	Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan
CIWG	Continuous Improvement Working Group
ECC	Emergency Coordination Center
ED	Emergency Declaration
EEI	Essential Elements of Information
ESF	Emergency Support Functions
EMAC	Emergency Management Assistance Compact
GIS	Geographic Information System
IAP	Incident Action Plan
JIC	Joint Information Center
MARS	Mitigation and Recovery Regional Coordinators
OREM	Office of Regional Emergency Management
OERS	Oregon Response Emergency System
PIO	Public Information Officer
RCs	Regional Coordinators
SitReps	Situation Reports
SoGs	Standard Operating Guidelines
SoPs	Standard Operating Procedures
SpotRep	Spot Reports
SRF	State Recovery Functions

Table 4: Accronym list used during this event

APPENDIX B: PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS

Federal	
• FEMA – Federal Emergency Management Agency	
State	
• Business Oregon • Department of Consumer and Business Services • ODA – Oregon Department of Agriculture • ODAS – Oregon Department of Administrative Services • ODE – Oregon Department of Energy • OEM – Oregon Department of Emergency Management • ODHS – Oregon Department of Human Services	• ODOT – Oregon Department of Transportation • OHA – Oregon Health Authority • OJD – Oregon Judicial Department • Oregon Department of Justice TITAN Fusion Center • OSP – Oregon State Police • Oregon State Medical Examiner • OPUC – Oregon Public Utility Commission • OMD – Oregon Military Department
County / Local	
• Burns Paiute Tribe • Confederated Tribes of the Coos, Lower Umpqua and Siuslaw • Coquille Indian Tribe • Cow Creek Band of Umpqua Tribe of • Confederated Tribes of The Grand Ronde • Klamath Tribes • Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians • Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation • Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs • Benton County • Clackamas County • Clatsop County • Columbia County	• Coos County • Deschutes County • Douglas County • Hood River County • Lane County • Lincoln County • Linn County • Malheur County • Marion County • Polk County • Tillamook County • Washington County • Yamhill County • City of Eugene • City of Portland • City of Springfield
Private Sector / Non-Governmental Organizations	
• NWS - National Weather Service	• ARC – American Red Cross

Table 5: Participating Organization