January 2024 Severe Winter Weather Event

Preliminary Findings and Action Steps

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List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

DCHS	Department of County Human Services
EMS	Emergency Medical Services
EOC	Emergency Operations Center
ESF	Emergency Support Function
ICS	Incident Command System
JOHS	Joint Office of Homeless Services
MCEM	Multnomah County Emergency Management
MHAAO	Mental Health and Addiction Association of Oregon
NIMS	National Incident Management System
PIC	"Person in Charge"; the lead person or staff manager at a severe weather shelter
TIP	Trauma Intervention Program Northwest

Key Findings

The January severe winter weather broke records on many fronts for the County. Icy road conditions, freezing temperatures, and wide-spread power outages impacted large swathes of the county's residents, as well as County operations and staff, shelter facilities, and operations. At the same time, the County and City of Portland were negotiating changes in the way they coordinate response activities and share resources for sheltering activities. Against this backdrop, the County successfully operated 12 shelters continuously for five nights, provided support for the expansion of two other shelter locations, and subsequently pivoted to opening three distribution points when weather conditions did not improve as quickly as forecasted, and reopened one shelter in the eastern part of the county for two nights, where conditions were worse.

The County also supported response efforts in Corbett, where both extended power and water supply disruptions affected hundreds of residents and livestock, and coordinated with energy providers to ensure that critical facilities and individuals with heightened medical needs were prioritized for assistance and support while power was being restored.

Our goal during any winter weather shelter activation is to shelter as many people as possible, as quickly as possible, inside and out of the elements — with as few barriers as possible that might lead someone to choose to remain in cold, wet and dangerous conditions. To support this goal, the county works to identify enough locations, recruit enough staff and provide enough supplies to accommodate everyone that comes to a shelter as long as the dangerous weather conditions persist.

This event was also affected by the storm with multiple shelter locations being impacted by power outages and burst pipes. While these impacts did not prevent the county from meeting its goal, it did limit the number of locations that could be utilized and resulted in the closing of one shelter site and the reconfiguration of two others, reducing their site occupation maximum. Burst pipes also resulted in the loss of shelter supplies at two different sites.

To support our goal and ensure nobody seeking shelter was turned away, we opened a record breaking 12 locations supporting 1,356 people at the peak. This excludes people who were accommodated in 144 hotel rooms procured during the event being coordinated through JOHS and DCHS to support people experiencing homelessness and or put a higher risk due to power outages. The successes of this response depended on changes introduced this season from past

learning, including intensive preparation at the beginning of the season to meet shelter response resource, staffing, and facility requirements; early and frequent coordination with served jurisdictions and partners; and how leadership makes decisions on shelter operations. Some of the records broken during this event are included in Table 1:

Table 1 - January 2024 sheltering figures

Category	Previous Record	January 2024 level	Percent Increase From Previous Event
Number of People Seeking Shelter (Peak)	1,133 *(one night over 1,000)*	1,356 *(three nights over 1,000)*	19.6% Increase
Number of Total Shelters Opened (Peak)	8	12	50% Increase
Total Shifts Filled (supporting shelters, logistics, and transportation)	1,150	3,586	211% Increase
Number of Different People Working Shifts	499	1,274	155% Increase
Number of Meals Served	2,900	7,650	163% Increase
Rides Coordinated by the County	157	404	157% Increase
Resource Requests Completed	330	1,060	203% Increase

Despite numerous successes and the ability to support the community during this long event, opportunities for improvement were also identified and questions arose regarding the final closure time and date. While no questions arose about the county's support during the highest risk days, the aftermath of the storm resulted in dangerous roadway and sidewalk conditions during shelter exiting with limited options available due to numerous private sector and government closures.

The event was also an opportunity for further learning and improvement in the way the County prepared for and responds to seasonal emergencies, particularly regarding continuity of operations and County response coordination beyond emergency sheltering for persons

experiencing homelessness. With climate change affecting the frequency and severity of seasonal weather events, longer term investment will be essential for the County to be resilient and adapt to changing conditions.

This initial findings document aims to capture the immediate feedback from the event, both what went well and what could be improved, and provide recommendations for continuous improvement. It was drawn from various hot washes, listening sessions, and other meetings conducted by County departments. This executive summary also provides recommendations as we continue to see both an increasing number of people seeking shelter and an increase in the severity of weather events and a need to be more resilient as climate change continues to impact the County. To improve the County's ability to support events in the future, we recommend the following:

1. **Continue to engage and expand support from our partners during large scale shelter operations**. The County witnessed a 211% increase in the number of shifts from our previous largest event and a 155% increase in the number of people working this event, with county workers supporting much of the increase. The County can not continue to support even larger events without additional support outside the County. This includes additional support from both governmental partners as well as engaging and recruiting from the community earlier.
2. **Identify larger and more resilient facilities for shelter use**. The total number of shelters created difficulties for both logistics in supplying locations, a 203% increase from our next largest event, and for staffing in key experience areas including Person In Charge (PIC) and health. We may also find some economies of scale and cost savings in other areas such as security and janitorial, just to name a few. The large number of locations also required significant transportation efforts and contributed to the largest number of transports seen during a large event, 157% more than our next largest event. Fewer locations that can expand as an event gets larger would provide the county with the greatest chance of success.
3. **Continue to identify and train shelter and support staff year round**. The county needs to move away from a workforce identified and recruited in the days prior to or during an activation. Planning for severe weather is a year round activity and we need to continue to identify and train more county workers in critical roles including PICs, logistics, Unified Commanders, Emergency Support Function (ESF) 6 leads and transportation support personnel all year.
4. **Flexible planning when forecasts change or ground conditions are worse than anticipated**. The county needs to plan for staffing, facilities and supplies beyond an anticipated closure.

5. **Continue to focus on security**. This was the first season we provided security at most of our locations, which has been well received by staff and contractors. Workplace Security - in collaboration with others piloted storing weapons temporarily for guests accessing the shelter during this event. Workplace Security and Risk Management should continue to explore options to improve safety as well as reporting when incidents do occur.

6. **Improving Countywide Facility Resilience for Severe Weather Operations**. The County needs to make future facility investments, ensuring those investments are supporting underserved communities in their neighborhoods during emergencies. These future investments also need to be flexible enough to serve multiple needs and should take into account nearby risks. One consideration should be to construct facilities with generators, higher construction standards and with common spaces and large meeting rooms on the ground floor allowing for more flexible use during severe weather responses. Two of the twelve locations we opened lost power after the start of the event and these issues could be significantly reduced with more resilient facilities.

7. **Better leverage existing passenger transportation resources**. The county has taken on the role of supporting transportation to and from shelter when other services are unable to meet the needs of residents, either because of access and functional needs of riders or loss or severe disruption of regular services. The county has been successful, but lacks enough emergency resources to fully meet its goals during such a large event. The County should pursue pre-disaster intergovernmental agreements with TriMet and continue to seek partnerships with other organizations that can reliably provide resources in emergencies.

Situation Overview

Multnomah County responded to severe winter weather that impacted the entire county from January 12 through January 21, 2024. Extreme cold temperatures, sleet, freezing rain, accumulating snow and ice, and high winds caused downed trees and power lines, widespread extended power outages, damages to homes and buildings, public transportation disruptions and dangerous travel conditions.

Weather

Over the course of the ten-day response, several winter storm warnings, wind advisories, and ice storm warnings were in effect. January 12 saw a decline in temperatures to at least 21 degrees Fahrenheit followed by a wintery mix which turned to snow on January 13. Strong east winds created an additional challenge, bringing the wind chill to below zero and reducing visibility due to snow blowing. On January 14, temperatures continued to drop into the teens, and hovered around 10 degrees towards the Gorge. An ice storm warning and wind advisory were issued for January 16; freezing rain subsequently coated the city. Approximately 0.5 inch of ice remained on roads and sidewalks well into January 17. Temperatures were forecasted to warm up to the mid 40s, yet they remained in the 30s through January 21, taking much longer for accumulated ice and snow to melt than anticipated.

Impacts - utilities

The winter weather event also resulted in multiple power outages affecting people throughout Multnomah County; a peak of 165,000 PGE customers (households) were affected on Saturday, January 13. PacifiCorp reached a peak outage on January 13 of 46,000 customers and a second peak on January 17 of 30,000 customers. In other words, from January 13, approximately 633,000 people, or nearly 80% of the county's population were without power. There were also 43 customers within Multnomah County who were notified of natural gas curtailment during the event.

At least 260 customers served by Corbett Water District were without water for several days during the event due to frozen valves at the reservoir. Corbett Fire Department reported that there were two residential fires and two outbuilding fires that were related to the winter weather event as people without power found alternate ways to heat their homes and livestock outbuildings. There were several fire hydrants in Corbett that were not working. The Old Scenic Highway and the community of Latourell were isolated due to extreme ice accumulation and changes in the Oregon Department of Transportation's snow plowing and maintenance. One emergency call in Latourell took hours to respond to due to icy road conditions.

Impacts - health

The County Health Department noted several records set for this event. Between January 12 and 21, the Health Department recorded 1,202 falls (peak: January 19, 228 fall injuries–the highest ever count); 101 cold-related illness visits to Emergency Departments (peak: January 13, 26 visits–the highest ever count); and 23 carbon monoxide poisoning visits (peak: January 14, 17 visits–the highest ever count). Emergency Medical Services (EMS) also noted many records set for this event. At the time of this report EMS was still conducting an internal review, but call volume was one record set; the time taken to return to normal cadence was another record. Hospitals are still recovering from the stress on orthopedic services related to the record number of falls and injuries.

The Multnomah County Medical Examiner had identified four suspected hypothermia deaths at the time of this report. Additionally, three people died as a result of downed power lines and at least one died as the result of a fallen tree. Finally, one person died of currently unknown causes after being transported by ambulance from a shelter at Multnomah County East on January 20.

The Behavioral Health Resource Center (BHRC) served 1,025 participants at its day center between January 12 and 21. A total of 1,628 signed up to enter. Its van/outreach service reached 2,283 participants during that period. Over the course of the event, Mental Health and Addiction Association of Oregon (MHAAO) experienced a decrease in the use of its services in line with individuals using other emergency services; the number expanded as emergency shelters closed on January 17. There was also an increase in the number of people encountered and supported with services and access to the day program through outreach in the surrounding blocks of the BHRC or through direct drop-off.

County government

The County Chair declared a state of emergency effective originally from January 12 through January 16, and extended it to January 17. County government offices were closed[1] on January 16, 17, and 18 due to the inclement weather. The Multnomah County EOC was partially activated from January 12 through January 21. Paid staff, temporary employees, and volunteers were mobilized to fill positions in planning, logistics, and warming shelter operations.

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[1] January 15 was a public holiday, so County government offices were automatically closed.

Shelter operations activation thresholds[2] are reflected in Multnomah County's Cold Weather Standard Operating Procedures. This event was the first activation in Multnomah County in the 2023-24 winter season for severe winter weather and was the longest consecutive period of activation for a seasonal weather emergency since 2016.

Warming shelters were opened at the following locations for 24 hours between Friday, January 12th and Wednesday, January 17th:
- Ascension Catholic Church: 743 S.E. 76th Ave., Portland - Staffed by Multnomah County
- Bud Clark Commons: 650 N.W. Irving St., Portland - Staffed by Transition Projects and Multnomah County
- Charles Jordan Community Center: 9009 N. Foss Ave., Portland - Staffed by Multnomah County
- Cook Plaza: 19421 SE Stark Street, Portland - Staffed by Cultivate Initiatives
- Freedom Foursquare Church: 660 S.E. 160th Ave, Portland - Staffed by Multnomah County
- Friendly House, 1737 N.W. 26th Ave., Portland - Staffed by Do Good Multnomah
- Imago Dei Church 1302 S.E. Ankeny St., Portland - Staffed by Multnomah County
- Market Street Shelter, 120 S.E. Market St., Portland - Staffed by All Good Northwest
- Multnomah County East Building, 600 N.E. 8th St., Gresham - Staffed by Multnomah County
- Portsmouth Union Church, 4775 N Lombard St, Portland - Staffed by All Good Northwest (overnight shelter in the winter months, extended operations to 24-hours).
- Powell Shelter, 7332 S.E. Powell Blvd., Portland - Staffed by Transition Projects
- Salvation Army, 5325 N. Williams Ave., Portland - Staffed by Multnomah County
- State of Oregon Building, 800 NE Oregon St, Portland, OR - Staffed by State of Oregon
- First Christian Church, 1314 SW Park Ave, Portland, OR (closed due to pipe burst on 01/12)
  - While this site opened and operated for a brief period of time, it had to be shut down on Saturday, January 13th due to a burst water pipe.

Due to weather conditions on January 18th, Health & Human Services opened three Points of Distribution (PODs) from 1:00 pm - 5:00 pm. The three PODs included:

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[2] Severe weather shelters open as needed when any of the following thresholds are met for any one of the conditions below that are forecasted to persist for four hours or more between the hours of 8:00 p.m - 7:00 a.m:
- Forecasted temperature of 25° F (-4° C) or below.
- Forecasted snow accumulation of 1.0 inch or more.
- Forecasted temperature at or below 32° F (0° C) with driving rain of 1.0 inch or more overnight.
- The COO or their designee may consider other conditions or circumstances during a severe weather event that could increase the risk to the community and activate elements included in this SOP.

- Bud Clark Commons: 650 NW Irving St., Portland - Staffed by Transition Projects and Multnomah County
- Cultivate Initiatives: 14625 SE Stark St, Portland - Staffed by Cultivate Initiatives
- Market Street Shelter, 120 SE Market St, Portland - Staffed by All Good Northwest

Additionally, one warming shelter site, Multnomah County East, re-opened for 24-hour access from 8:00 pm January 19th until 10:00 am January 21st due to cold and ice weather conditions in East County.

This response included the opening and operation of a record-breaking 12 24-hour warming shelters (not including expansion sites and Portsmouth Union Church staffed by All Good Northwest) and overnight shelters that hosted a total of 1,356 people at its peak, daytime warming spaces This excludes people and families housed in 144 hotel rooms and people supported during the emergency water assistance for the community of Corbett. The overall response also included intensive risk communication, outreach to unsheltered residents and the creation of three points of distribution, which opened on January 18, to distribute food and cold weather supplies to those in need.

Figure 1: Daily Peak Numbers by facility.

Warming Shelter Locations	Operated By	Guests/Capacity					
		Jan 12 (Peak)	Jan 13	Jan 14	Jan 15	Jan 16	Jan 17 *Morning Numbers
Salvation Army: 5325 N. Williams Ave., Portland	County	44	84	153	143	130	170
Friendly House: 1737 N.W. 26th Ave., Portland	Do Good Multnomah	65	65	95	95	106	106
Cook Plaza: 19421 S.E. Stark St., Gresham	Cultivate Initiatives	40	95	102	105	103	105
Ascension Catholic Church: 743 S.E. 76th Ave., Portland	County	29	90	100	96	97	93
Powell Shelter, 7332 S.E. Powell Blvd., Portland	Transition Projects	18	87	108	100	101	111
Market Street Shelter, 120 S.E. Market St., Portland	All Good Northwest	30	50	50	50	50	50
Freedom Foursquare Church 660 S.E. 160th Ave, Portland	County	Opened 01/13	44	95	97	101	98
First Christian Church 1314 SW Park Ave., Portland	County	Opened 01/13	47	Closed at 12:02 AM on 1/14	Closed	Closed	Closed
Multnomah County East 600 N.E. 8th St., Gresham	County	Opened 01/13	61	80	81	76	70
State of Oregon Building, 800 NE Oregon St., Portland	State	Opened 01/13	88	163	184	163	172
Charles Jordan Community Center, 9009 N Foss Ave, Portland	County		Opened 01/14	25	104	177	186
Bud Clark Commons, 650 NW Irving St., Portland	Transition Projects		Opened 01/14	37	50	46	52
Imago Dei, 1302 SE Ankeny St., Portland	County		Opened 01/14	18	98	92	93
Portsmouth Union Church, 4775 N Lombard St, Portland	All Good Northwest	50	50	50	50	50	50
Preferred Capacity		*495*	*790*	*990*	*1,020*	*1,055*	*1,055*
Totals		**276**	**761**	**1,076**	**1,253**	**1,292**	**1,356**

People

Staffing

The January 2024 activation required record numbers of staff to open, manage, supply and transport people to severe weather shelters. During the January event, the county recruited staff from our departments, our cities, the state, non-profits and the general public. While Multnomah County filled the most shifts (48.7% in total), the overall operation would not have been successful without participation from all parties. Figure 2 (below) shows the percentage of staff throughout the County and all our partners. Figure 3 (below), is also provided as we see a difference in the number of shifts each individual often works. Partners including Do Good often had staff working multiple shifts throughout the event, whereas community volunteers, who were recruited later in the event, often worked fewer shifts per person.

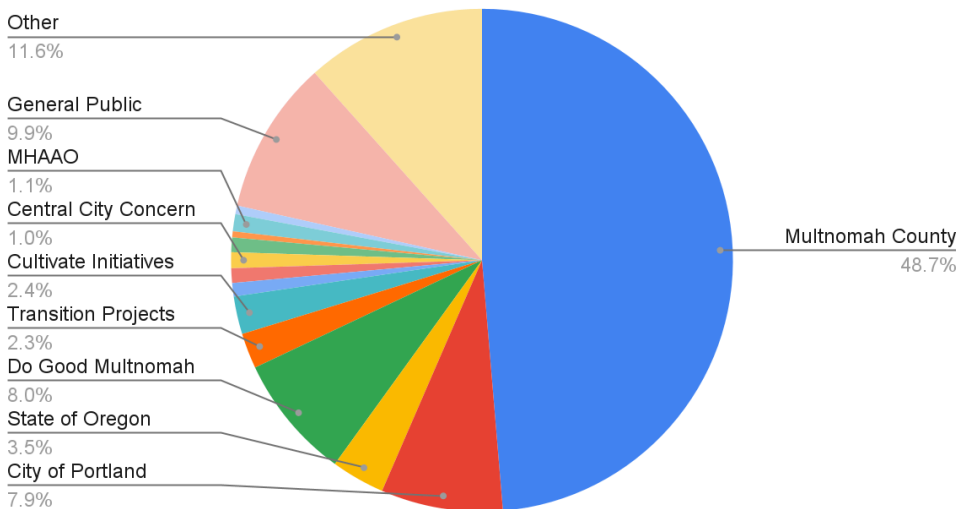Percentage of Overall Staff Throughout Activation

Other
11.6%

General Public
9.9%

MHAAO
1.1%

Central City Concern
1.0%

Cultivate Initiatives
2.4%

Transition Projects
2.3%

Do Good Multnomah
8.0%

State of Oregon
3.5%

City of Portland
7.9%

Multnomah County
48.7%

Figure *2: Percentage of Overall Staff Throughout Activation (excluding Portsmouth Union Church and Market Street Shelter)*

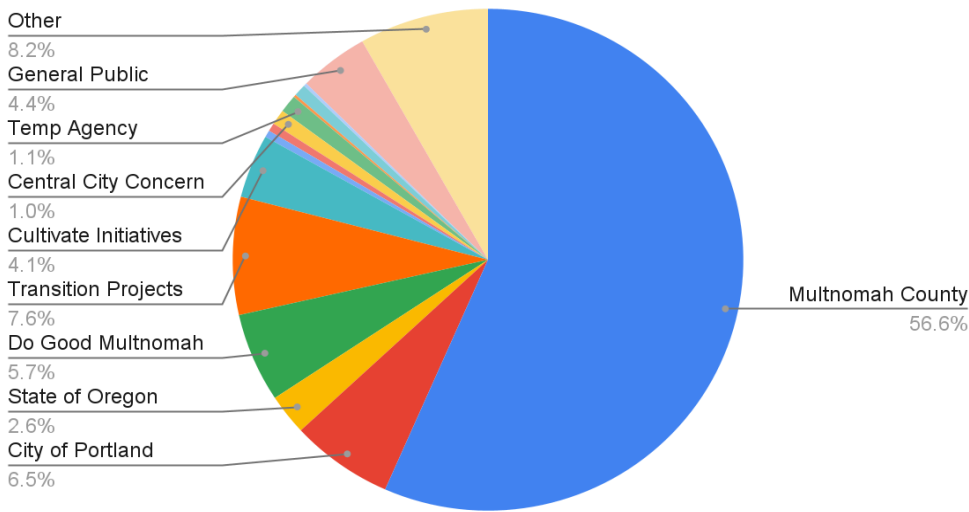## Percentage of Shifts Covered Throughout Activation

Figure 3: Total Shifts Across All Warming Shelter Sites (excluding Portsmouth Union Church and Market Street Shelter)

The County often supports a majority of the staff for shelter operations with the Department of County Human Services (DCHS) filling 36% followed by the Health Department at 23%. Figure 4: Multnomah County Shelter Shifts by Department provides a breakdown by department and we can see how shelter work is being supported across all departments.
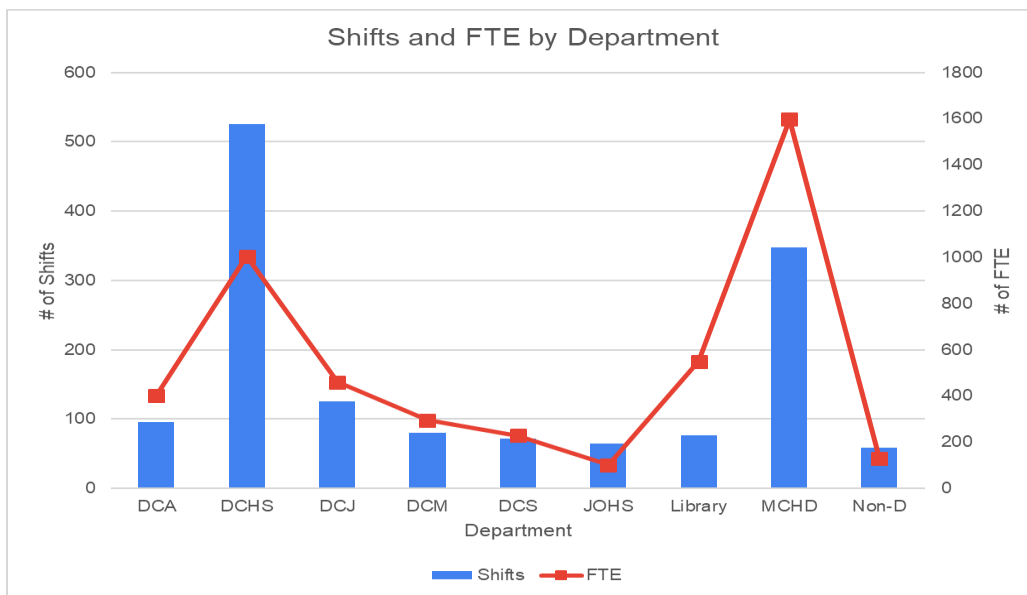

Figure 4: Multnomah County Shifts by Department Compared with FTE by Department

Operations

Operations oversees several components of our overall response with the largest being shelter management. DCHS manages sheltering operations and serves as liaison between Unified Command and shelter staff during activations. The ESF-6 Lead role is a 24-hour function, with the following duties:

- Support all 12 shelter sites
- Critical incidents (ie: 911 calls, overdoses, threats of harm)
- Fielding and entering supply requests
- Janitorial needs & contractor coordination
- Transportation of staff and guests
- Redistribution of guests, due to capacity
- Redistribution of staff,
- PIC support and problem solving

MCEM leads administration and coordination of general shelter staffing schedules with support from DCHS who recruits for PIC roles and troubleshoots to fill staffing gaps.

During activation, ESF-6 provided just-in-time support of shelter guests and staff during all building maintenance emergencies, and rebalanced guests and staff as needed. DCHS staff covered 88% of the 204 hours of ESF-6 lead work for this activation. ESF-6 also coordinated motel placement for health-related reasons, behavior management, overflow, and families with minor children.

Supplies

Logistics

Logistics is responsible for providing necessary supplies and services to shelters throughout an activation. In this event, Logistics moved over 260 pallets of material for setup, resupply and demobilization (equivalent to 10 fully-loaded 53-foot tractor trailers), and made over 180 individual trips to fulfill 1,060 resource requests during inclement weather and freezing rain conditions to support severe weather shelter operations. Eleven different vehicles were utilized, including three box trucks, all with different capabilities to keep locations operational during snow and ice events.

Logistics can pre-stage empty, County-managed sites including Cook Plaza and Powell Blvd. All other sites require "just-in-time" set up and often displace other programs being offered.

Just-in-time set ups also occurred throughout this event, which can also be made difficult with adverse road conditions and the necessity to resupply already open locations.

Logistics supported severe weather shelter operations by conducting deliveries from Thursday, January 11th through Saturday, January 20th. After shelters closed, Logistics ensured three points of distribution (PODs) were equipped with supplies while they were open from Thursday, January 18th to Sunday, January 21st, and supported the Multnomah County East (MCE) overflow site from January 19-21.

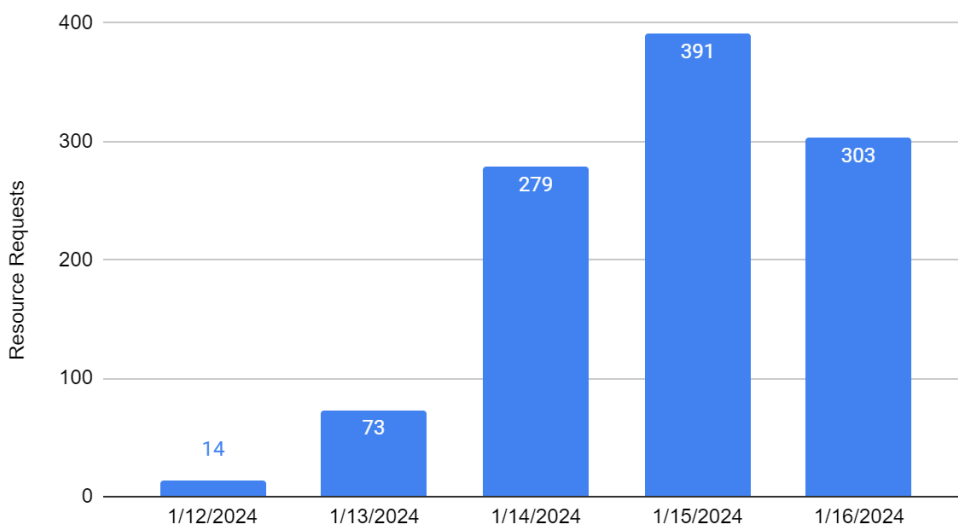## Resource Requests from ESF-6 to Logistics by Date

Figure 5: Resource Requests by Date

The Logistics Facilities Unit arranged flooring protection and scheduled cleaning for seven sites, providing materials for and/or installation of 44,741 square feet of flooring protection and arranging 150 janitorial cleanings, 150 biohazard and exterior cleanings, 75 snow/ice removal, and 75 junk/garbage haul-offs totaling 16,280 pounds of garbage across all sites (not counting additional services as needed).

The Facilities Unit also responded to numerous building maintenance emergencies throughout the severe weather event in coordination with County Facilities, DCHS, Gresham Fire Marshal and other partners, including: power outages (First Christian Church, 1/13, Logistics warehouse 1/13, and Ascension Catholic Church 1/13-1/14, requiring rental and installation of 60w generators with heater and electrical spider boxes), burst pipes (First Christian Church, 1/13, MCE, 1/16), and a reported gas leak (Salvation Army, 1/16).

The Logistics Food Unit provided 7,650 hot meals to all sites during activation, including early dinner service Wednesday evening to avoid safety risk for drivers during freezing rain conditions. Any leftover food was donated to POD sites, Transition Projects and the Market Street Shelter. Additionally, over 50,000 individual servings of snacks and 5,200 pounds of fresh fruit were delivered.

Prior to activation, Logistics supported expansion of sheltering capacity at the Behavioral Health Resource Center (BHRC) and Outside In's youth shelter by providing blankets, snacks, and other sheltering supplies. On January 15th, Logistics also fulfilled a resource request to the Corbett Fire Station to support individuals during Corbett's water crisis, including 10 relief beds, 10 blankets, 488 individual servings of snacks, and 2,352 bottles of water.

Street Outreach and Supply Distribution[3]

Activation of JOHS enhanced outreach and supplies distribution began on Tuesday, January 9th, well before temperatures fell, and continued until January 19. Different thresholds are in place to support enhanced outreach. Outreach workers began conducting outreach and getting lifesaving supplies out before the worst road conditions, continued throughout the storm, and concluded a few days after conditions had improved knowing many who had suffered the loss or damage of their survival items would need replacements. In total, our supply center filled 181 appointments at which over $165,000 in supplies were distributed to a diverse group of outreach partners.

Item	Total	1/9	1/10	1/11	1/12	1/15	1/16	1/17	1/18	1/19
Hand Warmers	3,640	500	600	460	500	360	280	120	300	520
Hoodies	712	100	120	92	100	72	56	24	60	88

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[3] Note that the outreach and supply distribution in this section is performed by the JOHS Safety on the Streets Teams and is separate from the Logistics support for warming shelters described elsewhere in this document.

Item	Total									
Sweatpants	**712**	100	120	92	100	72	56	24	60	88
Ponchos	**3,580**	500	600	460	500	360	280	120	300	460
Warm Hats	**2,148**	300	360	276	300	216	168	72	180	276
Warm Gloves	**2,292**	300	360	420	300	216	168	72	180	276
Socks	**4,188**	600	720	420	600	432	336	144	384	552
Blankets	**3,680**	500	600	460	620	360	280	120	300	440
Tarps	**3,278**	450	540	414	414	360	252	108	300	440
Tents	**870**	125	150	110	115	90	70	30	75	105
Sleeping Bags	**870**	125	150	110	115	90	70	30	75	105
Mylar Blankets	**3,590**	500	600	460	500	360	290	120	300	460
Water	**54,384**	8,016	12,192	5,448	11,304	6,792	2,904	1,056	1,440	5232

Severe Weather Item Distribution Totals via Street Outreach.

Strengths

Response Coordination - Unified Command and Operations

The emergency response coordination was illustrated in the following organization chart included in the Incident Action Plan produced and managed by MCEM.
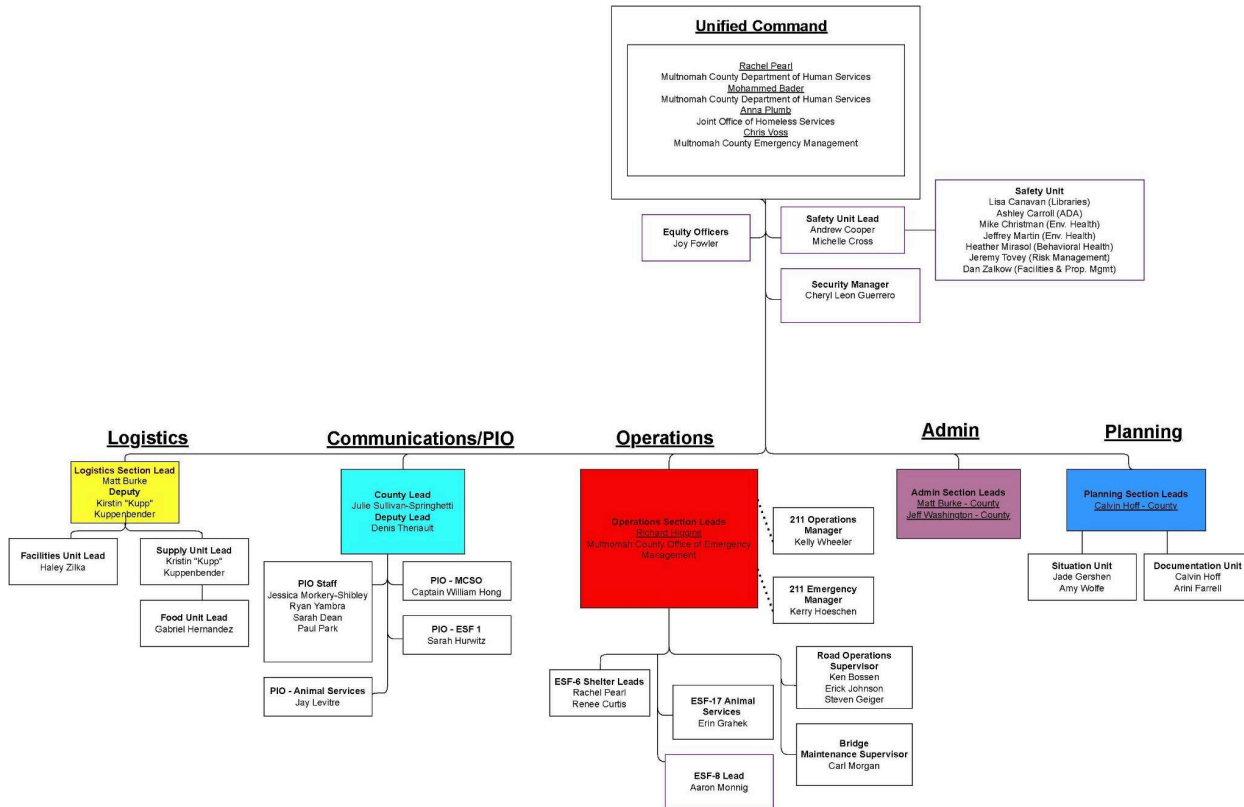

Figure 6. ICS-207 "Incident Organization Chart" for the January 12-16, 2024, Incident Action Plan

The Unified Command for this event included the DCHS director and deputy director, the Joint Office of Homeless Services (JOHS) director, and the Multnomah County Emergency Management (MCEM) director, emphasizing the focus on people with an elevated risk due to the storm.

Strength 1: Early planning for seasonal sheltering preparedness

Learning from past events, planning at the beginning of the season enabled leadership to understand requirements for severe winter weather sheltering responses and to come to an agreement on certain decision-making procedures. Early planning included DCHS conducting 22 virtual trainings, 18 outreach recruitment informational sessions and 24 group planning

activities between July and December 2023. To identify enough facility space to shelter over 1.300 people, a pilot program was instituted to provide some funding to organizations offering up space and the county leased its first location for the winter season. DCHS also initiated a process to use on-call staff and temp agencies to help fill shelter staff positions.

Strength 2: Unique funding for shelter response incentive pay

The Commissioners re-allocated $1.24 million from Metro funds to cover the 20% incentive pay for County employees who serve in shelter response roles, contractors, and to cover sheltering-related procurement costs. This was intended to motivate managers to allow their staff to serve in critical positions during the response without affecting their departmental budgets. With the application of a specific cost code for these funds, the County was also able to track the total amounts utilized for staffing and goods.

Strength 3: Strong communication with State partners

Improving upon previous responses, communications with State agencies, including Emergency Management, Human Services, and Health, happened earlier, more frequently, and smoothly to better facilitate requests for State resources to augment County response operations.

Planning

Strength 1: Clear deadlines established for deliverables

The Planning Section had clear timelines for when deliverables, such as the Incident Action Plan and Situation Report, were to be submitted to Unified Command for approval. This helped set expectations for managing workload.

Strength 2: Advance notice led to clear role assignments

With the advance notice of the potential activation, Planning section roles were able to be established in advance of the operation. Some roles were able to recruit from a group of identified staff with planning training, alleviating the burden of work on regular planning division members. Advance notice allowed for us to map out shelter sites, provide outreach to the community and recruit for staffing.

Public Information

The County received dozens of separate media requests. Public Communications published 41 press releases, 105 original graphics, and 300 social media posts and organized 17 press

conferences. This event generated significant coordinated public response and critical media stories.

Strength 1: Collaboration

Learning from previous emergencies, Public Information staff were more prepared and organized for this event. There was strong collaboration between the Central Communications and Health Communications teams, which helped define roles and responsibilities. There was also good communication with Healthshare, CareOregon, and other entities on messaging content.

Strength 2: Messages in multiple languages

Health communications were able to create urgent messages from lists of previously translated messages. Planning work had been done on this topic before the event, which facilitated the creation of messages. Collaboration with the Community Partnerships and Capacity Building team was successful, even on short notice, in ensuring that messages were shared in multiple languages and were reviewed by community liaisons to ensure they were culturally responsive.

Severe Weather Sheltering[4]

This section includes behavioral health and medical staffing at shelters, passenger transportation and ride facilitation, recruitment and staffing, safety and security, and facilities. A separate section on behavioral health addresses the support provided to emergency response workers following the event.

This year, the County allocated $1.24 million in special Metro Supportive Housing Services funds[5] to cover the costs of severe winter weather sheltering, including supplies and staffing incentive costs.

Across the board, advancing planning and preparations were credited for the County's ability to staff and support as many shelters as it did for as many days as it did.

Strength 1: Advance planning and incorporation of lessons from previous seasons

At the beginning of the season, MCEM facilitated a preparedness workshop with County leadership and relevant County department stakeholders for severe weather shelter operations to discuss action items and lessons from previous seasons and made recommendations for this season, including increasing the planning figure for shelter bed/night capacity, revising the

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[4] Please check DCHS's ESF-6 Mass Care Assessment for their complete report.
[5] JOHS Safety Off the Streets Winter Shelter and Severe Weather Metro Supportive Housing Services funds

decision-making process for keeping shelters open, and initiating plans to staff shelters through on call positions and temp employment agencies.

DCHS revised the training for General Staff, Community Members and Person in Charge and began implementing the new training leading up to this activation, conducting 22 pre-season trainings and 18 recruitment campaigns. Since August of 2023, 264 attended the interactive training sessions, 66 of those attendees were PICs or Shadow PICs. DCHS supported over 180 staff with listening sessions within 10 days of closing shelters and the feedback during those sessions and in the survey was that the majority of staff said they felt safe or very safe and agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "I felt prepared for this assignment". That is an improvement from past activations and speaks to the success of the training implemented. DCHS also collaborated with Risk Management, Workforce Security and contracted shelter managers on operations improvements and plans.

In addition, several Departments contributed to the new county resources for County staff (the Severe Weather Activation Commons page as a one stop shop for staff, pre season messaging from the COO and Wednesday Wire, videos highlighting PIC expectations and testimonials and General Staff).

Behavioral health[6]

Although, overall, the percentage of shelter shifts for behavioral health staff that were filled was lower (32%) than for typical response events, for this event more shifts were offered than any previous activation and nearly doubled the number of unique behavioral health workers[7] compared to the February 2023 event. For the January 2024 event, 71 behavioral health workers staffed an average of 1.8 shifts each. About 75% of shelters had at least one behavioral health staff for each shift. Additionally, several individuals qualified to fill behavioral health shifts also served in general shelter staff, shelter PIC (lead), and passenger transportation roles.

The Behavioral Health Call Center reported taking 41 shelter-related calls and 25 calls with cold weather concerns. Of these calls, Project Respond was dispatched 18 times to shelter locations for behavioral crisis assistance, Portland Street Response was requested 15 times, four calls were referred to the urgent walk-in, and two calls were referred to 911 for medical emergencies.

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[6] Please see Disaster Behavioral Health's Severe Weather Recap for more information.
[7] The 71 individuals who served in behavioral health staff positions in severe weather shelters comprised 33 Multnomah County employees, 6 members of the general public, 4 City of Portland employees, 4 MHAAO employees, 3 Neighborhood Emergency Team volunteers, 2 Medical Reserve Corps volunteers, and 19 whose affiliation was undeclared.

Medical staffing

Strength 1: Volunteers were mobilized to fill nearly all available shifts, providing medical attention and triage.

The Medical Reserve Corps (MRC) was activated quickly, drawing on a pool of 95 medical providers confirmed as an Emergency Medical Technician (EMT), Paramedic, Physician Associate, Nurse Practitioner, Medical Doctor, or Doctor of Osteopathy. For 60 needed shifts, 37 volunteers signed up (some taking multiple shifts throughout the response).

Passenger transportation and ride facilitation

Strength 1: Overall successful, given this was the first event supported with the county running the Passenger Transport Unit.

The Passenger Transportation Unit is a new responsibility for the County and while much was learned from when it was managed by the Portland Bureau of Emergency Management, there is still much to learn and processes to continue to develop for different contexts and events. Nevertheless, they have been flexible, responsive, and adapted to evolving circumstances to the best of their abilities. Having County transportation at hand allowed for special operations, including the movement of Multnomah Safe Rest Village residents to motels, and the evacuation of the First Christian Church shelter when it flooded. The addition of two County-owned wheelchair lift vehicles in 2023 improved the capacity for moving those with mobility limitations.

Strength 2: Slack (workplace communication app) was a good tool for coordinating with 211

Multnomah County IT quickly approved use of Slack for this purpose, with records-maintenance provisions, and this was essential for facilitating rides and successfully deploying transportation resources.

Animal services

Strength 1: Advanced planning and preparedness

Animal Services worked closely with Logistics early in the season to coordinate what supplies and quantities are needed for an activation as well as what needs to be immediately re-stocked following an activation.

Strength 2: Backup generator worked appropriately

Animal Services lost power during the event–potentially impacting 2 birds, 32 cats and kittens, 90 dogs and puppies, 21 rabbits, and 1 reptile–but the generator immediately turned on. Facilities received a notification that the power had gone out and immediately dispatched an electrician to ensure the generator was working properly.

Logistics

Strength 1: Seasonal preparation

The Logistics team had staged two shelter sites and prepositioned, five ready-to-deploy shelter trailers and other resources for this event. Ahead of the event, 5 new sites were identified and assessed for shelter suitability.

Strength 2: Communication and coordination

Communication was consistent, clear, and frequent throughout the event. Using group chats and other non-linear communication modes was helpful. Problems were resolved quickly. Having staff and volunteers who are already experienced and familiar with logistical operations was helpful: Everyone knew their roles and responsibilities. The 'who/where' board and a map of shelter locations were especially helpful.

Strength 3: Using contractors

Having contractors to lay flooring at shelters addressed a significant challenge in setting up shelters.

Recruitment and staffing

Strength 1: Staff training and support

When[8] surveyed for the mass care assessment , most shelter staff reported feeling safe and prepared despite lacking shelter work experience. Yet what helped prepare them most included prior direct experience or transferable skills, training (especially interactive), or onsite guidance from PICs and peers. Most respondents reportedly had what they needed and would do the work again, based on their positive experience or the work's importance, and occasionally for the resulting opportunities.

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[8] Please check DCHS's ESF-6 Mass Care Assessment for their complete report.

Strength 2: Human Resources rotation team

The COO team worked with MCEM to deploy County Human Resources staff to support the Admin Unit in Logistics and County staff. MCEM helped create a new HR Support position for the Unit, the Deputy COO sent a message to HR Leadership asking for 1-2 staff from each department who could fill the role and prior to the January event - Just In Time training was provided for this group. HR staff were asked to fill shifts each day for the January activation providing support to the Admin Unit and monitoring sign ups. The HR Support was helpful in dealing with various challenges and communicating with staff.

Safety and security

Strength 1: Security at every shelter

One action item from the previous winter season that was corrected this season was the increase of security staffing at County-operated severe weather shelters. Each shelter had either a roving or a permanently stationed security officer overnight.

Strength 2: Piloted temporary weapons storage boxes at three facilities

The Workplace Security office successfully piloted a weapons lock box system at three locations for shelter guests to store any weapons for the duration of their stay. Workplace Security has now ordered additional boxes and resources for a total of 15 so all security personnel can now have weapons checkboxes with them.

Facilities

Strength 1: The County was able to rent two facilities for the season for use as severe weather shelters

Two commercial structures–one on SE Powell Blvd and one on SE Division Place–were rented for the season. This enables MCEM to preposition supplies on site to more quickly open shelters. Each facility has a capacity for 200 beds, allowing for more stability for the first and second nights of shelter activations.

Strength 2: incentive program for facilities

An incentive program was developed this year to motivate partners to use their facilities as severe weather shelters.

Non-congregate Sheltering

Strength 1: JOHS and DCHS hoteling strategies.

JOHS and DCHS provided 144 total hotel rooms to provide temporary sheltering. This included families, seniors and other vulnerable populations put at significant risk due to homelessness, power outages, and structural instability. Of those: 30 were families experiencing homelessness, none of which were returned to unsheltered homelessness afterwards; 25 were families whose homes were made uninhabitable were temporarily sheltered in motels until able to return home or to another option they chose. In total, the JOHS procured about 600 room-nights across 114 rooms at seven different commercially operated motels. DCHS added another 30 rooms to also support high risk populations put at significant risk due to the storm.

DCHS worked with PGE and residents to escalate power restoration for electricity-dependent, medically fragile residents and other vulnerable residents who lost power for an extended period. DCHS also coordinated travel, food, motel placement and exit for those households.

Strength 2: JOHS was able to provide alternative sheltering in motels for adults from shelters, Safe Rest Villages, and those who needed to isolate for medical reasons

In addition to rooms used by families, others sheltered in motel rooms included those for whom congregate warming shelters were insufficient to meet their needs, adults from programs such as the Rose Haven Women's Shelter and Multnomah Safe Rest Village whose facilities were temporarily uninhabitable, and those who needed to isolate and recover from suspected cases of *Shigella* or COVID-19 at a time when ongoing Voluntary Isolation Motel capacity was in high demand.

In response to the *Shigella* outbreak, DCHS also worked with MCHD to create prevention strategies and with JOHS on isolation strategies through the motel rooms JOHS was able to secure.

Corbett Support

MCEM coordinated with Corbett Water District, Oregon Department of Human Services, Oregon Water/Wastewater Agency Response Network, Corbett Fire Department, and the City of Troutdale to provide emergency water services.

Strength 1: Prompt support from Oregon Department of Human Services (ODHS) and Oregon Water/Wastewater Agency Response Network (ORWARN)

ODHS and ORWARN were prompt and comprehensive in their response to resource requests to assist Corbett Water District with storm-related water interruptions. Through their support and coordination, MCEM was able to quickly secure a water tender, portable heater unit/generator, and collapsible water containers for the water district to distribute water to affected households and farms.

Strength 2: DCHS used Emergency Management Visualization Tool to contact 283 critical clients in Corbett

DCHS used its Emergency Management Visualization Tool[9] to identify and contact 283 critical clients affected by power and water disruptions

Roads and Bridges

Strength 1: Tracking of road closures has improved

The process for notifications and tracking has improved situational awareness and communication. Closures were tracked by date of closure, reason for closure, etc. The tracking spreadsheet supported the creation of regular situation reports.

Strength 2: Coordination between road maintenance, fleet, and small cities

Coordination and communication between road maintenance, fleet and small cities was greatly improved. Fleet is critical to the work and the team worked well with road maintenance. There was much more communication with the small cities than during the coordination meetings.

Health Facilities

Strength 1: Health facilities were resilient during historically high volume of patients

All hospitals in the region reported having declared internal disasters and having operational impacts as a result of the storm. Nevertheless, there was no need to move patients from one place to another. Hospitals were able to activate their response plans internally, without relying on external resource requests for large equipment. Back-up generators worked, hundreds of hospital staff stayed in hospitals for up to a week, sleeping on floors, using headlamps, etc.

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[9] DCHS's Emergency Management Visualization Tool (EMVT) identifies vulnerable individuals from data sources that feed into a mapping function.

Multnomah County Health Clinics were able to provide at least telemed services every day, and only had one day where pharmacy operations were fully closed. Medical and Dental Clinics saw two days of in-person cancellations, but the efforts of staff and facilities management to keep locations open as much as possible to provide significant care (>1,100 visits) and keep additional people from coming to emergency rooms.

Energy

Based on forecasting, power companies prepared for greater impact from the severe winter weather to be in Salem and Wilsonville. At peak response, over 200 crews were ordered to support power restoration, but those coming from California were stuck for about six hours on I-5. Within 96 hours of peak outages, 85% of customers' power was restored, but then a second wave of ice on January 16 resulted in more outages.

Strength 1: Communicated critical facilities list to utilities in advance

MCEM communicated critical County facilities and shelter locations to PGE and PacifiCorp in advance of the weather event to ensure they would be able to prioritize those areas for power restoration.

Strength 2: PGE customer service was available 24-hours for the duration of the event

PGE key customer service representatives were on 12-hour rotations throughout the event taking calls and ensuring that customers with medical needs were escalated and checked in with. PGE made over 900 calls daily in Multnomah county to customers registered with their medical certificate program. They also launched a shared spreadsheet with county emergency management and human services departments for escalating information on critical customers.

Areas for Improvement

Response Coordination - Unified Command and Operations

Area for improvement 1: Looking beyond severe weather sheltering and outreach

Opening severe weather shelters for our population experiencing homelessness is a significant and important function of these seasonal responses, but many people in departmental and ESF hotwashes felt this activation focused on severe weather sheltering more so than other county operations.

From the beginning of this event, snow, ice, and gusting wind had significant impacts to other ESFs such as transportation (road closures), public works (debris removal), health and medical (hospital and healthcare access), energy (widespread, multiple-day power outages), and business (inability to open certain services or functions). It would have been appropriate for the County to move the corresponding ESFs to enhanced activation status. Combined with continuity of operations actions, this would have supported staff in pivoting from normal operations to emergency planning and preparation.

Recommendations

- ☐ Continue to provide comprehensive communications regarding decisions to both staff and the public early and often.

- ☐ Codify the authority for activating EOC elements: Activate EOC sections as needed to respond to additional needs in the community, not just sheltering. Establish a Liaison framework and clarify the actions ESF leads should engage in when moved to enhanced activation.

- ☐ Rethink the current shelter-focused series of meetings, including the Situation Awareness call and subsequent coordination meetings, to meet the needs of other ESFs when activated/appropriate.

- ☐ Explore other models to expand available workforce during emergency activation to respond to all emergency needs.

Area for improvement 2: ICS practices and training

Some people serve multiple roles in ICS and people have varying training and understanding of the Unified Command system approach utilized for severe weather. Limited people in critical roles stretches some people, especially during long events.

ICS training helps Command and General Staff understand which EOC sections and units hold which responsibilities, how sections and units are activated, what an operational period and planning process are, and the relevant products and tools available for their use. A reporting structure allows for communications to flow, helping ensure problems are quickly identified and addressed.

Recommendations

- ☐ The Incident Action Plan can be shared with a wider audience so all command level positions are known by key personnel. Unified Command could also identify themselves in key meetings and help educate support personnel on the overall structure.
- ☐ Focus additional efforts on establishing clear expectations, constraints, decision making processes, spending authority, and other elements that can help provide clarity regarding priorities to Unified Command.
- ☐ Improve ICS training, including the availability of ICS 100, 200, 300, 400, 700 and 800 for personnel serving in a Command or General Staff position. Recommend position specific training courses for these leadership level positions as well.
- ☐ Agree to and socialize the organization chart and identify operational periods, shift overlaps, and rotations of Command and General Staff positions so that individuals are not continuously serving without breaks

Area for improvement 3: Partner notification of activation

EOC activation notifications should be widely publicized. These notifications should include points of contact for Unified Command, Operations, ESFs, Logistics, Planning, Safety, Liaison, and Public Information. They provide a summary of the incident and planned actions or objectives, the resource request process, and how and when to provide situational reports. Served agencies and partners use these notifications to determine how to integrate their staff into the response structure.

This notification demonstrates to our partners and the public that the County is serving as a coordination point and is temporarily restructuring staffing to a response ready posture. The notification has corresponding actions in many County departments, served agencies, and partners.

Recommendation

☐ Implement a consistent procedure for determining EOC level of activation and notification to ensure that Command, General Staff, County departments, served agencies, and partners are able to take appropriate actions for the response.

Planning

Area for improvement 1: Communicating and information gathering

We should improve the connection between the Situation Unit and key personnel with information needing to be captured for situation reports and operational awareness. Due to the size of this response, some of the situational awareness tools including the external shelter dashboard had inaccuracies and staff were too busy with other critical operations to communicate information for the reporting. Staff were also challenged to keep the 'Assignment/Communications List' accurate and updated. There is not adequate awareness across the response of the importance and purposes of this list. Staff felt they were not informed on what Unified Command wanted to include in the situation reports and that there was no single point of decision-making or approval within Unified Command.

Recommendations

☐ At the beginning of each event, clarify the schedule and cadence for inputs to situational reports and remind all stakeholders to provide accurate information.

☐ The situation report template could include a resource document that points the writer to official and vetted sources of information.

☐ Train additional staff in key leadership roles to support General and Command staff during larger activations. This training and introduction to tools should also be provided to County staff in between events.

Public Information

Area for improvement 1: Additional messaging

More information during the event on falls, carbon-monoxide poisoning, downed power lines, would have been helpful in determining additional messaging requirements. However, there are also the concerns of 'message overload' and duplicating efforts could confuse message recipients. Messages that are 'out of scope' should be left to those whose scope it falls within.

Recommendation

☐ Standard messaging templates can be created, reviewed, and updated during 'blue skies' prior to seasonal events such as this one, to expedite the delivery process during events. Messaging on slipping and falling, for example, should be prioritized.

☐ Determine with relevant stakeholders what severe weather messaging is within the scope of Public Health and what messaging should be left to other entities.

☐ Reviewing social media analytics can help track successful posts for future reference.

Area for improvement 2: Collaboration on messaging in languages other than English

The number of collaborators on messaging in languages other than English may have hindered the speed with which messages were crafted and agreed upon. Additionally, on the Facebook social media platform, the auto-translate feature into English confused some and introduced errors in the messaging.

Recommendations

☐ Build capacity with the Community Partnerships and Capacity Building team.

☐ When posting messages in languages other than English onto social media platforms such as Facebook, make sure that the setting for automatic translation is turned off.

Severe Weather Sheltering

Community members have high and growing needs. Staff see severe weather shelters as life-saving and impactful. Several key steps may increase preparedness.

Area for improvement 1: Planning for exits and having executable back-up plans

Given the uncertainty of weather forecasting, the county should plan to continue staffing beyond a projected closure so decisions can be altered if forecasts are not realized.

Recommendation

☐ Recruit staff to fill staff shifts past planned exit times in addition to planning for demobilization shifts.

Area for improvement 2: Expand ESF 6 Coverage in general and to navigate resource requests

The model for ESF-6 Shelter Leads was not set up to support 12 shelters operating at one time. Out of necessity during this activation additional staff were recruited to support the ESF-6 Shelter Lead with resource requests and other high priority tasks.

Recommendation

- ☐ Build on the effectiveness of the model implemented during this activation. Operationalize ESF-6 Lead coverage to include back-up, deputy or support role, to oversee the less urgent tasks. This support could also allocate additional time for vetting resource requests and resolving concerns from shelter PICs which could result in critical support and supplies being provided in a quicker and more efficient manner.
- ☐ Increase staff or skills to have more support on site, including to support less-skilled staff.
- ☐ DCHS and MCEM can collaborate on improved systems, however recognizing that large numbers of shelter sites and guests may strain these systems. ESF-6 should continue to work with PICs to streamline resource requests in an effort to submit prioritized requests during daytime hours.
- ☐ Add technology - such as a tablet - on site to communicate inventory requests efficiently and with clear timestamps and identities of the requester.

Area for improvement 3: Multiple people contacting security from shelters

This was the first event where all facilities were provided security and many new staff support operations at shelters. As a result of a large event with new team members, there were instances where multiple people were making calls for the same security incident.

Recommendation

- ☐ Develop a process and train people on the designated person at a shelter to contact security.
- ☐ Continue to train and socialize requirements for incident reporting and the process for notification of appropriate County leadership when an incident involves county staff.

Area for improvement 4: Shelter staff training for working with people's pets

While the county does not keep track of the number of pets in a shelter, we do know we transported 87, which was a 163% increase over the february 2023 event. It is likely our shelters had many more as most people are not transported through our transportation request

systems. With this increase comes new challenges and possibly new training and new supplies that should be considered. In one instance, a muzzle was requested.

Recommendation

- ☐ Animal Services could create a one-pager or a video for inclusion in shelter PIC and general staff training for shelter staff to handle different situations with pets at shelters

Medical staffing at shelter sites

Area for improvement 1: Revisiting the scope of medical services provided at shelters

There were several county staff who worked as general staff in shelters, many with tactical medical training, that felt unprepared for the level of drug withdrawals and overdoses, the use of naloxone, and what they felt was an overall increasing complexity of medical needs among guests at the shelters. Several shelter staff observed that many shelter guests needed wound care and were experiencing other non-urgent medical needs that may fall outside the current scope of first aid services provided by medical staff. Medications and supplies varied between sites, and certain medications like acetaminophen were not available. Medications for opioid use disorder (such as buprenorphine) as well as medications to help with opioid withdrawal (such as clonidine and ondansetron) were not available.

Recommendations
- ☐ Review the scope of medical services provided at shelters
- ☐ Expand available medications and wound care supplies
- ☐ Explore Multnomah County's Integrated Clinical Services' Mobile Medical Van to cycle through the shelters providing as needed care
- ☐ Pursue partnerships with existing mobile health providers (Outside In, Portland Street Response, Community Health Assess and Treat (CHAT) teams, Central City Concern, etc.) to provide expanded medical services.
- ☐ Consider additional sources for fully staffing medical positions; Increase the number or skill of onsite staff to better handle medical issues, use resources (e.g., AEDs, narcan, CPR), or respond to behavioral health concerns.

Area for improvement 2: Provide on-site trainings for naloxone administration for shelter staff

In the event that a shelter guest overdoses after using substances, shelter staff are able to provide nasal naloxone (Narcan). Narcan doses are available onsite at all shelters and training for Narcan Administration is expected of all shelter staff - staff who are comfortable can

administer Narcan in those instances supported by medical volunteers when available. Currently, the Narcan Administration training that is offered is offered virtually.

Recommendations

☐ Increase the skill of onsite staff to better handle suspected overdoses by offering onsite or in person training when staff are able to provide this.

Passenger transportation and ride facilitation

Area for improvement 1: Need more staffing

Staffing of the Passenger Transportation Unit (PTU) was insufficient for the demand, and there were many shifts where County vehicles were idle because of a lack of drivers or in-vehicle support personnel (ridealongs). Additional Unit Lead staff was also needed to ensure 24-hour coverage while still allowing Unit Leads to take time off.

Recommendations

☐ Continue to build a group of trained staff who can fill shifts for drivers and ridealongs and consider alternative staffing models to gain more Unit flexibility, especially for drivers and ridealongs during overnight and early day periods.

☐ Work with our external partners, including TriMet, to increase the availability and reliability of vehicles and drivers and better meet surge demands and emergent staffing or vehicle needs.

Area for improvement 2: Supplies for drivers and dispatchers

Radio communication was staticky, and cell phone communication via text was easier, but required some staff to use personal phones. Communication by text is not the most efficient method for some information. Other helpful supplies needed were head lamps or flashlights and computer monitors for dispatchers and Multnomah Building parking garage access.

Recommendation

☐ Ensure adequate supplies and accesses are available for PTU drivers and dispatchers

Area for improvement 3: Processes for prioritization, unique situations, and improved coordination

Processes can be improved to help prioritize or group rides for efficiency, to determine when to best use county resources instead of ride-share services, and how to best communicate with shelter PICs for moving guests between shelters.

Recommendation

☐ Develop processes and standard operating procedures for streamlining prioritization, coordination, communication, and other decision-making processes.

Area for improvement 4: Where does Ride Facilitation fit within the organization

A Ride Facilitation Unit was used to support 211 staff during surge hours with tracking ride requests and identifying ride resources for those rides. There needs to be a clear command structure for how this unit fits into the organization chart for answering questions within the chain of command.

Recommendation

☐ Clarify the relationship among these entities and recommend where they would best fit with sheltering operations.

Area for improvement 5: Utilize ride-share services more effectively and efficiently

Given the extended icy road conditions, there was both an increased demand for ride-share services and longer wait times, resulting in a higher rate of missed ride connections. 211 reported 628 Lyft ride requests, of which approximately 200 were cancellations that were charged cancellation fees. When ride-share requests are not filled, no information is given as to why, so the Passenger Transportation Unit (which will search for and call ride requestors) would be dispatched to ensure the person was not still waiting. This led to more unfilled rides, tying up resources that could have been used for other requests.

Recommendation

☐ Determine how to best prioritize ride requests to ride-shares that have the highest chance of being fulfilled, reducing cancellations and wait times.

<u>Logistics</u>

Area for improvement 1: Tracking durable goods

Several people were involved with the management and deployment of durable goods, such as PIC phones and AEDs to shelters, making it necessary to coordinate with multiple people to ensure that all durable goods are returned to the warehouse.

Recommendation

☐ Develop an agreed process for deploying, tracking, and demobilizing durable goods during response events.

<u>Recruitment and staffing</u>

Area for improvement 1: Promote and make available more training opportunities

Although training was offered ahead of and during the season, additional promotion could help open up to a broader pool of candidates. Additionally, new training topics could increase shelter staff skills and knowledge, to better respond to population needs and enhance onsite safety.

Recommendation

☐ Increase promotion of training at leadership, management and HR levels.
☐ Expand training to increase population-specific knowledge and skills.
☐ Identify new training promotion processes (e.g, through manager outreach).

Area for improvement 2: Clarification was desired by many respondents on the enforcement of a 10-hour rest period between shifts

Human Resources indicated that it would be enforcing a 10-hour rest period between shifts, to more closely align with current collective bargaining agreements and to discourage individuals from signing up for multiple consecutive shifts and putting themselves and others at risk with inadequate rest breaks. Many staff indicated that they were unclear on the policy or how it was enforced, raising equity issues and labor relations concerns.

Recommendations

☐ Human Resources, with Labor Relations and union representatives, should clarify what is expected of employees who sign up for multiple consecutive shifts and their management's approval.
☐ Human Resources, with relevant partners, should explore how to build an appropriate

number of trained staff so that 10 hour rest periods will not interrupt minimum staffing.

Area for improvement 3: Clearer communication with staff on coding their hours

Many staff who did work in shelter response positions during the event noted that they were not aware of how to code their hours correctly in Workday. Several email communications did include links to information on how to code hours at the end of lengthy emails seeking staff to fill roles. However, it might be helpful to send that information in a separate email or make it more prominent within the email.

Recommendation

☐ Consider different ways and redundant communications to inform staff on how to code their hours using the correct cost code and especially over holidays.

Area for improvement 4: Approval for County staff to be reimbursed for Lyft or Uber ride shares came belatedly and required approval from the MCEM Director

Icy road conditions prevented many staff from being able to serve in shelter response roles because they were unable to safely get to shelter sites or facilities and public transportation and ride-share or taxi options were very limited. Additionally, approval by a single person was needed to use Lyft or Uber ride-shares.

Recommendation

☐ Move rideshare approval to the Passenger Transportation Unit, which runs 24/7.

Area for improvement 6: Expand language for all contracted partners to be able to support shelter response operations

Currently only JOHS contractors and Behavioral Health peer contractors have language in their contracts to enable them to serve in shelter response operations.

Recommendation

☐ Expand this contracting arrangement to all County contractors, including DCHS, DCJ, and other contracting partners.

Safety and Security

Area for improvement 1: Continued but expanded collaboration between DCHS, ESF 6 and shelter PICs on security's roles and responsibilities

The number of challenges that have been communicated between onsite shelter staff and security were notably reduced during this activation, yet opportunities remain for improvement. Listening session participants and survey respondents noted improvements and appreciation for security, but more frequently also reported concern that security staff appeared disengaged and under-trained in population-specific knowledge or in trauma-informed skills of de-escalation.

Onsite shelter staff could also benefit from more training. Additional training for PICs to support storing weapons. The county piloted weapons boxes this last event and is continuing to expand that program. Some locations without weapons boxes were less prepared and it was heard that security stepped back and let PICs and Behavioral Health lead. We need to strike a balance with security and these roles and provide further training on security processes and policies as they are developed. It is needed to help PICs and general staff understand what Security's role is.

Recommendation

☐ DCHS, Behavioral Health, and Workplace Security to collaborate on clarifying the role of security at shelters, and training for PICs and general staff on temporary weapons storage.

Facilities

Area for improvement 1: Multiple lists of facilities

This event created several facility issues as two facilities and support from one contractor changed in the hours before opening. To manage all these last minute changes, multiple lists of facilities were being used by Logistics, Sheltering Operations (ESF 6), and Unified Command that were being updated for different, but overlapping, purposes, and no agreed procedure between ESF 6 and Logistics Facilities Unit.

Recommendation

☐ Ensure that just one document is used by all parties and that only specified individuals are responsible for making updates or changes to the document contents. Ensure that there is an agreed procedure between ESF 6 and Logistics on an opening plan to ensure that facility information is current.

Area for improvement 2: Managing multiple smaller sites is difficult

Managing multiple shelter sites with capacities for only 50-60 people is difficult in terms of overall staffing and logistics. The county has also seen challenges with very large sites like the convention center where we placed 800 people during a storm in December 2022. Higher capacities would be easier to staff and support logistically, but very large sites have limitations too.

Recommendation

- ☐ Study an optimum size of severe weather shelters and target these size locations for future winter agreements.
- ☐ Identify and secure agreements with facilities capable of supporting larger guest numbers.

Area for improvement 3: Bathroom spaces

Although external contractors were engaged to support more frequent cleaning of bathrooms, provide additional portable toilets, as well as cleanup following the demobilization of shelters, many employees staffing shelters observed that the cleaning services during the event were not keeping up with the demand. This was likely due to a combination of the severe weather conditions affecting the ability of the contractors to travel to all of the shelter sites and the higher number of guests and shelter locations. General shelter staff reported that they often ended up cleaning the bathrooms themselves. Additional portable toilets provided relief, but also required additional monitoring and managing of icy conditions outside shelters.

Recommendation

- ☐ Consider staffing longer and more frequent janitorial services, potentially 24/7.

- ☐ Try to enhance porta-potty safety; provide more, better bathrooms with increased janitorial staff.

Roads and Bridges

Area for improvement 1: Aging lift bridges are vulnerable to extreme cold and ice

Four of the six bridges maintained by the County are vertical lift bridges. Wind and freezing rain can cause the lift mechanisms to temporarily stop functioning. The aging infrastructure is not protected from the elements. Could not conduct required test lifts and had to notify the Coast Guard.

Recommendation

☐ Ensure equipment is appropriately distributed. Have contingency plans with multiple jurisdictions on potential bridge issues.

Area for improvement 2: Enhancing efficiencies and effectiveness of road and sidewalk clearing operations

Given the significant reliance of our community on roadway and sidewalk systems for transportation, we need to consider improvements to our snow and ice removal processes. The county sees winter storms rarely, but their impacts can be significant. During icy conditions, sidewalks and bike lanes were a source of particularly high risk for slips and falls.

The effectiveness of current sand and salt application on road surfaces was hindered by freezing in the equipment or by the lack of protection current storage facilities. Cold and wet conditions froze the sand used on roadways, impacting the usage of street sanders. Strategies and priorities for treatment also need to be well coordinated with cities.

Recommendation

☐ Work with our Cities to understand the latest technologies and work towards a county wide approach to equipment, treatment strategies,and prioritization. Our approach and recommendations also need to be balanced for a jurisdiction facing few severe weather events annually.

Behavioral Health - Trauma Intervention Program

Disaster Behavioral Health is again partnering with Trauma Intervention Program Northwest (TIP) to provide after action support calls to everyone that supported the disaster response shelters, ground transportation, and the EOC. These calls offer the response teams with non-judgemental supportive listening and an opportunity to process the stress and emotional exhaustion that can follow an activation. In the coming months, Disaster Behavioral Health will review feedback received from behavioral health staff and volunteers and incorporate input in the creation of the Spring training calendar and any future shift planning. Additionally, behavioral health staff and volunteers were included in after-action listening sessions hosted by ESF 6.

Area for improvement 1: The current contract with TIP does not support the current proactive offering of its services to all persons who support severe weather responses as shelter staff or in EOC support positions

The Health Department is reviewing the appropriateness of offering TIP to all persons who support severe weather responses in shelter staff or EOC support positions, as it is not something currently included in the terms of the agreement. The only formal contracts or agreements in place with TIP are with the Multnomah County Sheriff's Office and the Health Department's Disaster Behavioral Health Team. The Health Department is exploring what a contract would cost to expand beyond the Disaster Behavioral Health work to the rest of the Health Department for year-round support of all divisions.

Recommendation

☐ The Health Department is exploring a County-wide contract that all departments would contribute to based on their size and projected volume of calls.

Recovery

Federal Public Assistance

On January 29, Multnomah County submitted Initial Damage Assessments from County Departments and served jurisdictions, including water districts, fire districts, school districts, cities, and hospitals, amounting to $25.8 million dollars in storm-related damages and emergency expenses. This submittal to the Oregon Department of Emergency Management supports its efforts to determine whether the state will qualify for a Federal Public Assistance Program declaration for the severe winter weather that affected much of the western half of the state between January 12 and 19.

Broken down, $11.7 million came from the cities of Portland, Gresham, Troutdale, and Wood Village. Another $11.7 million came from special districts for schools, fire, water, utilities and certain private non-profit organizations (i.e., hospitals). The County government recorded $2.4 million, including $820,000 for shelter staffing costs.

Exceeding both the county's $3.8 million threshold and the state's $7.5 million threshold, the County will now be included in Preliminary Damage Assessments to be conducted between February 20 and March 1 by a joint team from FEMA's Region X office and the Oregon Department of Emergency Management. These meetings will be used to verify the claims made

in the Initial Damage Assessment and will be submitted to FEMA and the President in support of a formal request for a Public Assistance Program declaration.

If successful, a declaration will enable the reimbursement of 75% of eligible expenses by FEMA and 25% by the State and for the implementation of storm-related hazard mitigation projects.

MCEM will continue to work with County departments, Cities, and Special Districts throughout the process.

Conclusion

As climate change continues to increasingly affect meteorological hazards in Multnomah County and the population of people experiencing homelessness remains high, we must adapt to those changing conditions. While past activations can give us insights and indicate anticipated needs, each severe weather event is unique and creates a different set of challenges. As such, the County must plan for contingencies beyond past events, as well as be nimble to respond to emerging situational challenges during each activation. The County commits to prioritizing resources for seasonal responses, communicating with staff and County partners with more lead time, holding seasonal-response based exercises, and strengthening our Continuity of Operations Plans (COOP) process.

In order to better serve our communities, the County will provide more training, better utilize existing skill sets, and clarify expectations for staff. The improved relationships built through the planning process will result in strengthened relationships and procedures to sustain the use of County infrastructure, facilities, and utilities. This approach will improve safety, advocacy and resiliency for County employees and their families, leading to quicker and more substantive responses.