

FOR ELECTED & APPOINTED OFFICIALS



When life feels chaotic, people need clarity.

That's our job.

A Guide for Local Officials

Your roles and responsibilities in Wapello County's emergency management program. A companion to the *Ready for Anything* booklet.

Wapello County Emergency Management Agency · Protection Through Preparedness

Cover photo: Wapello County tornado, March 31, 2023. Wapello County Sheriff's Office, Deputy McConnell.

WHO'S IN CHARGE

Local first. Always.

How the Commission and the Agency fit together

You set the direction; the Agency carries it out for every community in the county.

COMMISSION

Supervisor, Sheriff, and every mayor. Sets the budget, approves policy, hires the Director.

DIRECTOR

The “coordinator” in Iowa Code. Runs the Agency and reports to the Commission.

AGENCY

Plans, trains, coordinates, and supports response and recovery.

ALL COMMUNITIES

Every city and the unincorporated county, served countywide.

Iowa Code § 29C.9–29C.10; 605 IAC 7.3(4)“a”

The Commission

Iowa Code § 29C.9 creates a county emergency management commission made up of a member of the Board of Supervisors, the Sheriff, and the mayor of each city. It adopts the budget, sets the mission, and appoints the coordinator. This is why every Iowa county has an EMA.

The Director

Iowa Code § 29C.10 calls this position the “coordinator.” Today it functions as the Emergency Management Director: hired by and serving at the pleasure of the Commission, the Director develops the countywide plan, and, when disaster strikes, provides coordination and assistance to the governing officials of the cities and the county.

Iowa ties grant funding to a qualified Director who keeps continuing education current (605 IAC 7.7(4)).

The Region

Wapello County is part of Iowa Emergency Management Association District 5, working alongside neighboring counties including Henry, Jefferson, Mahaska, Davis, and Appanoose.



The Wapello County 911 Service Board, one of the partner boards EMA works with.



County crews, Ottumwa Fire, and contractors working a rail incident together.

WHY A LOCAL EMA

State and federal partners support a local response. They do not take over.

Iowa Homeland Security and Emergency Management Department [Iowa HSEMD], 2024

“Disaster response and recovery are more effective when senior officials are familiar with emergency management processes and have established relationships with their community's emergency managers.”

FEMA, *Local Elected and Appointed Officials Quick Reference Guide*, 2022

Step 1: call your county EMA

ICAP, the risk pool that insures many Iowa local governments, lists “Contact your county emergency management agency” as the first step in its disaster planning guide. Wapello County EMA is an ICAP member.

Without a local Director, communities face:

- **Reduced preparedness:** plans go untested and outdated
- **Disorganized response:** no central point for services, volunteers, and resources
- **Slower recovery:** residents and businesses struggle to reach assistance
- **Greater risk and cost:** weaker mitigation and missed funding
- **More burden on others:** fire, law, and public health absorb duties without the resources

Without EMA, the “gray areas” of disaster coordination don't disappear. They just go unaddressed.

**We coordinate.
We don't take over.**

By law, the Emergency Management Director (the “coordinator” in Iowa Code) provides coordination and assistance to the governing officials of the cities and the county during an emergency. Your elected officials stay in charge; we make sure they have what they need. (*Iowa Code § 29C.10*)

Policy, not tactics.

Senior officials are rarely on scene. Your place is setting priorities and policy, wherever the incident is being managed, while trained responders handle tactics.

GET INFORMED

Stay in close touch with your emergency manager and set a regular meeting cadence.

TRUST & EMPOWER

Empower emergency management to request help, declare emergencies, and follow sound fiscal procedures.

COMMUNICATE

Speak quickly, clearly, and accessibly, coordinated with your public information officer.

FEMA, 2022

Your checklist: before, during, and after

BEFORE

- ☐ Make disaster planning a community priority
- ☐ Support the emergency management program with resources and authority
- ☐ Know your hazards
- ☐ Participate personally in exercises
- ☐ Visit the EOC and 911 center; review your legal authorities

DURING

- ☐ Get informed; keep regular contact with the Emergency Management Director
- ☐ Trust and empower emergency management
- ☐ Consider a local disaster declaration early
- ☐ Keep a personal log of information, factors weighed, and decisions
- ☐ Communicate: What happened? What are we doing? What should you do?
- ☐ Take care of yourself and your family

AFTER

- ☐ Set realistic expectations for recovery
- ☐ Understand the financial and in-kind assistance available
- ☐ Rebuild smarter with mitigation
- ☐ Keep codes and regulations enforced
- ☐ Support after-action reviews and improvement plans

Adapted from FEMA (2022) and Iowa HSEMD (2024)

Incident checklist enclosed

“When Disaster Strikes,” a write-on tri-fold of questions to ask, starting with life safety and a call to the EMA Director. A one-page quick reference is on the back of this insert.

Declarations, mutual aid, and the damage count.

Local declarations

When outside resources may be needed, declare early. The chair of the Board of Supervisors or a mayor may declare a local disaster emergency. A declaration can authorize emergency orders, allow exceptions to some procedures, and add weight to requests for help.

Iowa HSEMD, 2024

Iowa Mutual Aid Compact

Every Iowa city, county, township, and emergency management commission is automatically a member of IMAC unless it withdraws, letting neighbors help neighbors with workers' compensation and reimbursement terms already settled.

Iowa Code § 29C.22

24/7 state link

Your Emergency Management Director is the link to the Iowa HSEM Duty Officer, reachable around the clock for state resources and notifications.



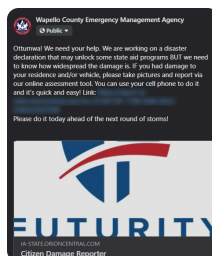
The damage count unlocks recovery

Local EMAs coordinate and collect damage information immediately after an event. It becomes the basis for the Governor's request for federal assistance.

1. Local damage reports and impact information
2. Joint preliminary damage assessment with state and federal teams
3. Governor's request for a Presidential declaration
4. Public Assistance, Individual Assistance, and Hazard Mitigation programs

Late or inaccurate damage information can cost the county eligibility for assistance.

605 IAC 7.6



EMA creates the incident in the state's Futurity system and publishes the reporting link to media, social media, and officials. **When you see the link, share it.**

Example: citizen damage reporting request, Ottumwa. Each disaster gets a new link; the old one is blurred.

How a disaster escalates

We're not the first on scene. We make sure the first on scene gets what it needs. When local resources run short, we move help up the ladder:

1 INCIDENT & LOCAL RESOURCES

County and city departments, businesses, and volunteers respond, with local responders and the county EOC. Your EMA Director coordinates resources and mutual aid; the HSEM Duty Officer is available 24/7.



2 MUTUAL AID & LOCAL DECLARATION

When local resources run short: neighboring counties and emergency management agencies help, and the Board chair or a mayor may declare a local disaster emergency.



3 GOVERNOR'S PROCLAMATION

When needs exceed county capability, the coordinator works with officials and Iowa HSEM to request a proclamation. State resources deploy at no cost to local jurisdictions; aid may open for low-income residents.



4 PRESIDENTIAL DECLARATION

If a disaster exceeds the state's capability, the Governor may request federal assistance.

Iowa HSEMD, 2024, 2026a

In a crisis, you are the face of the community.

Every message answers three questions

1

What happened?

Release confirmed facts quickly, and update often.

2

What are we doing about it?

Explain the plan, how long it may take, and what to expect.

3

What should you do?

Give people clear actions. Fear of the unknown is greater than fear of the facts.

Working with reporters

- Decide your key messages before the interview
- Every microphone is live
- Don't speculate; it's fine to say "I don't know"
- Be caring, empathetic, and truthful
- Channel releases through the EOC and one Joint Information Center

Iowa HSEMD, 2024



Virtual Press Conference & Facebook Live Event
2.4.21 10 am



Virtual press conference with Wapello County Public Health, February 2021.

Your EMA Director is a ready-made PIO

Emergency management directors train in public information and joint information systems, know the incident facts firsthand, and have working relationships with local media. Lean on your Director to draft messages, prepare you for briefings, stand up a Joint Information Center, or serve as the public information officer.

Reach everyone

Use a mix of new and old media, and plan for language translation, residents who are deaf, blind, or hard of hearing, and people with access and functional needs. Wapello Ready Alerts and the Wapello Life app give us two direct channels to residents.

Two ways to get alerts: Wapello Ready Alerts, part of Alert Iowa, sends warnings for your home or business address. The free **Wapello Life app** brings alerts to your phone wherever you are. Sign up for both at wapelloready.org.

WHAT YOU GET

Seven results for your community.

1

A prepared, responsive, and resilient community

2

Professional leadership during complex, high-impact situations

3

Agreement and shared expectations built through collaboration

4

Proven methods built on experience

5

Situational awareness produced from trusted relationships

6

Effective teamwork shaped by a common operating picture

7

Shared resources applied in a cost-effective way

“We don't just coordinate; we connect, advocate, and adapt.”

Our ability to remain calm and bring people together is the best skill we bring to an incident. And we know what records reimbursement will require, before the disaster.

See the full list of what we deliver every year in the *Ready for Anything* booklet.



Ice rescue training: partners practicing before they are needed.

When disaster strikes: questions to ask.

Your first steps as Mayor, or designee, the moment a disaster begins. The full write-on tri-fold is enclosed; keep it where you'll find it.

1

LIFE SAFETY

Priority one in every incident

Check first with the Fire Chief and the Police Chief or Sheriff's Office. Fire leads search & rescue and hazard control; law enforcement assists. EMA needs this initial picture.

- ☐ Utility hazards? Downed power lines, gas leaks
- ☐ Other hazards? (fire, collapse, hazmat, flooding)
- ☐ Injuries? Missing?
- ☐ Is search & rescue underway? Which areas are cleared?
- ☐ Are schools, care facilities, or residents who need help affected?
- ☐ Do people need shelter or evacuation?

2

CALL THE EMA DIRECTOR



24/7 duty phone

Share your initial picture: what, where, who is affected, and what you need.

- ☐ **With the EMA Director, consider a local disaster declaration.** Only the Mayor (or the Board chair for the county) can declare. Declare early if outside help may be needed.

3

INCIDENT STABILIZATION

- ☐ What area is affected, and who lives there?
- ☐ What resources are needed? Request them through the EMA Director so they can be balanced countywide.
- ☐ Who is watching for escalation and secondary impacts?
- ☐ Is debris blocking emergency access?

4

PROPERTY PROTECTION & DAMAGE REPORTING

Initial damage assessment

- ☐ What is the status of critical infrastructure? Power, gas, drinking water, wastewater, roads and bridges, rail crossings, cell towers and 911, hospitals and care homes, schools and shelters, government buildings, fuel stations, levees and dams.
- ☐ How many homes and businesses are affected? Where?

Start damage reporting. EMA opens the incident in **Futurity**, the state's damage reporting system, and publishes the self-reporting link to media, social media, and officials. **Must be done within 48 hours.**

- ☐ **Start tracking costs now:** staff and overtime hours, equipment use, contracts, and photos. FEMA reimburses only documented costs.

5

RESTORATION OF SERVICES

Check each Community Lifeline

- ☐ Which city and county services are affected, and what are the priorities?
- ☐ Is continuity of government or operations affected?
 - ☐ Safety & Security
 - ☐ Health & Medical
 - ☐ Communications
 - ☐ Hazardous Materials
 - ☐ Food, Hydration, Shelter
 - ☐ Energy
 - ☐ Transportation
 - ☐ Water Systems

Rate each: G = stable · Y = impacted, being stabilized · R = disrupted, no solution yet · ? = unknown

Every public message answers: 1. What happened? 2. What are we doing? 3. What should you do? Coordinate all public information with the EMA Director and the Joint Information Center (JIC).

Steps follow FEMA's incident priorities (life safety, incident stabilization, property and environmental protection) and the Community Lifelines construct. Questions adapted from Iowa HSEMD (2024); lifelines and status colors from FEMA's Community Lifelines Implementation Toolkit (2023).