

**Chittenden County Regional Emergency Management Committee**  
**Wednesday, May 17, 2023**  
**Meeting Notes**

**Attendees:**

REMC Members

Bolton – Amy Grover, Emergency Services Rep (*proxy for EMD*)  
Burlington – Michael LaChance, EMD  
Colchester – Seth Lasker, Assistant Chief Emergency Services Rep  
Huntington – Barbara Elliott, EMD (*proxy for Emergency Services Rep*)  
Jericho – John Abbott, Town Administrator  
Milton – Michaela Foody, EMD, Director of Public Safety; Milton – Steve Laroche, Police Chief  
South Burlington – Chris Corbin, South Burlington Fire Department Shift Captain  
Williston – Aaron Collette, Fire Chief; Joshua Moore, Williston Police  
Winooski – Elaine Wang, EMD

Others

American Red Cross – Michaela Olin; Dave Penny  
Green Mountain Power – Tiana Smith  
Vermont Emergency Management – Emily Harris; Harry Schoppman  
University of Vermont - John Marcus, Emergency Manager; Dorian Evans, Environmental Compliance Manager  
Vermont Department of Health - Derek Cronin, Emergency Preparedness Public Health Specialist  
Red Cross, RACES (Radio Amateur Civil Emergency Service)/ARES (Amateur Radio Emergency Service) – Bob Henneberger  
Vermont Air National Guard -- SSgt Kimberly Courcy  
Vermont Gas - David Attig, Safety & Compliance Manager

Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission

Christine Forde; Dan Albrecht; Darren Schibler

**Introductions**

Harry Schoppmann introduced himself as the incoming Northwest Regional Coordinator from Vermont Emergency Management. He also noted that he is working on reviewing and approving the 145 Local Emergency Management Plans (LEMPs) in his jurisdiction.

CCRPC staff introduced themselves and described their roles.

**Review February Meeting Notes**

There were no comments on the February meeting notes.

Emily Harris noted that the Vermont Legislature passed a law effective Friday 5/13 reducing REMC quorums to 5 members temporarily until December 31. Between now and December

31 REMCs can set their own quorum number as long as it is at least 20% of the voting members.

Elain Wang made a motion, seconded by Michael Lachance, to approve the February meeting notes. The motion passed 13-0 (including proxies).

### **Green Mountain Power -- Storm Response Procedures – Tiana Smith, Green Mountain Power**

Tiana Smith introduced herself and her agenda topic. GMP has been meeting with towns and REMCs to discuss how storms are changing and how they prepare for storms. Due to climate change, storms are becoming more severe and more likely to include heavy, wet, and cement-like snow, which are the most challenging conditions that lead to more outages and more difficult restoration. The most recent major storm on December 16<sup>th</sup>, 2022 was the largest outage in the state's history, and was followed by the similar Christmas Eve storm and March nor'easter. Outages lasted longer and were in areas where people were not prepared for the length of outages. Restoration for these events took longer compared to other types of events like high winds.

In terms of resiliency work, GMP is upgrading infrastructure with storm hardening (including steel wires where trees can fall without disrupting power), undergrounding rural overhead lines less expensively, and using self-healing distribution lines and battery storage / microgrids.

GMP does extensive public outreach before storms, including to critical care customers to ensure they are prepared for outages. She noted that communities with LEMPs and plans / staffing for storms are more resilient and can communicate information more effectively. Wang asked how GMP knows when critical care customers have moved – mostly this is through direct contact during events and follow-up communications. She noted that this is different from the state's CARES list.

GMP monitors 4 forecasters and weather models to inform its outage prediction models, but these are not always reliable. When severe storms hit, GMP has to quickly and drastically increase its workforce and relies on crews from outside the region (including Canada and as far south as Kentucky) through mutual aid.

Smith reviewed GMP's power restoration process, which starts with clearing hazards and making conditions safe. Transmission and substation facilities are the next priorities, followed by critical facilities, followed by main distribution lines and the largest number of customers. This unfortunately means that rural customers often are the first without power and the last to have it restored. She emphasized the importance of not touching downed wires since it's unclear if they are energized, and that individuals should stay at least 50 feet away and should not attempt to work on lines on their own.

Smith and Schoppmann noted the major concern about vulnerable populations – especially the elderly and those with health conditions. Schoppmann noted that VEM has limited

resources during a storm and relies on local emergency personnel to respond to these situations. Henneberger noted that the RACES / ARES network has hourly check-ins during emergency events, which can provide statewide coverage as an alternative to the limited cell phone coverage in the state.

Wang asked if there have ever been situations where existing mutual aid agreements are not sufficient to respond to a storm. Smith noted that there have been situations where GMP has to ask for aid outside the mutual aid group and is able to plan effectively for this. She noted that many places do not have resilience plans, and that the tolerance for power outages has been less in recent storms. She recommended that individuals and local emergency managers will need to prepare better, including providing backup generators for critical facilities.

Wang asked if GMP has an estimate for when undergrounding of distribution mains will be complete. Smith said this will likely take about 2-4 years (aided by a new temporary exemption from Act 250). GMP is also exploring battery storage in particularly remote areas.

#### **Red Cross Services – Michaela Olin, Disaster Program Manager, Northern Vermont Territory**

Michaela Olin introduced herself and provided her background. She noted that she covers the northern part of Vermont. She described Red Cross' service areas, specifically the disaster cycle which includes disaster response services, preparedness programs, and volunteer services.

The disaster services includes a 104-member workforce across the state in a range of specialties. They respond to natural disasters, hazardous materials, staffing for shelters, mass casualty events, and canteening requests from local emergency officials (food and drinks for emergency responders in extended events). She noted that individuals without shelter for 48+ hours qualify for Red Cross' relocation support services.

Wang asked if the Red Cross had plans for language support services in its responses, and Olin noted that this is now available following recent restructuring, including both a general translation phone line as well as more personal translation services within the response team. The restructuring also includes renewing partnerships with individual towns and local emergency managers.

Home fire response in FY2023 includes 52 responses in northern Vermont, 19 since January, and 5 in May so far. This includes financial services for the initial 72-hour period followed by referrals to other services.

Service delivery response structure starts with a call to dispatch (which covers 6 states throughout the Northeast), which generates a response within 3 hours. Services include emotional support, financial services, and material resources. Individuals don't have to request services immediately but can request Red Cross services for up to 365 days after the event.

Preparedness programs include:

- Home fire campaign – provides free smoke and carbon monoxide detectors and education.
- Youth programming – A pre-k to 2<sup>nd</sup> grade program known as Prepare with Peto teaches children preparedness skills such as how to move through a smoky environment, and healthy coping skills for stress.
- The Pillowcase Project is for 2<sup>nd</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> grade kids and teaches coping skills and personal and family preparedness.
- Be Red Cross Ready is a 13+ program that teaches how to prepare and respond appropriately to disasters likely to occur in the area.
- The Red Cross also provides hands-only CPR programs.

### **Chittenden County REMC Approvals – Pending Quorum**

Given the new (temporary) quorum requirement Christine proposed changing the bylaws to set the quorum for the Chittenden County REMC to 20 percent of membership, which would be 8 members. The positions of vice-chair, representation to the statewide LEPC, and representation to the Integrated Preparedness Plan Committee are still open. Let Christine know if anyone is interested in representing the REMC in those meetings.

Aaron Collette made a motion to approve the Bylaws, and the Regional Plan, and Michaela Foody seconded the motion. The motion was approved.

Michael Lachance made a motion to approve the recommendation for Barbara Elliott for Chair and Aaron Collette for Threat and Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment (THIRA)/Stakeholder Preparedness Review, and Aaron Collette seconded the motion. It was approved.

### **Continuity of Operation Planning (COOP) Overview – Emily Harris, Vermont Emergency Management**

Emily Harris (VEM) explained what a COOP is and reviewed resources that are available from VEM if a municipality wants to write one. A COOP is a plan detailing how a municipality will continue to meet essential functions in the event of interrupting incidents. The plan determines the mission-essential functions – the things that have to happen – and when, who, and how they will be done. Elements for consideration include who are the essential personnel, the critical facilities, the vital records, equipment, systems and databases. Consideration includes when and why the plan would be activated and who would be doing the notification. Also important to consider is who has the authority and step into key positions and who has the authority to take on different roles.

### **Vermont Emergency Management Updates**

Director Erica Bornemann is leaving VEM on June 2<sup>nd</sup>. Her position has been posted. Liz Rowell, the Planning Section Chief is also leaving and Max Kennedy is taking her position.

The Emergency Preparedness Conference is taking place on September 20-21 at Burke Mountain. VEM is providing each REMC with one free hotel room for a REMC member. The room can be used on either the 20<sup>th</sup> or the 21<sup>st</sup>. Anyone interested in taking advantage of the free room should email Christine and she will randomly select the recipient. The deadline for signing up with VEM is August 14.

#### **Future Topics**

Please share ideas for future topics with Christine. If anyone is working on anything others would be interested in we encourage you to make a presentation. We want folks to learn from each other.

#### **Adjourn**