

SNOHOMISH COUNTY EMERGENCY
MANAGEMENT

ANNUAL REPORT

2022





Director's message

I have been an emergency manager for almost 20 years and yet one niggling truth never seems to diminish: there is a lot I don't know.

Rather than discourage me, this is what keeps me in the field: the constantly changing problem set and the knowledge that I don't need to come up with the answers on my own. If we bring the right people together, with the right information, there is little we can't solve.

Only two months after taking the helm of the Snohomish County Department of Emergency Management, I can already attest that we have the right people. As you will see in the following pages, the team at DEM, with the support of our tremendous partners within county government and throughout the region, continues to do great work.

Coming off of almost 90,000 person/hours in the Emergency Operations Center during COVID, county emergency management partners:

- Earned certification from the Emergency Management Accreditation Program while simultaneously managing five federal disaster declarations.
- Developed and deployed innovative communications trailers to support first responders.
- Built out public information hubs that got information to those who needed it during the height of a wildfire.
- Put in countless hours coordinating behind the scenes to prepare our county for its worst day.

I am proud of the team that I inherited—proud of the work they accomplished over the past year and excited to see what we can do together to support the people of Snohomish County.



Lucia Schmit
Director
Snohomish County Emergency Management



Department recognized with elite accreditation

Emergency Management finished up work in 2022 to earn accreditation from a nationally recognized peer-review organization that tracks compliance with industry standards.

Successful completion of work required by the Emergency Management Accreditation Program (EMAP) means the department is now one of roughly 30 county-level agencies across the U.S. to have demonstrated excellence and accountability in emergency management. Accreditation followed a rigorous peer-reviewed process.

The department began seeking EMAP accreditation in 2019 and pursued that work through 2020 and 2021, despite concurrently managing the pandemic and other federally declared disasters. It achieved conditional accreditation in July 2021 and was granted full accreditation on Thursday, Jan. 26, 2023.

Agencies that obtain accredited status “have joined the elite leaders in emergency management,” EMAP Commission Chair Angee Morgan said.

The department was required to demonstrate and document compliance with more than 60 emergency management standards, as well as pass peer review by a team of EMAP-trained assessors.

Accreditation means EMAP recognizes Emergency Management’s ability to bring together personnel and resources from a variety of agencies and organizations to address any hazard. Accreditation is valid for five years. The only other nearby emergency management programs to attain EMAP accreditation are those operated by the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the State of Washington, King and Pierce counties, and the City of Seattle.

Our role in emergencies

Working for a safer Snohomish County

Snohomish County Emergency Management focuses on collaboratively limiting harm to people and property from a host of potential challenges, including earthquakes, floods, wildfires, severe weather, and human-caused hazards. We provide coordination and leadership in emergency prevention, mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery throughout the County's unincorporated areas and in all cities and towns, except for Everett, Bothell and Marysville, which partner with us using their own programs. Our work occurs before, during and after a crisis.



Before

Identify the community's greatest hazards. Coordinate response planning. Maintain the Emergency Operations Center for activation at any time.



Help people across the whole community understand and prepare for risks. Train with partners for the worst.

Ensure a duty officer is available around the clock, supporting incident responders and monitoring for signs of trouble.



During



Prioritize protecting lives, including getting the right information to the right people at the right time.

Coordinate response with partners. Help identify key objectives to speed recovery.



Manage efforts to secure personnel, equipment, materials, shelter and other critical resources.



Track progress on objectives, assess impact, and identify next steps.



After

Connect public agencies, businesses and residents with recovery resources.



Use data to identify repairs to infrastructure, or other projects, to limit future harm. Explore funding options.



Conduct after-action reviews to identify what worked and what didn't. Modify plans and procedures. Train on the lessons learned.



Emergency Operations Center upgraded, ready for challenges

The Snohomish County Emergency Operations Center plays a critical role in the community's response to hazards.

The EOC served as the central hub for coordination during the COVID-19 pandemic, the department's longest-ever emergency activation. The center was activated full time for 512 days between March 2020 and July 2021. It was used to focus the efforts of more than 200 people from 18 different agencies. In all, more than 88,000 hours of work were logged helping the community fight the virus and its impacts.



The EOC now incorporates lessons from the long COVID activation.

The department learned much from that unprecedented challenge, and the Emergency Operations Center reflects key lessons. In 2022, the department refitted the EOC, setting up more than 40 new workstations in a space that is now equipped with video and audio systems that better support hybrid collaboration. The remote-work technology already is proving useful, making interagency collaboration and information sharing easier, both during and after a crisis. The hybrid option also has reduced the need – and the expense – of deploying people into the building to address smaller, more routine challenges such as minor flooding. When deployment is necessary, however, the EOC has robust tools and technology to get the job done.



Volunteers assisted in the EOC upgrade.

The Emergency Operations Center activated in 2022 for a single event: the Bolt Creek Wildfire, which burned for weeks and scorched nearly 15,000 acres of forest lands in the Skykomish River Valley across Snohomish and King counties. Priorities included cross jurisdictional coordination, providing shelter options for displaced people and animals, and public safety guidance.

Bolt Creek by the numbers:

- Activation date: **Sept. 10-11, 2022**
- Agencies in EOC: **9**
- People: **26**
- Hours logged in EOC: **414**
- Additional hours by DEM staff: **1,223 hours supporting the response through Oct. 31, 2022**



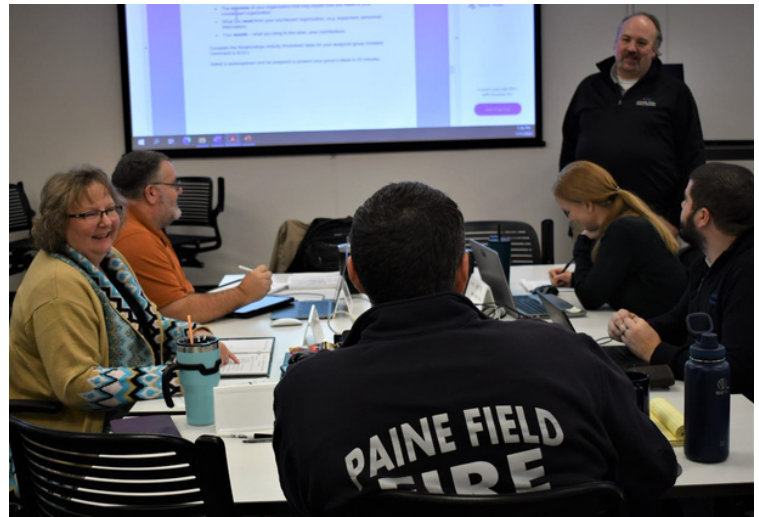
NW Incident Management Team 8 photo.

Fresh focus, expanded offerings for training and exercise

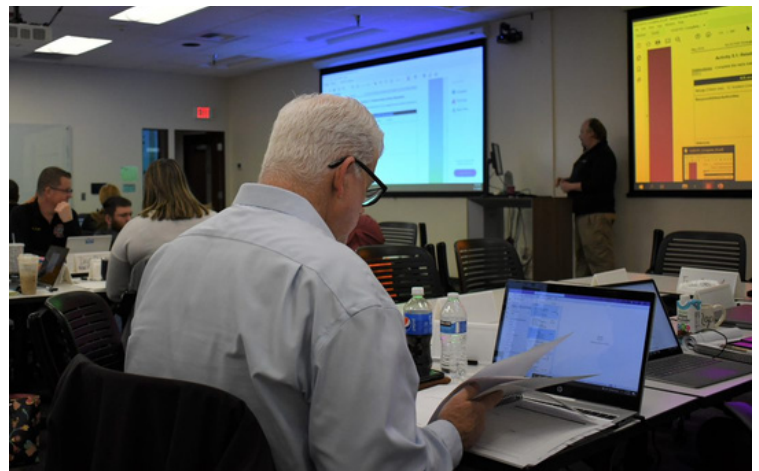
Emergency Management's training and exercise program was hard hit by the COVID-19 pandemic. The department took 2022 as an opportunity to refocus and chart a new course. A key development was hiring a program coordinator to turn attention full time towards identifying and scheduling emergency management training for Snohomish County partners. We also began work with multiple agencies to build a cadre of local instructors who can offer emergency management courses to the region. While work remains, we head into 2023 scheduled to host classes for responders every month on more than 30 subjects, including the incident command system, the intricacies of flooding, community evacuation and re-entry, disaster management for utilities, bomb detection, preparing people to survive an active-shooter attack, and much more.

We also created opportunities in 2022 to host seven courses at Emergency Management. They were attended by 211 students who received 1,720 hours of instruction.

The department anticipated internal training needs as it hired eight new staff to support expanded programs and to fill vacancies from people who left during the pandemic. An assessment also identified opportunities for more-seasoned staff to train for greater leadership during disasters, or to earn certification as course instructors.



Rob Thurston presents an emergency response class attended by partners from area cities and county departments.



A full schedule of classes is planned for 2023.

Here are some of the 2022 training results:

- Participating DEM Staff: 18
- Classes completed: 344
- Total training hours: 2,796
- Completed FEMA basic academy: 2
- Completed the Professional Development Series: 9
- Certified as state instructors: 3



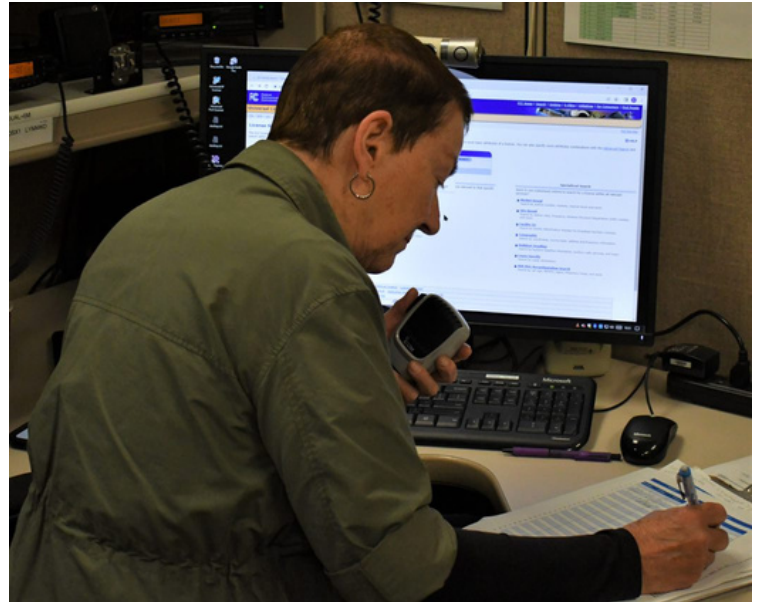
Jarrod Dibble leads a class.

Keeping people talking in the midst of chaos

Volunteers in the Snohomish County Auxiliary Communications Service provide support for Emergency Management in myriad ways. Many are licensed ham radio operators and train to make sure responders can continue to share information during disasters. They also collaborate as a workshop for technical innovation.

The team in 2022 continued to pioneer development of the department's Mobile Information Technology Resiliency Units, small trailers which house all of the hardware needed to generate electricity, connect to global communication networks and to stand up wireless service during emergencies. The units were deployed on eight missions in 2022 totaling 66 days of operation, including three weeks supporting the Bolt Creek Fire response. ACS team members custom built each of the units and were instrumental in making them operational in the field.

A core of about 20 ACS volunteers regularly staff the radio room off the Emergency Operations Center, take on projects and respond in support of staff. The numbers below only begin to provide a glimpse of their impact.



ACS volunteers participate in regular exercises.



Mobile IT Resiliency Unit in use during Bolt Creek Fire.

Snohomish County Auxiliary Communications Service 2022

- Hours volunteered: **4,664**
- Shifts covered: **730**
- Completed projects: **71**
- Exercises: **11**

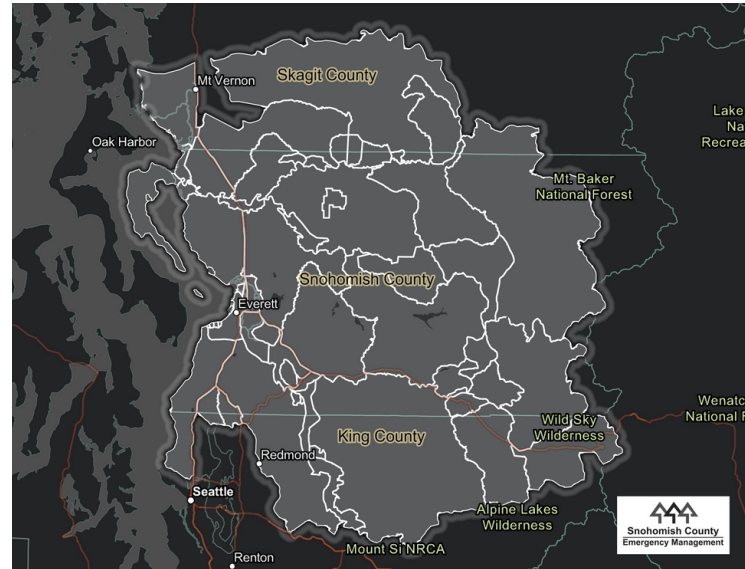


Volunteers built the Mobile IT Resiliency Units.

Planning for the Big One and fighting the overdose threat

The Planning and Resilience program helps the community better identify, get ready for and respond to threats that put lives and property at risk. The biggest accomplishments in 2022 included:

- ▶ Coordinating a ground-breaking disaster planning effort involving eight central Puget Sound counties, five cities and the Tulalip Tribes, preparing for likely damage to the region's transportation system during a megaquake. The data-driven effort identified 58 "population islands" that could form in the County because of downed bridges and damaged roads, plus 372 potential locations where relief supplies may be staged and residents trained to speed recovery. Work continues to incorporate this information in response plans and community preparedness efforts. By readying for a major disaster, we are better positioned to recover from challenges of all sizes.

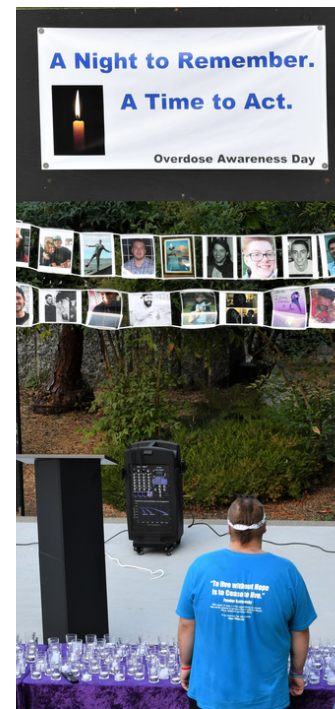


Possible 'population islands' after a megaquake.

- ▶ Continuing to apply the tools of emergency response to address the ongoing epidemic of overdoses, now linked to fentanyl and methamphetamine. This work included repositioning efforts to maximize the benefits of funding from settlements in lawsuits over responsibility for the crisis and naming a program manager to focus solely on the challenge. The department also worked with partners on Aug. 31 to help stage the "A Night to Remember, A Time to Act" vigil on International Overdose Awareness Day.

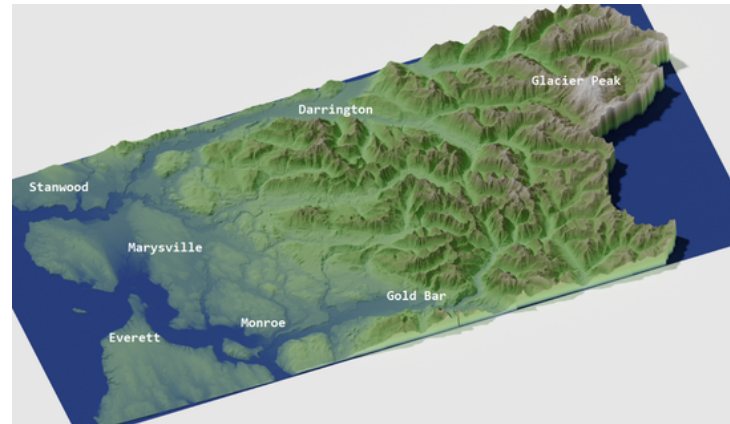


Dozens attended a vigil in Everett Aug. 31, supporting the fight against overdose deaths.

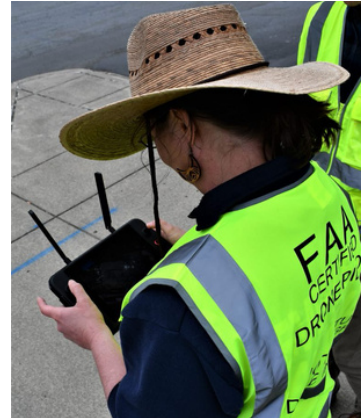


EESCS uses technology to enhance response, resilience

The staff of the Enhanced Emergency Services Communications System (EESCS) division at Emergency Management uses cutting-edge technology to ensure the community is prepared for any crisis. Much of their work focuses on helping maintain the technical side of the community's 911 program, including the accuracy of address data first responders rely upon when navigating to emergency calls. All members of the team are certified to fly uncrewed aerial systems – more commonly called drones – which are used in myriad ways before, during and after emergencies. Likewise, each team member is skilled at working with geographic information system (GIS) software and other tools. They create applications to capture, analyze and share information used for hazard response, as well as planning and public information. Snohomish County is unique in having such strong and on-demand GIS capability embedded within its emergency management program.



3-D map of Snohomish County created using GIS tools.



Melody Ovard pilots a drone to confirm address locations.

Key 2022 accomplishments include:

- Providing technical support for a \$1.5 million update to the community's 911 call-taking equipment. This work was funded from the County's portion of an excise tax collected on subscriber phone lines.
- Allocating \$8.1 million to the development of a new Snohomish County 911 Dispatch Center, again using excise tax collections. The money was carefully set aside over the last several years.
- Assisting a national working group develop best practices for maintaining digital maps and data for emergency service boundaries used in next-generation 911 systems. EESCS's program manager met weekly with the group for three years.
- Continued development of the Snohomish County Public Safety Hub, including repeatedly updating evacuation guidance, maps, and other content during the Bolt Creek Fire.
- Built interactive maps used for planning responses to a potential megaquake along the Cascadia Subduction Zone, including identifying locations for community points of distribution supporting relief efforts.

Drone Program

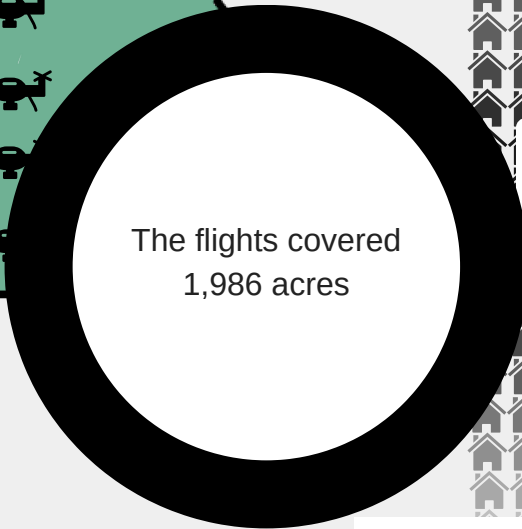


Drew Schwitters pilots a drone.

Uncrewed aerial systems – more commonly called drones – are used to ensure the accuracy of datasets and digital maps used for dispatching and routing emergency responders including police, fire and paramedics.



The department's three drone pilots flew 25 mapping missions.



The flights covered 1,986 acres



They captured precise locations of 2,788 new or existing address points

99.98%

Dispatch Accuracy

This attention to detail helps the County maintain a 99.98% address dispatch match rate.

New Homeland Security program already having impact



Federal grants help pay for the tools Snohomish County relies upon during emergencies.

Emergency Management added a Homeland Security program in 2022 and hired a program manager mid-year to lead the effort. In a few short months, the new program already has made strong progress in increasing Snohomish County's profile among the regional work groups that decide where grant money is spent to address hazards and mitigate their impact. The two-person team also has forged strategic relationships, including with private sector partners whose business interests intersect with managing supply chains and critical infrastructure.

A key accomplishment was spearheading a systematic assessment of threats and hazards in Snohomish County and identifying the gaps that exist between current capabilities and the magnitude of response efforts needed to limit harm to people and property from our biggest threats. This type of analysis can factor into determining how federal grants are distributed among a region's emergency management programs.

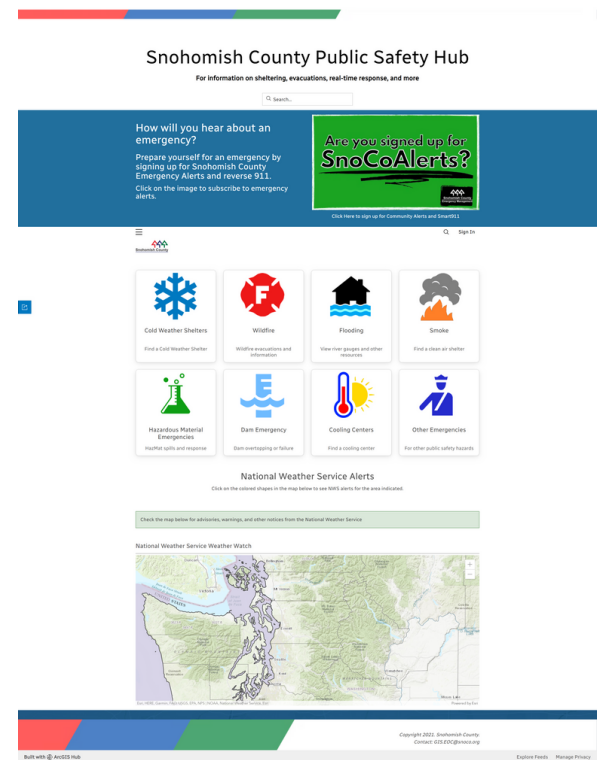
The team has been working with the department's technology experts to develop digital survey tools and other platforms that can better capture and share information among partners. It also has been overseeing an internship program to provide hands-on experience to emergency management students in the region in exchange for willingness to help with data gathering and other labor-intensive assignments.

Sharing information to help people stay safe

Emergency Management’s public information program focuses on helping the community stay safe by getting the right information to the right people at the right time.

The department makes robust use of social media, with more than 300 posts in 2022 focused on preparedness and guidance during hazards. Since 2019, our followers on Facebook have increased more than five-fold and Twitter followers jumped nearly 70%.

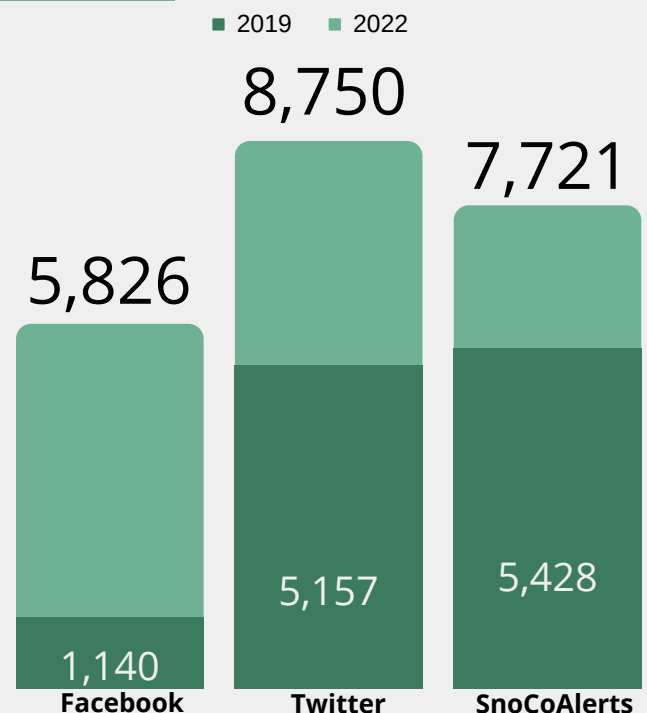
The department in 2022 launched the Snohomish County Public Safety Hub as a digital place for sharing emergency information, including real-time hazard mapping. The hub saw heavy use during the Bolt Creek Fire, logging more than 300,000 page views, two thirds of those during the first 72 hours of the emergency. That was in addition to roughly half a million impressions on fire-focused social media.



Public Safety Hub homepage

Other 2022 highlights include:

- Completing communication plans, including pre-approved social media and wireless emergency alerts, for all 13 of the community’s biggest natural and human-caused hazards.
- Obtaining translations of pre-approved emergency messages into 14 languages, including Spanish, Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese, Russian, Ukrainian and Arabic.
- Creating a Know Your Hazards campaign with flyers, social media posts and videos.
- Working in a public-private partnership with Sound Publishing to create and distribute a Preparedness Guide that went to all subscribers of The Daily Herald in Everett, in print and online, during National Preparedness Month in September.
- Launching an outreach campaign to grow subscribers to SnoCoAlerts, the county’s tool for sending critical emergency messages directly to residents’ mobile phones.





Snohomish County Emergency Management

Partners offer counsel and coordination

Emergency Management Advisory Board

The Snohomish County Emergency Management Advisory Board is codified in County code. Voting members include the chief executive or administrator (or their designee) from each city, town, or Tribe that contracts with the County through an interlocal agreements for emergency management services. Among other duties, the board provides advice on emergency management plans, the department’s budget, grant applications and charges paid by contracting agencies. The board met quarterly throughout 2022. It is chaired by Snohomish Mayor Linda Redmon.

Emergency Management Coordinating Committee

Pursuant to Snohomish County Code 2.36.085, the Emergency Management Coordinating Committee exists to foster alignment on emergency management issues across Snohomish County government and to provide advice to enhance preparedness for all County employees, departments and elected County officials. The committee met quarterly during 2022. A milestone was reached by year’s end with approval of a strategic plan outlining the committee’s work through 2025. Goals include:

- Equity and inclusion in all phases of emergency management.
- Improving coordination across Snohomish County government in all phases of emergency management.
- Addressing gaps identified in by the ongoing assessment of the Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan (CEMP).
- Increasing use of evidence-based decision making during all phases of emergency management to make better use of resources.
- Identifying private sector and community partner assets and incorporating them into disaster management plans. Establishing necessary resources for implementation.



Biermann joins Executive Office

Jason Biermann became Emergency Management's director in 2016. He was the second person to lead the department since its creation in 2005. In July 2022, Biermann transitioned to a new role as senior policy advisor for preparedness and resilience within the Snohomish County Executive Office. He has continued to be a strong partner and advocate for Emergency Management and its programs.

Biermann led the department's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Previously, he provided critical coordination during the deadly mudslide that in 2014 killed 43 people along SR 530 between Darrington and Oso. In 2017, he helped the County and its partners to begin using emergency management tools to better address the ongoing epidemic of overdoses. The Snohomish County Opioid Multi-Agency Coordination (MAC) Group was one of the first organizations in the U.S. to marshal resources from public health, human services, law enforcement, emergency medicine and other disciplines to address the crisis and its impacts.



There's much more to come in 2023

Emergency Management heads into 2023 with ambitious plans. Here are some examples of work we expect to engage:

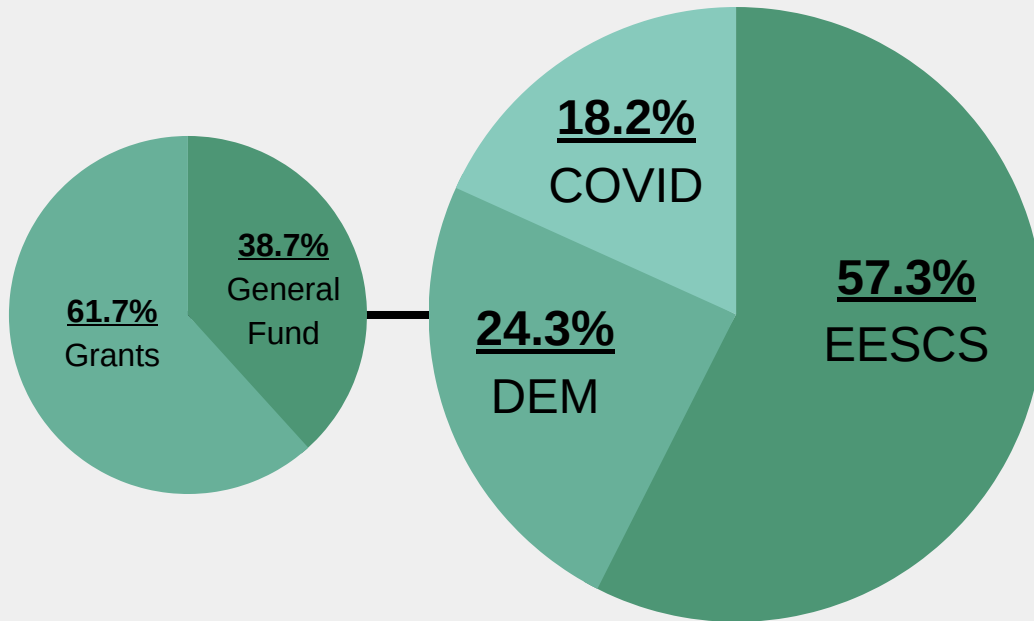
- ▶ Finalizing and implementing a new departmental strategic plan that outlines through 2025 strategies for improving countywide preparedness, delivering excellent customer service, instilling emergency management into the County's culture, increasing readiness at the Emergency Operations Center, enhancing staffing and addressing fiscal sustainability.
- ▶ Developing a web-based flood forecast mapping tool to model inundation in Snohomish County using flood-level predictions from the National Weather Service. Flood warnings would improve here by allowing people to visualize the effects of potential inundation at 6-, 12- and 24-hour intervals during a crisis.
- ▶ Building on community wildfire protection plans for the upper Skykomish and Stillaguamish valleys and expanding the planning footprint to include the whole community. The county's eastern area includes more than 725,000 acres of public and private forestlands. Meanwhile, roughly 130,000 people countywide live in places where trees, shrubs and homes are mixed together in what's called the wildland urban interface.
- ▶ Working with other county departments to comprehensively plan for expected impacts from climate change, including community vulnerability tied to natural hazards.
- ▶ Implementing a new system to manage volunteers and donations, including creating a database of pre-screened and registered volunteers who can be swiftly deployed during emergencies.
- ▶ Continuing to foster partnerships with the private sector to build resilience during disasters. Example: working with representatives of retail grocers to develop preparedness and recovery guidance for mass casualty situations, including active shooter events.
- ▶ Showcasing Snohomish County Emergency Management innovations and tools as presenters at national conferences and other venues.
- ▶ Refreshing Emergency Management's Hazard Viewer to include updated interactive maps and adding information about human-caused hazards, such as hazardous materials risks.
- ▶ Reshaping preparedness guidance to include strategies that will work across the whole community, including for people facing significant economic challenges and other barriers.
- ▶ Upgrading the department's web presence, including a retooling of pages on the County's website.



- ▶ We're capturing lessons from COVID, including writing a plan for warehouse operations during and after emergencies. With the worst of the crisis passed in 2022, we distributed 7.4 million pieces of free PPE to some 250 partners, including local and tribal agencies, health providers and care centers.

Finance

The tables and charts below demonstrate the sources of Emergency Management’s funding in recent years, as well as authorized expenditures. The department in 2022 remained well within the adopted budget, with just over \$14.4 million in expenditures by year’s end and roughly \$7 million in grant money reallocated to other County programs. The changes reflected the department’s continued shift away from COVID response to supporting recovery. Grant dollars remain an important funding source. The department’s new strategic plan recognizes the need to address fiscal stability and sets a target of reducing reliance on grants by 20% over the next four years. The EESCS funding for 2023 reflects approximately \$8 million for the new countywide dispatch center.



Approved expenditures by funding source

Year	2020	2021	2022	2023
Opioids	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$1,400,000
General Fund	\$1,189,974	\$1,231,155	\$1,322,695	\$1,518,370
Human Services	\$20,052	\$87,473	\$187,319	\$271,780
Grants	\$1,141,051	\$2,870,604	\$13,046,114	\$3,580,270
EESCS	\$7,527,691	\$8,460,625	\$8,915,249	\$17,358,034
Total	\$9,878,768	\$12,649,857	\$23,471,377	\$24,130,470





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Emergency Management

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