

UNCENTERED

Connecting public health preparedness with real-world experiences

A MAGAZINE FROM THE CENTER FOR PREPAREDNESS EDUCATION



“THE WOMAN ON THE CALL SAID IT COULD BE A LIFE OR DEATH DEAL FOR THIS KID”

A NEWBORN SCREENING TEST TRANSPORTED DURING THE PEAK OF THE FLOOD

HEALTH CARE COALITIONS HELP IN DISASTERS

Not even a bomb cyclone could stop the HCCs from responding.

THE STORY OF A TOWN THAT BECAME AN ISLAND

One Nebraska town evacuated a nursing home, set up Incident Command at a school, and slept in the gym

UnCentered

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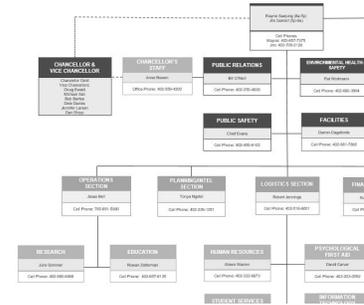
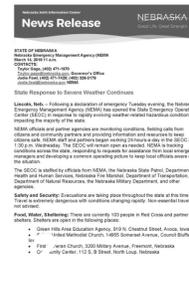


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- we will learn from those experiences that challenge us -



2019
NEBRASKA STRONG

In our 17 years of educational development, we at the Center for Preparedness Education have taught, prepared, and planned for the *worst*. We often create scenarios in our exercises that test plans, that are designed to overwhelm the system, and that require attendees to think outside the preparedness box. We never thought that events at that catastrophic level would take place in the real world. In the words of an Emergency Response Coordinator, "we never planned for what happened in March of 2019".

We dedicate this edition of our magazine to those responders who took charge of the flooding/blizzard events, those fellow Nebraskans who lost so much, and those neighbors who lost their lives.

The stories you will read in this issue will reflect the theme that kept shining-through during this epic event - **Nebraska Strong**.

*The Center for Preparedness
Education Staff*

editor's corner

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Nebraska Plains HCC

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Southeast Nebraska HCC

Tri-Cities Response System

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*The title **UnCentered** was chosen by our team to describe thinking outside the box or Center, if you will -- uncharted territory from traditional theories and methodologies.*

Signature

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PREPAREDNESS

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A Joint Endeavor Between
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NOT EVEN A 'BOMB CYCLONE' CAN STOP NEBRASKA'S HEALTH CARE COALITIONS

A bomb cyclone is considered a meteorological phenomenon and is often categorized when a storm has undergone bombogenesis, which is further defined when a storm's barometric pressure drops by 24 millibars in 24 hours. For Nebraska, this meant unprecedented rainfall, blizzard conditions, and never before seen devastation.

For the Panhandle Regional Medical Response System, this meant preparing for the worst. Hospitals arranged for early deliveries of supplies and in the end, had to shelter in place during snow days and took on roles they often times wouldn't a critical access hospital delivered a premature baby that normally would have been transported to Denver

The Nebraska Plains Healthcare Coalition, one of less damaged parts of Nebraska, activated their cache of supplies to send gloves and hand sanitizer to EMS responders in need.

The Omaha Metropolitan Healthcare Coalition shared information, maintained resource visibility and coordinated the sharing of resources while acting as a liaison between partners and the emergency operations center. The Pharmacy Workgroup helped coordinate the distribution of vaccines from several Omaha hospitals.

The Southeast Nebraska Healthcare Coalition worked in collaboration with the Omaha coalition to provide personal protective equipment in Cass and Nemaha Counties and also to secure specialized medical equipment for use in a Red Cross shelter in Dodge County.

The Tri-Cities Medical Response System assisted Loup Basin Public Health with resource location and notification of two long-term care facilities that required evacuation.

The Rural Regional One Medical Response System had two hospitals evacuate along with five long-term care facilities. The roads and bridges being washed out caused hospital staff delays in getting to and from work, and caused some delays with transporting patients and hindered timely transport of lab samples.

We hope we never have to experience a disaster of this magnitude again, but if we do thanks to the experience with the bomb cyclone of 2019, Nebraska is ready! The Nebraska Health Care Coalitions have demonstrated incredible skills, coordination, and support in times of need.

They have exemplified the phrase - Nebraska Strong.

A story of a Town that Became a Temporary Island

A SNAPSHOT IN TIME

It all came to a climax on March 12th, as the 20 inches of snow that fell the week prior began to melt. Debra Von Seggern wears many hats in the community of North Bend but because of the flooding situation that caused millions of dollars of damage to the state and her community, she's most well-known for her role as Paramedic/Physician Surrogate with North Bend Fire. She described her confusion and panic when water started rising through the basement floor when the field run off of water from the rain and snow melting, when she saw the ice jam on the river that was larger than she ever thought possible and when she got the text message that said "it's gone" referring to the levee that broke causing the city to lose the fight.

Debra is no stranger to disasters and high-stress situations, she has been a paramedic for 27+ years and serves as the Emergency Medical Services Coordinator for UNMC. But when the streets filled with water, when the fire department was no longer accessible because it was under water, when her department had to help evacuate the town including a skilled nursing home, all while her brothers and sisters in response were homeless and sleeping in the gym of the school she stepped up.

"It started with snow, then water started rising through the basement floor, ice jams the size of a car formed - then the levee broke".

The North Bend Fire Chief Waylen Fischer set up incident command at the North Bend School. Not only would the school become the heart of the response, it would be home to those responders who lost their homes, it would serve as a feeding station for those in need and be considered the beacon that held the town together. The school's superintendent, Dr. Dan Endorf supported the incident by not only opening the doors but by opening a server for the first responders to use which allowed seamless connectivity to the outside world.

The Story of a Town that Became a Temporary Island - continued

Some of the most common issues in disaster response is communication, spontaneous volunteers and donation management. The fire department was able to have access to four FirstNet phones that allowed the community access to non-emergency numbers that didn't bog down an already taxed wireless system, a direct phone line to a volunteer coordinator and donation location. For more information on FirstNet, see the Winter edition of UnCentered.

"It's scary when your landlocked city becomes an island," says Debra. Similar to Fremont, North Bend was almost completely cut off from other cities including access to hospitals. "Thankfully we only had one 911 call in those days where the roads were closed," Debra explained that one of the biggest challenges was the evacuation and relocation of the skilled nursing facility. Even with plans in place when resources are limited and an entire town is under water, it's hard to accommodate those that require assistance. Not only did North Bend Rescue help evacuate the nursing home they stepped up days later and helped the residents return.

When it was all said and done, the city took over incident command, the fire department is digging out of the mud, the school is bustling with children again and the first responders have begun to go back to their day jobs. But the city will forever be changed.

Roads need repair and basements redone but the pride of the residents in North Bend has never been stronger - North Bend Strong.

A SNAPSHOT IN TIME

Written by Tonya Ngotel



It was my first real life event and I had only been in my new position for three weeks.



ERC in the EOC

Article by:
ALLISON DYE

My name is Allison. I recently graduated from the University of Nebraska Medical Center (UNMC) with a Professional Certificate in Emergency Preparedness (CEP). Shortly after finishing at UNMC, I applied for a position as an Emergency Response Coordinator at Three Rivers Public Health Department (3RPHD) and was ecstatic when I was hired. Little did I realize the many challenges I would face in the first few weeks of the job.

At the beginning of flooding events, I sent out messages to each Emergency Manager (EM) of the three counties served by 3RPHD to let them know I was available for information, assistance, or anything they needed. My studies taught me that Public Health can play fundamental parts in emergency responses, so putting the communication out that I was available to assist was my first reaction. When one of the EMs invited me into the Emergency Operations Center (EOC), my first challenge was to draft a press release about the developing emergency.

The incident expanded rapidly.

Within two hours we were packing up boxes with equipment and moved the EOC to the Fremont Police Department (FPD). A discussion on whether to evacuate parts of surrounding areas was a major topic in the EOC. While ultimately no evacuation was required, the decision for the county to advise residents to voluntarily evacuate remained in place and was revisited frequently, as levees continued to fall. That night I was able to return to my home in Omaha, NE.

On Friday, March 15th, I returned to the EOC to find that shelters were being opened at a rapid pace. The Local Emergency Operations Plan (LEOP) of Dodge County directs the American Red Cross and Salvation Army to handle sheltering and donations. At this early stage in the disaster, these organizations were not yet represented at the EOC. To fill the gap, I determined that Public Health could step in until hand-off could be accomplished. Public Health proceeded to contact the community organizations/churches that had contacted the EOC offering to open as a shelter. Without the assistance of United Way and REACT volunteers, efforts to safely and securely direct evacuees, volunteers, and donations would not have been as organized or gone as smoothly as they did. Salvation Army arrived, and the responsibility of organizing volunteers and donations was handed off. By the end of the day, Fremont was flooded in on three sides, basically making the city an island and making it impossible for me to return home. My co-worker and I spent the next three nights sleeping on air mattresses in the health department. Eventually, flood waters receded, the American Red Cross arrived and took over shelters, and both my coworker and I were able to return to Omaha via a specific route that headed North before going East, instead of the Eastward Interstate drive we usually took over the (now washed-out) Elkhorn River.

Ultimately, every one of our three counties experienced flooding of varying degrees and recovery will be extensive. But the response efforts of everyone – first responders, local and State agencies, community organizations, and volunteers – supported the success of EOC operations.



NEWBORN SCREENING TEST TRANSPORTED BY HELICOPTER IN NICK OF TIME

"WE WERE DAMN GLAD WE COULD HELP - WE WERE JUST AT THE RIGHT PLACE AT THE RIGHT TIME"

Picture Retrieved from Nebraska State Patrol

Russ Wren, the agency's ESF Function Coordinator, was in charge of answering the phone at DHHS's Emergency Support Function #8 desk (Public Health and Medical Services) on March 15 when a call came in that a Newborn Screening blood specimen at Columbus Community Hospital had to reach a testing site in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania -- and this when many roads and bridges were closed or washed away due to flooding.

Meanwhile, the baby was getting older, increasing the possibility that an undiscovered genetic disorder - some of which make certain foods incredibly harmful - could result in serious disability or infant death.

Luckily he had the resources he needed. At the peak of the flood, all 15 of the state's ESF desks had been called up, including the State Patrol's ESF #13, just across the room at the Emergency Operations Center at the Nebraska Emergency Management Agency. The State Patrol representative was Sgt. Richard Aldag.

"I was just the guy with a phone," he said, laughing. "Russ had this need and he knew that we had a helicopter transporting needed items. 'Would it be possible to take the sample?'"

Aldag said they quickly arranged a conference call that included Julie Luedtke, manager of the newborn screening program, and the captain of the helicopter. During the discussion, it was decided to get the specimen to CHI Health St. Elizabeth in Lincoln, which would relay it forward.

Luedtke had earlier been in communication with a lab manager in Columbus who asked if the State Patrol helicopter could be used to get the sample where it needed to be.

Luedtke: "It was really quick back and forth. Once I had explained the situation, the specimen was ready to go. Those guys were wonderful." She added that because of poor reception on the call she never caught the name of the pilot with any certainty. Captain Frank had been her guess.

Captain Frank Peck and Trooper Pilot Jeremy Strack were sitting on the ramp in Columbus, their State Patrol helicopter idling, when they got the call.

NEWBORN SCREENING CONTINUED'

"We had brought blood from Omaha and we're going to return," Peck said. "The woman on the call said it could be a life-or-death deal for this kid. If you're telling me it's life or death, you're done convincing me. Just tell me what you need me to do."

Peck said there was a discussion about heading all the way to Omaha and returning the sample by other means to Lincoln.

"I said, we'll just take it to St. E's. I think Julie was shocked we could do that. We called to St. E's that we'd be coming. It really didn't put us behind."

While they were waiting for the sample on the pad in Columbus, a medical flight was coming in.

"I know Kim Wolfe, fly with him during my off hours, who had Midwest Medical. His hanger is nearby, so I set down there," Peck said. "Jeremy ran the couple of blocks or whatever it is to bring the sample."

Their arrival in Lincoln's St. Elizabeth's Hospital was captured on video by Peck's wife, Shelly, who works there in pediatrics as a cardiovascular sonographer.

"I was able to wave to her, at least," Frank Peck said.

It was a busy day for Peck, who said he and Strack logged about 8 hours just in the air.

"That whole day... I was in the air a whole lot. We were just damn glad we could help," he said. "Jeremy and I both liked the way it came out. We were just at the right place at the right time. The folks who coordinated it deserve the kudos. I guess we are Nebraska Strong."

Luedtke agreed, singling out the State Patrol pilots.

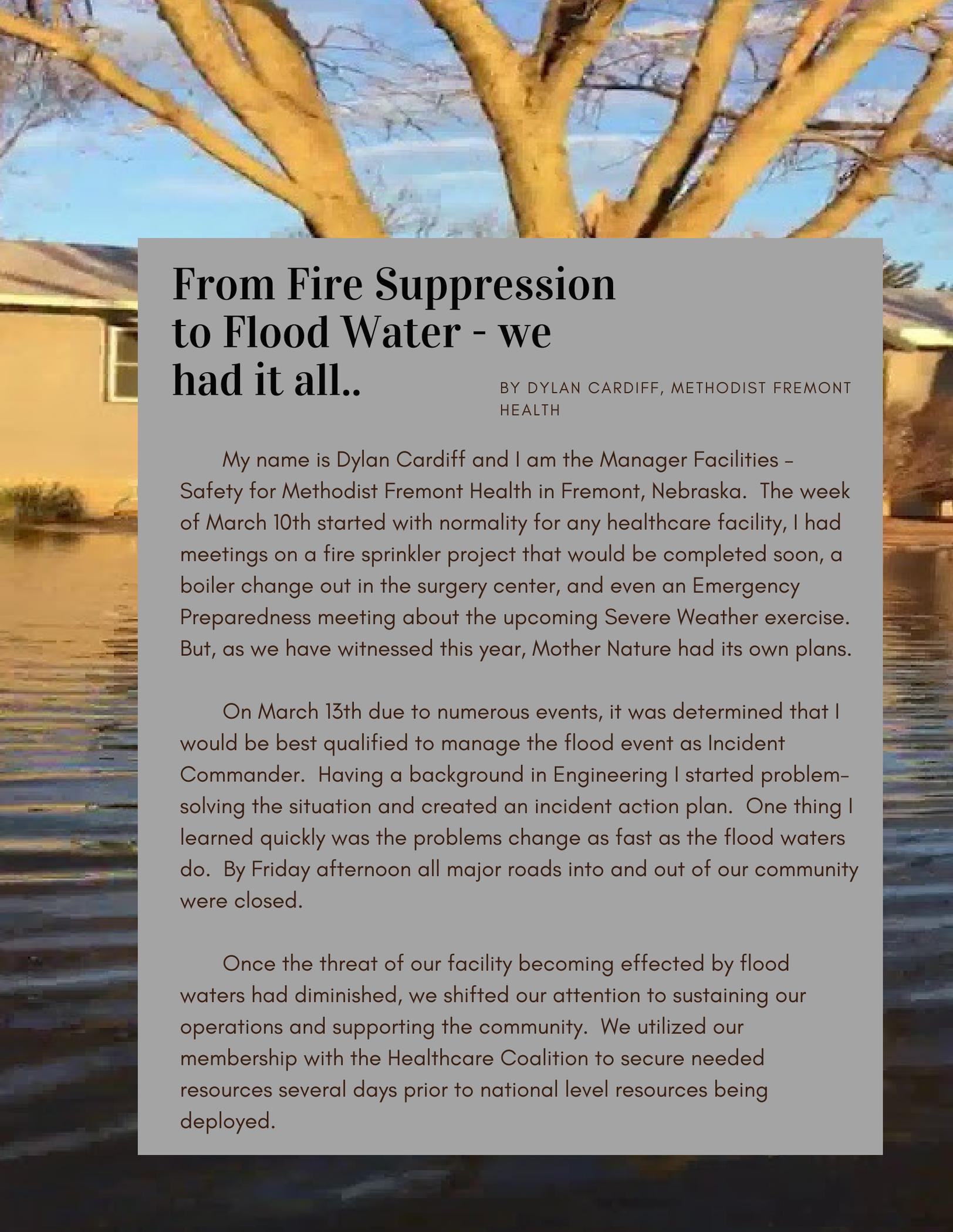
"It was amazing. I was so impressed by their cooperation and their help. It was a huge success," she said, adding the blood specimen reached the lab safely and was analyzed.

"Everything came back normal - but we didn't know that. That's why we screen."

Nebraska's Newborn Screening program, which tests for 32 genetic disorders, started in the 1960s.



*Article Submitted
by David Hudson,
Department of
Health and
Human Services*

A photograph of a flooded residential street. The water is murky and reflects the sky. In the background, there are trees with bare branches and a house with a window. The scene is captured during the day, likely in late autumn or winter.

From Fire Suppression to Flood Water - we had it all..

BY DYLAN CARDIFF, METHODIST FREMONT
HEALTH

My name is Dylan Cardiff and I am the Manager Facilities – Safety for Methodist Fremont Health in Fremont, Nebraska. The week of March 10th started with normality for any healthcare facility, I had meetings on a fire sprinkler project that would be completed soon, a boiler change out in the surgery center, and even an Emergency Preparedness meeting about the upcoming Severe Weather exercise. But, as we have witnessed this year, Mother Nature had its own plans.

On March 13th due to numerous events, it was determined that I would be best qualified to manage the flood event as Incident Commander. Having a background in Engineering I started problem-solving the situation and created an incident action plan. One thing I learned quickly was the problems change as fast as the flood waters do. By Friday afternoon all major roads into and out of our community were closed.

Once the threat of our facility becoming effected by flood waters had diminished, we shifted our attention to sustaining our operations and supporting the community. We utilized our membership with the Healthcare Coalition to secure needed resources several days prior to national level resources being deployed.



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*We cannot stop a disaster from occurring but
we can arm ourselves with knowledge.*

*Join the Center for Preparedness education in
our endeavor to be better prepared!*

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