

Governor's Emergency Management Advisory Council

2024 Annual Report

As required by §14-105(a) of the Public Safety Article

Executive Summary

In accordance with the Annotated Code of Maryland, Public Safety Article, § 14-105 (a) and (d), the Governor’s Emergency Management Advisory Council (GEMAC) is authorized to advise the Governor on all matters that relate to emergency management in Maryland. Staffed by the Maryland Department of Emergency Management (MDEM), the GEMAC continues to provide value to the Maryland State Executive Branch, and the residents of Maryland, by offering an independent, non-partisan, and holistic perspective for a diverse host of emergency management topics. The depth and breadth of experience the GEMAC contains, across many different emergency-management-relevant disciplines, is impressive and a credit to the State. As always, the GEMAC strives to remain agile and pertinent in its ability to advise the Governor, his office, and his designated homeland security/emergency management representatives.

This year the GEMAC met four times as is required by the Council’s charter. Quarterly meetings included presentations from MDEM and partners and stakeholders from the emergency management system. Topics of discussion included the collapse of the Francis Scott Key (FSK) Bridge response and recovery efforts, the 2024 Election, disaster risk reduction efforts like the Maryland Mesonet system, and Governor priorities including the Moore Miller State Plan. GEMAC heard presentations on the new Maryland Qualification System as well as the newly established Office of Resilience efforts, from the University of Maryland Center for Disaster Resilience, and from the Governor’s Office of Homeland Security. Through robust conversations with subject matter experts, GEMAC made three recommendations over the course of 2024:

Recommendation 1: MDEM staff continue to explore opportunities for data integration with the University of Maryland, and update GEMAC in 2025 on the progress of the Maryland Mesonet system.

Recommendation 2: Members should engage with the UMD Center for Disaster Resilience to coordinate presentations for members’ respective organizations, and MDEM should continue to develop partnerships with the Center in the areas of climate adaptation, including Capstone project opportunities.

Recommendation 3: The State should explore the use of AI to quickly identify and debunk mis- and disinformation.

GEMAC members continue to provide relevant connections, perspectives, and unique experiences through a wide array of representation within and adjacent to the Emergency Management field.

Purpose, Mission, and Scope of Work

The GEMAC is authorized by statute and is charged with advising the Governor on all matters that relate to emergency management in Maryland.¹ In addition, Executive Order 01.01.1987.11 designates the GEMAC as Maryland's State Emergency Response Commission² (SERC) in accordance with Title III of the Federal Superfund Amendments.

A primary focus of the State's overarching emergency management strategy is a whole-community approach, working not only with government stakeholders at the federal, state, and local levels, but also with non-governmental organizations, private sector partners, communities, and individuals throughout the emergency management system. In keeping with this whole-community approach, the GEMAC brings together subject matter experts from a wide range of disciplines, backgrounds, and geographic areas to discuss and develop specific recommendations for further study or investigation. As an independent advisory body, GEMAC members are given the opportunity to provide input and comment on the State's activities in moving Maryland forward and developing a comprehensive emergency management program.

Representation

By law, the GEMAC must include fair and reasonable representation from local government; representation from organizations that represent volunteer firefighters and rescue squads; and representation from manufacturing, utilities, and communications industries. There is no size limit or minimum membership requirement for the GEMAC; individuals appointed to the GEMAC serve two-year terms.

The GEMAC is composed of 20 members, including the Chairman. The Chairman of the GEMAC is Ronald Gill, Director of the Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Management, Prince George's County. The Chair of the State Emergency Response Commission, SERC, is Doug Brown, Deputy Director of Public Works for Carroll County. For a complete list of membership for the 2024 GEMAC, see Appendix A.

Summary of 2024 Meetings

The GEMAC met four times in 2024 as required by the Council's charter. Originally scheduled to meet in March, the first meeting of the GEMAC did not occur until July due to the Francis Scott Key Bridge collapse response.

July 17, 2024 Meeting

The first meeting of the year for the GEMAC included the following agenda items:

- Review of GEMAC requirements and introduction of new MDEM support staff
- Briefing from the Disaster Risk Reduction Directorate
- Briefing on the Moore Miller State Plan

¹ Maryland Code Annotated, Public Safety Article, §§ 14-105 (a) and (d)

² Code of Maryland Regulations 01.01.1987.11

- Briefing from the Governor's Office of Homeland Security
- State Emergency Response Commission updates

GEMAC Updates. At the first meeting of 2024, MDEM staff provided an update and review of the standard requirements associated with serving on a Governor appointed council/commission (e.g., the appointment process and the council's current status, attendance requirements, Open Meetings Act, and reporting requirements) for GEMAC members. Staff also provided a summary of the Governor's FY25 budget and the steps taken through the Board of Public Works (BPW) action which reduced the appropriation to the State [Disaster Recovery Fund](#)³ from \$2 million to \$1.5 million. The Maryland [Mesonet Project](#)⁴ funding was reduced by \$250,000, and staff indicated this reduction would not have an impact on the existing plans for system buildout and maintenance.

GEMAC members discussed other streams of funding for the State from the cannabis industry, funding allocation for the Disaster Recovery fund, and operational impacts for the State Emergency Operation Center (SEOC). The Council made no specific recommendations for action.

Disaster Risk Reduction Briefing. MDEM's Disaster Risk Reduction Directorate presented on Maryland Mesonet Program and the potential advantages of real-time weather monitoring for preparedness/early response. The Maryland Mesonet Program is a joint effort between MDEM and the University of Maryland. The program was developed because of Maryland's diverse state on multiple fronts (i.e., a topographical difference of 5 -7 miles which is significant). A mesonet (MESOscale Network) is a network of automated weather observing stations that take frequent and reliable atmospheric measurements. Data is transferred wirelessly to a central server, where it can be displayed on a website with visualizations, maps, charts, and archives. Data is distributed to the National Weather Service (NWS) and the National Mesonet Program for weather model ingestion verification and early detection/warning.

GEMAC members offered an interesting consideration regarding the integration of flood warning gauges with the Mesonet Program to potentially increase capacity (e.g., integration of Pennsylvania's gauges could be useful for hazardous materials monitoring and surrounding states). Additionally, members recommended considering how the Mesonet Program can be used to anticipate flying conditions from a planning perspective for various aircraft, for instance, the national guard and Governor's Office.

Recommendation 1: MDEM staff continue to explore opportunities for data integration with the University of Maryland, and update GEMAC in 2025 on the progress of the Maryland Mesonet system.

³<https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/mgawebsite/Legislation/Details/sb0650?ys=2023RS#:~:text=Establishing%20the%20State%20Disaster%20Recovery,Opposite:%20Appropriations>

⁴ <https://mesonet.umd.edu/index.html>

Moore Miller State Plan Briefing. MDEM Chief Development Officer & Legislative Liaison briefed on the [Moore Miller State Plan](#)⁵ to provide context and clearly indicated the goal for establishing the State Plan, to distinctly illustrate the Governor's vision. The Governor's ten priorities are that Maryland *Leave No One Behind* by:

- Ending child poverty in the State of Maryland
- Setting Maryland's students up for success
- Creating safer communities
- Connecting Marylanders to jobs
- Creating an equitable, robust, and competitive economy
- Making the State of Maryland a desirable and affordable home for all residents
- Advancing infrastructure to better connect all Marylanders to opportunities and each other
- Ensuring world-class health systems for all Marylanders
- Making Maryland a leader in clean energy and the greenest state in the country
- Making Maryland a state of service

Performance cabinets have been established to track and monitor performance. Each agency was asked to determine how the agency would fit under the Governor's vision, by identifying strategies and performance indicators. The plan is intended to be a living document, adjusting to new data and successes/challenges. MDEM shared areas where the Department has emergency management strategies and performance measures incorporated into the Economy, Housing, and Environment Performance Cabinets.

Governor's Office of Homeland Security. The Acting Director for the Governor's Office of Homeland Security briefed GEMAC on the priorities of the Governor's Office of Homeland Security (GOHS). The Governor's collaborative approach entailed identifying priorities by examining the Federal, State, Local, Municipal, and regional groups. While collecting existing resources, leveraging those resources, and rebranding for the GOHS the following were identified priorities:

- Election Security
- Reducing Cyber Threats to Critical Infrastructure
- Domestic Violence Extremism
- Extreme Weather

⁵ <https://governor.maryland.gov/priorities/Documents/2024%20State%20Plan.pdf>

SERC. Finally, the State Emergency Response Commission (SERC) Chair in tandem with MDEM briefed on the Safer Communities by Chemical Accident Prevention Rule. The Maryland Department of Environment (MDE) flagged this as an area of interest for the SERC. The rule was initially published in 2019 removed and revised by EPA and was reissued in 2024 as final rule. The rule updated the Risk Management Program requirements, specifically focusing on new training and drill/exercise requirements for facilities.

- Facilities are required to:
 - Conduct notification exercises once a year, which includes notifications to local emergency responders and the SERC
 - Hold at least one field exercise of a simulated release every 10 years which includes local responders
 - Produce a report for the exercise within 90 days of the exercise
 - EPA is responsible for ensuring compliance. No additional requirements for State or Local governments beyond participating in the exercise as facility and local plans dictate.
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September 25, 2024 Meeting

The September meeting agenda included:

1. Updates from MDEM
2. Briefing from the University of Maryland for Disaster Resilience
3. Briefing from the Maryland Office of Resilience (MOR)
4. MDEM's briefing on the Maryland Qualification System

MDEM Updates. MDEM delivered brief remarks on Maryland State response operations which include:

1. The September 2024 Medical Waste Incident
2. The 2024 Election
3. Hurricane Season

MDEM provided the GEMAC with an update regarding the Department's headquarters and SEOC operations. MDEM also provided GEMAC an update on the Secretary's #We Care Tour, an opportunity for county emergency management organizations to invite the Secretary to visit for the day and focus on successes and challenges of emergency management at the local level.

UMD Center for Disaster Resilience. Allison C. Reilly, PhD Associate Professor at The Pedro E. Wasmer and Professor in Engineering, Dept. Civil and Environmental Engineering presented on the mission and capabilities of the UMD Center for Disaster Resilience and to provide a briefing on the center's projects. Professor Reilly has a particular focus on risk equity and rural coastal

communities, vulnerable to sea level rise.⁶ UMD Center for Disaster Resilience's scope of work relates to climate resilience (e.g. hazard assessment, risk in the built environment, disaster finance, disaster policy, and infrastructure adaptation).⁷

Recommendation 2: Members should engage with the UMD Center for Disaster Resilience to coordinate presentations for members' respective organizations, and MDEM should continue to develop partnerships with the Center in the areas of climate adaptation, including Capstone project opportunities.

Maryland's Chief Resilience Officer, Mike Hinson provided a briefing on the establishment of the Maryland Office of Resilience (MOR), its priorities, and current operations. Mr. Hinson provided Maryland's definition of resilience, and spoke at length about the State Resilience Strategy effort and the Resilience Toolkit. Maryland's definition of resilience is:

Resilience is the ability of communities to adapt to the adapt to the challenges of changing conditions and disasters including human-caused and natural hazards – and to build, advance, and maintain capacities related to quality of life, health and wellbeing, durable systems, economic vitality, human made and nature-based infrastructure, and sustainable environmental systems.

MOR is also participating in a Department of Commerce to work with Federal partners related to the Resilient Maryland Defense Communities Project. Maryland was selected for military installations which is reported to have a \$61.4 billion economic impact.

Council members discussed the possibility of regulatory action to achieve the priorities of MOR as well as demonstrated interest in exploring the State Capital Expenditure budget for hazard mitigation and resilience.

Maryland Qualification System. The Department's Consequence Management team provided an update on the Maryland Qualification System, Maryland's implementation of the federally-required National Qualification System. As a part of the National Incident Management Systems resource management component, the state's qualification system provides standardization qualifications, and credential processes that standardize all response, incident workforce, personnel, across multiple types of disciplines for an improved nationwide approach to managing disasters and bring incident workforce partners to support other localities and even the federal government. FEMA catalyzed the implementation of credentialing by leveraging distribution of preparedness grants, as the requirement is included as a stipulation under the Notice of Funding opportunity for states and localities. Recipients of the Emergency Management Performance grant are required to implement the national qualification system fully by the end of

⁶ <https://cee.umd.edu/clark/faculty/289/Allison-Reilly>

⁷ <https://cdr.umd.edu/>

the calendar year 2025. MDEM is coordinating the Maryland Qualification System as part of its role as the state administrative agency for FEMA preparedness grants.

Council members inquired about the burden of credentialing at the state compared to local jurisdictions, MDEM reported the burden is mostly on local jurisdictions only when personnel are interested in deploying outside the State of Maryland.

October 30, 2024 Meeting

The October meeting agenda was limited to briefings on state government Election Security preparedness activities. Acting Director Travis Nelson of the Governor's Office of Homeland Security briefed GEMAC on national and regional considerations, and particularly discussed the threat of mis- and disinformation to Election Day and the days following the election. Acting Director Nelson also updated GEMAC members on emergency directives for state agencies to update social media passwords, forced logout, ensure implementation of multifactor authentication, and creation of new passwords to increase security of accounts and decrease risk of unauthorized use of trusted accounts to post or promote mis- or disinformation.

The MDEM Consequence Management team briefed the GEMAC on planning and coordination efforts up to, on, and following election day. In the lead up to election day, MDEM partnered with the State Board of Elections and coordinated two tabletop exercises with 24 local boards of election to prepare for potential disruptions to the election. After-action reports were prepared and provided to the State Board of Election for each exercise. The MDEM team outlined the Department's activation plans for election day, state election certification day, national election certification day, and the inauguration.

Council members inquired about early detection of faulty AI and best practice if any available, including leveraging resources for debunking misinformation.

<p>Recommendation 3: The State should explore the use of AI to quickly identify and debunk mis- and disinformation.</p>
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December 18, 2024 Meeting

GEMAC members gathered to review the recommendations for the year and discuss upcoming topics for 2025. Areas of interest include legislative updates, emergency management in the higher education setting, updates on fixed nuclear plant incident preparedness, national and regional best practices in the area of emergency management, and updates from key state partners including the Maryland Center for School Safety.

Appendix A: 2024 GEMAC Members

Name	Title	Status
Michael Berna	Fire Chief, Maryland Fire Chiefs Association	Member
Jonathan Bratt	Assistant Vice President, Enterprise Resilience, University of Maryland	Member
Douglas Brown	Deputy Director, Carroll County Department of Public Works	Member
Jonathan Dayton	Volunteer Firefighter/EMT, Allegany County & President of Allegany County Volunteer Fire Rescue Association	Member
Jonathan Favorite	Director, Strategic Partnerships	Member
Dwayne Freeman	Athletic Director, Facilities Coordinator for School Safety and Security Team at South Hagerstown High School	Member
Ronald Gill	Director of Emergency Management & Homeland Security, Prince George's County	Chair
Tiffany Green	Fire Chief, Prince George's County Fire and EMS Department	Member
Adrian Grieve	Division Disaster State Relations Director (PA, MD, DE, DC & FEMA Region 3), American Red Cross	Member
Jasper Jones	Grants Management Specialist, U.S. Department of Labor	Member
Joseph Lafleur	Manager, Crisis Management/Business Continuity/IT Disaster Recovery, GP Strategies Corporation	Member
Jennifer Martin	Deputy Commissioner, Population Health and Disease Prevention, Baltimore City Health Department	Member
Ryan Miller	Edwards Performance Solutions, Director, Organizational Resilience	Member
Thomas Moran	Executive Director, All Hazards Consortium	Member
Marvely Nettles	Consultant, Risk Management	Member
Robert Poole	Retired Special Agent, FBI; ODNI, Insider Threat SME	Member
Kevin Simmons	Director, Office of Emergency Management City of Annapolis	Member
Clay Stamp	County Manager, Talbot County	Member
David Wilenborg	Sr. Engineer, Technical Support, Department of Defense/NAVAIR	Member
Ex-Officio & Support Staff		
Russell Strickland	Secretary, MDEM	Ex-Officio
MG Janeen L. Birkhead	The Adjutant General	Ex-Officio
BG Adam Flasch, (USA), Ret.	Director, Maryland Governor's Office of Homeland Security	Ex-Officio
Anna Sierra	Chief Development Officer & Legislative Liaison, MDEM	Staff Support
Brittany Cook	Executive Associate, MDEM	Staff Support