

# Dept. of Military Affairs: Wisconsin Public-Private Partnership Summit focuses on planning and preparedness

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WISCONSIN DELLS, Wis. – Responding to and recovering from a disaster is a community-wide effort, with public agencies, volunteer groups, businesses and residents all playing a role in the process. Ensuring those many interests can share information and find resources can be crucial to protecting people and restoring services as quickly as possible.

Improving the public and private sector communication and planning that goes on before, during, and after a disaster was the focus of Wisconsin Emergency Management's (WEM) third annual Public-Private Partnership Summit, held this week at the Wilderness Resort's Glacier Canyon Conference Center in Wisconsin Dells. The summit brought together over a hundred representatives from the public and private sectors, including emergency managers, first responders, and those working for volunteer organizations and private businesses.

“With recent events across the nation, as well as the ongoing recovery efforts taking place, the need for collaboration and whole community preparedness and recovery is more imperative than ever,” said WEM Acting Administrator Greg Engle. “This summit is an opportunity to make those connections now, before they are needed during a disaster.”

WEM partnered with organizers of the Dells Area Response Exercise Series (DARES) for the summit, which also included training sessions on preparedness planning and a demonstration on responding to catastrophic events. Lake Delton Director of Public Safety Hardman said it's another piece of their ongoing efforts to improve collaboration on the local level.

"The private sector and the public sector need to collaborate because we're all affected by the event," Hardman said.

The summit featured several presentations on topics that included emergency management practices at Walt Disney World Resorts, public sector resources for combatting cyber and physical attacks, and lessons learned by private businesses during emergency incidents they have experienced.

During a panel discussion on how the private sector can access federal, state, and local resources to help with recovery efforts, U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) Public Affairs Specialist Kathy Cook offered advice to those seeking help from the government after a disaster. She stressed the importance of learning about the available assistance, how to apply, information to submit and managing expectations. Most assistance for businesses is in the form of low-interest loans, not grants. SBA strives to make loan determinations within 2-3 weeks after receiving a complete application package.

"One of the biggest challenges that people don't realize is that regardless of whether you had insurance, whether you are involved in a presidentially-declared disaster, money is not instant," Cook said. "Whereas it may take minutes, hours, maybe days for the disaster to occur, recovery takes a long time. And the bigger the disaster, the more problematic it can be. Widespread damage may result in limited building supplies and construction professionals. However, those businesses with existing disaster preparedness plans are much more likely to survive, recover

and thrive afterward.”

Cook and others on the panel encouraged businesses and non-profits to remain persistent when dealing with disaster assistance programs. With many programs, an initial denial is not always the end, since there’s often an opportunity to appeal the decision. She suggested carefully reading the agency’s correspondence, following the guidance, submitting additional information and to call for help if they have questions.

WEM’s Public-Private Partnership program and Business Emergency Operations Center (BEOC) play a key role in working to improve disaster response efforts in the state and build the collaborations and planning highlighted during the summit. WiscLift Chief Executive Officer Scott Williams, a BEOC liaison, said the summit helped to show both sides what the other has to offer.

“The private community is about more than donating resources. When there’s a need for bottled water or clothing, you’ll see a lot of businesses step up,” Williams said, “but we’re also good at providing emergency management services. From communications to dump trucks, it’s those private businesses that bring so much to the table.”

The Public-Private Partnership Summit is one of many opportunities WEM offers throughout the year, including a planned active shooter incident workshop early next year. More information on the state’s BEOC and other programs focused on building community resilience is available at <https://dma.wi.gov/DMA/wem/-preparedness/beoc-public-private-partnerships>.