

# Sen. Ballweg: Supporting Wisconsin's specialized emergency response teams

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Madison... Senator Joan Ballweg (R-Markesan) and Representative Amy Loudenberg (R-Clinton) authored a bill that makes several changes to state statute to ensure Wisconsin is able to maintain our critical emergency response teams. This legislation was signed into law as [2021 Act 104](#).

The Division of Emergency Management within the Department of Military Affairs (DMA) contracts with local agencies to staff both Wisconsin's Structural Collapse Team and the Regional Hazardous Materials Response Teams.

Wisconsin's Structural Collapse Team was created in 2009 and is comprised of 11 fire departments. The task force has been mobilized four times, including once in my district in response to the explosion at Cambria's Didion Milling plant.

The Regional Hazardous Materials Response Teams have been in existence for 26 years and are activated when there are incidents involving hazardous material spills, leaks, explosions or injuries, or if there is an immediate threat to life, the environment or property. There are currently 21 Regional Hazardous Materials Response Teams across the state.

"Our local firefighters and hazmat teams who serve on these task forces put themselves in dangerous situations," said Ballweg. "Without the structural collapse team and their specialized training and equipment during Cambria's explosion in

2017, there was potential to lose many more lives that day. I authored this legislation to support the individuals who serve on these teams and allow them to receive the necessary training to make sure Wisconsin is prepared to adequately respond to future emergencies.”

Provisions in the bill include:

- Transitioning the Wisconsin Structural Collapse Team into an Urban Search and Rescue Team, as defined by the National Fire Protection Agency and Emergency Management Accreditation program standards. This will allow the team to respond to many different types of incidents beyond structural collapse, including vehicle extrication, confined space, wide space and water rescues.
- Providing certainty to our local agencies that when they are deployed, they will be swiftly reimbursed for their services. DMA will reimburse municipalities within 60 days while DMA seeks reimbursement from a responsible party.
- Allowing DMA to reimburse a local agency for an increase in contributions for duty disability premiums.

This bill was drafted at the request of several Wisconsin fire chiefs and is supported by many associations representing local governments, fire departments and emergency services.