

Dept. of Military Affairs: Wisconsin's critical infrastructure partners focus on statewide

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MADISON, Wis. – The Wisconsin Department of Military Affairs hosted the biennial natural gas and electric public-private partnership meeting Feb. 20, at Joint Force Headquarters on Madison's northeast side.

The meeting between representatives from natural gas and electric utilities, Wisconsin Emergency Management, and the Wisconsin National Guard focused on strengthening the coordination required to safeguard Wisconsin's critical energy infrastructure and improve response to emerging threats.

Maj. Gen. Matthew Strub, Wisconsin's adjutant general and homeland security advisor, thanked partners for their continued participation, calling the meeting "a critical touchpoint in how we evolve together." He emphasized that utilities and state agencies share a common mission.

"At the end of the day, we share the same customers – the people of Wisconsin," Strub said. "The stronger our relationships are today, the faster and more effectively we can respond when our citizens need us most."

Strub further relayed that Wisconsin is facing a "new normal" of increased risks, including more severe weather, rising wildfire potential, growing cyber and physical threats, and continually increasing energy demand. "These aren't hypothetical scenarios; they're operational realities that demand proactive planning," he said.

The public-private partnership, commonly referred to as P3, was established in 2015 between electric utilities and Wisconsin government agencies charged with

emergency response. In 2018, the partnership expanded to include statewide natural gas utilities.

Jim Lorenz, vice president of energy operations at Madison Gas and Electric Company, currently serves as chair of electric utilities for the public-private partnership.

“This partnership is about keeping Wisconsin safe and resilient,” said Lorenz. “Not just restoring power or gas, but safeguarding people, critical services and continuity of government.”

According to Lorenz, utilities maintain strong internal emergency plans and national mutual-aid networks; however, large disasters require coordination with state agencies that provide capabilities utilities cannot replicate, including statewide situational awareness, emergency operations centers and military-supported logistics.

“Not all states have the partnerships we have built here in Wisconsin. In fact, very few do,” stated Lorenz. “We should be proud of what we have accomplished, value these important relationships and ensure they continue. We owe that to our state and the people we serve.”

Attending partners discussed improving information sharing through Wisconsin’s Utility Coordination Group, strengthening relationships with tribal and local emergency managers, and expanding joint training opportunities, to include participation in GridEx and Dark Sky exercises.

Following the opportunity for executive engagement, Drew Werner, Wisconsin Emergency Management’s response planning and support section supervisor, introduced attending partners to the State Emergency Operations Center.

Werner referred to the SEOC as the central hub for coordinating statewide emergency response efforts, explaining how it brings together state agencies and other organizations involved in emergency response to maintain situational awareness, allocate resources and support impacted jurisdictions.

“The SEOC strengthens coordinated emergency response efforts with our utility partners by bringing state agencies and electric and natural gas utilities together in one location,” said Werner. “This enables faster information sharing, clearer

understanding of infrastructure impacts and quicker coordination of state support to help expedite utility restoration efforts.”

Strub encouraged continued collaboration ahead of Wisconsin Emergency Management’s Capstone 27 exercise, stating that integrating utility partners into future planning could significantly strengthen statewide readiness.

“Time is the one thing we never get back during a crisis,” Strub said. “We must enable timely, coordinated response through shared insights and shared intelligence. That only happens when we invest in the relationships, the processes and the communication pathways that keep Wisconsin safe.”