



Contact: Alex Paul, Linn County Communications Officer, 541-967-3825 or email: apaul@co.linn.or.us



Neva Anderson, Linn County Health Emergency Manager and chair of the Region II Health Care Coalition addresses the group during recent meeting at the Linn County Fair & Expo Center.

Regional health coalition makes long-term disaster plans

ALBANY — Although it has existed for fewer than two years, the Office of Resilience & Emergency Management is reaching out statewide to assist counties affected by disasters — such as the Labor Day 2020 wildfires in the Santiam Canyon — more than 50 health care and emergency systems coordinators were told May 20.

Members of the Region II Health Care Coalition met for an all-day session on May 20 at the Linn County Fair & Expo Center.

Coalition chair Neva Anderson, Linn County Health Emergency Manager, facilitated the event.

Jeff Gilbert told the group the Office of Resilience & Emergency Management has a staff of 63 and hopes to double that number within the year.

The wildfires of 2020 were the impetus for the formation of the new office.

Gilbert said that when the fires erupted, the ODHA emergency management program had only three staff members, and the Office of Resilience and Emergency Management was formed around that nucleus. Its primary responsibilities include mass care, emergency shelters, food, water and disaster social services.

Since 2020 more than 4,300 people have been provided shelter and the state has provided more than 2.1 million meals.

More than 800 survivors have transitioned into long-term housing. Nearly 80 hotels/motels provided shelter with contracts with the Oregon Department of Human Services.

The office is working with contractors to develop portable shelters that can be implemented quickly after a natural disaster, Gilbert said.

Gilbert said his office has identified four key goals:

- Take ownership of mass care functions.
- Resolve overreliance on non-governmental organizations.
- Collaboration with community-based organizations.

Transition from mass care to disaster housing. Another major goal is developing a statewide program that is prepared if the Cascadia earthquake occurs. That will require consistent funding resources to ensure that emergency and recovery functions are adequately executed.

Gilbert said his office also assisted with COVID-19 vaccination programs and learned that vaccination rates went up if participants received a meal. So, the state contracted with vendors to provide meals and food boxes around the state.

To meet its goals, Oregon needs to:

- Permanently staff the mass care mission
- Enable effective emergency coordination through training and exercise
- Provide facilities, equipment and supplies to enable faster statewide deployment of mass care resources
- Build communities' capacity to empower effective local response across the state



Above: Linn County Sheriff's Office Emergency Manager Ric Lentz (partially hidden), Undersheriff Micah Smith and Neva Anderson are shown in the display of emergency equipment and tools on display during the Region II Health Care Coalition meeting held May 20 at the Linn County Fair & Expo. **Below:** Jeff Gilbert, outlines the goals of the Office of Resilience & Emergency Management.

Participants also heard from Curtis Ryun, who talked about the many projects underway at the Legacy Health Center Burn Center; Cathy Orcutt, who talked about the CISA emergency telecommunications system and had round table discussions.

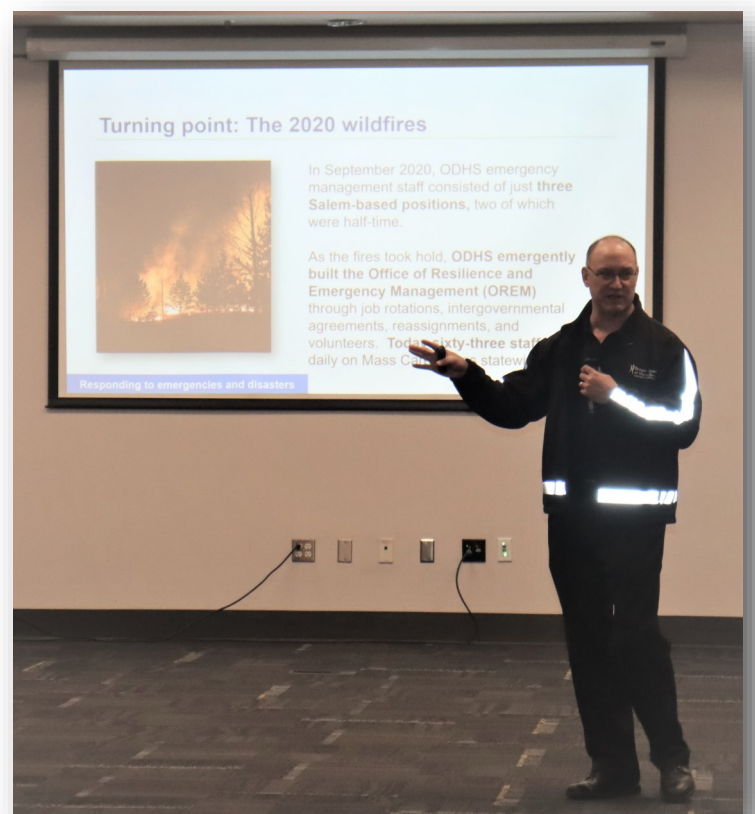
Numerous pieces of emergency equipment were on display for participants to look over.

The Region II Healthcare Coalition meets every other month and is composed of partners from six surrounding counties and four sectors (hospitals, Public Health, Emergency Management, and Fire/EMS agencies).

Anderson, who has chaired the Coalition for three years, said the goal is to "Prepare on blue sky days, versus being reactive during an emergency. We make plans and develop contacts and then exercise those plans to ensure they will work."

She said the coalition was formed after the 9-11 terrorist attacks.

The program is federally funded by the Assistant Secretary of Preparedness and Response.



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