



2020 Annual Report

THE VISION OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT IS THAT COWLEY COUNTY, KANSAS WILL BE A COMMUNITY OF CITIES AND CITIZENS WHO ARE DISASTER AWARE AND DISASTER PREPARED.

MARCH 23, 2021



Emergency Management Staff

Brian Stone, CEM®, KCEM
Director

John Stradal, KCEM
Assistant Coordinator

Jason Kazban, KCEM, MEP
EM Specialist

Taylor Dory, KCEM
Volunteer Coordinator

Cowley Co. Emergency Auxiliary (CCEA)

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President

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Glenda Schmidt
Treasurer

Ron Upton
Communications Officer

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Cowley County Emergency Management's Mission is:

To save lives, protect property and reduce the impacts of disasters through the mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery phases of Emergency Management.

Accomplishments and Highlights

Brian Stone, CEM® , KCEM - Director

Brian was selected by the Kansas Emergency Management Association (KEMA) Board of Directors to represent the organization as a member of the Kansas Association of Counties (KAC) Board of Directors. He began the first year of his second and final term. Brian is a member of the International Association of Emergency Managers (IAEM) and the Kansas Emergency Management Association (KEMA), Kansas Association of Public Information Officers (KAPIO) and facilitates the local PIO Working Group.

John Stradal, KCEM - Assistant Coordinator

John continues to serve as the Vice-President for the South-Central Region of the Kansas Emergency Management Association, representing the region as one of 11 members on the KEMA Board of Directors. He is also involved with the Cowley County Amateur Radio Club and works with this organization to build and enhance communications capabilities within the county.

Jason Kazban, KCEM, MEP - EM Specialist

Jason, who performs duties as an Emergency Management Specialist, finished his term on the Board of Directors for Leadership Cowley County (LCC). He is an instructor on the LCC curriculum committee as well. Jason is also a member of KAPIO (Kansas Association of Public Information Officers) and the local Cowley County PIO group.

Taylor Dory, KCEM - Volunteer Coordinator

Taylor has worked hard since he began his career with Emergency Management in early 2017. He successfully received his Kansas Certified Emergency Manager (KCEM) professional certification through the Kansas Emergency Management Association. The KCEM is a certificate only bestowed upon those who have met specific requirements including employment, experience and professional training and education. Taylor is a volunteer firefighter for Cowley County Fire District #3 – Burden.

Cowley County Demographics

Population: 34,908 (2019)

Area: 1,132 mi²

Cities: Arkansas City, Atlanta, Burden, Cambridge, Dexter, Geuda Springs (partial), Parkerfield, Udall and Winfield

Townships: 25

Colleges: Cowley College (Arkansas City)
Southwestern College (Winfield)

School Districts: 462-Burden, 463-Udall, 465-Winfield, 470-Arkansas City, and 471-Dexter

Emergency Management Volunteers

When emergencies occur or disasters strike, volunteers are a welcome sight for EM Staff and a vital resource for all agencies. Volunteers are a crucial part of the Emergency Management program as they are willing to endure the worst conditions to help when needed. Volunteers give their time and effort without expecting anything in return.

COWLEY COUNTY EMERGENCY AUXILIARY (CCEA)



The Cowley County Emergency Auxiliary is a volunteer-based group that acts under the direction of Cowley County Emergency Management. The original group dates to August 8th, 1985. The CCEA's primary role has previously been to provide trained storm spotters for Cowley County. This elite group of volunteers donates their valuable time and provides a commitment to ensure the safety of Cowley County residents through early warnings and work closely with other public safety agencies within the county. The Cowley County Emergency Auxiliary continues to be a big part of the community by working with the public in weather and personal safety.

In recent years, Cowley County EM had four separate volunteer groups: Cowley County Emergency Auxiliary (CCEA), Community Emergency Response Teams (CERT), County Animal Response Team (CART) and Radio Amateur Civil Emergency Service (RACES).

Over the years, several common themes were noticed: 1) The number of volunteers for each group was diminishing slowly; 2) Volunteers were cross-training to learn parts of each group; and 3) Having separate groups was not only time consuming for EM staff, but time consuming for the volunteers.

EM staff and key leadership began the discussion of consolidating all the groups into one large group. The goal was to create one diverse group to carry out a multitude of functions to assist EM and the community.

CCEA Volunteers have the ability to focus on one or more of the core functions:

- **EOC Support** – work in the EOC during severe weather or other emergencies/disasters. These volunteers can provide assistance with dispatching, logging, mapping, radar interpretation and public information.
- **Severe Weather Spotting** – training spotters to go into the field during severe weather events to relay ground truth information back to the EOC.
- **Field/Event Support** – provide support to agencies or groups during emergencies and non-emergency events or activities. Emergency events could include manning a barricade, providing traffic control, supporting shelter operations. Non-emergency events could include parade assistance or a public-oriented safety event.
- **Auxiliary Communications (AUXCOMM)** – provide assistance to EM or other public safety entities by supporting or augmenting regular communications systems or by establishing and maintaining backup systems in case of primary system failure.

A CCEA trainee must meet minimum training requirements as set forth in their by-laws and then each function has its own set of training. Those who wish to be considered for a leadership position have additional training as well.

What volunteers bring is the human touch, the individual, caring approach that no government program, however well-meaning and well-executed, can deliver.

~ Edward James Olmos

Fundraisers

Unfortunately, one of the many victims of 2020 was the Dexter BBQ 5K-2M run/walk. Plans were underway and donations were beginning to arrive when the tough decision was made to cancel the event. Participants that were pre-registered were offered full refunds for their fees. Four donations had been received and their generous nature was evident when they all chose to leave their funds with the CCEA and not take them back. Those groups were KPM Computer Solutions, O'Reilly Auto Parts, Dexter Outreach Center and McKenna & Company, LLC. We appreciate their kindness and willingness to support the cause.

The CCEA did apply for a grant through the Kansas Pipeline Association (KPA). The CCEA was awarded \$1,635.00 which was used to purchase Streamlight Stinger flashlights for volunteers.



L-R: Taylor Dory, Cowley County Emergency Management Volunteer Coordinator; Richard Ubben Tallgrass Energy representing the Kansas Pipeline Association; Adam Bauler, Cowley County Emergency Auxiliary Vice-President and Cameron Groom, Cowley County Emergency Auxiliary President.

CCEA awarded a \$1,635 grant from the Kansas Pipeline Association(KPA).

Community Outreach and Education

Public Education and Outreach

Public education and outreach are a major part of our day-to-day duties in Emergency Management. While we cannot reach everybody, it is important to reach as many citizens as possible to share public safety tips and preparedness information. As noted, 2020 was a bit different and these events were cut short. We were able to attend activities at Adams Elementary in Arkansas City, Irving Elementary in Winfield and a safety seminar by Story of a Runner (SOAR) in Ark City reaching a total of 226 people. Each activity we attend is an opportunity to educate or assist one our citizens and we truly enjoy every opportunity we have.

Storm Fury on the Plains

The annual storm spotter training was held at the Cowley Cinema 8 Theater near Strother Field on Tuesday, February 25th. Two separate presentations were given by meteorologists with the National Weather Service in Wichita. The 2:30pm presentation had 61 attendees and the 6:30pm presentation had 157 attendees for a total of 218. Twenty NOAA All-Hazard Weather Radios were given away during those sessions which now provide early severe weather warnings to that many new households in Cowley County.



Turn Around Don't Drown Signs

The National Weather Service in Wichita accepted applications for counties to apply for 'Turn Around Don't Drown' signs to be placed near locations that commonly flood and create dangerous conditions for drivers. Cowley County applied for and received two of the signs to be placed on 26th Road west of Rock in northern Cowley County. Once the signs are received, the Public Works Department will install them as one more reminder to avoid flooded roadways.



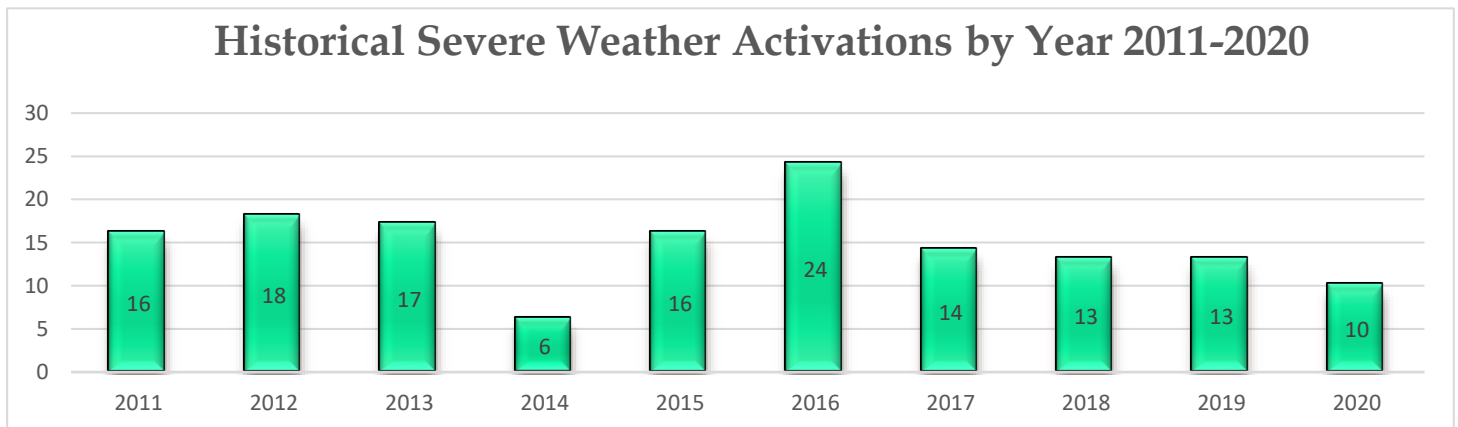
Alone we can do little; together we can do so much ~ Helen Keller

Severe Weather Operations

Cowley County EM, by use of the Emergency Operations Center, coordinates severe weather response activities. The EOC is the hub for all spotters, fire, law and citizens to submit reports. Outdoor Warning Sirens are sounded from the EOC and maintaining situational awareness during severe weather is a top priority for the citizens.

Severe Weather Statistics for 2020

EOC Activations: 10	Time in the EOC: 9 hours and 26 minutes
Severe Thunderstorm Watches: 7	Tornado Watches: 0
Severe Thunderstorm Warnings: 18	Tornado Warnings: 0
Severe Hail Reports: 7	Tornadoes: 0
Severe Wind Reports: 0	Significant Weather Advisories: 61



Shelf cloud approaching Winfield from the southwest at 7:25am on July 16, 2020.
Photo courtesy of Taylor Dory, Cowley County EM.

Communications

Amateur Radio Class

Cowley County Emergency Management, in cooperation with the Cowley County Amateur Radio Club, once again held a Technician Level Amateur Radio class in 2020. Amateur Radio is a form of two-way radio communication where licensed operators may communicate with other Amateur Radio operators both locally and around the world. Amateur Radio operators are often able to still communicate when other means fail and have been valuable assets during many large-scale disasters. Classes began during the month of February and concluded in June after being paused due to the pandemic. A total of 4 new operators received their license as a result of this year's class. Through classes held since 2011, the total number of new operators in Cowley County is now 94.

Preparedness

Weather-Ready Nation Ambassador

As a Weather-Ready Nation Ambassador, Cowley County serves in a role in affecting societal change by helping build a nation that is ready, responsive, and resilient to the impacts of extreme weather and water events. As an Ambassador, we are committed to the following:



- 1) Promoting Weather-Ready Nation messages;
- 2) Engaging with NOAA personnel on potential collaboration opportunities;
- 3) Sharing our success stories of preparedness; and
- 4) Serving as an example by educating employees on workplace preparedness.

Cowley County was the first County in the South-Central Region (and the 26-County Wichita Forecast Area) to become a Weather-Ready Nation Ambassador. To date, there are 56 different agencies/entities in the State of Kansas that are Weather-Ready Nation Ambassadors.

StormReady®

Cowley County is proud to be a StormReady® County since 1999. To remain a StormReady® community, Cowley County must adhere to the following guidelines:



- 1) Communication: establish a 24-hour warning point (CCEC) and establish an EOC;
- 2) NWS Information Reception: have 4 separate ways for the EOC/WP to received NWS alerts;
- 3) Hydrometeorological Monitoring: have 3 separate ways to receive hydrometeorological data
- 4) Community Preparedness: have a minimum of 3 weather safety talks annually, train spotters and dispatchers biannually, and host an annual NWS spotter training; and
- 5) Administrative: have a formal hazardous weather operations plan, biennial visits by the Emergency Manager to the NWS, and an annual visit by NWS official to the community.

This year marks the 21st year that Cowley County has been considered a StormReady® county. A new application has been made for a three-year renewal; however, the process has been put on hold due to the pandemic.

As of the end of 2020, Kansas had 52 StormReady® designations, with 36 of those being Counties.

EXERCISES

Due to the pandemic and the inability to have in-person gatherings for much of the year, the exercises that were previously scheduled were not held.

However, we were able to participate in the South-Central Kansas Primary Care Tabletop Exercise, Risk Assessment and Emergency Preparedness Training virtually on November 18, 2020. This event included representatives from the South-Central Kansas Medical Center, the Ark City Clinic and Cowley County Emergency Management.

Multi-Year Training and Exercise Plan

Cowley County, in compliance with the Emergency Management Performance Grant (EMPG) requirements, worked to complete a multi-year Training and Exercise Plan (during a Training and Exercise Planning Workshop) following the LEPC meeting in December. Entities and jurisdictions from all areas of Cowley County came together virtually to develop a three-year plan for training and exercising. Each entity has specific "requirements" for training and exercising. This concept pulls all entities together and works on a collective plan to suit the needs of all participants. This is the sixth year Cowley County has completed this plan, which is reviewed mid-year. This year's workshop had representatives from fifteen separate entities which emphasizes the need for continued collaboration among all agencies.

TRAINING

Training for 2020 was limited to self-study or online courses due to the pandemic.

WORKING WITH AND IN THE COMMUNITY

PIO Working Group

Formed in 2016, the PIO Working Group is comprised of Public Information and Public Relations Officers from entities across Cowley County. Our mission is to provide accurate information in a timely manner to help citizens make informed decisions.

Day to day events show us the need to disseminate information in a routine manner. However, emergency events or disasters dictate an immediate response to the community. Together, this group is learning to share resources, how to disseminate accurate information quickly, yet remain responsible for their own jurisdiction.

The Cowley County PIO Working Group was able to work together this year during the COVID-19 Pandemic. The PIO function was led by the City-Cowley County Health Department. Overall, the group had 46 participants.

Preparedness

"When you need it, but don't have it.... you sing a different tune." ~ Burt Gummer

NOTABLE EVENTS

Grouse Creek Wildfire January 8, 2020

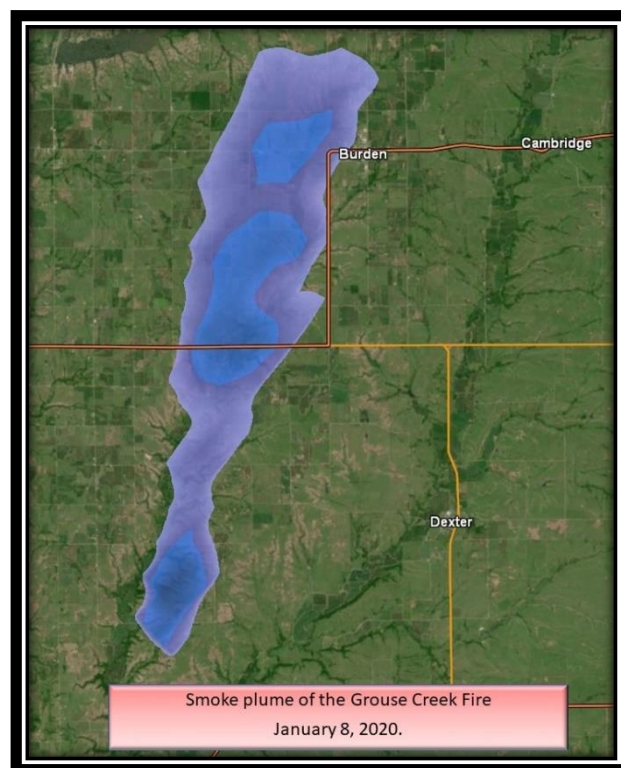
At 1:08pm a grass fire started approximately 1 mile north of the US 166 and Grouse Creek Road junction. The fire spread primarily to the north in a rural area that was difficult for fire crews to reach. Crews from approximately 30 different agencies battled this fire until it was under control at 5:28pm.

The initial fire notification was made by the NWS from their Hot Spot notification. 911 calls started just seconds after receiving the first message.

Cowley Alerts was used to send three separate messages to residents in the area. The alerts were sent to 51 different residents.

Many different entities came together that day to provide support. The Dexter Community Building was opened as a place for firefighters to get food and water. Groves Oil out of Ark City was there to provide fuel if needed.

The American Red Cross was there until 10pm providing food and drinks to those units who were able to leave. For those still at the scene, an ARC volunteer drove food and drinks to them. A special thanks goes to Wal-Mart in Winfield for donating water for the firefighters.



COVID-19 Pandemic

The year 2020 taught us all a lot and brought to light many terms – some common and some rarely seen. Those terms include social distancing, flatten the curve, quarantine, isolation, asymptomatic, community spread, essential, front line, PPE and many more. While this pandemic consumed most of 2020 for everyone and it was a huge part of the year in Emergency Management, we do not plan to spend a lot of time covering this.

Emergency Management focused a large portion of time on logistics during the pandemic. We spent many days, nights and weekends making sure that agencies were able to obtain supplies such as face masks, gloves, face shields, hand sanitizer and even some medications. We spent time assisting with the public information aspect trying to get the right information to the right people in a timely manner. In addition, EM staff spent considerable time assisting with the Coronavirus Aid, Economic Relief and Security (CARES) Act, facilitating an upgrade to the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) and supporting the Quarantine Box (Q-Box) program to get basic supplies to citizens tested at a public testing site.

EOC Upgrade

As part of the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, the State of Kansas awarded Cowley County Emergency Management with a grant to enhance the functionality of our Emergency Operations Center. The grant focused on improvements in several categories intended to help adapt to the challenges faced as a result of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. These categories included connectivity, communications, and mitigation.

Once notified of the grant, we quickly identified our needs and developed a plan to address them. One gap we identified was the lack of videoconferencing ability. Panoramic cameras were purchased for our two primary rooms plus a backup location to enhance our capability to participate in collaborative calls that were happening on a daily basis.

To go along with the new cameras, the projectors and screens in our larger rooms as well as computer monitors in other locations within the office were upgraded to allow us to better see video call participants and any information being shared. The existing TVs in the two larger rooms were relocated to accommodate the new projector screens and were interconnected to allow us to display information from multiple sources and locations on each one.

Another gap identified was our audio systems in the two larger rooms. One room did not have an audio system at all and relied on small portable speakers. The other had an existing system, but it lacked the expansion capability to accommodate audio for the upgraded video capabilities. Both rooms were equipped with new hardware to allow us to meet our needs.

To help protect staff, air scrubbers and portable plastic partitions were purchased for the larger rooms and hallway in our office as well as for our backup location. These measures provided additional protection in high traffic areas and where six-foot distancing was not always possible.

These upgrades and enhancements would not have been possible without the assistance of the County's maintenance staff and the MIS/GIS department. Their help and expertise allowed us to turn raw materials and boxes of equipment into working solutions that will serve our department for many years into the future, and we can't thank them enough.




Social Media in Emergency Management

Cowley County Emergency Management began using social media tools, specifically Facebook and Twitter, in February 2012. Our goal is to reach out and interact with the public before, during and after emergencies or disasters. We share photos, tips, stories, and much, much more. We encourage our citizens to interact with us and provide us with information and feedback. Please be aware that social media outlets are not intended to replace 911 and if anyone has an emergency that requires immediate assistance, please call 911 and do not use social media. We hope to stay connected with our citizens and provide accurate information in a timely, reliable manner.

The Cowley County website is a valuable place to see updated information such as weather situation reports, bridge work, road closings, preparedness tips, departmental plans and volunteer group information. Go to <http://www.cowleycounty.org/em> to check out our latest information.

 Cowley County EM ended the year with 1,119 Twitter followers and had sent a total of 7,540 tweets to our followers. A tweet on July 16 with a photo of a shelf cloud approaching Winfield garnered 6,834 impressions.

 Cowley County EM ended the year with 6,193 Facebook followers. The two cities with the most followers are Winfield (1,953) and Arkansas City (1,820). Posts on two dates generated the most reaches: January 9 (Winter Storm Watch) reached 11,976 viewers and January 8 (radar picture of smoke from the Grouse Creek fire) reached 11,401 viewers.

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