

THE RISK JOURNAL

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Managing Risks Related to Extreme Weather Events

by Cindy C. King, Director
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WINTER WEATHER HAS already made its mark in some parts of Michigan, and the rest of the state is sure to soon follow. MMRMA would like to remind members of the importance of being prepared for inclement winter weather, and what can happen when a forecast of a few inches of snow ends up being much more.

Snowfall averages in Michigan range from 35 inches in Port Huron to 77 inches in Grand Rapids, and 185 inches in Iron Mountain in the Upper Peninsula. While these amounts vary over time, there is some comfort in the relative predictability of snowfall averages when gauging a response to a snow event.

Ice storms less predictable

In February 2023, more than 700,000 electrical customers were without power when a frigid ice storm descended upon southeast Michigan.



Ice storms with freezing rain, sleet, ice and snow are particularly treacherous.

What were once called "hundred-year storms" are now occurring with troubling frequency.

According to the *Detroit Free Press*, "The freezing rain and ice storm that blew through Michigan downed trees and limbs, cut power to about 700,000 homes and businesses, closed schools and offices, suspended the QLINE, delayed air travel, caused car crashes and killed a firefighter in Paw Paw..."

"Michiganders are used to winter ice, but ice storms—a combination of freezing rain, sleet, ice and snow—are relatively rare, and wreak havoc on communities because they

weigh down tree branches, power lines, and roofs; they also coat roadways and railways." ¹

Storm patterns changing

It may not be possible to fully prepare for relatively rare weather events, but planning and mitigation efforts will go a long way when one does occur. Many members have realized that extraordinary weather events—sometimes billed as once in a "hundred-year storms"—are becoming more frequent and damaging.

Several communities across the state have faced heavy rainfall events over the last few years that caused significant flooding that

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Member Resources

MMRMA has developed risk guidance tools to help members plan and prepare for weather events:

- > Facility Condition Assessment
- > Risk Management Planning for Special Events
- > Snow Load Safety Guide—FEMA
- > Surface Ice/Frigid Water Rescue for Fire/EMS
- > Tips to Prevent Pipes from Freezing and Bursting
- > Tips to Safely Thaw Frozen Pipes
- > Winter Activity Safety Model Guidelines for Parks and Recreation Operations
- > Winter Safety Tips, Vol. 1 and 2
- > Winter Weather Checklist

¹ <https://www.freep.com/story/news/local/michigan/2023/02/23/michigan-ice-storm-2023-power-outages/69935226007/>

CASE STUDY

Strengthening Cybersecurity with an Independent Audit

by Jeff Satkowski,
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IN AN ERA WHERE DIGITAL threats loom large, ensuring the security of vital information is paramount. Recognizing this need, the Michigan Public Safety Communications System (MPSCS) extended an invaluable opportunity to Public Safety Answering Points (PSAPs) to undergo an independent cybersecurity audit.

As an interface agency with MPSCS, Lapeer County Central Dispatch eagerly embraced this offer, which was an essential step to fortify our digital defenses. The comprehensive audit was a vital component of MPSCS's broader cybersecurity assessment. Given the interconnected nature of PSAPs across the state, this initiative held even greater weight.

Opting for this audit was an easy decision, as it incurred no cost to our PSAP and addressed a matter of utmost importance. The ever-evolving landscape of cyber threats demands continuous vigilance, and participating in this audit was a proactive stance to safeguard sensitive data and operations.

Protocols prove effective
The results of the cybersecurity



audit spoke volumes about Lapeer County Central Dispatch's commitment to maintaining a secure digital environment. The audit thoroughly evaluated our cybersecurity practices, hygiene, and internal and external penetration testing. The outcome was nothing short of excellent—revealing that our cybersecurity protocols were robust and effective.

A particularly gratifying experience was the auditor's assessment declaring our PSAP as one of the top performers in the state regarding cybersecurity efforts. This recognition is a testament to our team's dedication and our protocols' effectiveness. It reaffirms that our efforts have been fruitful and a fitting example for others to follow.

Addressing audit recommendations

The absence of significant findings or risks was a source of pride. While no system can be entirely immune to

Access cybersecurity best practices, alerts, and related guidance on our member portal at [MMRMA.org](https://mmrma.org).

vulnerabilities, our PSAP demonstrated a commendable level of preparedness.

The audit's recommended actions were primarily centered on minor adjustments, reflecting our proactive approach to cybersecurity even before the audit took place. At the time of publication, many recommendations had already been completed, while others were being implemented.

Value of independent audits

Central to the success of this cybersecurity audit was the decision to engage an independent, third-party company to conduct it. This choice distinguishes our approach both from self-assessments and from audits conducted by IT vendors.

The impartiality of a third-party auditor is paramount.

Unlike self-assessments, this approach ensures that cybersecurity measures are evaluated by unbiased experts who bring fresh perspectives and critical insights. Using the third-party auditor eliminated potential conflicts of interest and presented a transparent evaluation of our security posture.

Trust and transparency

Moreover, relying on an external agency bolsters the credibility of the audit's outcomes. A self-audit—or one performed by a vendor with a vested interest—could be perceived as self-serving, raising doubts about the accuracy and thoroughness of the assessment. In contrast, the involvement of an independent auditor instills confidence in the integrity of the results and recommendations.

The cybersecurity audit conducted under the auspices of the MPSCS is a testament to Lapeer County Central Dispatch's dedication to maintaining digital security.

The voluntary decision to undergo this audit showcases our commitment to protect sensitive data and ensure uninterrupted operations. With favorable results and a commendable standing among PSAPs in the state, we continue to stride confidently toward an even more secure digital future.

Extreme Weather Risks, continued from page 1

collapsed dams and took out roads and bridges. Residents had to endure multiple incidents of flooded basements and destroyed property.

A storm in late August 2023 resulted in the closure of Detroit Metropolitan Airport for a day. Still other regions of the state have faced incidents of strong, damaging windstorms or tornadoes leading to loss of life or property damage.

Wide-reaching effects

Nonprofit, independent media organization Grist reports: "Every four years, the federal government is required to gather up the leading research on how climate change is affecting Americans... and then publish a National Climate Assessment... a collaboration between more than a dozen federal agencies and a wide array of academic researchers."

The report indicates the Midwest "is getting more rain, and that's...bad news for aging dams, roads, bridges, and wastewater facilities, which are already getting overwhelmed by water."

The article notes that the Great Lakes "are among the fastest-warming lakes in the world, with climate change stressing out an ecosystem already plagued by toxic



The Great Lakes are among the fastest-warming lakes in the world, further threatening an already fragile ecosystem.

algae and invasive species and also reducing populations of walleye and trout."

Grist points to "another once-rare phenomenon that'll become more common: wildfire smoke. Midwesterners got a preview this summer when smoke poured in from the fires in Canada, inundating Michigan [and neighboring states] with 'very unhealthy' air." ²

Boosting preparedness

According to the website American City and County,

Wildfire smoke and haze will become more and more common as drought conditions worsen.

"In the first five months of 2023 alone, the United States experienced 11 climate disaster events with confirmed losses of over \$1 billion each. With June's severe weather in the south, that number climbed to 12. Last year, there were 18 such disasters, costing more than \$175 billion and 474 lives."

The site recommends several ways local governments can prepare for weather events:

Leverage data and know who your vulnerable residents are. Safety officials have to know who in their jurisdictions are most at risk and educate those people on the dangers of extreme weather.

Communicate before, during, and after an event. It's important for communications to include informa-

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Best Practices in Preparing for Severe Weather Events

Everbridge, a crisis management software provider, offers these suggestions in its "Preparing for Severe Weather and Other Events":

- > **Conduct a THIRA (thorough hazard identification and risk assessment)**
- > **Identify and work with partners**
- > **Plan for those with accessibility or functional needs**

> **Create a communication plan that fits your community**

> **Use communication channels to your benefit**

> **Amplify communications**

> **Understand what funding is available and who pays for damages**

Use this link for more information on each of these best practices:

<https://www.everbridge.com/blog/7-best-practices-for-emergency-managers/>

² <https://grist.org/climate/national-climate-assessment-2023-us-regional-impacts-summary/>

MMRMA Team Attended Active Shooter Training



In Frankenmuth, the holidays aren't just a season—they last all year long. Michigan's "Little Bavaria" is home to a world-famous Christmas store and a restaurant that serves up more than two million family-style chicken dinners, complete with traditional German trimmings, each year.

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LAST MONTH, MMRMA HOSTED ACTIVE shooter response training for employees at our Livonia office. The session was meant to reinforce skills taught in a similar session in 2019—and in recognition that more than 20 new employees have joined our team since then.

As a risk management-focused organization, MMRMA considers the safety of its employees among our highest priorities. The Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) notes that "the most effective workplace violence prevention plan is one that is put in place long before trouble occurs."

Ron Taig of Tactical Encounters, Inc., presented the classroom training and coordinated the reality-based exercises. Tactical Encounters is also instrumental in the Rapid Response to Active Shooter training that MMRMA has provided to member law enforcement officers for many years.

According to Taig, "This active shooter training, with its simulated sounds of gunfire and people screaming, is as close as employees can come to understanding



how to respond to an actual active violence situation without experiencing one."

Taig adds: "Reality-based training provides stress inoculation, which has proven to decrease reaction time and increase mental performance. This allows people to perform better should the need arise.

"The goal is to help attendees survive a potential active shooter event by instilling the ability to think rationally under extreme stress and take action to protect themselves."

Participants gave the training high marks in a survey. One respondent commented that the training "helped reinforce...strategies needed to stay safe."

Extreme Weather Risks, *continued from page 3*

tion about where people can go to take shelter, or who they can reach out to for aid.

Don't be afraid to think outside the box. During one of the first heat waves of this past summer, New York City used its emergency alert system to ask residents to conserve energy and help prevent rolling power outages that could have left people vulnerable to the heat. The strategy worked—the city avoided major outages, highlighting how mass notifications can be used in non-traditional ways to create positive outcomes.

Advance preparations

Building upon these recommendations, MMRMA encourages members to:

- > Have a current emergency management plan.
- > Develop mutual aid relationships with neighboring communities.
- > Create a business continuity plan for member organizations.
- > Identify snowplow routes and priorities such as access to hospitals or emergency shelters.

Most of us have been advised to always keep our gas tank half-filled and stash a snow scraper and blanket in our vehicle during the winter months. Similarly, managing weather-related risks in communities requires preparing well in advance to help mitigate hazardous outcomes as much as possible.

MMRMA members can access risk guidance tools related to extreme weather on our member portal. Login (or request an account) here: <https://mmrma.org/members/login/>.