2023 WINTER STORM
AFTER-ACTION REVIEW

OREGON DEPARTMENT OF
EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

OEM

AUGUST 29, 2023

OREGON DEPARTMENT OF
EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

Administrative Handling Instructions

The title of this document is **2023 Winter Storm After-Action Review.** The information gathered in this After-Action Review (AAR) is classified *For Internal Use Only*. **This draft AAR contains observations that have yet to be validated and will not be final until reviewed by relevant incident subject matter experts for accuracy.** This document should be safeguarded, handled, transmitted and stored in accordance with appropriate security directives.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This After-Action Review (AAR) focuses on efforts of the state in preparing for and responding to the 2023 Winter Storm event. The state responded to an extreme weather occurrence in the middle of February to early March of 2023 that resulted in a winter storm and Governor-declared State of Emergency. This AAR focuses on the initial Winter Storm event from Feb. 17 to March 4, 2023, in which state agencies and local emergency partners responded and supported to extreme hazardous weather-related issues: Downed utilities, slick driving conditions, transportation, communication lines, loss of heating and other emergency-related issues.

The purpose of this AAR is to summarize key findings and provide recommended actions related to the preparedness and response planning for and implementation of core capability elements for future weather-related events in Oregon. The AAR identifies areas of success and opportunities for improvement for the Oregon Department of Emergency Management (OEM) and the state to take proactive action in helping the agency better prepare and respond to weather resiliency.

The information collected for this report was derived from individuals and organizations that were identified as stakeholders through OEM, partner agencies and affected jurisdictions. This is an evaluation of state systems and coordination effectiveness, not an evaluation of partners' decisions and actions. Documentation related to the preparedness and initial response capabilities for this event was reviewed, including situation reports, daily briefing emails, Incident Action Plans (IAP) and other forms.
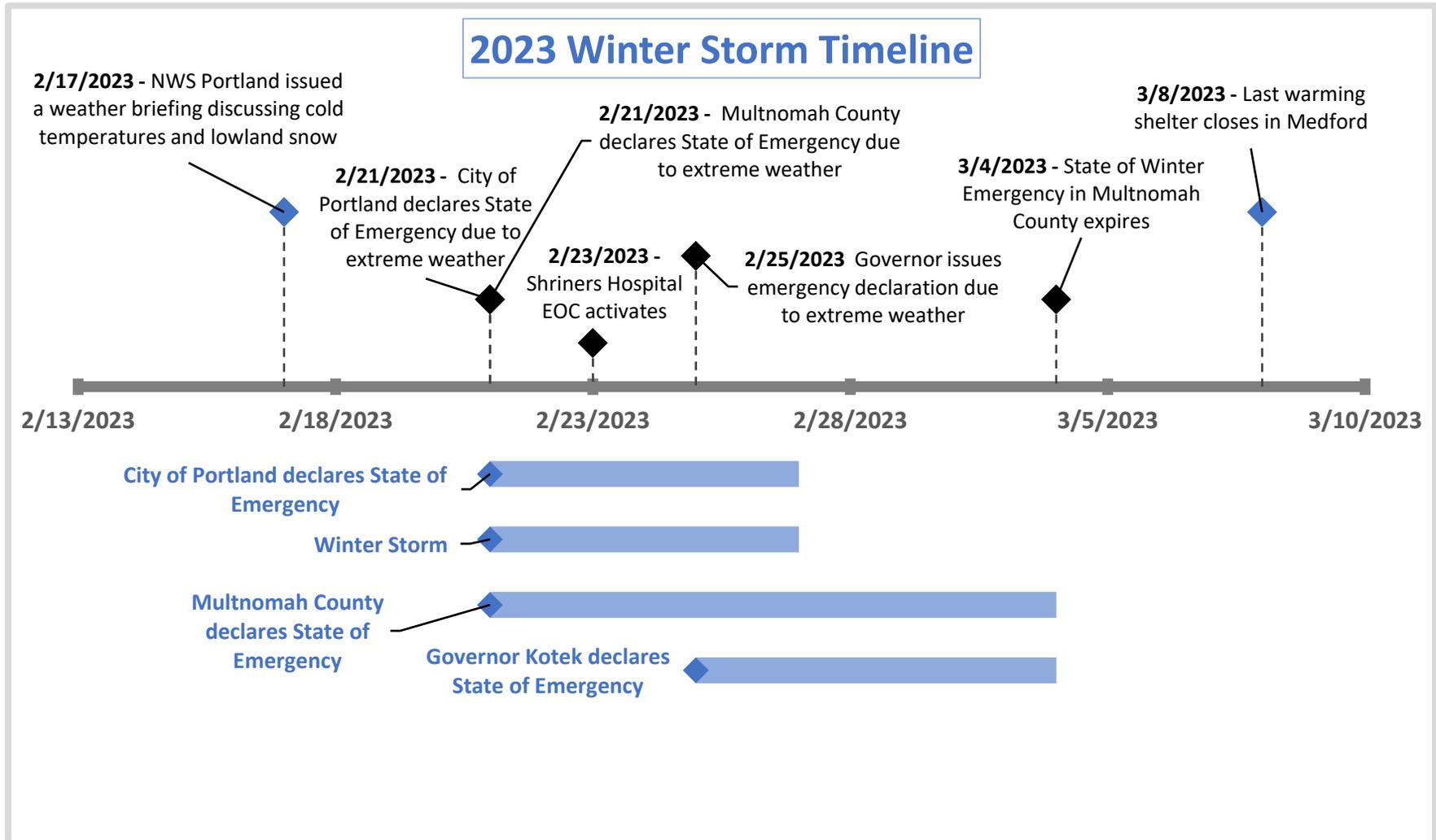
2023 Winter Storm Timeline

Table 1: Timeline of Key Dates

Key Findings

OEM identified 10 findings within the Operational Coordination and Planning core capabilities. The National Preparedness Goal describes five mission areas: Prevention, protection, response, recovery and mitigation; and 32 activities called core capabilities that address the greatest risks to the nation.

Effective communication was a key factor in the success of operational coordination for the 2023 Winter Storm. All stakeholders were kept informed of progress and any changes that occurred. Communication was timely, clear and concise, which helped to prevent misunderstanding and confusion. The collaboration of different state agencies and department levels was critical to the success of operational coordination. State agencies worked with local jurisdictions toward a common goal, sharing information and resources and supporting partners during this event.

Adequate planning played a significant role in the success of operational coordination. All partners involved in the planning process helped ensure that everyone understood their roles and responsibilities according to the objectives at hand. The planning process also identified potential issues and allowed for solutions to be developed once started. Being flexible was also a key factor during this event. The ability to adapt to changing circumstances was another area of success for operational coordination. Despite the best planning efforts, unforeseen circumstances can occur. All partners involved were able to adjust their plans and adapt to changing situations, which helped keep operations on track. Effective leadership was also a success during this event. Providing clear guidance and direction motivated the teams and ensured everyone worked together to help Oregonians.

While there were numerous successes, there were also areas of improvement identified. During the event, some local partners did not include specific resource request information, which created confusion and delayed fulfillment of requests. Clear and specific resource requests are needed to accomplish the response objectives. While planning went well, pre-incident planning could be improved. Lack of clarity of when state agencies should have been stood up to support the winter storm response led to miscommunication and misunderstandings of roles and responsibilities. A more comprehensive pre-incident plan that covers a wide range of potential issues could help mitigate the impact of unforeseen situations. Finally, communication and coordination could be improved. While communication was effective, there were some instances where partners were unsure whom to contact for an information update or resource request. Additionally, better coordination between partners could help prevent duplication of effort.

Table 2: Summary of Key Findings – Areas of Strength

Core Capabilities	Key Findings – Areas of Strength
Operational Coordination	**OEM Internal Coordination -** Great communication between the Executive Duty Officer (EDO), regional coordinators and response staff supporting the structure. There was internal coordination as well as good communication across the 4-5 OEM staff involved with coordination the weekend of the winter storm.
Operational Coordination	**ESF Coordination –** ESF-12 coordinated with electricity and natural gas companies to support information needs to the statewide coordination calls. This situational awareness included outages, restoration and what the energy utilities were encountering. ESF-12 also provided rapid responses to the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT).
Operational Coordination	**Statewide Coordination Calls –** Statewide Coordination Calls established regular opportunities for information sharing. These meetings provided clarity on roles and responsibilities as well as response objectives. Everybody generally understood whom to communicate with, received contact information (numbers and email addresses) and coordinated.
Operational Coordination	**Fulfilling Resource Requests –** ESFs provided support to local partners including ODOT providing requested resources for three graders to Portland.
Operational Coordination	**Information Sharing -** OEM Regional Coordinators (RCs) anticipated potential county needs, facilitated local and county requests, and worked with appropriate partners, including ODOT and the Oregon Department of Human Services (ODHS). RCs were effective at providing reports, especially as the main part of the storm was coming in and explaining processes review resource needs to county staff and supporting the fulfillment of requests.
Planning	**Pre-Incident Planning –** State agencies planned and communicated to stand-up resources in anticipation of the incoming weather pattern. This included initiating 211 services, identifying ODHS volunteer staff and pushing out potential volunteer opportunities for warming shelters.

Table 3: Summary of Key Findings – Areas of Improvements

Core Capabilities	Key Findings – Areas of Improvements
Operational Coordination	**Information Sharing –** There were limitations to information available given limited personnel resources and technological systems. Some small and rural Public Utility Districts (PUDs) do not have the technology for real time updated GIS outages maps. They're not using publicly accessible data when they are dealing with outages all the time.
Operational Coordination	**State Coordination Calls –** State coordination calls could have been sooner, with the state responding a day earlier. If a statewide meeting had been held 24 hours earlier, it may have helped alleviate some of the communication gaps. An SOG for when OEM arranges state or interagency coordinate calls for all communications.
Operational Coordination	**Resource Requests –** There was confusion on the resource request process and how "exhausted local resources" and "mutual aid" are defined and established from local jurisdictions. Local jurisdictions were using public works agreements and then exhausting all means of that mutual aid agreement that encompasses the entire state. Some resource requests also lacked necessary information, including prioritized needs. Overall, both local and state parties need to have a better understanding of existing requests as well as potential future requests. State agencies may not be able to fill a request if it doesn't identify priorities of who, what, where, why, and when. Mobilization of resources may take 48 to 72 hours. The more lead time that can be given to try to mobilize the assets, the higher the likelihood of fulfilling a request in the needed timeframe.
Operational Coordination	**Clear Reporting System -** There were mixed messages as to who had whose contact information and understanding there is more than one way to request an Ops Center request. Our partners need to understand how to appropriately submit an Ops Center resource request with the information (who, what, where, why, when) needed to complete the task. It's important to formulate a good reporting and request system to make sure everybody's on the same page, otherwise some agencies won't fully utilize their capabilities.

Next Steps

The 2023 Winter Storm AAR will be used to identify findings to improve future weather-related incident operations within planning and response for communities in Oregon.

ANALYSIS OF CORE CAPABILITIES

Table 4: Summary of Core Capability Performance

Observations	Primary Core Capability	Performed without Challenges (P)	Performed with Some Challenges (S)	Performed with Major Challenges (M)	Unable to be Performed (U)
Coordinate information sharing meetings on planning efforts for local jurisdictions and state agencies involved with the winter storm event	Operational Coordination		S		
Assigning regional coordinators to city and county jurisdictions	Operational Coordination	P			
Fulfill appropriate resource requests submitted to the state	Operational Coordination		S		

Performed without Challenges (P): The targets and critical tasks associated with the core capability were completed and did not negatively impact the performance of other activities. Performance of this activity did not contribute to additional health and/or safety risks for the public or for emergency workers, and it was conducted in accordance with applicable plans, policies, procedures, regulations and laws.

Performed with Some Challenges (S): The targets and critical tasks associated with the core capability were completed and did not negatively impact the performance of other activities. The performance of this activity did not contribute to additional health and/or safety risks for the public or for emergency workers, and it was conducted in accordance with applicable plans, policies, procedures, regulations and laws. However, opportunities to enhance effectiveness and/or efficiency were identified.

Performed with Major Challenges (M): The targets and critical tasks associated with the core capability were completed but some or all of the following were observed: The demonstrated performance had a negative impact on the performance of other activities; contributed to additional health and/or safety risks for the public or for emergency workers; and/or was not conducted in accordance with applicable plans, policies, procedures, regulations and laws.

Unable to be Performed (U): The targets and critical tasks associated with the core capability were not performed.

SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

The 2023 Winter Storm AAR includes information collected from individuals and organizations that were identified as stakeholders through OEM, partner agencies and local emergency management organizations. This AAR is an evaluation of systems and operational coordination effectiveness regarding statewide preparedness and response, not an evaluation of activation and actions from partners. The information was gathered through interviews held virtually through discussion workshops, meeting notes and status briefings. Documentation related to the preparedness and response for this special event was reviewed, including situation reports (SITREP), daily briefing emails, incident action plans (IAPs) and other forms.

Data Collection

From March to April 2023, one OEM collection and analysis staff member began data collection to support the development of the AAR. The scope focused on how state agencies responded to the coordination of state resources to meet requests for resources during the 2023 Winter Storm that best supported local, city and tribal partners. Target core capabilities focused on operational coordination. This collection included workshop discussion with OEM staff, state agencies, locals and tribal emergency managers and other partner who assisted with the activation. One workshop that included OEM personnel, state agencies and local jurisdictions was held on April 17, 2023. Other information was gathered through the Collection Analyses Plan (CAP). A total of 30 state, county and city partners were asked to participate. All data collected is summarized in the metrics Table 4 and Table 5 below.

Table 4: Data Collection Metrics

Interview Participants	Survey Responses	Participating Groups	Feedback Forms
15	0	7	0

Table 5: Collection Documents

Incident Collection Document
• Collection Analysis Plan (CAP)

CONCLUSION

The state responded to the 2023 Winter Storm event that occurred between the middle of February through early March. Operational coordination performance for the state met planned objectives and performed the needed resources requested by local jurisdictions. Next steps would be adding corrective actions and recommendations to the Continuous Improvement Working Group (CIWG). Some information presented in this AAR may be outdated following this publication. Current data on the status of corrective action implementation is maintained in the CIP Action Tracker. The CIP Coordinator is responsible for maintaining data in the CIP Action Tracker and facilitating the CIWG, which includes:

- Strengths, potential best practices areas for improvement and innovations identified during the event.
- The division responsible for corrective action development and implementation.
- The assigned point of contact.
- The corrective action or actions formulated by the point of contact.
- The completion date of each corrective action.

APPENDIX A: Acronym List

AAR	After-Action Review
AFI	Area for Improvement
AOS	Area of Strength
CIP	Corrective Implementation Plan
CIWG	Continuous Improvement Working Group
ESF	Emergency Support Function
FEMA	Federal Emergency Management Agency
IAP	Incident Action Plan
POC	Point-of-Contact

APPENDIX B: Participating Organizations

Table 2: Participating Organizations

State Partners
• Oregon Department of Emergency Management – **OEM**
• Oregon Health Authority – **OHA**
• Oregon Department of Human Services – **ODHS**
• Oregon Public Utility Commission – **OPUC**
• Oregon Medical Examiner
County / Local Jurisdictions
• Multnomah County
• City of Portland