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STATE SENATOR • 17TH SENATE DISTRICT

Capitol Update

By Senator Howard Marklein

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Help! It's a State of Emergency!

In Wisconsin, we often count our blessings during hurricane season as we watch our coastal neighbors nail boards across their windows, sandbag and evacuate. We pity the western states when they experience long-lasting droughts. We sympathize with Midwestern neighbors who experience terrifying tornadoes each spring.

Sure, we have our fair share of tenuous weather, but we Wisconsinites are used to it. We're prepared, hearty stock that can take pretty much anything that nature throws at us. Twelve inches of snow? Typical. Three days of rain? Good for our crops. Ninety-five degree heat? It won't be long before summer is just memory under our wooly hats.

But sometimes, weather pushes us to our limits. This past week, Richland County experienced an extreme amount of rainfall that caused flash flooding throughout the county. Richland County Emergency Management, law enforcement and community leaders did a terrific job of keeping residents informed and safe. The Richland County Fair also weathered the storm and I give the fair board tremendous thanks and credit for managing a difficult situation.

When weather hits our communities with a one-two punch in ways that we cannot easily overcome, our state and local leadership is equipped with tools to declare a State of Emergency. This declaration sets off a chain of activities across state government to provide aid, resources and access.

Wisconsin Statutes Chapter 323 outlines state laws related to Emergency Management. The legislative intent of Chapter 323 is "to prepare the state and its subdivisions to cope with emergencies resulting from a disaster, or the imminent threat of a disaster, it is declared to be necessary to establish an organization for emergency management conferring upon the governor and others specified the powers and duties provided in this chapter."

The goal of Emergency Management is to plan for disasters, tenuous weather situations and other widespread events that require a collaborative, strategic response. We have Emergency Management professionals throughout our state who have planned for, thought through and trained for overcoming a wide variety of situations and circumstances so that if (and when) they occur, we are ready to respond.

The Governor has a central role in the declaration of a state of emergency in Wisconsin. If he or she determines that an emergency from a disaster or the imminent threat of a disaster exists, the Governor may declare an official state of emergency for up to 60 days. A local unit of government may also declare a state of emergency by ordinance or resolution for a local area. These declarations trigger emergency management plans and orders that have been designed well before an emergency exists.

During a state of emergency, the Governor has the power to deploy resources, issue orders, contract with responders and suspend any administrative rule to respond to the emergency. The state's Adjutant General becomes the Governor's primary director of coordinating emergency response and thus can deploy the members of Wisconsin's National Guard to provide aid and assistance. Depending on the nature of the emergency, a state agency may also be deployed to manage the emergency.

On July 11, 2016, Ashland, Bayfield, Burnett, Douglas, Iron, Price, Sawyer and Washburn counties in northern Wisconsin were deluged with torrential rain, damaging wind, significant hail and tornadoes. This combination of factors forced local emergency managers to evacuate people from their homes because of downed trees and power lines, flash flooding, and significant damage to roads and bridges. Click here to read the formal Executive Order:

http://emergencymanagement.wi.gov/news/2016/Executive_Order_202.pdf

According to the Governor's office, 25 Wisconsin National Guard from the 157th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade's 724th Battalion, headquartered in Chippewa Falls reported to active duty to assist during the emergency. The Governor also requested a Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Preliminary Damage Assessment as the first step to requesting federal disaster assistance. Additional state agencies were deployed for a wide variety of tasks. Follow this link to read more about each of the agency's actions: http://emergencymanagement.wi.gov/news/2016/Northern_WI_Recovery7-19-16.pdf

As northern Wisconsin recovers from their emergency in July and Richland County recovers from recent flash flooding, it is important for each of us to prepare ourselves and our families for potential disasters. For checklists, ideas and inspiration, visit <http://readywisconsin.wi.gov/> to learn more about ways you can prepare to respond. As Benjamin Franklin said, "By failing to prepare, you are preparing to fail."

Be ready.

For more information and to connect with me, visit my website <http://legis.wisconsin.gov/senate/17/marklein> and subscribe to my weekly E-Update by sending an email to Sen.Marklein@legis.wisconsin.gov. Do not hesitate to call 800-978-8008 if you have input, ideas or need assistance with any state-related matters.

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