



NORTH CAROLINA COUNTY GOVERNMENT CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

Purpose and Scope

County governments are responsible for ensuring public safety and maintaining public trust. This plan offers a framework for timely, transparent, and coordinated communication during crises and significant incidents. It outlines roles, responsibilities, and communication protocols to ensure accurate information reaches residents, businesses, media, and other stakeholders.

While no single plan can address every potential crisis, this document acts as a guide to assist county personnel in responding effectively to:

- **Critical incidents** that require an immediate and coordinated response across departments.
- **Reputational crises** that impact public confidence in county government.
- **Significant incidents** that require public communication but are not classified as crises.

Definitions

Critical Incidents and Crises

The Federal Emergency Management Agency defines a critical incident as any natural or human-caused event that threatens lives, causes substantial injury, or results in severe property damage, necessitating extraordinary measures to protect public safety and restore services.

In this plan, the terms "**crisis**" and "**critical incident**" are used interchangeably to describe events that fall under the FEMA definition and those that could significantly impact the county government's reputation.

Examples of Critical Incidents and Crises:

- Natural disasters such as hurricanes, blizzards, extreme flooding, and wildfires
- Transportation disasters (train derailments, plane crashes, multi-vehicle collisions, etc.)
- Acts of violence (active shooters, mass casualty events, violent protests)
- Public safety incidents (law enforcement-involved shootings, serious structure fires)
- Government misconduct refers to actual or alleged criminal or ethical violations committed by county officials
- Cyberattacks (ransomware or malware that greatly affects county operations)
- Any event that attracts substantial regional or national media attention



Significant Incidents

These are serious events that still require strategic communication with internal staff and the public but do not fall under the definition of critical incidents or crises. Instead, they may represent more routine circumstances that the county government encounters.

Examples of Significant Incidents:

- Localized infrastructure failures, such as power outages and water main breaks
- Disruptive weather impacting county services and/or travel
- School lockdowns
- Traffic disruptions
- Felony offenses, crime sprees, or crimes at notable locations
- Fires and other public safety incidents that cause public concern but do not significantly threaten safety or travel routes

Key Objectives

- Ensure timely and accurate communication during critical incidents and significant events.
- Define the roles and responsibilities in the crisis communications process.
- Ensure public trust by maintaining transparency and consistency in messaging.
- Proactively manage the reputational risks that affect county government.
- Prevent misinformation and speculation with clear, factual communication.
- Establish the county government as the most trustworthy source of information about the events it manages or responds to.

Crisis Communications Flow Chart





Internal Audience Priority

Ensuring Internal Awareness Before Public Release

Internal personnel should be informed about incidents impacting county government personnel before the media or the public whenever possible. The goal is to prevent employees from learning about major incidents impacting them or their organization through social media or external news sources.

A process such as a phone tree, email distribution list, or other internal mass notification system should be established to rapidly disseminate information internally.

Internal Notification Information Flow

Employee Role

County employees must promptly report any incidents likely to attract significant public or media attention.

- **Evaluate** – Assess the potential impact of the incident on public safety, reputation, legal standing, and urgency.
- **Notify** – Immediately inform a supervisor and include all relevant details.
- **Maintain confidentiality** – Share sensitive information only when necessary to ensure a controlled and coordinated response.

Incidents Requiring Immediate Supervisor Notification Include:

- **High public interest:** Events expected to draw considerable media or community attention.
- **Reputational risk:** Circumstances that could harm the county's credibility or trust.
- **Public safety and health:** Threats to the public, including acts of violence and the release of hazardous materials.
- **Operational disruptions:** Significant effects on county operations, such as infrastructure failures or cyberattacks.
- **Regulatory compliance:** Possible violations of industry standards or internal policies.
- **Ethical concerns:** Conflicts of interest, misconduct, or code of conduct violations.
- **Personnel impact:** Refers to the death or injury of an employee, whether on or off duty.

Supervisor Role

Supervisors must immediately notify their department heads when they receive information about any of the above incidents. Confidentiality should be maintained, and information should only be shared as necessary for a coordinated response.

Department Head Role

Department heads will promptly notify the county manager or designee based on the incident's severity and public impact.



Incidents Requiring Immediate County Manager Notification Include:

- Natural disasters
- Death or critical injury of a county employee
- Mass casualty events
- Infrastructure failure or significant building damage
- County employee involvement in a fatal or serious injury incident
- Arrest of a county employee for a felony or any on-duty criminal conduct
- Any other incident requiring county leadership's immediate awareness

County Manager Role

The county manager will:

- Notify county commissioners and other key stakeholders.
- Inform the public information officer (PIO) to ensure timely public communication.

Public Communication Strategy

What to Communicate and When

Crises and critical incidents impacting public safety, major transportation routes, key infrastructure, or likely to draw significant public interest should be communicated immediately upon confirming initial details. Significant incidents that may cause public concern or require timely public assistance should also be shared as soon as possible.

Example of Incidents Necessitating Prompt Public Notification:

- Active threats (mass casualty attacks, bomb threats)
- Serious felony crimes impacting public safety where a suspect is not in custody
- Missing vulnerable persons or AMBER Alerts
- Hazardous material spills/releases affecting public safety
- Major fires or large-scale emergency responses
- Severe weather events or natural disasters
- Disruptions to critical public infrastructure
- Cyber events severely impacting county operations
- Significant transportation incidents
- Any other crisis or critical incident that threatens public safety, transportation, or county operations

Example of Incidents Necessitating Public Notification at a Reasonable Time:

- Other serious felony crimes after key facts are confirmed
- Emerging crime patterns that may affect public safety
- Fire incidents that may cause community concern but do not pose immediate danger
- Non-critical infrastructure/service disruptions
- Public health advisories



(See **Appendix C** for sample emergency alerts and messaging templates.)

Social Media and Emergency Alert Notifications

Initial Proactive Messaging

- Use social media as the fastest way to push initial information.
- Consider emergency alerts (Reverse 911, Everbridge, Rave, CodeRed, etc.) as appropriate.
- Initial messaging should share what is known at the time and won't change in the future. (For example, "A report of shots fired" versus "shots fired" when a shooting has not yet been confirmed.)
- Information should be qualified when reasonably believed to be true but not completely verified. ("At this time, it is believed," "Early information indicates," etc.)
- Suspend unrelated scheduled posts and unpin content to maintain focus on the crisis.
- Consider media interviews if they add clarity.

Key Elements of Crisis Communications

- **Define the problem:** In clear conversational language, describe what is known at the time.
- **What you are doing about the problem:** Describe the county government response.
- **Call to action:** Share what the public can do to protect themselves or to assist the county government's response.
- **Source for information:** Reiterate the county government is the most reliable source for information about the incident and encourage the public to follow official social media platforms for updates.

Continued Communication

- Update social media at least every 15-30 minutes (as practicable) with accurate, real-time information.
- If no new information is known, continue to reiterate what the county government is doing and the call to action.
- Once the situation is resolved, use the same channels for initial messaging to issue an all-clear message or resolve the incident.

Media Relations

Media Staging

For incidents with expected media response, the PIO should:

- Designate a media staging area that does not interfere with emergency operations and is not near the incident command or near any reunification center/assistance center/victim relocation point.
- Ensure media staging provides access to a visual element of the incident, if possible, without compromising public safety operations.
- Coordinate with the incident command to determine what information can be released.



Media Briefings

Schedule a single media briefing instead of multiple one-on-one interviews, when possible.

- Ensure the spokesperson is prepared with key facts and messaging.
- Begin with a brief statement of what is known at the time, including key messaging and the county's response.
- Be prepared to take media questions.
- Livestream media briefings on county social media platforms when possible.

News Releases

- Headlines should clearly state the issue and the county government response
- News releases should begin with the most up-to-date information and then provide incident background information in subsequent paragraphs.
- Use clear, conversational, and concise language. Avoid jargon (specialized language used by a particular profession).
- When sharing news releases to social media, avoid using screenshots of documents. Instead, use a custom "news release" (or similar wording) graphic and post the text of the news release as the text of the social media post.
- Archive news releases on the county website.

(See **Appendix D** for a news release template.)

News Conferences

A well-executed news conference ensures clear, controlled messaging during a crisis. Follow these key guidelines:

- **Preparation**
 - Verify Key Details – Confirm facts before addressing the media.
 - Select a Spokesperson – Use a trained official or subject matter expert.
 - Draft Key Messages – Cover what is known, what is being done, and what the public needs to know.
 - Anticipate Tough Questions – Prepare responses to likely concerns.
 - Always take media questions.
- **Setup**
 - Choose an Accessible Venue – Ensure safety, accessibility, and minimal disruption.
 - Livestream the news conference on county social media platforms, ensuring a microphone is used for adequate livestream sound.
- **Delivery**
 - Start on Time – Reflects preparedness and control.
 - State Key Facts First – Address public safety and county response.
 - Include Empathy – Show genuine concern for those impacted
 - Use Clear Language – Avoid jargon and speculation.
 - Set Expectations – Provide timelines for further updates.
- **Managing Q&A**



- Call on Reporters Strategically – Balance local and major outlets.
- Stay on Message – Redirect off-topic questions to key points.
- Correct Misinformation – Address false claims immediately.
- Control the Flow – If an answer isn't available, commit to follow-up.
- **Closing & Follow-Up**
 - Summarize Key Points – Reinforce critical information.
 - Provide a Media Contact – Direct further inquiries to the PIO.
 - Monitor Coverage – Track reports to address misinformation.

A well-managed news conference builds trust, controls messaging, and keeps the public informed.

Establishing and Using a Joint Information Center (JIC)

A **Joint Information Center (JIC)** is activated when multiple agencies must coordinate public messaging during a crisis. It centralizes information flow, ensures consistency, and prevents misinformation.

- **When to Activate a JIC**
 - Multi-agency response (e.g., natural disasters, mass casualties, major law enforcement operations).
 - High-profile incidents requiring unified messaging.
 - Large-scale emergencies involving local, state, or federal partners.
- **JIC Roles & Structure**
 - **Lead Public Information Officer (PIO):** Coordinates all messaging, ensures message discipline.
 - **Agency PIOs:** Represents their respective agencies while aligning messaging.
 - **Monitoring Team:** Tracks media and social sentiment for misinformation.
 - **Content Team:** Drafts and distributes news releases, social media updates, and talking points.
- **JIC Operations**
 - **Develop a Unified Message:** All agencies speak with one voice to maintain credibility.
 - **Designate Spokespersons:** Only approved representatives address the media.
 - **Share Real-Time Updates:** Use internal coordination tools (e.g., shared docs, secure messaging).
 - **Monitor & Correct Misinformation:** Quickly identify and counter false narratives.
- **JIC Location & Setup**
 - **Physical JIC:** Established at an Emergency Operations Center (EOC) or other designated county facility.
 - **Virtual JIC:** Used when agencies are spread across multiple locations, relying on shared digital platforms.

A well-run JIC ensures unified, accurate, and timely communication, enhancing public trust and improving emergency response coordination.



Crisis Response Timeline

- **First 30 Minutes:**
 - Begin gathering and verifying information
 - Notify internal personnel (county leadership, PIO)
 - Issue initial internal communication when the incident impacts county personnel
- Issue an initial “What We Know Now” social media post
 - Determine if the incident requires a Joint Information Center (JIC)
- **30 Minutes – 1 Hour:**
 - Draft and issue a holding statement
 - Continue to gather and vet information
 - Provide social media updates
 - Monitor social media and correct misinformation
 - Assess need for a media briefing
- **1 – 2 Hours:**
 - Continue gathering and vetting information
 - If needed, schedule a media briefing
 - Provide public updates on social media at regular intervals
 - Continue to monitor social and correct misinformation
- **Hours to Days After Incident:**
 - Issue updates and additional clarifications as needed
 - Provide resolution/all clear
 - Evaluate crisis response effectiveness
 - Conduct an after-action review to improve future response.

(See **Appendix E** for an after-action report template.)

Post-Crisis Review and Documentation

After the crisis event has passed, it’s crucial to bring the county crisis communications team together to assess the response and identify areas for improvement. Here are a few key steps to follow:

1. **Conduct a Debriefing:** Hold a meeting with all team members to discuss the effectiveness of the communication strategy and identify what went well and what could be improved.
2. **Document Lessons Learned:** Create a detailed report outlining the responses, decisions, and communications strategies that worked, as well as areas for improvement. This will be invaluable for future crisis situations.
3. **Update the Plan:** Based on the insights gathered, revise the crisis communications plan to incorporate new strategies and best practices for handling future crises.

By documenting the lessons learned and adjusting your approach, you can strengthen your team’s preparedness for future incidents.



Conclusion

This Crisis Communications Plan ensures that North Carolina county governments can respond swiftly, transparently, and effectively to any critical incident. By following this framework, counties can protect public safety, preserve trust, and manage reputation in times of crisis.

For More Information or Assistance

The NCACC Communications Office is here to help. For additional information or guidance on this plan or any other communications-related needs, please reach out to us at communications@ncacc.org.

Appendices

Appendix A: News Conference Media Advisory Template

Appendix B: News Release Template

Appendix C: Emergency Event Templates

Appendix D: Power Outage Notification

Appendix E: Radio Scripts

Appendix F: Missing Persons Notification

Appendix G: Donation Coordination After a Disaster



APPENDIX A

News Conference Media Advisory Template

XXX County Media Advisory Announcing News Conference (insert day)

April 16, 20XX (insert correct date)

For more information, contact:

XXX County Public Information Officer (insert correct name)

(insert correct phone number)

(insert correct email address)

XXX COUNTY TO HOLD NEWS CONFERENCE TO DISCUSS (TOPIC)

XXX County, N.C. – In the wake of XXXXXXXX , (County Commissioner, Manager, or primary spokesperson) will hold a news conference to discuss the most current information about the event.

(Add any specific details they will discuss or take questions about.)

What: XXX County (agency name) News Conference

Who: Speaker's name and title

When: Time and date

Where: Location and address

For reporters who cannot attend in person, live streaming can be found here: XXXXXX (if livestream is available.)

R.S.V.P. If needed

Additional Information: (video opportunities, handout information, one-on-one interviews, etc.)



APPENDIX B News Release Template

NEWS RELEASE
Organization Name (Anytown Police Department)

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
[DATE]

Contact:
[NAME, EMAIL, CELLPHONE #, OFFICE #]

Headline That Summarizes Main Message
Sub-headline Can Show What Action Is Being Taken

(City, State) - Lede: Who, What, Where, When, and Why. This is the most critical information for your readers to understand what you are releasing and why. This may include restating your headline.

The second paragraph is for background information and quotes.

Subsequent paragraphs can share additional background information, quotes from additional sources, and other information not critical to the main message.

####

(Signifies completion of press release)





APPENDIX C

Emergency Alert Templates

Public Safety and Crime Alerts

Person with a weapon	We are responding to a report of a (man/woman/person) with a (weapon) near (location). Avoid the area. Updates to follow.
Shots fired	We are investigating reports of gunfire near (location). Stay clear of the area. Shelter in place if in the area. More details to come.
Active shooter reported	⚠️ ACTIVE SHOOTER – (LOCATION) We are responding. Avoid the area. Shelter in place if in the area. Media staging and updates to follow.
School lockdown	(School name) is on lockdown for (describe what is known). Law enforcement is responding. DO NOT respond to the school. Keep roads clear for first responders.
Shelter-in-place order	🚒 SHELTER-IN-PLACE ORDER Due to (threat type), all residents in (specific area) should shelter in place immediately. Stay indoors, lock all doors and windows. Stay away from windows. Updates will follow – tune into official channels.
Barricade or hostage situation	🚒 POLICE INCIDENT Large police presence at (location) due to a (barricade/hostage) situation. ⚠️ The threat appears contained at this location. Avoid the area. More details and media updates to follow.
Criminal investigation	Police are investigating a (incident type) at (location). (Street name) is closed to traffic. Avoid the area. ☎️ Call (non-emergency number) or Crime Stoppers at (phone number) with any information.
Critical public safety alert	🚒 CRITICAL PUBLIC SAFETY ALERT (Description of suspect and location of last sighting). ⚠️ Do not approach. Call 911 with any sightings. (If available) Additional details and suspect image: (link)



Missing Persons and Abductions

Missing person alert

🚨 MISSING PERSON ALERT

(Name, age) was last seen at (time, date, location). (Identify vulnerability if applicable.)

Last seen wearing: (clothing description). Vehicle: (if applicable). Call (phone number) immediately if seen. Please share.

Missing child alert

🚨 MISSING CHILD ALERT

(Name, age) was last seen at (time, date, location).

Last seen wearing: (clothing description).

Call (phone number) if you have any information. Please share.

Amber alert/abduction

🚨 AMBER ALERT

(Name, age) abducted near (location).

Suspect: (description). Vehicle (description, plate # if available).

Call 911 immediately with any information.

Public assistance: Do you know me?

👁️ DO YOU RECOGNIZE THIS PERSON?

We are seeking to identify the person in this image in connection with a (type of case).

Call (phone number) with any information.

Bomb, Hazard, and Explosion Alerts

Suspicious item

🚨 SUSPICIOUS ITEM INVESTIGATION

We are investigating a suspicious (package/device) at (location).

Evacuate immediately and avoid the area. Media staging and updates to follow.

Explosion reported



🚨 EXPLOSION RESPONSE

Authorities are responding to a reported explosion at (location).



Evacuate immediately and avoid the area. Media staging and updates to follow.



Bomb, Hazard, and Explosion Alerts (Continued)




Bomb threat	 BOMB THREAT INVESTIGATION We are responding to a bomb threat at (location). Evacuate immediately and avoid the area. Media staging and updates to follow.
Hazardous spill/gas leak	 HAZARD RESPONSE Public safety crews are responding to a (spill/gas leak) at (location). Evacuate immediately and avoid the area. Media staging and updates to follow.

Weather, Fire, and Natural Disaster Alerts






Severe weather alert	 (Tornado/Severe Thunderstorm) Warning issued for (area). Seek shelter immediately. Stay away from windows and doors.
Fire investigation	 FIRE RESPONSE (Agency name) is on scene at a fire in (location). If in the area, follow official instructions. More details to come.
Wildfire warning or response	 WILDFIRE ALERT A wildfire is burning near (location). Evacuation orders may be issued. Air quality may be affected – limit outdoor activity.
Flash flood warning	 FLASH FLOOD WARNING (Location). Move to higher ground immediately. Roads closed: (list closures). Never drive through flooded roads. Turn around, don't
Evacuation order	 EVACUATION ORDER Due to (fire, flood, hazardous material, etc.) an immediate evacuation is ordered for (affected area). Leave now. Follow designated evacuation routes. Shelter location: (if available). Updates to follow.



Utility and Traffic Alerts

Power outage	 POWER OUTAGE UPDATE (Affected area). Utility crews are working to restore power. DO NOT call 911 for outages — only for life-threatening emergencies.
Traffic crash	 TRAFFIC ALERT We are responding to a (number of vehicles) crash at (location). (Roads closed). Please avoid the area. We will update when roads reopen.
Road closure	 ROAD CLOSED (Location) is closed due to (reason: construction, downed tree, event, etc.) Expected reopening: (timeframe). Please use alternate routes.

Scams and Cyber Security Alerts

911 system outage	 EMERGENCY SYSTEM ALERT 911 lines are down. If you have an emergency, call (alternate number). Stay tuned for updates.
Scam alert	 SCAM WARNING (Agency name) is aware of a scam involving (nature of scam). Verify calls by dialing (official number). Report scams to (phone number or website).
Cyber-attack or data breach	 CYBER SECURITY ALERT (Agency name) is investigating a cyber security incident affecting (system or service). Do not click unknown links or provide personal information. We are working to resolve the issue — updates to follow.
Fake law enforcement scam	 SCAM ALERT Scammers posing as law enforcement or firefighters are calling residents, demanding payment.  Law enforcement and fire departments never ask for money over the phone.



APPENDIX D

Power Outage Notification

In the event of a power and internet outage, counties should direct their cities and towns to develop a physical, posted communications plan. Some counties are rural with widely dispersed residents, but where there is a central meeting place, such as a town hall or main street, there should be a physical location that serves as a message board. This location should be made familiar to residents and news outlets through county communications, prior to natural disasters and internet outages. The ability of a location like this to reach even a small percentage of a town's population, who may otherwise be unreachable, is highly valuable.

- Select physical locations on public buildings where information will be posted:
- Examples include at the entrance of the Town Hall, library, or post office.
- Designate one person, preferably two people, who are nearby for each location – and could get to the location and post this information. The employee and the backup employee chosen should ideally have a landline in addition to their cell phone, and a hotspot device.
- Examples of information that may be posted include shelter locations, map of impassable roads, dates/times of supplies made available, electric utility estimate on the length of the outage, and notices of emergency government assistance.
- Place a laminated flyer at each of the locations that will remain there permanently, identifying that as a location for emergency postings.
- In advance of extreme weather events, post about the physical location of emergency postings on county websites and county social media.

Example

Alexander County Website Update

The Emergency Operations Center (EOC) will provide an update regarding emergency operations by 8:00 a.m. on Wednesday, April 23, 2025. This message will be emailed and posted on the Emergency Information Page if there is power. If the power is out, this message will be communicated via Everbridge Nixle, posted on the Emergency Information Page, and posted at the following locations:

- Main doors to the Alexander County Courthouse
- Main doors to Scotts Elementary School
- Main doors to Lenoir City Hall



APPENDIX E

Radio Scripts

Radio is a valuable conduit for messaging around disasters, with the ability to reach listeners even in a power outage. Update your news contacts list with all radio outlets in and near the county. Radio scripts sent to local radio stations like KISS FM can come straight from the updates you make to your Emergency Operations website or county emails to residents. If you don't have time to break it into a short script, send your update directly to the radio contact, with bullet points of key facts at the top so they can easily see them.

When conveying information on the radio, keep the scripts short – just a few sentences, no more than 30 seconds, and radio announcers can repeat them throughout the day to reach more listeners. The writing for radio is short, conversational, clear, and to the point. The most critical and urgent facts always come first.

Examples

Evacuate Now Radio Script

- Evacuate NOW if you live along the Catawba River! All those downstream of the Oxford Dam MUST evacuate now!
- Sheriff's deputies are serving evacuation notices on the following roads: Fred Jolly Lane, River Shoals Ridge Drive, Mountaire Drive, Carl Fox Road, Perry Fox Lane, Olive Road, Grasshopper Circle, and Stewart Rock Road.
- Go to the emergency shelter – open now at the Wittenburg Fire Department.
- Once again, evacuate now if you are along the Catawba River downstream of the Oxford Dam. Additional floodgates are soon to open at the Oxford Dam. Leave the area!
- Alexander County's Emergency Operations Center is now activated and open for the duration of the storm. It's reporting more than 5 INCHES of rain so far from Helene.

Debris Removal Radio Script

- It's your LAST CHANCE for free debris removal in Rutherford County!
- Check the county zone map on the website for your zone. Rutherford County will cover:
 - Zone 1 on Monday, February 10
 - Zone 2 on Monday, February 17
 - Zone 3 on Monday, February 24
- Debris pickup will happen on state-maintained and municipally controlled roads. Place all hurricane-related debris within the road's right of way. The county has ALREADY picked up XXX tons of debris so far. Once again, if it's a Monday in February – it's free debris removal!





APPENDIX F

Missing Persons Notification

Counties must develop and raise public awareness of missing persons protocols before extreme weather events.

Collaborate with your Sheriff's Office to create a plan for handling missing persons reports and welfare checks, especially from out-of-area individuals.

Internal Process for Missing Persons Protocol

- **Tracking Welfare Checks:**
 - Choose an app to assign welfare check areas.
 - Develop a database to record checks, noting whether homes are empty or evacuated, with date and time stamps. Deputies should update the database in real time.
 - Example: Madison County used the SARTopo app for welfare checks but added a database for tracking, preventing redundant checks on evacuated homes.
- **Real-Time Database Updates:** Ensure the welfare check database is updated as checks are completed.
- **Reporting Missing Persons:** Establish a clear process for the public to report missing persons or request welfare checks during power outages. Note: Many people called 211 to report missing individuals, but 211 staff had no way to confirm if the person had been located once power returned.

Evacuation Procedures

- Meet with your Sheriff's Office and leadership to establish evacuation procedures.
- Determine when to issue shelter-in-place vs. evacuation orders and communicate this to the public.
- Provide public messaging via the county website, social media, and physical handouts in public buildings to educate the public on evacuation and shelter-in-place protocols.

Registering Vulnerable Residents for Evacuation Assistance

- Create an "Evacuate Early" database for vulnerable or disabled residents who need immediate evacuation assistance during a threat.
- Establish a protocol for residents to add themselves or others to the "Evacuate Early" list.

External Communications for Missing Persons Protocol

- Use the emergency operations website and social media to inform the public on how to report missing persons or request welfare checks. Provide clear instructions on who to contact, especially for out-of-area individuals.



- Consider public messaging encouraging the early registration of vulnerable or disabled residents for evacuation assistance.
- Remind the public to plan with family members about who to contact to confirm safety once they've evacuated, especially to notify others when they reach an emergency shelter.
- Post instructions on reporting missing persons before and during extreme weather events. Maintain a dedicated section on the emergency website for missing persons and welfare checks.

Example

Missing Person Protocol Post – Facebook/Instagram (Burke County)

Content:

Photo of an evacuation center or graphic: "Extreme Weather Risk! Make a Plan"

Caption:

Make a Plan!

Hurricane Helene is expected to bring heavy rainfall and significant flooding, starting Thursday, April 24, 2025, at noon. Widespread power outages are also likely. Before the storm, let family and friends know your evacuation plan.

Prevent Panic – Call a friend or family member to confirm your evacuation plan and have them check in with you after the storm.

If you need to evacuate, shelters will be open at:

- Oak Hill Methodist Church, 2239 NC-181, Morganton, NC 28655
- Valdese Recreation Department, 312 Massel Avenue SE, Valdese, NC 28690 (with showers)
- Phifer Family YMCA, 2165 South Sterling Street, Morganton, NC 28655 (with showers and charging stations)



APPENDIX G

Donation Coordination After a Disaster

Following Hurricane Helene, some counties experienced overwhelming donations. For example, Madison County was left with “warehouses full of diaper donations,” as described by the county manager. To prevent this, counties should coordinate with nonprofits ahead of any extreme weather event and delegate the handling of both monetary and physical donations.

- **Organize a Meeting with Local and State Nonprofits:**
 - Include representatives from key state nonprofits to discuss disaster response coordination.
- **Designate Points of Contact:**
 - Establish clear contacts within both agencies and nonprofits for post-disaster communication.
- **Determine Donation Procedures:**
 - Decide where the public should drop off donations.
 - Create a specific list of needed items and clearly specify any items that are not wanted.
- **Establish Donation Distribution and Emergency Funds:**
 - Plan where and how donated items will be distributed and set up a fund for monetary donations.
- **Prepare Public Messaging:**
 - Develop website and social media content for post-disaster donation drop-offs and fund information.

Example

Disaster Fund – Website and Social Media Post

The Community Foundation of Burke County has created the Burke County Disaster Relief Fund to support nonprofits serving Burke County. Nonprofits involved in disaster relief can apply for up to \$10,000 in funding. Learn more at www.cfburkecounty.org/grants.html.

If you or someone you know would like to volunteer, connect with accredited organizations via the following links:

- [Volunteer NC Disaster Volunteer Opportunities](#)
- [NC 2-1-1 Volunteer List](#)

Important: Do not self-deploy to Western North Carolina. Help us maintain critical supply lines. Volunteer Number: 828-764-7068