



2024 SGA Awards Finalists: Emergency Management

Entry: ICS Training & Exercise Program & Roster Management

Your Company: NiSource

Linking people, ideas and information

The goal of the Emergency Management program is to strengthen capabilities to ensure safe, effective and efficient response to gas related incidents on our system. The program is based on lessons learned, FEMA guidance and best practices from within and outside our industry. Nearly 850 employees currently have ICS roles, and many have worked together during exercises and actual incident response. In addition, company exercises now include public safety participation from law enforcement, fire and emergency management agencies to strengthen relationships, share information, educate on response protocols, and build a better understanding of the company's capabilities and available resources during incident response.

Name of Your Project / Initiative

ICS Training and Exercise Program and Roster Management

The solution

The foundation of the NiSource Emergency Management program is the use of the Incident Command System (ICS) to oversee incident response. It follows Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) guidance and ensures alignment with public safety responders and ensures the use of common terminology. Approximately 850 employees from across the company have been assigned an ICS role based on knowledge and skills. The company maintains in-depth rosters, which are linked to our Workday records so that we immediately know if someone is on extended leave, has taken a new day-to-day job or has left the company. Using rosters that are updated weekly, Incident Management teams are accessing the most accurate information to only activate individuals who are trained and prepared for their respective roles. Each quarter, the rosters are reviewed with utility company leadership to ensure the right people are in the right roles. A sample redacted roster and a summary of the Emergency Management database are attached to this entry.

Once individuals are assigned an ICS role, they enter the company's training and exercise program, which is progressive in nature. The training program combines computer-based

learning through foundational knowledge and FEMA courses, instructor-led classes, independent study, position-specific workbooks, coaching sessions, and ICS scenario training. Exercises include discussion-based workshops and tabletop exercises, and operations-based functional and full-scale exercises. As individuals assigned as Command and General Staff demonstrate competency in their respective roles, they will participate in intermediate (ICS 300) and advanced (ICS 400) FEMA training on expanding incidents of increasing complexity. A sample position-specific workbook, and training and exercise plan overview are attached to this entry.

Results of your project / initiative.

Strong Incident Management Team (IMT) feedback

“Players in their roles were actively engaged and always considering next steps. Great teamwork and facilitation.” – Columbia Gas of Virginia, Operations Center Manager (Portsmouth, Va. Functional Exercise)

“Good teamwork across all departments. Excellent relationships with First Responders” – Columbia Gas of Kentucky (CKY) Construction Manager, Incident Commander (CKY Tabletop Exercise)

“Realistic Scenario, materials well prepared, strong participant engagement. Nice having the Fire Department participate too” – Manager, Operational Excellence, Safety Officer (Columbia Gas of Maryland Tabletop Exercise)

Strengthened partnerships with the following public safety organizations in several jurisdictions through exercise participation:

Allen County (IN) Office of Homeland Security
Chesterfield (VA) Fire Department
Chesterfield County (VA) Department of Homeland Security
Columbus (OH) Division of Fire
Columbus (OH) Division of Police
Delaware County (OH) Department of Homeland Security and Emergency Management
Fort Wayne (IN) Police Department
Fort Wayne (IN) Fire Department
Franklin County (OH) Emergency Management and Homeland Security
Hagerstown (MD) Fire Department
Indiana Department of Homeland Security
Lexington (KY) Fire Department
Lexington (KY) Police Department
Lexington-Fayette County (KY) Emergency Management Agency
LaPorte (IN) Fire Department
LaPorte (IN) Emergency Medical Services

LaPorte (IN) Hazmat
LaPorte (IN) 911
Ohio Emergency Management Agency
Portsmouth (VA) Police Department
Portsmouth (VA) Fire Department
Portsmouth (VA) Emergency Management

Positive public safety feedback

“Good ICS implementation, a realistic scenario and good attendance across all disciplines.” – Fayette County (KY) Emergency Management Agency

“The team has good familiarity with ICS. They seem to have an excellent level of preparation for the areas in which they will have to operate.” – Hagerstown (MD) Fire Department

“...knowledge of everyone in the exercise, not only their position but others also. It was very organized and on point.” – Lexington (KY) Police Department

“Strengths included use of the Incident Command System for established roles and responsibilities, as well as the identification of partnership opportunities between the county and private sector partners.” – Chesterfield County (VA) Emergency Management

“As an EMA that utilizes the ICS command structure in our EOC, I again commend your personnel for their understanding and implementation of ICS with only a few years of experience...Every member was professional and purposeful in their contributions to the exercise and I believe it permitted each section to have a great understanding of each other's roles and responsibilities...Even as an observer, I had many takeaways that I am bringing back to Delaware County.” – Delaware County (OH) Department of Homeland Security and Emergency Management

Successfully trained ~850 employees who have been assigned an Incident Command System (ICS) role

Maintain state-specific rosters of trained individuals who are available to be activated to support incident response

Recognized as a best practice by industry associations, and invited to present during workshops and conferences

Clarified roles and responsibilities during incident response

Enhanced communication and collaboration internally and externally during incident response

[Incident Command System \(ICS\) Incident Commander Workbook](#)
[Summary of EM Database Management](#)
[EM Training Progression](#)

Entry: Tornado & Wildfire Response

Your Company: Summit Utilities, Inc.

Linking people, ideas and information

In the face of devastating natural disasters in Arkansas and Colorado, Summit Utilities' emergency response showcased our dedication to safety, community, and resilience. Our response efforts in both states served not just as immediate relief actions but also as platforms for connecting people, ideas, and information. In Arkansas, the utilization of Picarro technology verified the safety of our system, underscoring our innovative approach to ensuring public safety and infrastructure integrity amidst chaos. This technology became a focal point for discussions on enhancing emergency response strategies across the utility sector.

Our proactive communication efforts, including the creation of an Arkansas Tornado Information Hub and active engagement through social media and emails, ensured timely updates and essential information reached our customers and community members. These channels facilitated a two-way dialogue, allowing us to address concerns and coordinate with local and state officials effectively.

Furthermore, our charitable contributions and volunteer efforts, particularly the Tree Replacement Project with the Central Arkansas Master Naturalists, highlighted the importance of long-term community recovery and environmental stewardship. By sharing our journey from immediate emergency response to long-term recovery efforts, we connected with other organizations and communities, inspiring a collaborative approach to disaster response and resilience building.

These initiatives demonstrated Summit's commitment to not only restoring services but also fostering community solidarity and environmental recovery, making meaningful contributions to connecting people, ideas, and information for a stronger, more prepared future.

Name of Your Project / Initiative

Tornado and Wildfire Response

The solution

In March 2023, Summit Utilities faced unprecedented emergencies as tornados tore through Arkansas and wildfires threatened Colorado. Our comprehensive emergency management program sprang into action, embodying our commitment to community safety and resilience. In Arkansas, over 150 Summit team members and contractors responded to over 500 work orders, clearing debris, and conducting additional leak surveys to ensure the integrity of our gas

systems. The innovative use of Picarro technology played a crucial role in verifying system safety, a testament to our commitment to leveraging cutting-edge solutions in crisis situations.

In Colorado, the proximity of forest fires to residential areas and critical infrastructure prompted a swift evacuation and response strategy. Our team established an incident command center and worked tirelessly to isolate sections of the natural gas system to prevent further danger. The quick decision-making and actions of our team members, especially in notifying fire services of the imminent threat to Sanborn Ranch, exemplified our proactive and safety-first approach.

Our program extended beyond immediate disaster response; it included significant charitable contributions, the establishment of donation portals and boxes for relief efforts, and organized volunteer opportunities for team members. Summit's response was a multi-faceted effort combining emergency preparedness, community engagement, and environmental stewardship, showcasing our dedication to not just rebuilding but strengthening the communities we serve.

Both teams in Colorado and Arkansas were able to complete their emergency response efforts without any injuries.

Results of your project / initiative.

The effectiveness of Summit Utilities' emergency management program was vividly demonstrated in the aftermath of the 2023 tornados in Arkansas and wildfires in Colorado. Our team's ability to respond to over 500 work orders in Arkansas, coupled with the strategic management of natural gas systems in the face of Colorado's wildfires, showcased our operational excellence and dedication to community safety.

In Arkansas, our efforts led to the swift restoration of services and mitigation of potential safety hazards, with Picarro technology ensuring the comprehensive integrity of our system. The dedication of our teams, working through the night and clearing debris, not only restored normalcy but also deepened the trust and reliance our communities place in us.

In Colorado, our preemptive actions and coordination with firefighting services prevented what could have been a catastrophic escalation, demonstrating the importance of preparedness and rapid response in emergency management. Our actions protected numerous homes and the Sanborn Ranch, highlighting our team's effectiveness in crisis situations.

The program's impact extended well beyond immediate response efforts. Our charitable contributions of \$30,000 to local organizations directly supported recovery and relief efforts, demonstrating our investment in the communities we serve. The establishment of donation portals and boxes facilitated substantial contributions from both our team members and the wider community, embodying a collective spirit of support and recovery.

Volunteer efforts, especially the collaboration with Central Arkansas Master Naturalists on the Tree Replacement Project, underscored our commitment to environmental restoration and community resilience. By engaging in reforestation efforts and supporting biodiversity, Summit Utilities contributed to the long-term recovery and sustainability of disaster-stricken areas.

Moreover, our comprehensive communication strategy ensured that all stakeholders, from customers to local government officials, were informed, involved, and engaged throughout the response and recovery process. This approach fostered a sense of unity and collective action, enhancing our program's overall effectiveness.

Summit Utilities' emergency management program not only responded effectively to immediate crises but also laid the foundation for ongoing community support and environmental stewardship. Our efforts underscored the importance of utility companies in disaster resilience, demonstrating how innovative technology, strategic planning, and community engagement can come together to navigate the challenges posed by natural disasters. The program's success reflects our deep commitment to the safety, well-being, and recovery of the communities we are privileged to serve, marking a significant achievement in emergency management and community service.



Entry: Atmos Energy Supports Gainesville During Outage

Your Company: Atmos Energy

Linking people, ideas and information

Atmos Energy's efforts throughout the natural gas outage in Gainesville are a testament to the dedication and commitment we have to our communities. Our employees lived out the AtmoSpirit principles by being at their best, making a difference, and inspiring trust among our neighbors. Our actions in quickly restoring service to Gainesville, followed by thanking the Gainesville ISD Education Foundation and Gainesville Fire-Rescue, strengthened a solid partnership between Atmos Energy and Gainesville.

Name of Your Project / Initiative

Atmos Energy Supports Gainesville During Outage

The solution

Winter Storm Heather swept across our service territory in mid-January, joining some of the coldest weather events in recent memory after Winter Storms Uri (2021) and Elliott (2022). Thanks to year-round, meticulous planning across all departments and divisions, we were prepared to address any issues that arose. On Jan. 13, when one of our natural gas valves was inadvertently closed by city water crews, Atmos Energy's highly trained technicians responded to a temporary service outage in Gainesville, Texas. A staging area was established at the W.E. Chalmers Elementary School, where Atmos Energy technicians and contractors quickly assembled and deployed to resolve the outage.

Results of your project / initiative.

Service was restored to nearly all 700 customers 24 hours later, underscoring the skill and efficiency of our highly trained crews to address an outage of this magnitude. At a city council meeting on Feb. 6, Mayor Tommy Moore presented the Star of North Texas to Atmos Energy Public Affairs Manager Travis Buckner for his leadership during the gas outage mid-cold snap. The mayor said Buckner and the Atmos Energy team not only responded to the outage, but helped set up an Emergency Operations Center, helped with warming shelters, and helped people throughout our community get reconnected. On Feb. 12, Atmos Energy presented the Gainesville ISD Education Foundation with a \$10,000 check to thank W.E. Chalmers Elementary School for opening its facilities to and providing snacks and water for our crews, so we could restore service quickly to Gainesville residents. We also donated \$5,000 to Gainesville Fire-Rescue to show appreciation for their help with city residents.

