

COUNTY OF MILWAUKEE
Inter-Office Communication

Date: 4/16/2025

To: Marcelia Nicholson, Chairwoman, Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors

From: Cassandra Libal, Director, Office of Emergency Management

Subject: Office of Emergency Management 2024 Annual Report

File Type: Informational Report

This informational report provides a report on how Milwaukee County Office of Emergency Management set and achieved its 2024 goals.

POLICY

This report aligns to Chapter 108: Achieving Racial Equity & Health.

Milwaukee County Code of General Ordinances:	Chapter 108: Achieving Racial Equity & Health
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ALIGNMENT TO STRATEGIC PLAN

- 1A: Reflect the full diversity of the County at every level of County government
- 1B: Create and nurture an inclusive culture across County government
- 1C: Increase the number of County contracts awarded to minority and women-owned businesses
- 2A: Determine what, where, and how we deliver services to advance health equity
- 2B: Break down silos across County government to maximize access to and quality of services offered
- 2C: Apply a racial equity lens to all decisions
- 3A: Invest “upstream” to address root causes of health disparities
- 3B: Enhance the County’s fiscal health and sustainability
- 3C: Dismantle barriers to diverse and inclusive communities

Alignment to the above strategic goals is articulated in responses to the questions below.

BODY

1. Please submit your Scorecard Report along with this report, to show progress on your Department/Office's top goals in 2024. If you would like to add any additional information about the extent to which you accomplished your goals, please do so here.

In 2024, the Office of Emergency Management made great strides towards achieving our top goals. Our Emergency Management Division increased partnerships by establishing new outreach efforts through our participation in the Southeastern Wisconsin Corporations and Organizations Active in Disaster (COAD) partnership. Emergency Management is part of the Board of Director's for the SE WI COAD and works directly with many of our key, non-governmental organization partners that play a vital role in the response to and recovery from a major incident or disaster.

The EMS Division established new partnerships, in 2024 through its participation on the Overdose Public Health and Safety Team (OD-PHAST). OD-PHAST, a multi-disciplinary team comprised of key public health, public safety, and other partners that reviews data and conducts case reviews for fatal overdoses. OEM's active participation in OD-PHAST drives collaboration with local fire departments that are developing Mobile Integrated Health (MIH) teams for overdose follow-ups and referrals. With a recent Opioid Settlement Fund (OSF) award of nearly \$2.4 million, OEM is helping fund these efforts to strengthen Milwaukee County's emergency response and community outreach.

The Radio Division improved responder communication, fluidity, and border to border continuity with three projects upgrading radio system infrastructure. The OASIS system core underwent an advanced upgrade from the physical infrastructure in Waukesha, to a cloud-based solution, called WIPSN (Wisconsin Public Safety Network). This project was accomplished at zero-cost to the County, while operating within existing Motorola contracts. All new hardware, resulting in a full refresh of the older OASIS system core, has been provided by Motorola. This innovative solution brings a new level of redundancy, reliability, flexibility, scalability, and interoperability to the region.

Utilizing \$3.6 million of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding, the Radio Division was able to fully replace the previous OASIS Microwave Backhaul Network. The new Microwave Backhaul system redesigned the OASIS microwave antenna pathways to increase efficiency and reliability for improved responder communication. The updated Microwave Backhaul also provides increased data capacity for added redundancy and allow for system expansion in the future.

Lastly, the Radio Division replaced outdated radios for the Milwaukee County Sheriff's Office (MCSO) which was funded, in part, through the use of the APX 7000 radio replacement capital project. These radios have been replaced with next

generation radios from Motorola, which brings with them a host of new features to greatly improve first responder communications. One of these new features is that the new APX NEXT radios have the ability to automatically convert to LTE from traditional radio signal to dramatically improve redundancy and increase radio coverage in areas and environments that previously had radio coverage issues. Two examples would be in large, heavily constructed facilities where building features prevented radio signal transmissions, and MCSO teams that may need to operate beyond the borders of our existing radio network. They also can use GPS, to see emergency responders on a map for improved situational awareness for incident commanders and dispatchers.

Additionally, in 2024 all of OEM was impacted by the 2024 Republican National Convention (RNC) and the staggering amount of work that was required to ensure the event went on without any major safety issues. Staff from OEM participated in over 15 of the 27 subcommittees that were tasked with preparing for the coordination, safety, and security of the event. During the week of events, OEM personnel were charged with staffing several key operational centers, including the Multi-Agency Coordination Center (MACC), the local Emergency Operations Center (EOC), the Joint Information Center (JIC), and two dispatch centers, ensure continuity of operations throughout all four of OEM's Divisions. To ensure continuity during the event, the 911 Division staffed two locations able to function as dispatch centers. By separating communication staff in two locations, we were able to increase the number of call-takers and dispatchers while protecting our service from any threat that may affect our downtown location, which could compromise the answering of phone and radio requests.

The Emergency Management Division worked directly with the City of Milwaukee in managing the RNC Emergency Operations Center (EOC), which was responsible for coordinating all local, state, and federal resources that were in-place during the event and responding to calls for service. The Radio Division increased interoperability by coordinating locations for multiple federal and state agencies' radio equipment during the RNC and staffed key locations throughout the event to ensure continuity of all radio infrastructure for public safety entities. The Director's Office and EMS Division staffed the MACC throughout the event, which functioned as the key hub for all information being collected and disseminated during the RNC.

2. What key factors *enabled* progress toward accomplishing these goals?

The Emergency Management Division was able to accomplish its goal of establishing a new outreach initiative due to the strong relationships that have been built with key stakeholders. These relationships allow for effective collaboration on new initiatives and streamlined processes that leverage the strengths of each organization involved in the SE WI COAD.

The 911 center was able to reach its goal by intentionally investing in its employees. In 2024, the Board approved a budget that allowed for raises and a re-evaluation of pay compared to the national average. This has been greatly received by the team, which has strengthened and renewed their commitment to Milwaukee County. Due to our continuing staffing shortage, our team is often working twelve hours per day but remain dedicated to servicing one citizen at a time despite their exhaustion. This mindset and focus allow them to get all the information needed without delaying service.

EMS was successful in establishing a leadership role within the overdose public health and safety team steering committee as well as the committee of the whole. This success was made possible by our natural role as the EMS system oversight, with significant access to patient care level data. Using this data we can observe trends, detect populations of focus, and view geospatial areas of interest where there is high overdose activity occurring. In addition, OEM is leveraging opioid settlement funded awards to be able to secure resourcing and programming that is able to inform and respond to these areas and individuals within the county. Early data is showing positive impact as we have been able to identify nearly a 30% decrease in fatal overdoses, a downward trend in non-fatal overdoses, and a significant decrease by more than 40% for naloxone administered by first responders. This data may indicate that there is solid uptake of naloxone and testing instruments within the community that are available from low barrier access locations such as the harm reduction vending machines. GIS and patient care data from OEM has been used to strategically place these vending machines where they are most likely to be needed and used.

The Radio Division projects were able to be completed with ARPA and capital funding. The transition to WiPSN was accomplished without impacting the operation budget of the Radio Division or end users of OASIS. Both projects required a strategic system cutover that was supported by all of OEM, as well as our vendor partners and adjacent Waukesha County personnel.

3. What key factors *hindered* progress toward accomplishing these goals?

The Emergency Management Division has continued to be unable to fund a dedicated Community Outreach Coordinator position due to a lack of availability of grant dollars and flat levy targets. The workload of what would be a dedicated outreach position is currently shared by three Emergency Management Coordinators who are balancing their normal mitigation, planning, preparedness, response and recovery responsibilities with performing outreach initiatives.

Staffing is a continual challenge in 911 Communications. We continue to struggle to find qualified, experienced candidates resulting in hiring personnel with little to no dispatching experience. This extends the training period to as much as 6-8 months,

which does not provide relief to our current staff. Inexperienced trainees are also stunned at the type of workload 911 Communications entails, and it is common for them to resign within the first few months.

Our EMS Data team encountered a staffing turnover issue for our data analytics position, that is funded through OSF. This situation has since been resolved as we were able to successfully recruit and fill the position. OEM is now working to onboard our new data coordinator and getting that individual up to speed with the data products and elements available for analysis.

The Radio Division faced setbacks with the departure of the Radio Services Director at the beginning of 2024. Identifying the gap of information naturally possessed by the previous Director, completing projects, and moving forward with system upgrades, took time and increased workload for the remaining radio division personnel.

4. If any goals are changing, please list your Department/Office goals for 2025. (Please put "N/A" if your goals will remain the same.)

In 2025, OEM will look to increase its investment in employee training and development by increasing training hours by 10% throughout all four divisions. 911 will continue to strive for answering 95% of emergency calls within 10 seconds, or less. EMS is planning to work with health systems to better integrate data and establish a bi-directional, healthcare information exchange. This integration of data will provide hospitals with more timely information from the EMS system, while providing patient outcome information back to EMS once the patient has been discharged. OEM is aiming to get two of the six health systems integrated by the end of 2025. The Radio Division will be working to increase radio resilience for our fire department users by establishing a dedicated fireground radio frequency template that will be trunked, repeatable, and recordable across the entire county. Currently fireground operations are handled on a simplified local talkgroup that is not recordable.

FISCAL EFFECT

The report is informational only and there is no fiscal impact.

VIRTUAL MEETING INVITES

PREPARED BY:

Cassandra Libal, Director; Office of Emergency Management

APPROVED BY:

Cassandra Libal, Director; Office of Emergency Management

ATTACHMENTS:

cc: Kelly Bablitch, Chief of Staff, Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors
Janelle M. Jensen, Legislative Services Division Manager, Office of the County Clerk