



Stillwater County Department of Emergency Services

Year in Review 2024

Vision

The vision of the Stillwater County Department of Emergency Services is to create and sustain a safer future for Stillwater County through effective programs, partnerships, and engaged communities committed to saving lives and reducing the impact of disasters.

Mission

The Mission of the Stillwater County Department of Emergency Services is to reduce the loss of life and property and protect the citizens and visitors of Stillwater County through a comprehensive, all hazards, emergency management program of prevention, protection, mitigation, response, and recovery.

Stillwater County Department of Emergency Services (SC DES) strives to provide the best possible emergency response, recovery, preparedness, and mitigation services for emergencies and disasters in our county. Over the past year we have continued to expand and enhance the services we are providing. Planning and real-life experiences make a significant difference in how we prepare, respond, mitigate, and recover. We have certainly had our share of real-life experience during 2022 and 2023. SC DES led the response and recovery process for two presidentially declared flooding disasters and a train derailment in the Yellowstone River. These were some of the most impactful disasters in Montana's history. While response is difficult, managing recovery is the big lift and certainly was during 2022 and 2023. Because of the experience and training we made it through and recovered.

2024 allowed SC DES time to reset and accomplish many things that we did not have time for in 2022 and 2023. We continue to respond to local emergencies, update our local emergency plans, conduct hazard surveys, provide training and exercises, and manage ongoing grant funding. We have also enhanced our services and built new partnerships throughout 2024. Below we have outlined how SC DES is advancing the level of service we provide to the citizens of Stillwater County.



Response and Coordination

Effective coordination and response help keep emergencies and incidents small and allow for an effective recovery. One of the most important parts of response is communications to our first responder departments. SC DES has collaborated with I am Responding to enhance our county first responder alerting application. SC DES and I am Responding partnered in 2024 to enhance the alerting application. Stillwater County is one of only six other jurisdictions in the United States that is participating in this beta version. Now first responders receive real time computer aided dispatch (CAD) information that is automatically pushed to the alerting application from Stillwater County 911 Dispatch. This allows first responders to have critical information and allows for better decision making during a response.

SC DES applied for and received a Homeland Security Grant (HSG) that allowed for the purchase of active shooter response equipment and training for a multi county region. During 2024 Stillwater County used that funding to purchase and distribute active shooter equipment to Stillwater, Carbon, Sweetgrass Counties, and the City of Laurel. This standardizes the equipment that is used during an active shooter/ hostile event. SC DES and Carbon County partnered to contract with the National Tactical Officers Association (NTOA) to deliver three active shooter/ hostile event training courses in our region. These courses were delivered in Columbus, Red Lodge, and Laurel. These courses were well attended, and we now have a more standardized response to these types of incidents.



Stillwater County first responders participating in active shooter response training.



Effective communication is key during response and SC DES is working with the Stillwater County Sheriff's Office to upgrade the Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) in our 911 center. Central Square is the provider and will be upgrading our CAD system in 2025. The upgraded CAD will speed up response times, provide real time data to first responders, and allow for a more coordinated and effective response to our citizens in their time of need.

SC DES continues our great partnership with the FirstNet Authority, which is the only cellular carrier designed for first responders. SC DES Chief David Stamey was asked to participate in the 2024 FirstNet Emergency Managers Cohort. This cohort is made up of emergency managers from across the United States and works with FirstNet to continue to improve their service and network with emergency managers from across the nation. In October of 2024 Chief Stamey was invited to tour the FirstNet Lab, in Boulder, Colorado. The FirstNet Lab is the center where new communications technology is being developed for first responders across the country.



When wildland fires happen in the county, SC DES and all of our partner first response agencies are ready to respond. In 2024 we experienced several wildland fires across the county. SC DES working as the Fire Warden assists our local, state, and federal agencies with coordination of efforts to keep the fires small and protect life and property. SC DES also leverages state resources, such as aviation assets, to assist with wildland fire suppression. At the end of the 2024 fire season SC DES coordinated an after action review that was conducted by MT DNRC Fire. It has been several years since we have had an after action review and this allowed us to capture best practices for future response to wildland fires.



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Wildland Fire Response 2024



MT DNRC Aviation assists with fire suppression



Preparedness

Preparation and regular training is a key element for improved emergency and disaster response. First responders are able to respond more effectively to emergencies if they have received training and practiced responses through exercises. Planning and having agreements or a memorandum of understanding (MOU) in place improves our ability to respond and adds capacity for our first responders at critical times. Public education to our community provides our citizens with information they can use to stay safe and understand how to respond during an emergency.

During 2023 and 2024 SC DES Chief David Stamey completed a FEMA Incident Command train the trainer course. This instructor course allows SC DES to provide in depth incident command training that was previously not available locally. In 2024 SC DES taught multiple incident command courses to our EOC Team and also taught several courses in the region, including Billings Fire Department. This type of training allows SC DES to continue to support and train local staff and first responders without having to request outside resources to provide training.

SC DES Chief David Stamey attended multiple training courses and conferences in 2024. This training is essential to maintain or expand the required knowledge, skills and abilities for an emergency management program. Attending training and conferences also expands our professional network and enhances sharing of ideas and information about emergency management.

SC DES Chief David Stamey continues to serve as the Vice-President of the Montana Emergency Managers Association (MEMA) that coordinates and promotes emergency management across Montana. As Vice-President, David was responsible for coordinating the 2024 emergency management conference that was held in Butte. This conference provides education for emergency managers from across Montana and promotes networking between response agencies. David also serves as the chair over the newly created Public Information Officers (PIO) Committee that now resides in MEMA. This committee will promote education and coordination of PIO resources across Montana.

Wildland Fires are always at the top of the list of concerns for our county and citizens. SC DES has collaborated with MT DNRC Fire, Columbus Fire and Rescue, Stillwater Valley Watershed, US Forest Service, and others to form a fuels mitigation workgroup, known as Fire Safe Stillwater. This workgroup coordinates fuels mitigation projects across the county and provides education to the public. In November of 2024 Fire Safe Stillwater held the first ever home hardening workshop. This workshop provided our citizens with fire safety and home hardening education.



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Fire Safe Stillwater Members at the November Home Hardening Workshop

Being prepared includes being ready for most any type of disaster or emergency. Based on the 2022 and 2023 disasters we identified a lack of sheltering or evacuation sites. In 2024 SC DES partnered with the Stillwater County Schools and we now have agreements in place to use schools for sheltering and evacuation sites. We are now able to use schools buses to assist with evacuations.

Preparing for disasters includes making sure we have support and backing from county leadership. SC DES facilitated the development of two county resolutions supporting emergency management. Resolution 2024 – 08 adopts our EOC Handbook and Resolution 2024 – 09 confirms the national incident command system (NIMS) will be used for all disasters or emergencies in Stillwater County.

Realizing that other threats exist in the county, SC DES utilized funding from our Homeland Security Grant (HSG) to purchase Bleeding Control (BCON) Kits. BCON Kits were deployed and now located at every county building or work site. These kits are used to control severe bleeding from gun shot wounds or other serious trauma.





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Mitigation

Mitigation is one of the most important activities to keep our county and citizens safe. On average, for every dollar spent on mitigation you save between 5 – 7 dollars. SC DES has been working with Montana Disaster and Emergency Services (MT DES) on a regional and local hazard mitigation plan. The plan has been approved by FEMA and will be approved locally in 2025. A hazard mitigation plan serves to identify hazards that exists in the county, which allows SC DES to develop mitigation projects and strategies. A hazard mitigation plan is also required to receive many different types of grant funding.

SC DES applied for and received funding from MT DNRC to develop a Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP). Think of a CWPP as a hazard mitigation plan for wildland fires. Our current CWPP is outdated and in desperate need of updating. SC DES partnered with Carbon, Park, and Gallatin Counties to develop individual county plans while leveraging additional funding that will include advanced mapping to identify fuels and better define the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI). The CWPP will allow SC DES and Fire Safe Stillwater to identify much needed fuels mitigation projects throughout the county and better respond to wildland fires.



Grant Funding

SC DES strives to deliver high quality disaster response services that are cost effective. SC DES is currently managing multiple grants that off set the cost of doing business and save our citizens money.

Emergency Management Performance Grant \$110,000.00

Funding to support emergency management services for SC DES.

Homeland Security Grant \$72,000.00

Purchase advanced communications equipment that supports field operations. Purchase active shooter/ hostile event equipment training for the region.

Homeland Security Grant \$10,000.00

Design, develop and deliver a Field Operations Guide that supports a coordinated response. The field operations guide will be distributed to every emergency manager in Montana.

MT DNRC Grant \$78,000.00

Design and develop a Community Wildfire Protection Plan for Stillwater County.

MT DNRC Grant \$15,000.00

Purchase subscription to the I am Responding alerting application that is use by all first responders in Stillwater County. Purchase GIS subscription that supports mapping services for first responders and our 911 dispatch center.

Total Grant Funding \$285,000.00

In summary, Stillwater County Emergency Services has had many successes and formed excellent relationships with many different local, state, federal and industry partners. We will continue to enhance the services we provide, build additional partnerships, and continue supporting and working for the citizens of our county.

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