

## State Agency Coordination During Energy-Related Emergencies

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When energy emergencies arise, whether national in scope or within state boundaries, public utility commissions (PUCs) and state energy officials are often called to assist in the response and restoration efforts. There is no one-size-fits-all model of success, but collaboration among emergency response partners in PUCs, state energy offices (SEOs), and state offices of emergency management (OEMs) before, during, and after an incident is invaluable. The purpose of this mini guide is to identify organizational models that enable effective coordination, describe their benefits, and highlight how some states have overcome challenges that may inhibit successful coordination. State agencies interviewed for this guide include PUCs, SEOs, and state OEMs.

### Background: A National Approach to Energy Emergency Response

In 2008, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security released the National Response Framework (NRF), which establishes a comprehensive approach to preparing and providing a unified response to disasters and emergencies. It describes specific authorities and best practices for managing incidents that range from the serious but localized to large-scale terrorist attacks or catastrophic natural disasters.<sup>1</sup>

A foundational principle upon which the NRF rests is engaged partnership across all jurisdictional levels—federal, state, and local. Such partnership provides unity of effort that respects jurisdictional authorities and operational capabilities and ensures efficient incident management and effective use of resources. The NRF also provides an organizational construct that delineates response capabilities and enabling resources by functional categories called Emergency Support Functions (ESFs). There are 15 ESFs, each representing a unique bundle of roles, responsibilities, and activities in an area most often relied upon to carry out a national response effort.

**ESF-12 – Energy** addresses energy emergencies and is the focus of this document. This functional area includes “producing, storing, refining, transporting, generating, transmitting, conserving, building, distributing, maintaining, and controlling energy systems and system components.”<sup>2</sup> The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) is the designated lead federal agency for ESF-12, responsible for bringing together expertise and assets, building capacity, and managing response activities when energy emergencies of a national scale occur. States agencies, particularly PUCs, SEOs, and OEMs, play an instrumental role in marshalling resources and coordinating response efforts within their jurisdictions.

#### About the NCEP Mini Guide Series

*The National Council on Electricity Policy (NCEP) is a platform for all state-level electricity decision makers to share and learn from diverse perspectives on the evolving electricity sector. The NCEP mini guide series promotes this dialogue by highlighting examples of successful engagement across its members. Each mini guide features collaborative approaches, lessons learned, and interviews with leading state and local decision makers.*

1 [https://www.fema.gov/media-library-data/1466014682982-9bcf8245ba4c60c120aa915abe74e15d/National\\_Response\\_Framework3rd.pdf](https://www.fema.gov/media-library-data/1466014682982-9bcf8245ba4c60c120aa915abe74e15d/National_Response_Framework3rd.pdf)

2 <https://www.fema.gov/media-library/assets/documents/25512>

## State Coordination during Energy Emergencies

Many states have adopted the ESF construct into their own emergency management plans and coordination configurations because of its focus on collaborative partnerships and proven organizational value. The flexibility inherent in the ESF construct also allows states to tailor their implementation to align with their own characteristics such as geography, population, industry, and capabilities of local jurisdictions.

That flexibility extends to the designation of the state agency that leads the energy emergency response efforts. A review of publically available state emergency management plans suggests that states rely on one of three models for ESF-12 leadership and support:

**MODEL 1:** PUC is the primary ESF-12 Coordinator with the OEM and SEO in supporting roles. New York, New Jersey, Ohio, and Massachusetts are examples of states that have implemented this model.

In this model, the PUC leads the state's energy emergency response planning and serves as the central point of coordination during energy emergencies. The PUC coordinates with other state agencies and energy utilities and may aid in the recovery of supply and service delivery. The PUC also communicates with federal partners to help them in their assessment of the on-the-ground situation. PUCs using this model have varying degrees of responsibility in preparing the wider community for energy disruptions.

**MODEL 2:** SEO or OEM is the primary ESF-12 Coordinator with the PUC in a supporting role. Nevada, Arizona, Washington, and Virginia are examples of states that use this organizational model.

Generally, PUCs under this model support the ESF-12 coordinator in energy emergency response planning and during energy emergencies. However, many nuances exist. In some states, the PUC may play a more prominent role in some aspects of energy emergency response despite its ESF-12 support designation. For example, in Arizona, Nevada, and Virginia, the SEO or OEM serves as the primary ESF-12 coordinator and the PUC supports where needed. However, the Virginia PUC acts as the lead agency on liquid transport fuels and serves as the liaison between the utilities and the Emergency Operations Center (EOC). Notably, Dominion Energy is also listed as a supporting agency under ESF-12, because it is the largest investor-owned utility in the state. In Arizona, the PUC only monitors state pipelines. In Nevada, the commission is tasked with deciding whether utility regulations need to be suspended during an energy emergency.

**MODEL 3:** The PUC shares roughly equal responsibility with the SEO or the OEM. Wisconsin, Connecticut, Florida, Oregon, Louisiana, Maine, and Hawaii are examples of states structured in this manner.

In states like Florida, the PUC's responsibilities vary, depending on the type of energy emergency. For example, during power outages the PUC will take a primary role, whereas the OEM will serve as the primary lead during fuel emergencies. In Wisconsin, the SEO resides within the PUC and shares responsibility during energy emergencies to advise the OEM on power restoration efforts and natural gas pipeline safety issues. Similarly, Connecticut's PUC and SEO share responsibility in ESF 12 activation, but the energy office is not located within the commission. In Oregon, during an ESF-12 activation the PUC is in charge of electricity and natural gas planning and response, and the SEO handles petroleum, liquefied natural gas, and nuclear planning and response. During a potential or actual emergency both aid in the restoration of damaged energy systems and components. In Louisiana, the Department of Natural Resources (where the SEO resides), handles intrastate natural gas and gathers and reports on information concerning oil and gas production in the Gulf of Mexico, whereas the PUC is responsible for the regulations and restoration of natural gas and electric utilities.

Although the models differ, each provides clearly delineated roles and responsibilities for each state agency, which are typically described in their state emergency management plans (EMPs) and in some instances their state energy assurance plans. These plans generally include ESF annexes that document the lead agency or agencies for each ESF function and support agencies during an activation. In some cases, such as Virginia, those responsibilities are formally defined by statute.

## Attributes of Successful Collaboration

NARUC identified exemplars of ESF-12 collaboration and conducted interviews with principals in each agency—PUC, SEO, and OEM—to learn more about their views on the benefits and challenges of their collaboration. A set of key themes emerged from interviews with Oregon (Model 3), Wisconsin (Model 3), and Virginia (Model 2). Surprisingly, the model is not necessarily relevant when it comes to the effectiveness of collaboration. Rather, three key attributes appear to be more important:

- 1. Inter-organizational relationships among the PUC, SEO, and OEM are strong.** Cooperation is built on a foundation of clearly documented roles and responsibilities and joint problem solving, not necessarily statute-based authority. In Virginia, for example, the roles and responsibilities of state agencies involved in ESF-12 are formally laid out by state code, but are implemented in a manner that provides flexibility in how those responsibilities are executed. Oregon's ESF authorities also derive from state statute, but collaboration is fostered through well-defined and documented roles and responsibilities and standard operating guidelines, which are updated annually. Each agency fills out a yearly ESF maturity assessment to ensure the emergency response partners understand each other's capabilities and where gaps may exist. Wisconsin takes this approach one step further by creating joint coordination groups to solve implementation challenges that may exist between different ESF agencies. For example, the Wisconsin Office of Energy Innovation created a legal coordination group to allow legal teams from different agencies to examine questions of who should receive priority fuel in the event of an emergency.
- 2. The PUC, SEO, and OEM routinely communicate to maintain situational awareness and effectively leverage each other's efforts during emergencies.** Another hallmark of effective collaboration is consistent communication among ESF counterparts, especially during emergencies. Such communication not only enables rapid response during emergencies but also serves to build and institutionalize these important relationships. Many states, such as Virginia, maintain situational awareness and facilitate response activities, in part, through conference calls among federal, state, and local ESF-12 partners before, during, and after an ESF-12 activation. They also rely on web-based platforms such as Eagle-I, created by the DOE and WebEOC to maintain situational awareness and foster effective communication and incident management during an emergency. Both Virginia and Wisconsin use these tools to adapt and respond to emergencies in real-time. Uniquely, Oregon has created its own tool, called RAPTOR, to aid in mapping response and recovery efforts in an ESF-12 activation. Each state agency in Oregon has access to this mapping tool through OsCenter (a platform similar to WebEOC) to see the on-the-ground situation and to better facilitate response and recovery efforts among ESF counterparts.
- 3. PUCs, SEOs, and OEMs exercise together in the form of tabletop exercises and workshops.** In addition to effective communication during emergencies, state agencies that collaborate well also meet and exercise their response roles at least once a year, oftentimes more frequently. In Wisconsin and Oregon, state agencies participate in state-wide tabletop exercises. In Oregon, these tabletop exercises address both large and small scale events, including a major earthquake (e.g., along the Cascadia fault line) and a solar eclipse. Each event exercises the depth and breadth of response and coordination required based on the scenario. Wisconsin also participates in large- and small-scale exercises, recently conducting an exercise based on a major power outage scenario that included more than 200 state agencies. Virginia emphasizes participation in federal tabletop exercises, where federal and state ESF counterparts work together and network with people they would be interfacing with in a real emergency.

Another benefit of regular participation in tabletop exercises is that it helps to minimize the disruptive effects of employee turnover at state agencies. Regular participation in training events ensures that employees from each agency continue to interact and remain informed on who their ESF counterparts are in various state offices at any given time and aids in deepening and further institutionalizing relationships.

## Tips and Tricks for Overcoming Common Challenges to Effective Collaboration

Regardless of how well state agencies collaborate, there are always challenges to building and maintaining the relationship. These include **personnel turnover**, navigating the **jurisdictional boundaries** between regulators and regulated utilities, and where to focus **funding** for improving state energy emergency response. Personnel turnover is an issue for many state agencies. Staff may leave and find other jobs within or outside the government, creating a talent vacuum. PUCs also have a delicate relationship with the utilities they regulate, and utilities can be sensitive about releasing confidential information to the PUC—making maintaining open lines of communication a challenge. Finally, funding is always an issue for state agencies and can make it difficult for agencies to participate in collaborative efforts such as tabletops and workshops. However, these challenges are not insurmountable.

NARUC asked ESF-12 partners in Oregon, Wisconsin, and Virginia about these challenges to gain insight into strategies they use to overcome them. The following bullets include some of their tips and tricks.

- Ensure that job descriptions, standard operating procedures, and contact lists are always up to date.
- Create easy-to-follow playbooks<sup>3</sup> and train new personnel to use them.
- Use group email lists and phone numbers to minimize the reliance on one or two people, and have a documented succession plan.
- Create joint coordination groups within state ESF-12 partnerships to discuss solutions to contentious issues surrounding jurisdiction, guidelines for fuel priority, and other divisive issues.
- In addition to getting to know ESF-12 partners specifically, meet partners who perform other ESF functions within the state (e.g., ESF-2 – Communications) and what their capabilities will be during an ESF-12 activation to foster quick and efficient communication among the agencies.
- Participate in exercises and workshops to build a deep, collaborative relationship among ESF partners.
- Focus requests for funding on possible projects of joint collaboration among partners that can improve every agency's ability to respond effectively to an energy emergency.
- Retain open lines of communication with ESF-12 partners and utilities to ensure that each group knows where funding is needed and how much funding is available for use by other agencies.

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3 For an example, visit Oregon's Cascadia Playbook at: [https://www.oregon.gov/oem/Documents/Cascadia\\_Playbook\\_V3.PDF](https://www.oregon.gov/oem/Documents/Cascadia_Playbook_V3.PDF).

## Collaboration in Their Own Words

To gain insights into how collaborative relationships work in practice, NARUC interviewed ESF-12 partners in Oregon, Wisconsin, and Virginia. The following section describes the unique ways that they approach collaboration. Interview questions were designed to elicit best practice insights. Each interview ended by asking for advice for states that are trying to improve collaboration among their ESF-12 counterparts. The variety of responses provide valuable information for consideration by PUCs, SEOs, and OEMs.

**Table 1. Mini Guide Interviews**

State	ESF-12 Lead & Supporting Agencies	PUC	OEM	SEO
Oregon	PUC Shares Responsibility Roughly Equally with SEO or OEM During Emergency	Lisa Gorsuch	Kelly Jo Craigmiles	Deanna Henry
Wisconsin	PUC Shares Responsibility Roughly Equally with SEO or OEM During Emergency	Jim Lepinski	Drew Werner	Megan Levy
Virginia	SEO or OEM is Primary ESF-12 with PUC supporting	Tim Faherty and David Essah	Patrick Cox	Al Christopher and Brandi Frazier Bestpitch

*Each person interviewed expressed his or her own opinions. Inclusion in this document does not indicate author's or organization's endorsement of any statement or suggestion.*

## OREGON: Using Formal Statutes and Maturity Models to Institutionalize and Deepen Relationships among State Agencies

During NARUC's interviews with staff from the Oregon state energy office, state emergency management agency, and the public utility commission, it became clear that these agencies employ a process-oriented approach to collaboration. Each agency formally documents ESF-12 roles and responsibilities and creates standard operating guidelines. These reference documents help combat staffing challenges if there is higher than normal employee turnover. This likely also helps streamline the onboarding process for new employees.

*The following text is an abridged transcript of interviews conducted with Lisa Gorsuch at the Oregon Public Utility Commission (PUC), Deanna Henry at the Oregon Department of Energy (DOE), and Kelly Jo Craigmiles at the Oregon Office of Emergency Management (OEM).*

### **Describe what brought your agencies together. Is it a formal relationship or an informal one?**

**Lisa Gorsuch, Oregon PUC:** In Oregon, it is formal and by statute. Oregon Revised Statute 401.045 names the 18 agencies that will interact and liaise with the Office of Emergency Management during an emergency. This includes not only the State Energy Office and the Public Utility Commission but also State Police, State Lands, the Department of Veteran Affairs, the Department of Environmental Quality, and the Department of Corrections to name a few. So if you look at the statute, that's what brought us together, but so much of the coordination is through administrative rules as well as through the production of position descriptions that describe each employee's responsibility during an ESF-12 activation.

**Deanna Henry, Oregon DOE:** We all have to attend the Oregon Emergency Response System (OERS) Council Meetings. The OERS Council meets monthly and discusses issues of joint interest, such as what training opportunities are available and tabletop exercises are upcoming. The Oregon Office of Emergency Management also staffs the OERS Council, so we are collaborating with them regularly.

**Kelly Jo Craigmiles, Oregon OEM:** We are the agency charged with emergency coordination and response for all ESFs, so we help in formally coordinating the response efforts among the other state agencies.

### **Are staff roles written down? Are you confident that should a staff member be unavailable, this documentation is sufficient to get other staff members up to speed?**


**Lisa Gorsuch, Oregon PUC:** Yes. In the event that our building is destroyed we have a very simple description of our standard operating guidelines for each position that a new employee can reference. It is not overly complicated, but still detailed enough to allow the new employee or replacement to effectively pick up and use in a disaster scenario.

**Deanna Henry, Oregon DOE:** Yes, and it is built into our state ESF framework. The new position holder in either the commission or the state energy office can be given access to all of the detailed plans and procedures that encompass that position.

**Kelly Jo Craigmiles, Oregon OEM:** Yes, it might be difficult at first, but there is enough documentation that someone could pick up the slack if anything were to happen to any of us. The replacement employee would look at not only documentation on their position description, but also at the ESF maturity model. That model helps state agencies self-assess their ability to respond in an ESF-12 activation, granting the new employee an idea of where the agency is and what changes may need to be made to improve its capability to respond to a disaster.

### **What tools do you use to help in fostering the strong collaborative relationships among your agencies?**

**Lisa Gorsuch, Oregon PUC:** Being in the Cascadia Subduction Zone, we are particularly focused on keeping our response plans up to date. We also conduct our own self-assessments in the form of an ESF maturity model where each agency involved in an ESF-12 activation must assess their current preparedness to respond to a disaster and score themselves on their perceived readiness to respond. We often interact with the other agencies during the process of these self-assessments and that seems to improve our collaboration and ability to respond in a disaster scenario.



**Kelly Jo Craigmiles, Oregon OEM:** The ESF maturity model has been helpful in not only fostering a strong collaborative relationship among our state agencies, but also in quickening the new employee onboarding process. That's a major benefit of the maturity model: it allows new employees and people not familiar with the ESF response framework to look at the assessment in the model and familiarize themselves with what is being done and what still needs to be done to improve the agency's ability to respond. Lisa Gorsuch's help in finalizing the maturity model really helped bring it to fruition and the relationship has been great with them in every way since then.

**What advice would you give other states who would like increase the collaboration they have with their ESF-12 partners?**

**Lisa Gorsuch, Oregon PUC:** I think the number one thing is communication. Getting to know all of your ESF partners (not just your ESF-12 counterparts) is critical and while it's great to participate in tabletop exercises, I think what's truly important is meeting people face-to-face. You don't want the first time you are meeting to be over the phone, or worse still, during or after a major disaster that requires activation of ESF partners.

**Deanna Henry, Oregon DOE:** It's imperative to regularly check in with your ESF counterparts. In Oregon, we have monthly calls with our partners even when an event isn't happening. If a storm is approaching, we have daily coordination calls to make sure we are prepared and ready to respond in a cohesive manner.

**Kelly Jo Craigmiles, Oregon OEM:** Echoing Lisa's statement, I would say the most important thing is to actually meet your ESF partners. However, I'd take it a step further and say, "don't meet the director, meet the worker bees," the ones that are going to make stuff happen, the movers and shakers that are going to be in your coordination center and deploying assets. That's the number one recommendation I can give to anybody—get to know your partners.

## WISCONSIN: Using Formal and Informal Mechanisms for Collaboration to Navigate Challenges

Wisconsin uses both formal and informal mechanisms to engage with their ESF counterparts in the event of an ESF-12 activation. They use formal, joint coordination groups and regular phone calls to keep themselves informed and apprised of the preparation and response efforts of their partners. However, they also use more informal, relationship-based mechanisms for collaboration where the Wisconsin Office of Emergency Management (OEM) and Office of Energy Innovation (OEI) serves as a liaison between the Public Service Commission (PSC) and the utilities themselves. This helps in navigating challenges that arise from the fact the OEI is located within the Wisconsin PSC.

*The following text is an abridged transcript of interviews conducted with Megan Levy at the OEI, Drew Werner of the OEM, and Jim Lepinski from the PSC detailing Wisconsin's hybrid approach to collaboration.*

### Could you describe some of the approaches you've used to navigate challenges when working with your ESF-12 counterparts?

**Megan Levy, Wisconsin OEI:** Being located within the public service commission does complicate matters to an extent. For example, we had a case where a school that wanted to obtain solar panels was unable to do so and I called up the utility to ask them what was going on. Being part of the public service commission, they were hesitant to speak to me about the matter. So I set up a legal coordination group to figure out the issue with the solar panels. That structure has remained in place to help us navigate those types of difficulties and facilitate the flow of information. The legal coordination group is also kept apprised of any tabletop exercises and other joint events that are occurring with the other ESF-12 agencies.

**Drew Werner, Wisconsin OEM:** I think the biggest challenge we have is how and when to incorporate the utility commission into regular partnership meetings. The Department of Military Affairs (DMA) has been able to establish a robust partnership with the utilities and representatives from DMA and the utilities meet regularly to discuss how they can help each other. While the PSC and the utilities certainly share information, utilities, in some cases, feel incorporating regulators into these partnership meetings may cause hesitation on the part of some members to share thoughts and ideas openly. There is general agreement that the PSC needs to be made aware of the procedures the partnership has developed to coordinate response activities, but what level of direct involvement they should have in the meetings is still being worked out. In the state Emergency Operations Center, the PSC and Utility Liaison Officer sit right next to each other, and during the power outage exercises we've held over the last two years, there have been no issues that have held up any response activities. I am certain that if we had a major outage situation here in Wisconsin, everyone would pull together to respond and recover as quickly and efficiently as possible.

### Would you detail how OEI, OEM, and the PSC collaborate and communicate before and during emergencies?

**Drew Werner, Wisconsin OEM:** If we were dealing with a major incident with downstream effects like a New Madrid seismic fault event, we'd be focused on shortages in natural gas and petroleum and any other major outcomes of the event (e.g., power outages). For petroleum, we'd be talking to OEI to understand what the situation is and asking if we could reach out to all of their contacts to get an idea of the ground truth. We'd also be talking to the PSC about the natural gas side of things in order to get an idea of what issues the utilities are having in responding to the fallout from the event. By talking to both agencies in a formal and informal capacity, we can get a better idea of the whole picture on the ground and what we need to do to help the response efforts.

**Megan Levy, Wisconsin OEI:** I believe the collaboration that we have through the Pipeline Emergency Responders Initiative helps in minimizing the impact of pipeline disasters. I think it's really important to bring people who work on pipeline safety together. One of the major things that jump started our initial collaboration was that we were sort of informally 'throwing stuff at the wall' and brainstorming on how best to respond in these types of scenarios. I brought as many state agencies together as I could and when I discussed my concerns with them we decided to create a fuel coordination group where we could have breakouts with other state agencies and talk about issues we didn't want to talk about with private entities. It provided us with an open forum to discuss these matters and kept apprehension surrounding regulatory concerns with the PSC at bay since we aren't regulators.

**Jim Lepinski, Wisconsin PSC:** Since the utilities provide updates to us directly, PSC staff has access to information directly from the source. This arrangement also avoids any situation where PSC staff must relay information to emergency management staff, which could lead to inaccurately conveyed or misunderstood communications.



## Do you have formal mechanisms or policies in place to deal with a cyber emergency?

**Megan Levy, Wisconsin OEI:** The state of Wisconsin has a formal cyber strategy and response plan, but at the PSC, our CIO is also working on developing a Cyber Risk Assessment tool for local governments and emergency management agencies. The CIO is also part of our civilian cyber team and participates in council meetings along with our staffer who handles our continuity of operations plans. We can gain some valuable information from those meetings about how to respond and prepare for a cyber emergency.

**Drew Werner, Wisconsin OEM:** Our state emergency operations plan has a cyber incident response annex and it covers how we would respond to cyber-attacks with different levels of severity. It also delineates who the lead coordinating agency would be in the event of such an incident. Depending on the type of incident, the governor can either appoint the Department of Administration or the Department of Military Affairs to lead the state response. Either way, we have the capability to send out cyber response teams to aid in the response of the incident. So we feel pretty well equipped to respond.

**Jim Lepinski, Wisconsin PSC:** To my knowledge, the PSC does not make a distinction among emergency types, so our response procedures apply to both situations and only change based on the level of the severity of the attack. For example, some of the exercises we have conducted include some more severe attacks that contain elements of both cyber and physical threats and the strategy for response might change in that case.

## What advice would you give other states who would like increase the collaboration they have with their ESF-12 partners?

**Drew Werner, Wisconsin OEM:** I would say, get involved. Go to tabletop exercises and workshops and don't limit yourself to your local region, if you can. Get out there and meet people in different states and regions. No matter what their role is you can learn something new and better understand what they do on a daily basis and use that to inform the way you do things in your own state. Ask about the information streams they access on a regular basis and see if you can get access to those as well. Any information you can gather and relationships you build are critical in aiding your ability to respond to emergencies.

**Megan Levy, Wisconsin OEI:** Put a coordination group together and start holding meetings. Get on the Department of Energy's ISERnet and go to the database of energy assurance coordinators from different regions and call them up, get to know what they are doing in their states, and see if you can make that work in your own [state]. Within your own state, you can call up your ESF-12 counterparts and let them know that you are setting up a group to discuss your response plans during an emergency. Just start calling people and start collaborating.

**Jim Lepinski, Wisconsin PSC:** Increasing collaboration between your ESF partners will take time and resources. Consequently, it is best to seek advice from your counterparts on what would be some good first steps for increasing that collaboration. Start with baby steps and build from there. Just by communicating more with your ESF-12 counterparts you are already increasing your level of collaboration.

## VIRGINIA: The “Hub and Spokes” Approach to Coordination

Virginia’s approach to coordination is less prescriptive than approaches other states may have adopted, yet, coordination is strong and a deep institutional relationship exists among the state agencies. Using a “hub and spokes” approach, the OEM is the central point of coordination and relies upon the subject matter experts in the PUC and SEO and the relationships that those agencies maintain to ensure rapid response to energy emergencies. Lessons learned from Virginia could help those states with non-prescriptive coordination models to learn how to better work with their ESF counterparts.

*The following text is an abridged transcript from interviews with Al Christopher and Brandi Frazier Bestpitch of the Virginia Department of Mines, Minerals, and Energy (DMME, which is the SEO); Patrick Cox of the Virginia Department of Emergency Management (VDEM); and Tim Faherty and David Essah of the State Corporation Commission (SCC, which is the PUC) concerning this hub and spokes approach.*

### Describe what brought your agencies together. Is it a formal relationship or an informal one?

**Al Christopher, DMME:** It’s largely an informal, administrative process. However, there are references in the state code that outline some of the agency’s duties and authority and bear on our responsibilities in an ESF response. But really, it’s more of a ‘hub and spokes’ approach—the various ESF functions are handled by different state agencies, but the Virginia Department of Emergency Management is essentially the hub through which we all report in and communicate with one another.

**Patrick Cox, VDEM:** The SCC is mentioned in our emergency operations plan as one of the lead entities for ESF-12 and that has the power of state law behind it. So from that standpoint, the relationship is formal. However, the day-to-day relationship between the VDEM and the SCC is more informal. They come to trainings when they can and support us when needed and I’d say that due to the nature of Virginia’s EOP, the relationship is rather symbiotic. Dominion Energy has a spot in our EOC and because of that there can be some tension with information sharing between the commission and the utility. However, the informal nature of the relationship allows the VDEM to serve as a sort of mediator or liaison between the utility and the commission since there is not traditional, formal face-to-face conversation going on between the utility and the commission.

**Tim Faherty, SCC:** The SCC is not an executive branch agency like the other agencies involved in emergency response. The interagency relationship for emergency matters, though not statutorily prescribed, remains a high priority and intersects with the commission’s expertise and commitment to oversee necessary utility services for Virginians. A number of years ago, there was a need to ensure timely and accurate expertise related to utilities and power outages, and the SCC stepped in to fill that role. Since we are an agency that has well established channels for communicating with electric, gas, water, and other utilities, it is an arrangement that has worked well.


### What are the benefits to collaboration using this sort of model?

**David Essah and Tim Faherty, SCC:** Because of the flexible nature of the collaboration, we feel more of a need to communicate well and back each other up. For example, when we learned that the EOC had temporarily lost its ability to get power outage data from utilities, we quickly filled that gap. On the VDEM side, they have a GIS-based system that we can make use of to get a better idea of the outages being experienced on “on the ground.” At the same time, the SCC can provide VDEM with the names of the counties or localities and the associated outages occurring in the wider area. We all have different capabilities that we can bring to the table and have the ability to share and communicate that information symbiotically.

**Al Christopher, DMME:** Despite the informal nature of the relationship, we are very much plugged into one another and emergency professionals are able to provide us with a great deal of situational awareness. We really do know what’s going on around the state, especially during larger emergencies because we are able to get the big picture from all of our ESF partners. The ability to receive so much information so easily may be a benefit of having a looser, less formal collaboration model.

### Is there a particular event that comes to mind that really summarizes the benefits to your state’s model for collaboration?

**Patrick Cox, VDEM:** In 2009, we had a massive thunderstorm come through Virginia. When I saw it approaching on our radar, I decided to activate the EOC. There was no preparation for it whatsoever and the next day there were thousands upon thousands of customers without power. Multiple 911 call centers were down and so were many telephone lines. The extreme nature of the outage required VDEM to meet directly with utilities to figure out how best to deal with the power failures and what tradeoffs would need to be made to effectively restore electricity to many areas. The speed and fluidity with which power was restored was likely aided by the loose nature of our collaboration model, since there wasn’t as much bureaucratic red tape to get through.



**Al Christopher, DMME:** The hurricane this past fall would be a good example I'd say. We don't work in silos, but we have a very 'hub and spokes' sort of process. We are given responsibility for things in our bailiwick that we have contacts for and expertise in, and we report on that function as part of our responsibilities under ESF-12. So we do research and reach out to the people we need to in order to get the industry information to support issuance of transportation waivers for fuel delivery, for example. Likewise, we are also contacted by other agencies (or 'spokes in the wheel') asking us for information. It's an informal process, but because of our deep understanding of one another's responsibilities, it works well.

**Tim Faherty and David Essah, SCC:** In 2003, after Hurricane Isabel made landfall and we were in the recovery stages, the state realized that it would be a good idea to give Dominion, our largest investor-owned utility, a seat at the EOC to speed up and keep lines of communication open. Broad representation at the EOC level provides us confidence, that we don't need to be physically present to communicate outage and restoration information relative to the utilities under our jurisdiction. We haven't had any major issues with collaborating effectively with our ESF counterparts.

**What advice would you give other states who would like to increase the collaboration they have with their ESF-12 partners?**

**Tim Faherty and David Essah, SCC:** Develop the relationship with your ESF counterparts before disaster hits and establish clear guidelines with the emergency management office for the authority your agency or commission has during an activation. For example, we as the commission are not able to dispatch resources during an emergency. It's important that our colleague agencies know what we can and cannot do before a disaster strikes to help reduce a chance of misunderstanding during an actual emergency.

**Patrick Cox, VDEM:** To my ESF-12 counterparts and peers, I would say to always make sure that you are offering something while demanding something. It's counterproductive to come into these sorts of partnerships with a lot of demands and a heavy hand. Cooperate and communicate with your partners and try and understand where they are coming from and who they have to answer to in the long run.

**Al Christopher, DMME:** Participate in trainings and workshops that your emergency management agency is offering to build out and deepen that relationship. For increasing collaboration between the public utility commission and the state energy office, I'd recommend taking part in joint enterprises like the NASEO-NARUC electricity planning task force. It's a great way to really get acquainted with what each agency is doing.

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**NATIONAL COUNCIL  
ON ELECTRICITY POLICY**

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### **About the National Council on Electricity Policy**

The National Council on Electricity Policy (NCEP) is a platform for all state level electricity decision makers to share and learn from diverse perspectives on the evolving electricity sector. Our community includes over 200 representatives from public utility commissions, air and environmental regulatory agencies, governors' staffs and state energy offices, legislatures, and consumer advocates. We are an affiliate of the National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners (NARUC) Center for Partnerships and Innovation (CPI).

NCEP serves as a forum for collaboration around grid-related topics at state, regional, and national levels, offering a unique opportunity for state electricity decision makers throughout the country to examine the ways new technologies, policies, regulations, and markets impact state resources and the bulk power system.

NCEP facilitates an annual meeting, connections to virtual resources, and ongoing learning opportunities for members to explore multiple perspectives on complex electricity system issues.



**NARUC**

National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners

### **About the NARUC Center for Partnerships & Innovation**

The NARUC Center for Partnerships & Innovation (CPI) identifies emerging challenges and connects state utility commissions with expertise and strategies to navigate complex decision-making. We accomplish this by building relationships, developing resources, and delivering training that provides answers to state commissioners' questions. CPI works across four key areas on a wide range of projects: energy infrastructure modernization; electricity system transformation; critical infrastructure, cybersecurity, resilience; and emerging issues. CPI is funded by cooperative agreements with the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE), the U.S. Department of Commerce's National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST), and charitable sources.