



THE BEACON

a moving force in emergency management

December 2025
Issue

Thank you!

As we close out the year, I want to recognize all of our membership and emergency managers across the state for the efforts you have made individually and collectively for your jurisdictions and our association. I see cooperation and collaboration as one of the most important attributes in our profession to accomplish goals and complete tasks.

In 2025, this was on full display by the EMAG committees and among EMA's across the state. A new year presents new opportunities to enhance capabilities and continue moving emergency management forward. I look forward to hearing about these accomplishments during area meetings and being featured here in upcoming editions of the Beacon. Thank you for all you do and on behalf of the Board of Directors, we are wishing you a great holiday season!

In humble service,
Stephen Dooley, President



CHAPLAIN'S CORNER—RUN THE RACE THIS SEASON

Hebrews 12:1 *Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us. 2 We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith. Because of the joy awaiting him, he endured the cross...*

This passage reminds us how to run this race we call life. It is especially important to remember this time of year. The Holidays season can be brutally busy for some and mysteriously sad and quiet for others. As Christ-followers, we should remember to run free (strip of weight), run faithful (with endurance, not a sprint), and to run focused (with our eyes on Jesus). Afterall, Jesus is the true reason for the season! Not the busyness, not the gifts, not the to-do-list...but JESUS!

Lord, I ask you to be with all of the emergency managers this year as we continue to minister to our communities. Remind us to run free, faithful and focused as we enter 2026, Amen!

Check on your neighbor,
Scott Cagle, EMAG Chaplain



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SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST

- Be on the look our for member spotlights!
- Remember to join EMAG today! pg.8

SOME AREA NEWS...

Gwinnett County Emergency Management has successfully completed its week-long on-site assessment through the Emergency Management Accreditation Program (EMAP) as part of the county's five-year reaccreditation cycle. The assessment team conducted an extensive review of our program's plans, procedures, capabilities, and documentation. Preliminary findings indicate that Gwinnett County is compliant with all 73 applicable EMAP standards. Final accreditation approval is expected following the EMAP Commission's formal review in spring 2026.

As you know, EMAP accreditation represents the industry's benchmark for excellence in emergency management. The program evaluates our emergency management program across a full spectrum of capabilities, including hazard identification and risk assessment, mitigation planning, resource management, communications and warning, training and exercises, and operational readiness. This EMAP process provides an independent validation that Gwinnett County's Emergency Management program meets nationally recognized standards and is committed to continuous improvement.

Achieving preliminary compliance during this on-site review marks a huge accomplishment for Gwinnett County's first reaccreditation cycle since initially earning EMAP accreditation in 2020. It demonstrates the county's ongoing commitment to strengthening preparedness, ensuring accountability, and maintaining a high level of resilience for its residents and partner agencies. This accomplishment was strongly supported by EM Specialist Stephanie Swanson, who served as our Accreditation Manager and ensured the process moved forward with accuracy, dedication, and remarkable attention to detail. And she is to be highlighted for all her achievements and work on this reaccreditation process.

!KUDOS TO GWINNETT COUNTY EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT!



ROCKDALE COUNTY PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release
October 17, 2025

Contact: Mike White, Deputy Director
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Rockdale County EMA Installs Outdoor Weather Siren System

ROCKDALE COUNTY, Ga. – Rockdale County Emergency Management Agency (EMA) has successfully installed its weather siren system, marking a significant step forward in public safety and emergency preparedness. After being on hold for three years, the project is finally complete, and the system is now fully operational.

There are nine fully operational sirens throughout the County:

- Costley Mill Park
- South Rockdale Park
- Lorraine Park
- Legion Fields
- Johnson Park
- Wheeler Park
- Lakeview Estate Park
- Black Shoals Park
- Earl O'Neil Park

This automated system is directly linked to the National Weather Service, allowing for real-time activation during tornado warnings. The system delivers faster, more consistent alerts to residents who are outdoors, urging immediate action during life-threatening weather emergencies.

Residents are reminded that weather sirens are designed to warn people who are outdoors and may not be heard inside buildings. When a siren sounds, individuals should seek shelter immediately, move to the lowest interior room of their home, and stay away from windows. It is also important to monitor local media, radio, television, or weather apps for further updates and instructions.

Monthly siren tests will occur on the first Saturday of each month at 1:00 PM, unless severe weather is present.

The Rockdale County EMA encourages all residents to sign up for emergency notifications by texting "ROCKDALE" to 67283 and to use weather radios for continuous alerts from the National Weather Service.

For more information, contact Rockdale County EMA at 770-278-8405.

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!WELL DONE ROCKDALE COUNTY EMA!

2026 EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT SUMMIT & TRAINING SESSION

Time is ticking... the 2026 Summit and Training Session will be held at the Jekyll Island Convention Center.

75 Beachview Dr N, Jekyll Island, GA 31527

April 1, 2026 - April 3, 2026

March 31 - Travel Day

More information to be posted soon!

"I have been going to these conferences for over 10 years and this is the best one we've ever had." ~Last Years Attendee

COPING WITH STRESS, DEPRESSION AND THE HOLIDAYS

The holiday season often brings unwelcome guests — stress and depression. And it's no wonder. The holidays present a dizzying array of demands — parties, shopping, baking, cleaning and entertaining, to name just a few.

But with some practical tips, you can minimize the stress that accompanies the holidays. You may even end up enjoying the holidays more than you thought you would.

Preventing holiday stress and depression

When stress is at its peak, it's hard to stop and regroup. Try to prevent stress and depression in the first place, especially if the holidays have taken an emotional toll on you in the past.

Acknowledge your feelings. If someone close to you has recently died or you can't be with loved ones, realize that it's normal to feel sadness and grief. It's OK to take time to cry or express your feelings. You can't force yourself to be happy just because it's the holiday season.

Reach out. If you feel lonely or isolated, seek out community, religious or other social events. They can offer support and companionship. Volunteering your time to help others also is a good way to lift your spirits and broaden your friendships.

Be realistic. The holidays don't have to be perfect or just like last year. As families change and grow, traditions and rituals often change as well. Choose a few to hold on to, and be open to creating new ones. For example, if your adult children can't come to your house, find new ways to celebrate together, such as sharing pictures, emails or videos.

Set aside differences. Try to accept family members and friends as they are, even if they don't live up to all of your expectations. Set aside grievances until a more appropriate time for discussion. And be understanding if others get upset or distressed when something goes awry. Chances are they're feeling the effects of holiday stress and depression, too.

STRESS CON'T

Stick to a budget. Before you go gift and food shopping, decide how much money you can afford to spend. Then stick to your budget. Don't try to buy happiness with an avalanche of gifts.

Try these alternatives:

- Donate to a charity in someone's name.
- Give homemade gifts.
- Start a family gift exchange.

Plan ahead. Set aside specific days for shopping, baking, visiting friends and other activities. Plan your menus and then make your shopping list. That'll help prevent last-minute scrambling to buy forgotten ingredients. And make sure to line up help for party prep and cleanup.

Learn to say no. Saying yes when you should say no can leave you feeling resentful and overwhelmed. Friends and colleagues will understand if you can't participate in every project or activity. If it's not possible to say no when your boss asks you to work overtime, try to remove something else from your agenda to make up for the lost time.

Don't abandon healthy habits. Don't let the holidays become a free-for-all. Overindulgence only adds to your stress and guilt. Try these suggestions:

- Have a healthy snack before holiday parties so that you don't go overboard on sweets, cheese or drinks.
- Get plenty of sleep.
- Incorporate regular physical activity into each day.

Take a breather. Make some time for yourself. Spending just 15 minutes alone, without distractions, may refresh you enough to handle everything you need to do. Find something that reduces stress by clearing your mind, slowing your breathing and restoring inner calm. Some options may include:

- Taking a walk at night and stargazing.
- Listening to soothing music.
- Getting a massage.
- Reading a book.

Seek professional help if you need it. Despite your best efforts, you may find yourself feeling persistently sad or anxious, plagued by physical complaints, unable to sleep, irritable and hopeless, and unable to face routine chores. If these feelings last for a while, talk to your health care provider or a mental health professional.

Take control of the holidays

Don't let the holidays become something you dread. Instead, take steps to prevent the stress and depression that can descend during the holidays. Learn to recognize your holiday triggers, such as financial pressures or personal demands, so you can combat them before they lead to a meltdown. With a little planning and some positive thinking, you can find peace and joy during the holidays.

SOURCE: MAYO CLINIC



RESOURCES



2025 BUSINESS MEETING HIGHLIGHTS

-Brasstown Valley Resort was selected as the 2026 Fall Conference location, dates are 11/15/26 – 11/18/2026

-The EMAG Spring Conference will be held at the Jekyll Island Convention Center 4/1/2026 – 4/3/2026

-Registration will be announced by email to emergency managers and then to CVENT contacts and our website.

-Hotel blocks have been arranged with special rates for EMAG and will be available within the registration process.

Beginning January 1, 2026 EMAG Membership Cards will be emailed.

EMAG Membership pricing is changing to:

- \$150.00 Corporate Membership
- \$50 Active/Voting Member
- \$25 Associate Member

**BECOME A
MEMBER**

Click here



IN OTHER NEWS...GEORGIA REPRESENTS @ IAEM



From the IAEM Conference, James Westbrook reported the following people from Georgia were recognized:

- Spencer Hawkins (Macon-Bibb EMA) - IAEM-USA Presidential Citation for his efforts in helping to lead IAEM's Government Affairs Committee.
- Ashley Tye (Lowndes County EMA) - IAEM-USA Clayton R. Christopher Memorial Award (This is a career achievement award for local emergency managers).
- Jeffrey Jellets (Salvation Army) - IAEM-USA Career Excellence Award.



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2025 Fall Conference & 67th Annual Business Meeting

AWARD WINNERS



Sharon Courson (Barrow County EMA) – Outstanding Contribution to the Profession



Katy Westbrook – Volunteer/Citizen of the Year



Jim Totten (Pike County EMA) – Director of the Year



Columbia County – Emergency Management Agency of the Year

RESOURCES

(CLICK ON LOGOS)

EMAG

The Emergency Management Association of Georgia (EMAG) is an association of professionals serving its members by promoting professional development, providing networking opportunities, and serving as an advocate for the profession of Emergency Management.

EMAG has three primary goals:

To assist members in their efforts to save lives and protect property from the effects of disasters.

To provide a forum for professionals to discuss current issues in the emergency management field.

To serve as a policy advisory board to local emergency management agencies as well as to the Georgia Emergency Management Agency/Homeland Security.



GEMA/HS

Training
Registration
System



FEMA

Emergency
Management
Institute



FEMA



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EMAG is the moving force of emergency management in the State of Georgia, driving professional excellence and decisive action when it matters most. We unite practitioners, share proven strategies, and foster a collaborative community dedicated to safeguarding lives and protecting property from natural, technological, and man-made hazards. Whether confronting hurricanes, floods, cyber threats, or large-scale public events, EMAG delivers the insight and support you need to make every response count.

Our mission moves us forward through three core commitments:

- 1) We empower members with immersive workshops and training that sharpen your readiness and confidence.
- 2) We cultivate a vibrant forum where practitioners dissect emerging threats, exchange best practices, and provide innovative solutions that keep Georgia one step ahead.
- 3) We serve as the trusted policy adviser to local EMAs and GEMA/Homeland Security, injecting frontline insights into legislation, guidelines, and statewide initiatives. Meanwhile, our Legislative Committee champions emergency managers interests at the Georgia General Assembly to work to secure sustainable funding, regulatory reforms, and policies that translate into real-world resilience.

Joining EMAG means more than a membership card it's a commitment to excellence and community. Active, associate, and corporate members each gain exclusive access to advocacy channels, and strategic partnerships that accelerate your professional growth. Our annual conference convenes leaders, practitioners, and industry innovators for keynotes, hands-on demos, and unparalleled networking, while regional meetings keep you plugged into the latest developments. Step into Georgia's premier emergency management association where collaboration sparks innovation, advocacy drives change, and every member becomes the moving force behind Georgia's emergency management programs, propelling the state toward a safer, stronger tomorrow.

Join Today