



Virginia Department of
Emergency Management

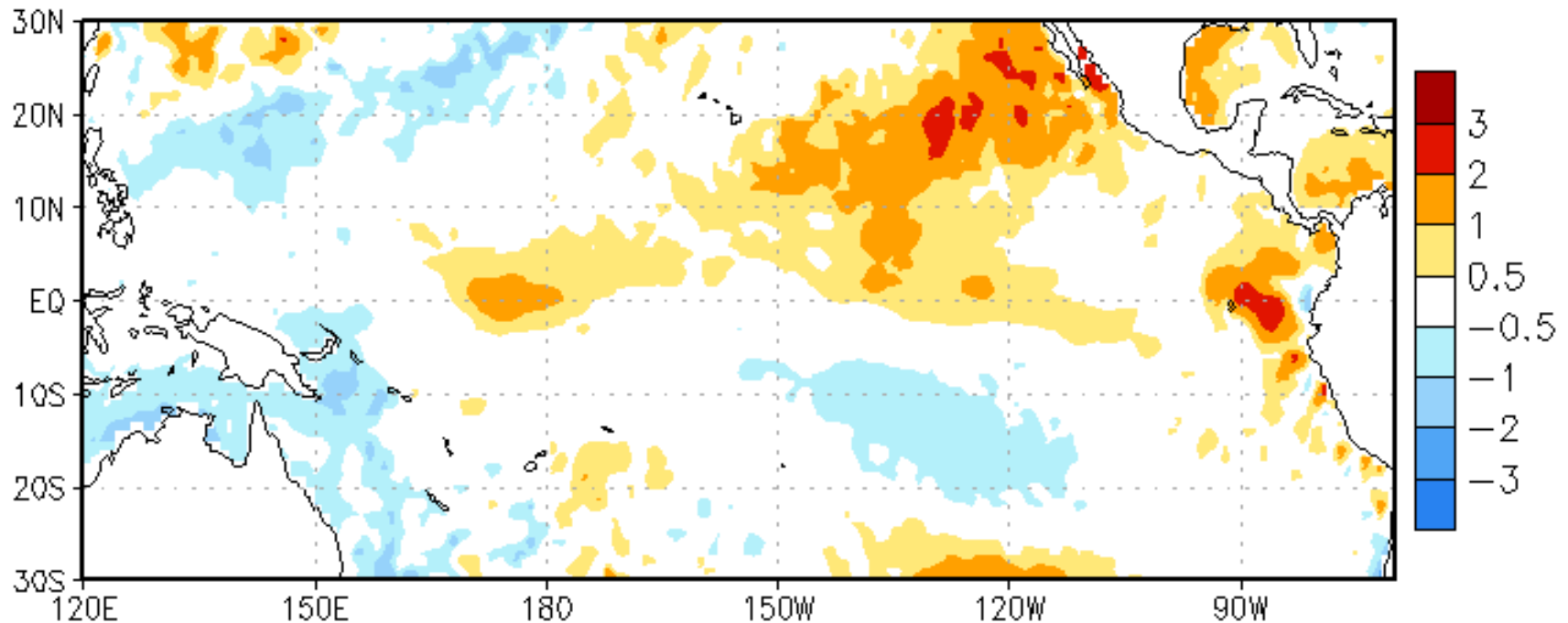
2026 VEST Hurricane Readiness Briefing

July 23, 2026

El Niño Strengthening

Meteorologist In Charge, Wakefield NWS, Jeff Orrock

Week centered on 29 APR 2026
Relative SST Anomalies (°C)



There is an **97% chance of El Niño persisting until spring 2027.**

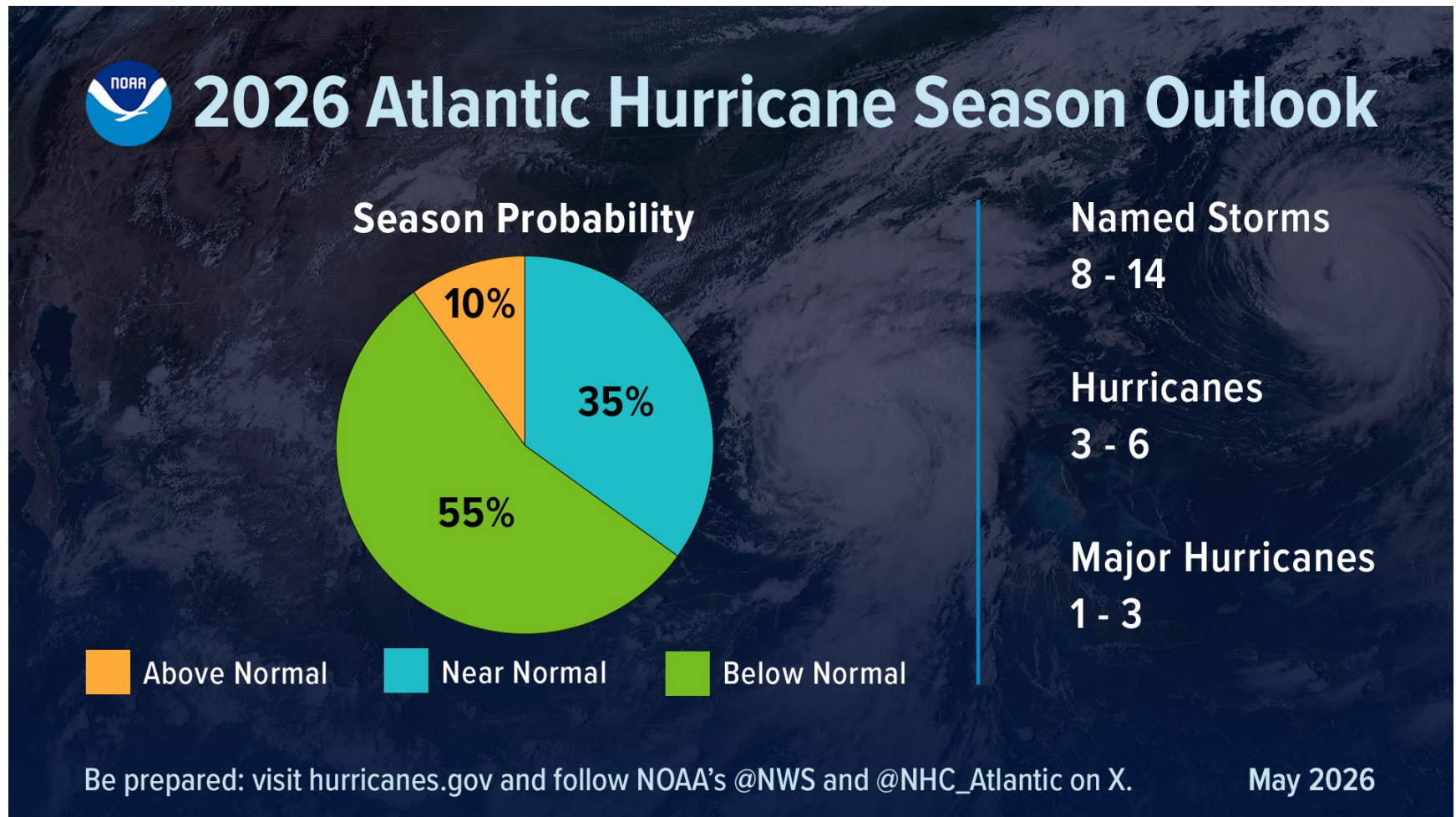


What does an El Niño Typically Mean for Atlantic Hurricane Season?

- El Niños bring warmer than normal ocean temperatures and lighter winds and more storms to the equatorial Pacific
- El Niños tend to increase wind shear, which inhibits tropical development in the Atlantic
- An El Niño does NOT mean no Atlantic hurricanes
- Don't let a "below-normal" season catch you off guard! Here are some examples of notable storms that impacted Virginia during El Niño seasons:
 - Hurricane Fran (1996, flooding & widespread power outages)
 - Hurricane Bonnie (1998, coastal flooding, storm surge, beach erosion, strong winds)
 - Hurricane Joaquin (2015, catastrophic flooding in SE VA)
 - Hurricane Florence (2018, inland flooding and tornadoes)



Below-Normal Season Predicted



Normal: 14 Named Storms, 7 Hurricanes, 3 Major Hurricanes



2026 Atlantic Tropical Cyclone Names

Arthur
Bertha
Cristobal
Dolly
Edouard
Fay
Gonzalo

Hanna
Isaias
Josephine
Kyle
Leah
Marco
Nana

Omar
Paulette
Rene
Sally
Teddy
Vicky
Wilfred

Be prepared: visit hurricanes.gov and follow NOAA's @NWS and @NHC_Atlantic on X.

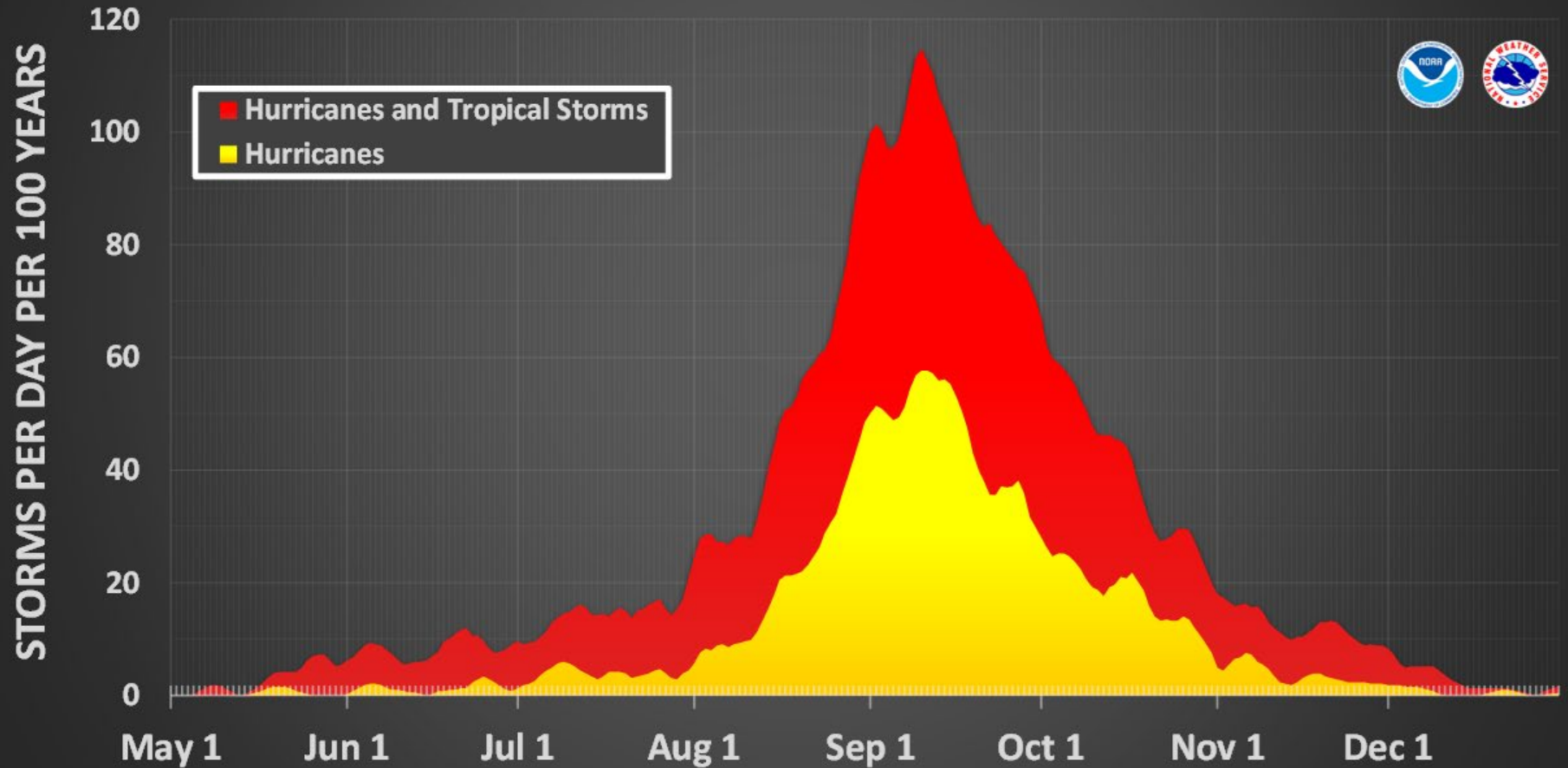
May 2026

Same as 2020 list, with Leah replacing Laura. The name Laura was retired after Hurricane Laura hit Louisiana as a Category 4 storm.



Atlantic Hurricane and Tropical Storm Activity

Based on Data from 1944 to 2020



VDEM Hurricane Program Updates

Hurricane Program Manager, Bruce Sterling

- Hurricane Evacuation Study
- Hurricane Season Kickoff Meeting
- Regional Delmarva Planning
- Annual Virginia / North Carolina Evacuation Meeting
- FEMA / Virginia Annual Pre-Hurricane Season Meeting
- Hurricane Readiness for Inland Communities Course



Principals of Emergency Management

State Coordinator, Lauren Opett



- All disasters are LOCAL disasters
 - *locally executed, regionally coordinated, state managed, and federally supported*
- Emergency Managers coordinate, more than they command.
- Preparedness and readiness is key - The purpose of federal support and reimbursement is to supplement, *not* to supplant existing programs/insurance.



Commonwealth of Virginia Emergency Operations Plan (COVEOP)



Acting Chief of Preparedness, Rachel Slotter

- Framework for how the Commonwealth supports local governments, individuals, and businesses
- Improves capability to respond to and recover from disasters
- Emergency Management = Whole of Government Responsibility



COVEOP

An “Interoperable” Plan



- Compatible with federal plans and statutes in order to provide prompt, effective, and seamless assistance to local jurisdictions when federal assistance is requested
 - Promulgated by Governor
 - Outlines roles and responsibilities of all Executive Branch Agencies
 - Identifies command and control
 - All hazards; natural and human caused



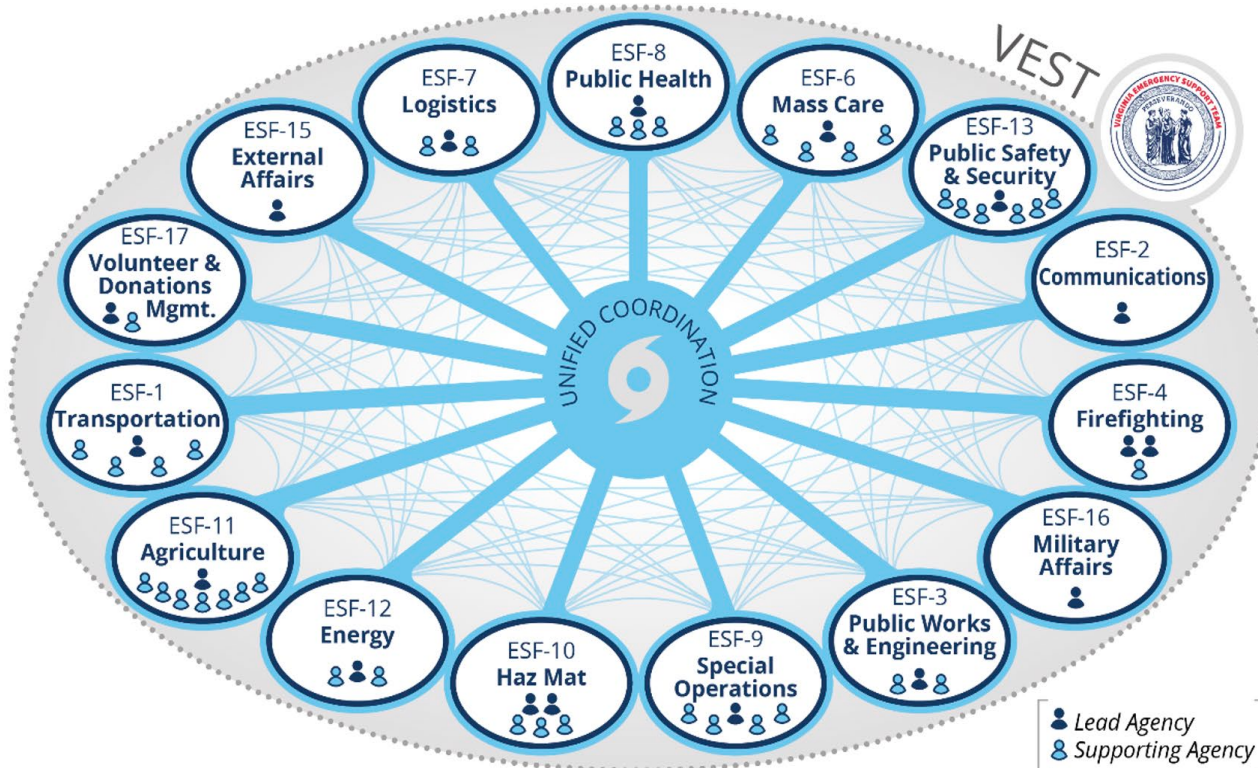
Agency Responsibilities



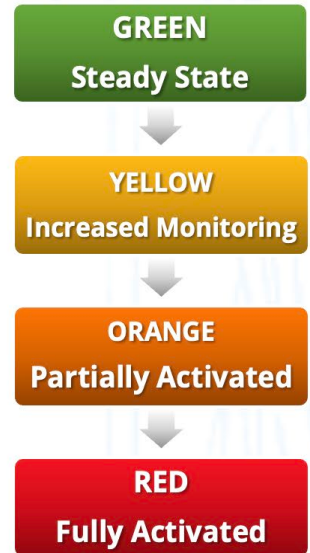
- **Have plans or procedures**
 - to implement assigned responsibilities in the COVEOP
 - to implement assigned responsibilities in supplemental plans and annexes
 - for response to and recovery from a natural or human-caused disaster
- **Provide**
 - assistance directly to political subdivisions during small, localized events
 - personnel to the VEST to support ESF operations
 - situational and incident-specific information to the VEST
- **Identify** staff liaisons or points of contact to provide technical and subject matter expertise, information, and support
- **Encourage and permit** employee participation in training and exercises related to their assigned emergency roles
- **Promote** participation in the Adjunct Emergency Workforce Program



... Requires a Coordinated, Resilient Approach



VEST ACTIVATION LEVELS



COVEOP and Annexes

- **Basic Plan (COVEOP)**
- **Support Annexes**
 - Continuity of Government
 - Statewide Recovery
 - Family Assistance Center
 - State Managed Shelter
 - Mass Fatality Response
- **Hazard Specific Annexes**
 - Earthquake Response
 - Hurricane and Tropical Storm
 - Severe Wildfire Response
 - Radiological Response
 - Cyber Incident Response
- **Related Plans**
 - Critical Infrastructure Protection and Resilience Strategic Plan
 - Emergency Alert System Plan
 - Homeland Security Plan
 - Logistics Management Plan
 - Critical Transportation Needs Plan



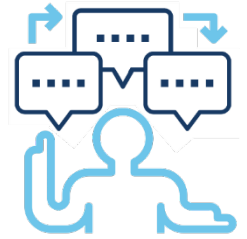
A Closer Look: Hurricane & Tropical Storm Annex

- One of the few annexes that specifies actions 'left of bang'.
- Spells out decision points in time and context prior to, at and after landfall.
- Identifies the roles and responsibilities of state agencies as they support response and recovery.



Key Concepts

State Coordinator, Lauren Opett

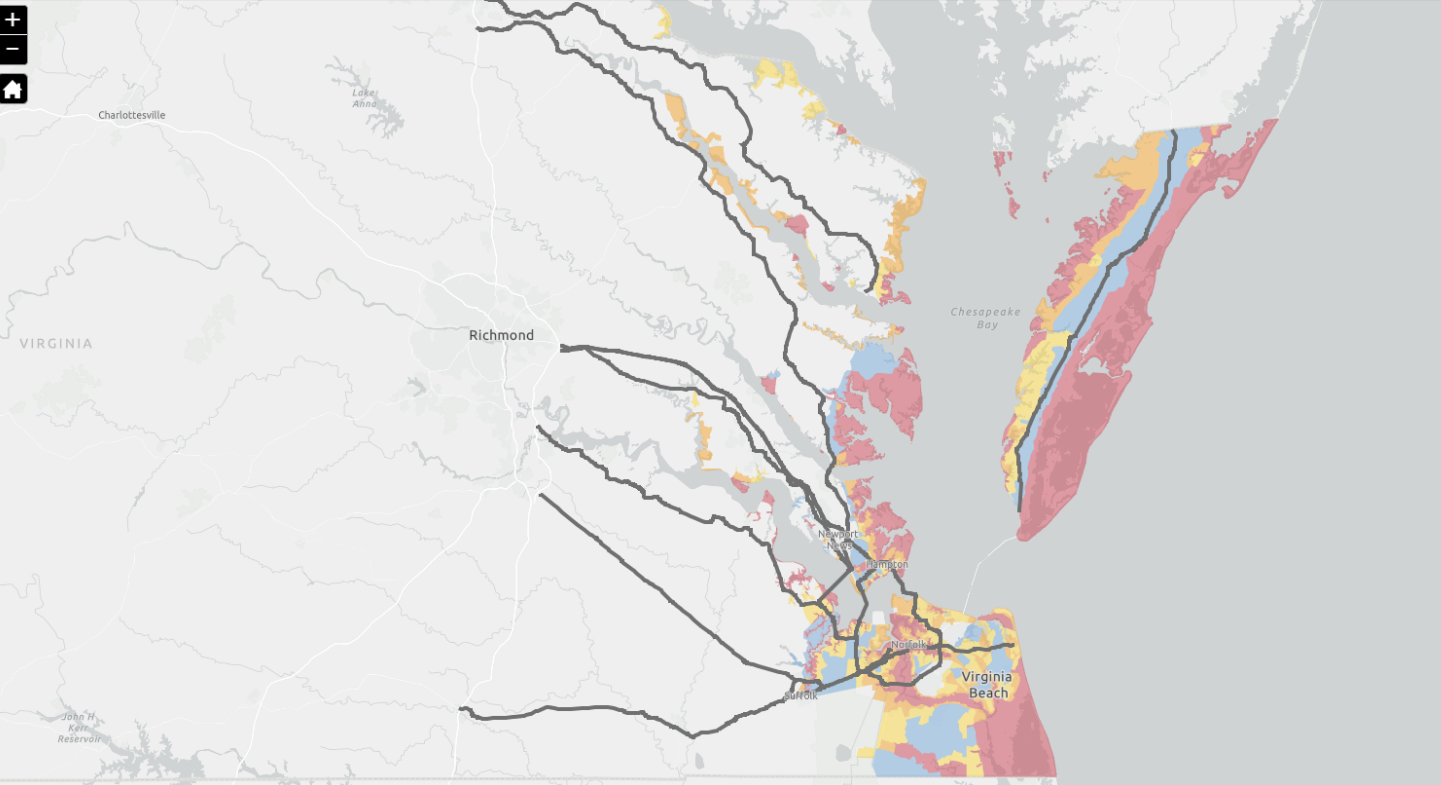


- “Run from water, hide from wind”
- Many structures are rated to “withstand” high winds; flooding/storm surge is a different story.
- Locality role in evacuation
- Stress the importance of individual and business preparedness
 - Including insurance
- “Know your Zone” - knowyourzoneva.org



Know Your Zone - Virginia

**Virginia Know Your Zone** ...be prepared and know your zone



Find Your Zone
Search for an address to learn about Virginia Hurricane Evacuation Zones by entering an address in the search box, using the my location button or clicking in the map.
27983, Windsor, North Carolina X Q
No Zone
This location is not in a hurricane evacuation zone.
If your address is not located in a designated zone, the good news is you are not expected to be evacuated due to any of the identified storm scenarios. However, that does not mean you will never have to heed instructions from your local emergency manager for major emergencies. Conditions can change quickly and emergency managers will provide you the best instructions to stay safe.
[Click here](#) for more information

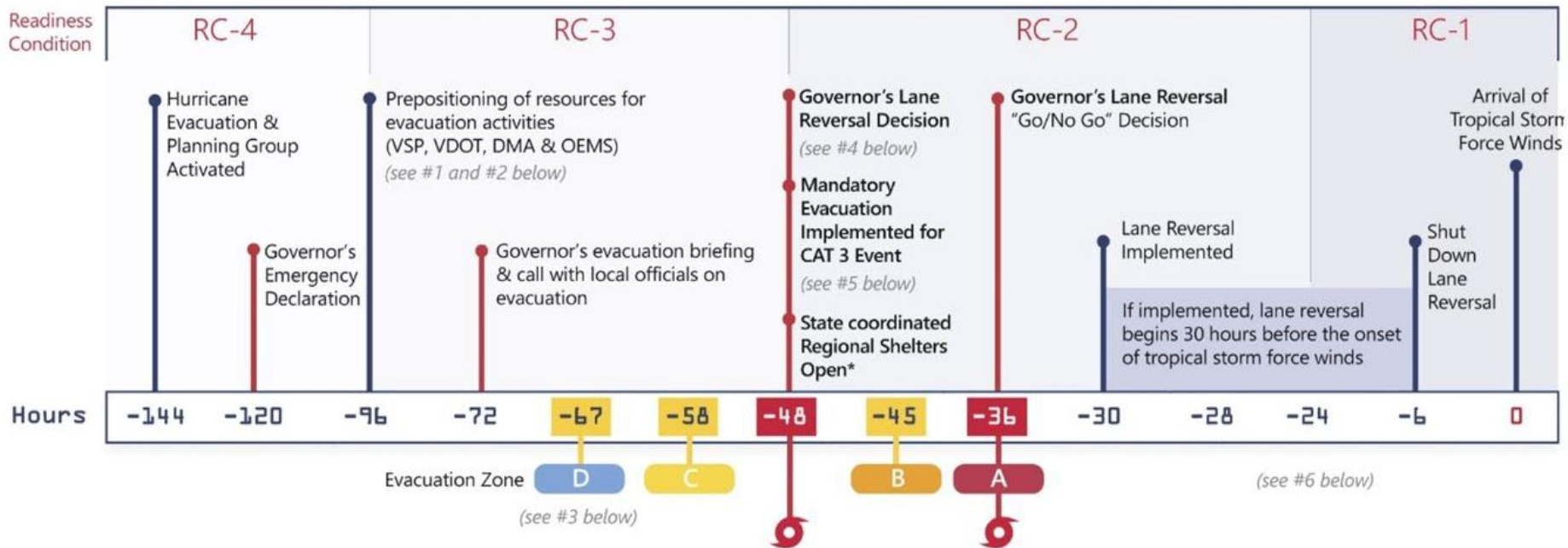


Hurricane Evacuation Timeline

Commonwealth of Virginia

Hurricane Evacuation Action Timeline

Timeline shows maximum times and trigger points for CAT 1-3 hurricanes.
The timeline may vary depending on the storm.



*Level of services depends on amount of preparation time.

1

In accordance with the transportation vendor contract, VDEM will execute the contract at least 24 hours prior to the commencement of an evacuation.

2

The Vehicle Staging Area (VSA) is set up no later than 18 hours after VDEM executes the transportation vendor contract.

3

A Critical Transportation Need (CTN) evacuation will commence simultaneously with the evacuation of the general population.

4

State resources move from pre-staging areas to duty post with lane reversal decision.

5

Evacuation implementation point for Southside Hampton Roads, with or without lane reversal direction (Bowers Hill Evacuation Traffic).

6

Evacuation Zone Start Times from 2020 Virginia Hurricane Evacuation Study; assuming 80% Participation Rate of Vulnerable Population.

Governor's Evacuation Decision

- Challenges for localities – including re-entry
- Contraflow – time and resource intensive
- Existing road network limited
- Virginia also impacted by North Carolina with additional impacts into Maryland and Delaware



Key Players – Hurricane Evacuation Coordination Working Group (HECWG)



- Multi-Agency Advisory Group that provides recommendations concerning issues and problems associated with evacuation and its aftermath.
- Members of this group provide their expertise and recommendations to the State Coordinator regarding evacuation, sheltering and re-entry
 - Evacuation decision made by the governor and must be primarily communicated by localities
- Core members: VDEM, VDOT, VSP, DMA, VDSS, VDACS and VDH
- Additional members as needed: VA Energy, DGS, VTC, DRPT, DBHDS, DOA, VITA



Virginia Department of Transportation



Acting Director, Office of Safety, Security and Emergency Management, Matt Lott

Preparedness

- Coordination of ESF1 within the VEST and participation in the Hurricane Evacuation Coordination Group
- Planning and coordination
 - Traffic management strategies
 - Evacuation (with or without lane reversal)
 - Damage Assessment
 - Recovery/debris removal
 - Continuity of Operations
- Tests, Training and Exercises

Response

- Evacuation (traffic management with or without lane reversal)
- Resource Management
- Emergency protective measures

Recovery

- Damage Assessment
- Debris Removal
- Emergency/Permanent Repairs
- Federal reimbursement (FEMA and FHWA)



Virginia Department of Health



Director, Office of Emergency Preparedness, Bob Mauskopf

Extreme Heat & Hurricane Preparedness



Photo: Mount Rogers Health District staff with a mobile health unit after Hurricane Helene caused devastating flooding in Damasus - September, 2024.



Incident Coordination



Public Health Surveillance



Public Information & Outreach



Mass Care and Shelter Support



Vaccinations



Local Health District & MRC Readiness



Environmental Health & Drinking Water



Healthcare Coordination



Recovery



Virginia Department of Military Affairs



Brigadier General Hubbard

Dep J3 / Emergency Management, Jason Burrow

- Preparedness:
 - Coordination of ESF 16 within the VEST and participation in the Hurricane Evacuation Coordination Group
 - Emergency Declaration - Decision Point
 - Coordination with VDEM and other State Agencies on Pre-Positioning of Resources if needed.
- Response:
 - Manpower
 - Debris Reduction
 - Commodity movement and distribution
 - Aviation Resources
- Recovery:
 - Debris Reduction
 - Damage Assessment
 - Commodity movement and distribution



Virginia State Police



Lieutenant Colonel, Director of the Bureau of Field Operations, Todd Taylor

VSP participates in the following decision actions during hurricane incidents:

- Emergency Declaration
- Activation of Evacuation Plans
- Activation of Sheltering Plans
- Activation of Interstate 64 Reversal Plans

VSP responsibilities during hurricane incidents:

- Traffic control supporting evacuation and lane reversal
- Security at State Shelters
- Staff VEST (ESF-13 Lead Agency)
- Aviation support (Med-Flight, aerial/hoist rescue, damage assessment, etc.)
- Search and Recovery Teams
- Medical Support Teams
- Coordinate general law enforcement support across the Commonwealth



Virginia Department of Social Services



VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF
SOCIAL SERVICES

Emergency Manager, Division of General Services, Kate Archie

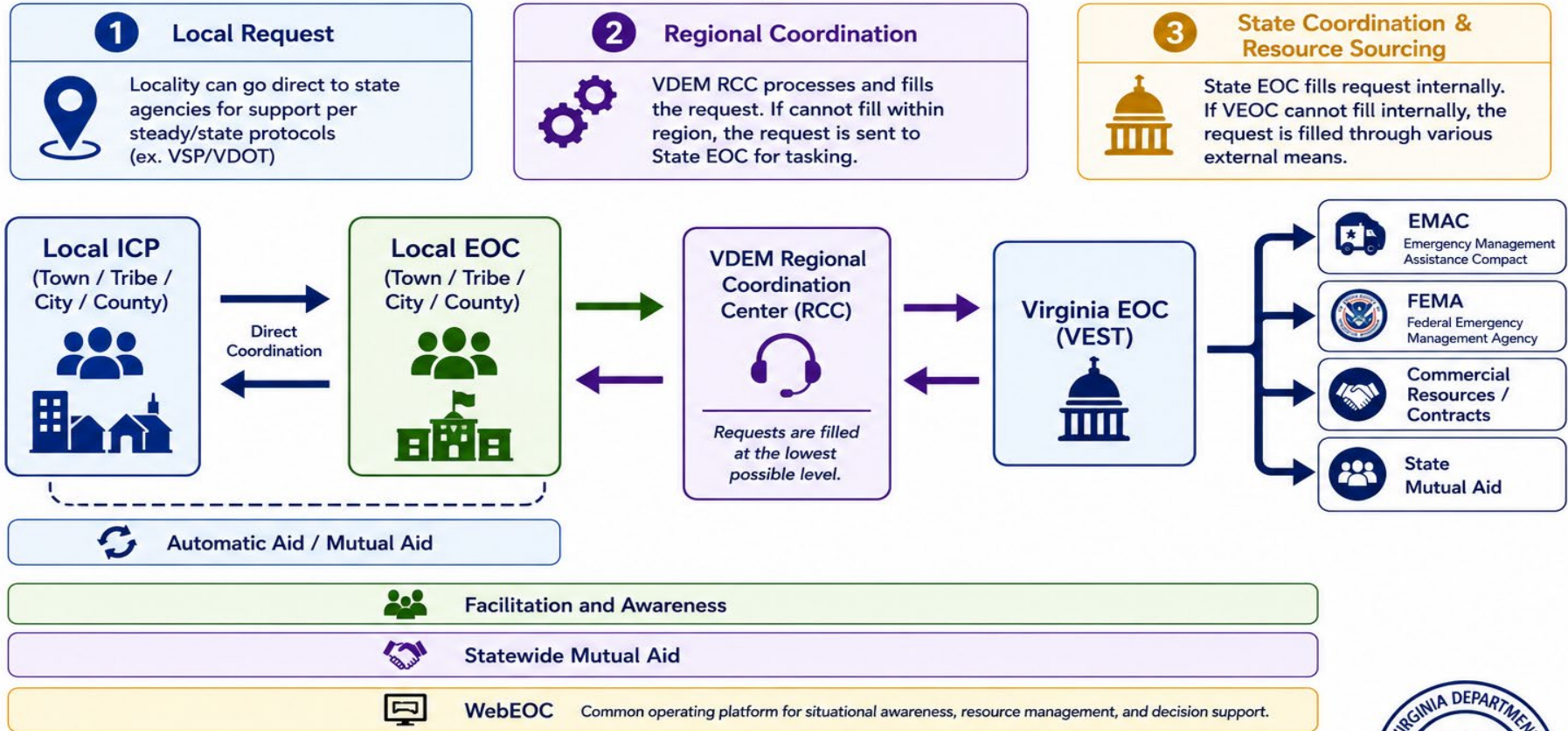
- Monitor local and state situation reports to maintain situational awareness, anticipate issues and needs
- Resolve mass care related requests for assistance (limited agency resources, most often identifying and coordinating partner resource assistance, providing subject matter expertise)
- Lead operations if state shelter plan is activated by the Governor



Virginia Department of Emergency Management

Chief of Operations, Andy John

Resource Request Process



LEGEND

ICP - Incident Command Post

EOC - Emergency Operations Center

RCC - Regional Coordination Center

EMAC - Emergency Management Assistance Compact

FEMA - Federal Emergency Management Agency

VEST - Virginia Emergency Support Team

VDEM - Virginia Department of Emergency Management



Virginia Department of Emergency Management

Virginia Flood Monitoring System

Virginia Department of Emergency Management

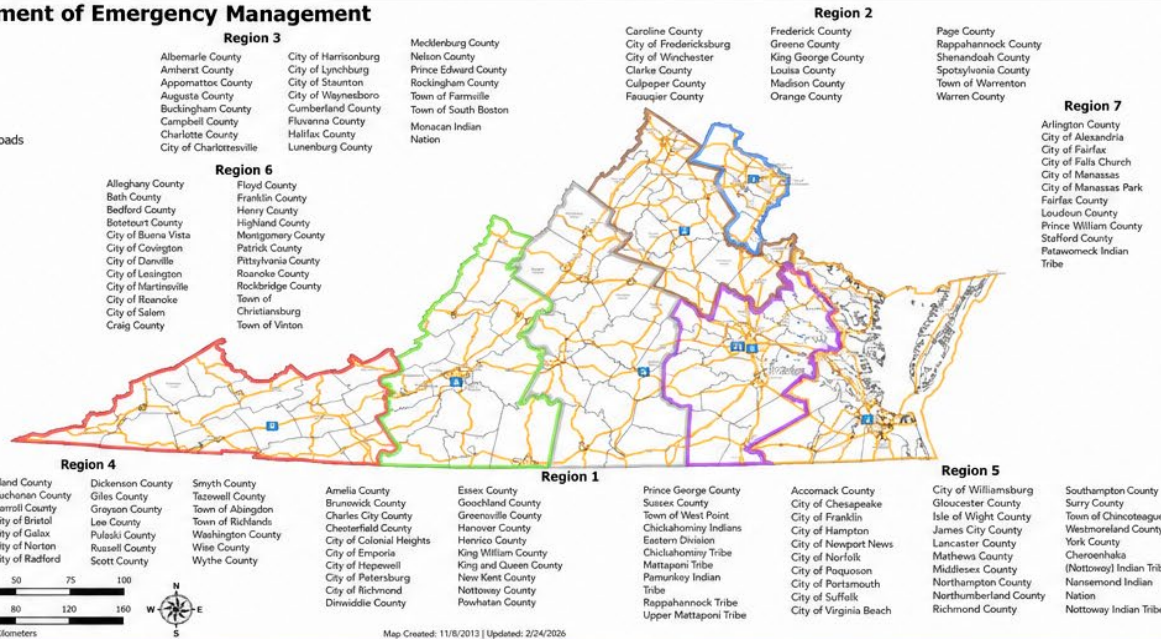
VDEM Regional Offices

- 1 - Richmond
- 2 - Northwest
- 3 - Central Virginia
- 4 - Far Southwest
- 5 - Tidewater-Hampton Roads
- 6 - Southwest Virginia
- 7 - Northern Virginia

Virginia Tribes

Recognition

- Both State & Federal
- Virginia



EASTERN SHORE OPERATIONAL SITES

- 1 Accomack County Airport**
 - Primary hub for inbound/outbound air operations.
 - "Runway Overrun" area used for major staging operations.
- 2 Sawmill Park**
 - Base of Operations (BoO) and Responder Camp for 250 personnel.
- 3 Harborton Boat Dock**
 - Alternate support site.
- 4 Accomack Fire Training Center**
 - Secondary staging site for shelter and relief supplies.
- 5 Tangier Island**
 - No pre-staged supplies due to risk; supplies will be delivered post-storm.

SUPPLY STAGING DETAILS

Commodities Summary (Pre-Storm Staging Totals)

- Meals:** Over 34,000 meals staged across sites.
- Water:** Over 120,000 bottles staged (approx. support for 15,000 people/day).
- Shelter Supplies:** Start-up kits for several hundred people, including pet accommodation.
- Roof Covering Supplies:** Plastic sheeting and furring strips stored at multiple sites.



Virginia Flood Monitoring System

- Team of 3 that manages a statewide gauge network – 184 current stations – that collects precipitation and water level data
- Think of gauges as smoke detectors but for heavy rain and rising water levels
- Provides data every 15 minutes directly to NWS to enhance their flood awareness, watch and warning capabilities
- Cache of 10 rapid deployment rain gauges



9-1-1 Support Team

Chief of 9-1-1 and Geospatial Services, Dorothy Spears-Dean

- Created a specialized team to support PSAPs for blue/gray sky coverage
- Provides additional regional support during activations
- Enables statewide real-time situational awareness regarding operational status of centers
- Brings direct resources and personnel to PSAPs to triage 9-1-1 disruptions, outages and other communication issues
- Liaise with ESF-2 for Situational awareness and to scale for significant communication outages



Enterprise GIS

- Enterprise staff will maintain access to foundational data layers, while also serving in a variety of VEST roles under the ISM:

ESF-2

Information Management Branch Support

Assist with RCC Regional Support

IT Support



Additional Geospatial Support

- Prepare the use of the Virginia Resource Coordination System (VARCS) as needed.
- Maintain the VEST Activation Staffing and Meal Accountability Survey and disseminate results to relevant stakeholders.
- Perform incident modeling, complete mapping requests, and produce digital and large-format maps to support response and recovery efforts.
- Manage the collection, validation, integration, and maintenance of geospatial data from diverse sources to produce accurate and actionable geospatial products.



Strategic Communications Update

Communications Director, Will Merritt

- The VDEM Communications Division team serves as the lead agency for the state Joint Information Center (JIC), located at the Virginia Emergency Operations Center (VEOC).
- The Director of Communications serves as the External Affairs Chief and the other staff members serve as JIC Managers that rotate on a weekly on-call schedule.
- JIC leadership complete media training, and courses in EOC operations, WebEOC, public information and warning, and the incident command system.
- *Per Executive Order 41 - All executive branch agencies appoint a Public Information Officer (PIO) to staff the VEST JIC at the request of VDEM.*



Hurricane Season Resources

- Hurricane Evacuation Guide
- Inland Impacts Guide
- Postcard with QR codes linking to both
- Webpages – vaemergency.gov and knowyourzoneva.org



Partners in Preparedness Program

- A VDEM program that ensures that we were providing community outreach to the residents and visitors of Virginia
- The program is partnering with non-profit organizations, faith-based leaders, businesses, education, health care, community advocates and community centers, local governments and more to understand the communities that these groups serve, their unique needs, and how we can work together to best communicate information to these communities through all phases of a disaster.
- The program aims to provide the tools and resources for every Virginian to know about the risks that we face, and how to prepare for them.
- Learn more at <https://vdem.virginia.gov/prepare/partners-in-preparedness/>



How Can You Engage?

- Follow us on social media!

Facebook, Instagram, X, LinkedIn

- Share!

- **Link our communications team with your PIO:**
PIO@vdem.virginia.gov



Post Storm

Deputy Director, Grant Management and Recovery, Debbie Messmer

- Supporting State and Local Damage Assessments
 - Residential
 - Commercial
 - Public Infrastructure
- Debris Removal
 - Technical Assistance
 - Requests for Assistance



Federal Disaster Declaration Types

- **Emergency Declaration**

Provides VDEM the ability to request resources directly from the federal government up to \$5M

- **Major Declaration**

Following joint preliminary damage assessment, if the President determines that the disaster has exceeded the State's capability to recover.

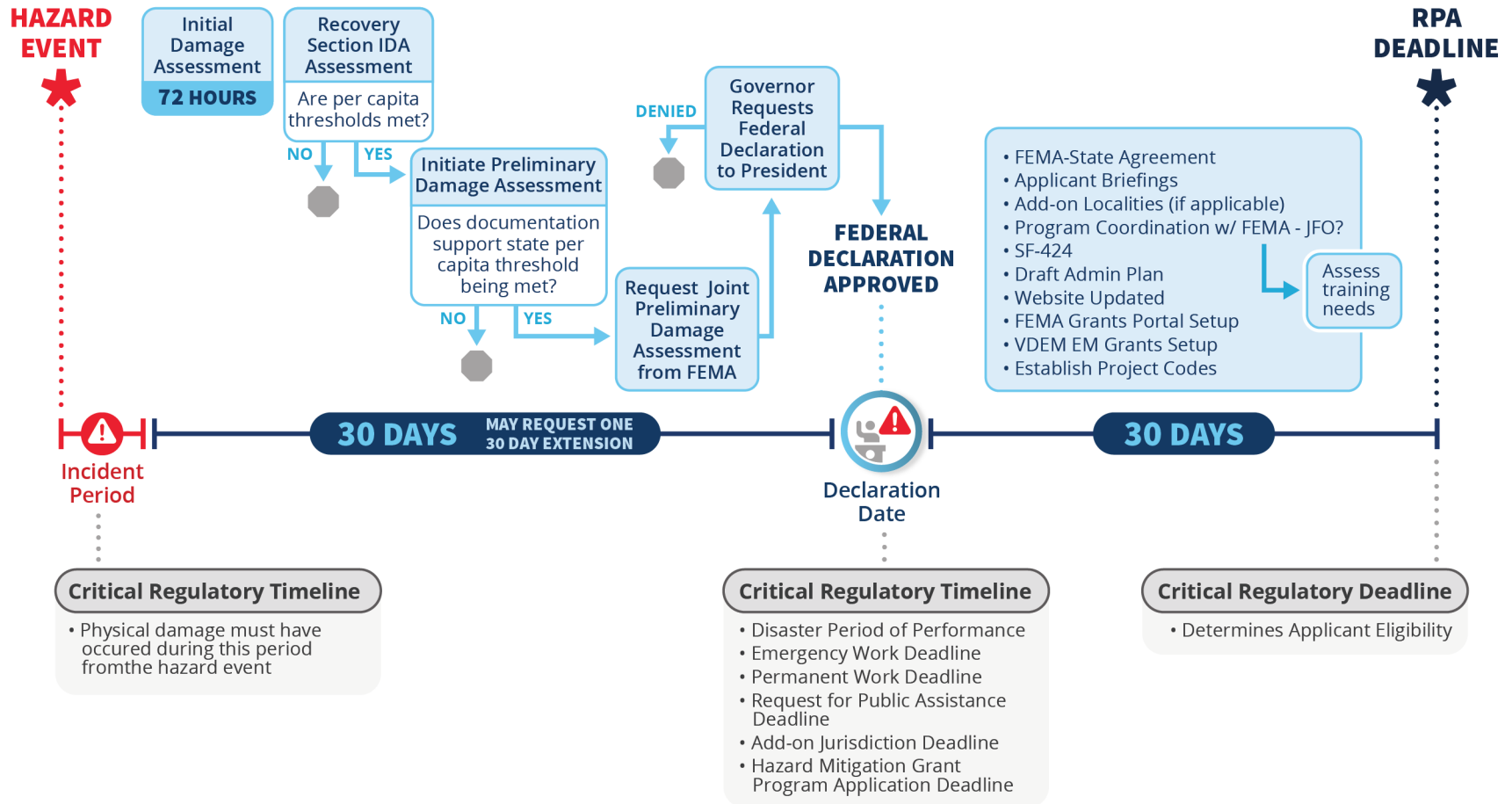
- 3 Major Programs
 - Public Assistance (PA) - \$16.7M in damages
 - Individual Assistance (IA) – 6 factors, including state's total taxable revenue
 - Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (15% of PA and IA)

- **Expedited Major Declaration**

Reserved for catastrophic disasters for which assistance programs need to get turned on immediately but damage assessments have not been completed.



60 Days Post-Storm



State Coordinator Wrap-Up

State Coordinator, Lauren Opett

- Working closely w/ FEMA to ensure seamless operations
- Close coordination w/ other states (EMAC) as needs arise to request or provide assistance
- Continue strong relationships w/ local government officials, state agencies, General Assembly, and CODEL
- Leverage private sector partners to supplement and scale resources and expertise
- Thank you for being trusted messengers to those on their worst day



THANK YOU!

