



EMAO NEWSLETTER



Feb 2026

EMA Association of Ohio strives to advance public safety for Ohioans through effective collaborations with local, state, and federal partners.

NEW HISTORICAL EM SOCIAL MEDIA CAMPAIGN

A single spark can change everything.

In Emergency Management, the most powerful lessons often come from moments that reveal what works and what fails when the stakes are highest.

AAR: Moments That Made explores these moments from history through a modern emergency management lens. These are not traditional after-action reports. They focus on real decisions, failures, and successes that shaped how communities respond and prepare today.

Follow along on our Facebook page to read each monthly installment of AAR: Moments That Made and see how moments from history continue to shape emergency management today.



AAR: MOMENTS THAT MADE EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT



ISSUE 01

FIRE ON THE WATER

JUNE 1969 | CUYAHOGA RIVER, CLEVELAND, OH

THE MOMENT ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARDS BECAME
EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT



BY LAURA JOHNSTON FOR USE BY EMAO

in THIS ISSUE

**New Historical EMA Social
Media Campaign**

**Why Ohio EMs Should
Pursue the OCEM**

Ohio at IAEM

Legislative Update

Sector Updates

**The 2026 EMAO Officers
& Letter from the President**

SAVE THE DATE

March 19, 2026

EMA Spring Conference
(Byxbee Center)

June 5, 2026

EM Fundamentals Course

December 3-4, 2026

EMA Winter Conference
(Salt Fork)

The OCEM is more than a certification — it is a professional statement. It reflects dedication, expertise, and pride in serving Ohio's communities. For emergency managers committed to advancing their careers and strengthening the profession, the OCEM is a credential worth pursuing.

For more information on the program please visit:

<https://www.emaohio.org/aws/EMA/pt/s/p/program>

Missed the first issue, Fire on the Water?
Scan the QR to read it in full.





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Why Ohio Emergency Managers Should Pursue the Ohio Certified Emergency Manager (OCEM) Credential

Article provided by Kathy Brown, Union County

Professional certification is more than a resume line, it is a statement of credibility, commitment, and competence. For emergency management professionals in Ohio, the **Ohio Certified Emergency Manager** credential represents a meaningful opportunity to demonstrate expertise, advance careers, and strengthen the profession statewide.

The OCEM was developed by Ohio emergency managers, for Ohio emergency managers. Earning this certification signals that you meet a standard of excellence and are committed to continuous professional growth. Below are several key reasons why pursuing the OCEM is a valuable investment in your career:

A Peer-Recognized Standard of Excellence

A strong value of the OCEM is that it is reviewed and evaluated by your Ohio EM peers. The certification reflects standards agreed upon by professionals who understand the unique hazards, governance structures, and operational realities of Ohio emergency management. This peer-based validation adds meaningful weight to the credential.

A Recognized Benchmark for Competence and Commitment

The OCEM is a recognized benchmark that demonstrates both competence in the field and commitment to the profession. It shows that you have gone beyond minimum requirements to validate your knowledge, skills, and experience through a formal, structured process.

Demonstrates Comprehensive Emergency Management Knowledge

Earning the OCEM signals that you possess comprehensive knowledge across all phases of emergency management—mitigation, preparedness, response, recovery, and prevention. This holistic understanding is critical for effective coordination, planning, and leadership before, during, and after disasters.

Enhances Marketability and Career Mobility

In a competitive professional environment, certification matters. The OCEM is an easy, effective way to demonstrate that you are more marketable as an emergency management professional. Whether pursuing advancement, applying for a new position, or strengthening your standing within your organization, the OCEM provides clear, third-party validation of your expertise.

Encourages Lifelong Learning and Professional Growth

The OCEM requires ongoing learning and recertification, ensuring that certified professionals stay current with evolving best practices, emerging technologies, and changes in the field. This commitment to continuous improvement benefits not only individual practitioners but also the communities they serve.

State-Level Recognition That Matters

While the IAEM-CEM provides national and global recognition, the OCEM offers something uniquely valuable: state-level recognition by Ohio emergency managers. This acknowledgment reinforces professional credibility within Ohio and highlights your engagement with and contribution to the state's emergency management community.

Strengthening the Profession Across Ohio

When more EMs pursue the OCEM, the entire discipline benefits. The certification helps raise professional standards, encourages consistency across jurisdictions & reinforces a culture of excellence within Ohio emergency management.

A Strong Step Toward the IAEM CEM

The OCEM is not just a standalone credential—it can be used as a professional contribution toward the International Association of Emergency Managers (IAEM) Certified Emergency Manager (CEM) designation. For professionals who aspire to the nationally and globally recognized CEM, the OCEM provides a strategic and practical stepping stone while reinforcing state-level credibility.



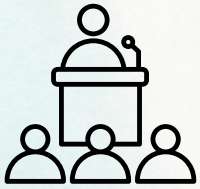


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O-H-I-O AT IAEM



The International Association of Emergency Managers (IAEM) hosted their annual conference this past November in Louisville, Kentucky and Ohio emergency managers were well represented!



The Ohio delegation of emergency managers during the Region 5 Meeting and the Presidential Banquet!



Erin Konecki, Wood County, receiving her CEM during the Presidential Banquet!



Amy Seward, Knox County, and Sydney Renner, Warren County, at the Poster Showcase with their submissions!

LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE UPDATE

The Ohio Statehouse is entering the 2nd year of the general assembly. In 2025, there were 638 bills introduced in the House and 338 in the Senate, total of 976 bills. Only 52 were signed into law by Governor DeWine.

It's expected that in 2026 the focus will be tax reform bills. Hopefully you are aware there is an initiative in the state to have a Constitutional Amendment on the November ballot to eliminate property taxes. Should this pass, it will take effect January 1, 2027. This leaves 8 weeks for the legislature to come up with new funding sources for political subdivisions (i.e., schools, townships, EMS/fire districts, special assessments and anyone else relying on property taxes). Without funding, these services may no longer be available to our citizens. As I am sure you can imagine, the idea of no property taxes will seem very appealing to most people. It will be important we help to educate the public about how this impacts the services available to them. It is important you speak with your auditor to identify the specific impacts for your county & political subdivisions.

Another potential ballot initiative is the elimination of qualified immunity. While this is aimed primarily at law enforcement, it most likely will impact all government employees. The passage of this initiative would allow the public to take legal action against government workers as private citizens. There are currently laws in place for government employees who act outside their scope of employment.

As you can see, 2026 will be a very impactful legislative year for all of Ohio. Additionally, on the federal side, multiple legal actions are in the federal court system for FEMA funding and are expecting changes. For these updates, we recommend monitoring the IAEM legislative updates as they have a physical presence in DC. The EMAO Legislative Committee will continue to do our best to providing updates as they arise.

Article contributed by: Jeff Klein and Ryan Shackelford



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SECTOR UPDATES

Scan to submit a sector update for the next newsletter



Central Sector	Met on January 12th in Mt. Vernon. There was a presentation by the Ohio EMA Watch Office. There were 15 counties in attendance. Next meeting is March 9th, 2026 in Knox County.
Northeast Sector	Last met on October 24th. A focus of the meeting was the Homeland Security Grant Program. Directors noted that individual communities are now applying for funds independently, resulting in: Redundant Projects being submitted within the same region, and Inventory Burdens where County EMAs are often left responsible for tracking equipment they did not request. Also reviewed the initiative to abolish property taxes, expressing concern over the potential loss of vital funding for local emergency services.
North Central Sector	Met on January 16th. Ohio EMA staff were in attendance (Sima Merick, Geoff Martin, Jerry Mullins, regional staff) and discussed Ludlums, SERC Handbook, GIS Dashboard, Debris Management, Mitigation, Grants, Safe Room and had round table discussions. Next meeting is March 20th
Northwest Sector	Met on January 14th. Commander Ben Williams, from the Multi-area Narcotics Unit, spoke on current area drug trends. A safety rep. from the 180 th Fighter Wing provided an overview on multiple unexploded ordinances that have been reported in Putnam County. Next meeting is March 11th.
Southeast Sector	Met on December 16th. Recapped the great IPAWS class at Hocking County EMA. Athens County reported a successful TTX with Rural Electric. Homeland Security Rep. mentioned reaching out about OCIDS program (infrastructure GIS layer creation) & discussed drone capability to live stream to EOCs. Next meeting is February 17th and Steve Ferryman will be discussing mitigation & funding issues.
Southwest Sector	Met on January 8th. New sector officers were elected to finish out current terms for those are no longer able to serve. Officers are President Sydney Renner (Warren), Vice President Tom Breckel (Clinton), and Secretary Jim Bolen (Butler). Next meeting is March 12th.
Western Sector	Last met on January 27th. Had a guest speaker from Team Rubicon. Discussed a recent School Reunification workshop, that had ~100 attendees from numerous school districts. Region has been discussing reunification, and how it could apply in other situations.

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INTRODUCING **THE 2026 OFFICERS**

President



Alex McCarthy
Delaware County

President-Elect



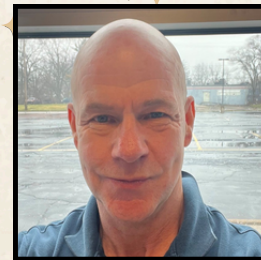
Jason Troyer
Holmes County

Vice President



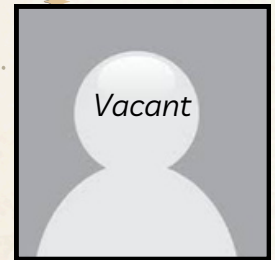
Ryan Shackelford
Portage County

Treasurer



Dave Freeman
Lorain County

Secretary



Vacant

A word from our new President

Greetings EMAEO Membership,

Hopefully you all are having a good start to the new year, even with the snow and cold temperatures over the last several days. I would like to start this letter by expressing my appreciation to you all for collectively supporting the adoption of the proposed Constitution and Bylaws changes at our Annual Meeting during Winter Conference. Congratulations are also in order for our new officers, with Ryan Shackelford being elected as our new Vice President and Dave Freeman as our new Treasurer. We currently have a vacancy in our Secretary position and will be hosting a special meeting on February 12th to fill that position. Thank you Garrett Blevins, Tiffany Nash, and Ethan Raby for volunteering to run for this position. Please plan on joining us for this virtual meeting to cast your vote.

At Winter Conference, I took a few moments to lay out my vision for what I hope to accomplish with EMAEO in 2026. My top two priorities for the year include improving our advocacy efforts as an association and finding ways to better engage and increase our membership. I highly encourage you all to consider joining the EMAEO Legislative Committee to stay aware of ongoing legislative issues pertaining to our field. Please also be on the lookout for a survey in the near future to assess the legislative issues that are most important to you. Regarding member engagement, we will also be kicking off our Strategic Planning Committee soon to formulate a strategic plan for our Association to guide our future efforts.

As we move through this new year, thank you for all that you do, and please feel free to contact me if you have any questions or need anything from me.

Sincerely,
Alex McCarthy