2025 Events/Incidents

- Spring 2025 Severe Weather Events AAR-IP

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Spring 2025 Severe Weather Events

After-Action Report/Improvement Plan

May 22, 2025

Unclassified (U): This document does not contain sensitive and/or confidential information. It is available for public inspection.

Incident Overview

Incident Type	**Severe Weather (Tornado/High Wind/Rain/Etc.)**
Incident Date	Spring 2025
Incident Location	Arkansas State University (entire campus)
Hotwash Date	May 1, 2025
Scope	This incident included multiple severe weather events, featuring primarily a high tornado and heavy rainfall threat for campus. The purpose of the After-Action Report is to assess the event, response decisions, and to identify areas for improvement highlighted in the Improvement Plan section of the report.
Focus Areas[1]	Protection, Mitigation, Response
Capabilities[2]	§ Community Resilience § Operational Communications § Operational Coordination § Planning § Public Information and Warning § Situational Assessment
Target Capabilities	§ Increase awareness of severe weather safety among campus members § Increase capacity of shelter space § Establish operational guidance and processes for severe weather incidents

Incident Type	**Severe Weather (Tornado/High Wind/Rain/Etc.)**
After Action Review	
Organization	Arkansas State University
Lead Agency	Office of Emergency Management
Participating Agencies	Office of Student Affairs, University Communications, University Housing, University Police Department
Point of Contact	**Wyatt Reed,** Emergency Operations and Occupational Safety Specialist Office of Emergency Management Arkansas State University WReed@AState.edu or (870) 972-3352

Analysis of Capabilities

Table 1 includes the objectives, aligned capabilities, and performance ratings for each capability as observed during the incident and determined by the after-action review team.

Target Capabilities	Core Capability [3]	Performed without Challenges (P)	Performed with Some Challenges (S)	Performed with Major Challenges (M)	Unable to be Performed (U)
Campus members are aware of severe weather threats and appropriate emergency actions.	Community Resilience		**X**		
	Operational Communications		**X**		
	Public Information and Warning		**X**		
Provide adequate shelter for campus members seeking safety from severe weather.	Planning			**X**	
Maintain operational guidance and processes that support campus members during severe weather incidents.	Operational Communications		**X**		
	Operational Coordination		**X**		
	Planning		**X**		
	Situational Assessment	**X**			

Table 1. Summary of Core Capability Performance

Rating Definitions:

Performed without Challenges (P): The targets and critical tasks associated with the capability were completed in a manner that achieved the objective(s) and did not negatively impact the performance of other activities. The performance of this activity did not contribute to additional health and/or safety risks for the public or for emergency workers, and it was conducted in accordance with applicable plans, policies, procedures, regulations, and laws.

Performed with Some Challenges (S): The targets and critical tasks associated with the capability were completed in a manner that achieved the objective(s) and did not negatively impact the performance of other activities. The performance of this activity did not contribute to additional health and/or safety risks for the public or for emergency workers, and it was conducted in accordance with applicable plans, policies, procedures, regulations, and laws. However, opportunities to enhance effectiveness and/or efficiency were identified.

Performed with Major Challenges (M): The targets and critical tasks associated with the capability were completed in a manner that achieved the objective(s), but some or all of the following were observed: demonstrated performance had a negative impact on the performance of other activities; contributed to additional health and/or safety risks for the public or for emergency workers; and/or was not conducted in accordance with applicable plans, policies, procedures, regulations, and laws.

Unable to be Performed (U): The targets and critical tasks associated with the capability were not performed in a manner that achieved the objective(s).

The following sections provide an overview of the performance related to each objective and associated capability, highlighting strengths and areas for improvement.

Capability Definitions:

Community Resilience: Enable the recognition, understanding, communication of, and planning for risk and empower individuals and communities to make informed risk management decisions necessary to adapt to, withstand, and quickly recover from future incidents.

Operational Communications: Ensure the capacity for timely communications in support of security, situational awareness, and operations by any and all means available, among and between affected communities in the impact area and all response forces.

Operational Coordination: Establish and maintain a unified and coordinated operational structure and process that appropriately integrates all critical stakeholders and supports the execution of core capabilities.

Planning: Conduct a systematic process engaging the whole community as appropriate in the development of executable strategic, operational, and/or tactical-level approaches to meet defined objectives.

Public Information and Warning: Deliver coordinated, prompt, reliable, and actionable information to the whole community through the use of clear, consistent, accessible, and culturally and linguistically appropriate methods to effectively relay information regarding any threat or hazard, as well as the actions being taken and the assistance being made available, as appropriate.

Situational Assessment: Provide all decision-makers with decision-relevant information regarding the nature and extent of the hazard, any cascading effects, and the status of the response.

Incident Brief

Background

In the Spring of 2025, several severe storm systems brought destruction to the region. These storms brought a host of hazards to campus, including tornadic activity, hail, heavy rains, and high winds.

The first major storm system to impact the area was on Friday, March 14th, 2025. This was a nocturnal storm system that featured multiple training supercells in a line. The greatest destruction from this system was to Cave City, AR and to Diaz, AR. More locally, significant damage was noted to Paragould, AR. While there was high confidence in a destructive storm system being possible, guidance on the location of this system was not well tuned until the early to midafternoon hours Friday. The forecast included a moderate (4/5) risk for the A-State area. A total of 39 tornado warnings were issued in Arkansas for this event. 4 tornado warnings were issued within 10 miles of the Reng Student Union during the event.

The next (and most major) storm in this system struck on Wednesday, April 2nd, 2025, into Thursday, April 3rd. This storm was upgraded from a moderate (4/5) risk to a high (5/5) risk on midnight Wednesday. A total of 53 tornado warnings were issued across Arkansas for this event. This was the first high risk in Arkansas since March 31, 2023 (Wynne Tornado Event). The most noteworthy tornado from this event occurred in Lake City and Monette from a tornado that started just outside the Jonesboro city limits near rural Harrisburg (Poinsett) and Bay (Craighead). 4 tornado warnings were issued within 10 miles of the Reng Student Union during the event.

Another storm system moved in during the late hours of Friday, April 4th, 2025. While the primary threats were to the south of Jonesboro, campus was placed in a moderate (4/5) risk this day. No warning products ended up being issued within 10 miles of the Reng Student Union.

The final system of note occurred on Saturday, April 5th, 2025. In addition to a tornado threat that increased with little advanced notice, multiple flood warnings were issued for this event. A total of 4 flash flood warnings and 1 tornado warning were issued within 10 miles of the Reng Student Union.

From January 1st to May 1st of 2025 a total of 11 tornado warnings and 8 flash flood warnings were issued within 10 miles of the Reng Student Union. Prior to this, the last tornado warning issued within 10 miles of the Reng Student Union was in April of 2022.[4]

After-Action Review

On May 1, 2025, the Arkansas State University Office of Emergency Management conducted a “hotwash” of the incident and performed an after-action review. Observations and recommendations of that review are compiled into this report. Members of this review committee included:

- Martha Spack, Assistant Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs
- Natalie Eskew, Director of University Housing
- Ronnie Gilley, Emergency Management Coordinator
- Wyatt Reed, Emergency Management Specialist
- Randy Martin, Chief of University Police
- Billy Branch, University Police Department Captain
- Todd Clark, Chief Communications Officer
- Rachel Anderson, Social Media Coordinator

The following pages of the after-action report and the corresponding improvement plan are based on the review of the above committee.

After-Action Report

Review Process

On May 1, 2025, members of the after-action review committee for this incident met and performed a hotwash of the incident along with the review. Members met in a closed environment and were encouraged to speak freely without fear of repercussion. Honesty and transparency are the pillars of affecting future change from incidents, including recognizing shortcomings and/or inefficiencies to better assess true capabilities and potential vulnerabilities. This review took place at approximately 11:30 a.m. in the Reng Student Union of Arkansas State University. All members listed as part of the review committee were present.

Overview

For each event (except for Saturday, April 5th), multiple days of notice were available to indicate a significant weather event was likely to occur. Weather briefings were sent ahead of each event’s impact, and some had multiple days of briefings sent. The Reng Student Union was opened past regular business hours on days that featured tornado watches with expiration times that were after normal closing hours.

The Office of Emergency Management (OEM) coordinated with Facilities Management (FM) liaisons to ensure the Student Union was properly prepped for sheltering individuals. OEM used lessons learned after talking with University Police (UPD) and FM regarding the March 14th incident to adjust shelter operations and accommodations.

University Housing worked alongside OEM and University Communications to make multiple notifications to residents alerting them to the potential for dangerous weather conditions and with

resources to obtain safety information and shelter.

University Communications worked in collaboration with OEM and utilized the National Weather Service's chat service to consistently disseminate information to campus members via social media platforms.

OEM monitored local school closings and worked with city/county emergency management officials to ensure situational awareness and information sharing.

Senior executives from A-State remained invested in the planning and response needs and moved to make decisions regarding public safety (such as early closure) in a timely manner.

Strengths

Strength 1 (Internal Communication): One key trend that showed after reviewing hotwash notes is the improved effort of campus decision makers to communicate with one another. This collaboration and coordination provide confidence to decision makers that the appropriate decisions were being made based on the available information at the time, especially in such unprecedented incidents. **(Capability: Community Resilience, Operational Coordination, Planning, Situational Assessment)**

Strength 2 (Senior Executive Buy-in): As they have in previous incident, the executive team of Arkansas State consistently stayed invested in the preparedness process and in making efforts to understand the anticipated outcomes/timing of the storm systems. This allowed OEM easy ability to share information and provide recommendations for campus safety needs or the need to impact normal operations, all of which were received well. **(Capabilities: Community Resilience, Operational Coordination, Planning, Situational Assessment)**

Strength 3 (Campus Preparedness): A final important note is that campus preparedness efforts related to general and severe weather preparedness seemed to have a positive effect. Thousands viewed public information resources shared in collaboration with OEM, University Communications, and University Housing. A large portion of campus sought shelter and were aware of the university's expected emergency actions as the events approached. **(Capabilities: Community Resilience, Planning, Public Information and Warning)**

Areas for Improvement

Area for Improvement 1 (Shelter Space): A primary issue that recurred was a lack of adequate shelter space. The Reng Student Union was not designed with shelter in mind, and while areas can be used for shelter additional space is needed. Discussions on options and capabilities for future incidents were discussed in the AAR and will be included as part of a separate feasibility study (see Appendix B). **(Capability: Community Resilience, Planning)**

Area for Improvement 2 (Preparedness and Operational Planning): One other gap that was noted is the lack of a standard operating procedure for severe weather response. This has the potential to cause confusion, duplication of resources, and other obstacles within response. At

times, the organization’s unity of effort struggled due to conflicting directives and procedures. There exists a need for a streamlined plan that involves all stakeholders. This will likely be resolved via updates to the A-State Emergency Operations Plan. Additional challenges in communication were observed due to the dated radio communications infrastructure of OEM. Additional projects will be presented soon for solutions to this. **(Capabilities: Community Resilience, Operational Communication, Operational Coordination, Planning, Situational Assessment)**

Area for Improvement 3 (Consistency in Emergency Operations): While this area could likely also fall underneath AOI 2, it is important that the university maintains unity of effort across its respective operations. For example, buildings that generally are not open for shelter were allowed to be opened during one or more severe weather incidents. This creates a host of operational challenges, such as security concerns, public information hurdles, response delays, etc. The university needs to ensure it is consistent in its implementation of policies and plans when incidents occur. If an alteration does need to be made, this needs to be discussed with key stakeholders to ensure there are no unforeseen consequences and so that these decisions can be appropriately communicated to campus members as needed. **(Capabilities: Operational Coordination, Planning)**

Appendix A: Improvement Plan

This IP is developed specifically for Arkansas State University as a result of the Severe Weather Events in Spring of 2025:

Area for Improvement	Corrective Item	Implementation Plan	Primary Responsible Organization	Organization POC
Shelter Space	Reng Student Union Shelter Spaces	The Reng Student Union will be evaluated to: a) Quantify existing shelter space b) Explore additional shelter space options	Emergency Management (Primary)	**Emergency Management:** Wyatt Reed or Ronnie Gilley
	Campus Shelter Options	Evaluate the effectiveness of current shelter options and operations. If gaps are identified, a study of potential solutions will be completed to remedy any gaps.	Emergency Management (Primary)	**Emergency Management:** Wyatt Reed or Ronnie Gilley

Area for Improvement	Corrective Item	Implementation Plan	Primary Responsible Organization	Organization POC
Parking Deck Overcrowding	Additional controls are needed for parking operations within the parking deck during severe weather incidents. The organizations responsible should work together to identify possible solutions for controls and enforcement.	Parking Services (Primary) University Police (Secondary)	**Parking Services:** Dr. Dave McKinney **University Police:** Randy Martin or Billy Branch	
Preparedness and Operational Planning	Update Emergency Operations Plan	The A-State Emergency Operations Plan will contain guidance for operations during times of severe weather, to include shelter protocols and staffing. Update will be included in newest EOP (est. Fall 2025).	Emergency Management (Primary)	**Emergency Management:** Wyatt Reed or Ronnie Gilley
	Communication Strategies	Upgrades to the A-State OEM's radio system should be considered for better interoperability.	Emergency Management (Primary)	**Emergency Management:** Wyatt Reed or Ronnie Gilley
Consistency in Emergency Operations	Unity of Effort	Processes outlined in planning need to be closely adhered to.	All	**All**

[1] Selected from National Preparedness Goal's Five Mission Areas (DHS, 2015)

[2] Selected from National Preparedness Goal List of Core Capabilities (DHS, 2015)

[3] Selected from National Preparedness Goal List of Core Capabilities (DHS, 2015)

[4] All data from Iowa State University's Environmental Mesonet