

**Findings and Report Regarding
the May 16, 2025 Tornado
in the City of St. Louis**

August 15, 2025

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The City's warning siren system never sounded during a highly destructive EF3 tornado that struck the City of St. Louis on Friday, May 16, 2025. As part of its effort to prevent this from happening again, and to help restore public confidence in the City's emergency preparedness, the City engaged Carmody MacDonald P.C. as an outside, independent party to conduct an investigation into fact surrounding the City's response to the tornado. Carmody MacDonald conducted hours of interviews and examined hundreds of pages of documents, including emails, City Emergency Management Agency ("CEMA") policies, and other documents.

That investigation has uncovered multiple cascading failures at almost every level leading up to and even after the storm event. Those findings are detailed below, and many if not all of them were preventable. For that reason, we have included recommendations on improving the City's preparedness.

The design and orientation of the City's siren equipment made it unnecessarily difficult if not impossible to fully activate the siren system during the storm. Ineffective testing protocols prevented City officials from learning about these deficiencies in advance of the storm. However, the City has since made significant strides in fixing the vast majority of the non-functional sirens.

Complicating matters was a lack of communication and working relationship between CEMA Commissioner Sarah Russell and both the Fire Department and the Police Department. The absence of clear leadership meant that nobody manually triggered the sirens during the tornado. In recent weeks, the City has upgraded the siren system to be automatically triggered by alerts from the National Weather Service.

The communication breakdown also created a disjointed and unorganized response that was not compliant with federal regulations in the days immediately following the storm. Commissioner Russell's absence from the Emergency Operations Center ("EOC") and failure to ensure that CEMA maintained an updated Emergency Operations Plan ("EOP") further impeded CEMA's ability to perform its expected public safety functions in the aftermath. It is clear that CEMA was understaffed, underfunded and under resourced. However, we do not believe that the foregoing failures are directly attributable to those issues.

We also found CEMA's policies to be defective in multiple respects, including that they were not updated or publicly available. In line with that conclusion, below is a summary of recommendations that we believe will assist CEMA going forward to prevent these failures from occurring again:

- CEMA needs to be fully staffed as soon as possible. Such staffing should, in addition to the current positions, include at least one Emergency Management Specialist.
- The City should establish an incident response protocol involving a representative from CEMA, the Fire Department, and the Police Department to coordinate a National Incident Management System ("NIMS") and Incident Command System ("ICS") compliant emergency response if the need should arise.

- There needs to be a rotating monthly test of activation points (alternating between Fire Department and CEMA each month), supplemented by a quarterly full-system integration test (including both activation points and representative siren sampling) to ensure redundancy and resilience. CEMA and the Fire Department should establish a written policy agreed to by both departments that govern whose responsibility it is to activate the siren for monthly tests.
- To ensure that the testing is conducted and the results are assessed, CEMA and the Fire Department should each independently conduct an annual audit of the siren testing results.
- The City should establish a policy specifying who is responsible for maintaining and repairing the siren system.
- The current single repeater (a device which sends the signal to the siren network) at South Patrol is a critical single point of failure. To enhance resilience, the City should establish redundancies with an automatic backup system—such as using multiple, geographically separated repeaters to ensure uninterrupted siren activation even if the primary repeater fails.
- CEMA’s reporting structure should be integrated under either the Fire Department or the Police Department.
- CEMA’s EOP has not been updated since 2003, which predates the wide adoption of smartphones. CEMA should update its EOP and establish regular intervals for assessing the need for further updates going forward.
- After the City proceeds with its plan to refurbish the entire siren system, the City should establish a regular maintenance contract with a vendor to repair and maintain the sirens.
- CEMA should have at least two certified ICS instructors on staff to train other City employees.
- The City should establish a training policy whereby police officers and firefighters who are promoted to leadership/supervisory positions are required to complete higher-level ICS courses.
- The City should establish a training policy whereby Police Academy and Fire Academy recruits are introduced to ICS and participate in an ICS-100 course.
- On a City-wide level, each department which could be involved in response to an emergency must have at least two employees, who, in addition to the Director/Commissioner of the agency, can be delegated full decision-making authority in the event of an emergency. During an emergency, those employees should prioritize emergency response above other duties or obligations, so that routine training exercises or other work does not interfere with disaster response.

Our recommendations are presented in fuller detail in Section VII.

I. BACKGROUND & OBJECTIVES

A. Incident Overview

On Friday, May 16, 2025, shortly after 2:40 p.m., a tornado originating in St. Louis County entered the City of St. Louis and continued northeast until it ultimately crossed the Mississippi River into Illinois. The National Weather Service issued a tornado warning at 2:35 p.m., prior to the tornado touching down. Although other means to notify City residents of the tornado were employed, the City's critical outdoor warning sirens were not activated at any point, leaving any residents who do not have access to phones or weather radios without any warning of the impending tornado.

B. Failure Summary

At the time of the tornado, the City's outdoor tornado siren system had to be activated manually from either the City's Fire Alarm office or the CEMA headquarters. As a result of the failures outlined more fully below, nobody at the Fire Alarm Office and neither of the two CEMA employees capable of activating the siren did so. While the failure to activate the sirens was perhaps most publicly noticeable issue on May 16, 2025, our investigation discovered additional systemic problems, including (i) a failure to maintain a current EOP, (ii) a failure to maintain a functional siren system, (iii) a lack of communication between CEMA and the Fire Department and Police Department, and (iv) CEMA's lack of staffing, funding, and resources. The foregoing issues coupled with the inability of Commissioner Sarah Russell, the head of CEMA, to direct and control the EOC resulted in a failure to follow and implement the NIMS and ICS. As a result, there was no Incident Action Plan ("IAP").

C. Purpose of the Investigation

The purpose of this independent investigation was to determine what improvements and corrections can be made to the City's preparedness for and response to future natural disasters including tornadoes.

D. Scope

The scope of this independent investigation is to analyze the following:

- The roles, responsibilities and applicable protocols of CEMA and the Fire Department in responding to the threat of severe weather, including but not limited to any weather alerts issued by the National Weather Service;
- The adequacy of CEMA's response to the weather alerts issued by the National Weather Service on May 16, 2025;
- The adequacy of the Fire Department's response to the weather alerts issued by the National Weather Service on May 16, 2025; and
- The role the City's respective agencies should have played in response to the weather alerts issued by the National Weather Service on May 16, 2025.

II. METHODOLOGY FOR THE INVESTIGATION

A. Timeline

The investigation began in July 2025 with the interview of Chief Dennis Jenkerson of the St. Louis Fire Department and a tour of the Fire Alarm Office at the Fire Department Headquarters. From there, the investigation continued throughout July with interviews of CEMA employees, Fire Department personnel, employees of the Board of Public Service, and emergency management personnel in the surrounding area.¹

B. Tour of the Activation Points

Because the investigation stemmed from the failure of the siren system on May 16, 2025, it was essential to gain firsthand operational context by touring the activation points. Accordingly, three members of our team visited the Fire Alarm Office activation point on July 3, 2025, and two team members toured the CEMA activation point on August 7, 2025, to observe the activation process and underlying procedures directly.²

C. System Testing or Technical Consultation

We interviewed Chris Ginder, President and CEO of Global Technical Systems Inc. (“GTSi”). GTSi has historically serviced the City’s siren system. It also services the siren system in St. Louis County. Until 2021, GTSi had an ongoing maintenance contract with the City. Mr. Ginder stated that the maintenance contract was not renewed under Commissioner Russell’s leadership due to budgetary constraints (although it had previously been within CEMA’s budget).

D. Limitations

Due to the repairs and upgrades made in the days following the May 16, 2025 tornado, we were unable to inspect the activation point at the Fire Alarm Office in the precise condition it existed on May 16, 2025.

Despite our efforts, we were unable to contact any representative from ABNA Engineering (“ABNA”), the consultant responsible for evaluating the City’s siren system and conducting the full audio test on May 15, 2025, just one day before the tornado.

¹ Summaries of each of the interviews conducted are attached hereto as Exhibit A.

² Images of the activation points at the Fire Department and CEMA are attached hereto as Exhibit B.

III. NARRATIVE SUMMARY

On May 16, 2025, an EF-3 tornado touched down in Clayton and then moved through North St. Louis before crossing the Mississippi River into Illinois. The storm system that passed through St. Louis City, including the tornado, resulted in five deaths and 38 injuries and approximately \$1.6 billion in damages.³ Shortly thereafter, reports began emerging from citizens that the sirens were not activated after the tornado warning.

Issues with the City's Outdoor Warning Siren System ("OWS") were first flagged by someone other than a CEMA employee in a 2024 internal audit of CEMA conducted by the Comptroller's Office. Specifically, the report provided that inadequate outdoor warning sirens posed a high risk in that the spires were not functional in all areas of the City. CEMA received budget funds to replace the siren system in 2024, and it began the process to hire a consultant to evaluate the siren system. Ultimately, ABNA was selected to evaluate the OWS and provide a written report regarding its findings which would help guide the replacement of the system in the future. The last time the sirens were successfully activated from the Fire Alarm Office was on Monday, April 7, 2025 during the monthly test.⁴

The City's siren system, like that in St. Louis County, relies on "repeaters" to propagate the signal to the sirens across the network. In the early months of 2025, Commissioner Russell was working to install the City's only repeater at a new location in the City.⁵ The repeater was previously located at the KDNL building at 1215 Cole Street, but the building was sold, and the new owner did not plan on maintaining the antenna that the repeater was located on. Commissioner Russell consulted with Chris Ginder of GTSi and Charles Gastler of the Police Department regarding potential replacement locations in the City. After a coverage analysis was conducted for each of the three antennas available in the City,⁶ the new repeater was ultimately placed on the antenna at the South Patrol Division building at 3157 Sublette in South St. Louis on March 31, 2025.⁷ This was meant to be a temporary location pending the City's replacement of the siren system. After the repeater was installed, the Fire Department button was tested on April 7, 2025, although the Fire Department was never informed that the equipment had been moved.

Subsequently, the sirens were activated from the CEMA activation point twice in May: during the monthly test on Monday, May 5, 2025 and again on Thursday, May 15, 2025. It was CEMA's decision for CEMA to conduct the monthly test in May. The testing on May 15, 2025 was conducted as part of ABNA's evaluation of the siren system in coordination with CEMA. The

³ National Weather Service, The May 16, 2025 St. Louis Tornado Story Map. <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/df6a15ddfa5e44308750aa22ec175da7>

⁴ The January and February 2025 siren tests were cancelled by CEMA. In March, CEMA determined that it would activate the sirens during the monthly test and in response to inclement weather on March 14, 2025.

⁵ By comparison, St. Louis County has three repeaters which each have redundant backups.

⁶ It is worth noting that none of the three antenna sites provided 100% coverage for the entire City as the KDNL building had previously.

⁷ In a May 22, 2025 email to Chief Jenkerson, Chris Ginder of GTSi states that the system was connected to the new repeater on March 9, 2025. However, having now reviewed GTSi's records, Mr. Ginder has determined that the system was in fact moved to the new repeater on March 31, 2025 on the same day the new repeater was installed.

siren system was activated six times every twenty minutes for ABNA to audibly test each of the City's 60 sirens.

The day after the testing, May 16, 2025, CEMA Commissioner Sarah Russell and two CEMA employees were scheduled to attend a workshop hosted by CEMA with Air Collaborative at 1520 Market Street. The fourth CEMA employee was at training in Arnold, Missouri. In the preceding days, various entities (including CEMA itself) made multiple social media posts about the anticipated severe weather on May 16, 2025. Despite this, all CEMA employees were offsite that day attending the workshop and training. The workshop began at 8:00 a.m. and was scheduled to last all day. Commissioner Russell and Public Information Officer Kim Vanden Berg monitored the weather throughout the day. As the weather continued to progress, Vanden Berg asked Commissioner Russell if one of them should return to CEMA headquarters given the severity of the weather. Commissioner Russell decided that they would remain at the workshop.

Subsequently, the National Weather Service issued Tornado Warning 63 for St. Louis County and St. Louis City in Missouri and Madison and St. Clair counties in Illinois at 2:34 p.m. At 2:37 p.m., Commissioner Russell called the Fire Alarm Office and asked: "You got the sirens?" Commissioner Russell intended the question to be a confirmation that the Fire Dispatcher was going to manually trigger the alert sirens. Fire Dispatcher Erricka Moorehead understood Commissioner Russell's question to be whether she had received the Wireless Emergency Alert ("WEA") that had just sounded on her cell phone and answered: "Yes." Because Dispatcher Moorehead did not understand Commissioner Russell's question and because no one was at CEMA to activate the sirens, the sirens were never activated after the tornado warning. At 4:15 p.m., Vanden Berg called the Fire Alarm Office again to ask whether the sirens had been activated. After checking with others in the Fire Alarm Office, Dispatcher Moorehead confirmed that the sirens were not activated.

After the tornado cleared downtown, CEMA employees Vanden Berg and Kristen Capps-Jones went back to the Police Department headquarters to establish the EOC.⁸ Instead of accompanying them to ensure an effective disaster response, Commissioner Russell left 1520 Market to personally drive the affected area for the purpose of conducting a "windshield assessment" within North St. Louis. This decision was a departure from normal protocol as these "windshield assessments" are typically performed by police officers, and the CEMA Commissioner should be coordinating the disaster response at the EOC. After concluding the windshield assessment, Commissioner Russell finally arrived at the EOC at 4:00 p.m.

Dozens of individuals were called in by the Commissioner to assist. By way of example, St. Louis County's CEMA Director was called, and she sent several employees to the St. Louis City EOC to assist. Additionally, the Mayor and many members of her staff reported to the EOC to offer assistance as well. It is standard and expected that the City would have a current and accessible EOP – one that incorporated the NIMS and ICS frameworks – and that this Commissioner would promptly respond to the EOC to activate and implement the operation

⁸ Images of the EOC in CEMA Headquarters are attached hereto as Exhibit C.

protocols.⁹ These principles are required by state law and offer a standardized model for command, control and coordination.

However, in this instance, no updated EOP existed. Only a 2003 version was on hand, and it was not made available or utilized by responders upon activation of the EOC. Moreover, the Commissioner did not assume command at the EOC as expected; instead, the Grants Manager, Kirsten Capps-Jones, activated the EOC without any supporting plan or guidance. As a result, neither NIMS nor ICS were implemented, leading to widespread confusion, disorganization, and operational breakdown across CEMA and among responding agencies.

From May 16 through May 20, multiple emergency management personnel – including from St. Louis County emergency management, Washington University, Franklin County officials, the regional supervisor, and others – made repeated attempts to locate or execute an operational plan. No such plan was ever found or executed.

On May 20, 2025, Mayor Cara Spencer placed Commissioner Russell on administrative leave pending a full investigation. Captain John Walk of the Fire Department was appointed Acting Commissioner. As part of his duties, he took over the EOC and, on May 21, 2025, with the help of Metro West Fire Protection District Division Chief Mike Thiemann and his team, a plan was ultimately put into place. With their interim leadership the EOC began to properly implement NIMS/ICS, restoring a structured and coordinated response.

Mayor Spencer issued Executive Order No. 83 delegating responsibility for siren activation to the Fire Department on May 20, 2025. After this change was announced at a press conference, the Fire Department tried to activate the sirens from its activation point located in the Fire Alarm Office at its headquarters. The test was unsuccessful. The Fire Department brought in Vanden Berg from CEMA to test the sirens again, and the second test was also unsuccessful. Eddie Quinn, Chief Communications Specialist for the Fire Department began looking for a vendor to come evaluate and diagnose the issue. Ultimately, GTSi techs were on site later that day to repair the system. They determined that the system was not connected to the repeater now located at South Patrol. Further, GTSi discovered that the antenna for the system had been removed from the roof of the hose tower and instead placed in the building's ceiling, impeding its ability to transmit a signal.

GTSi brought the system back online late in the evening of May 20, 2025 and early in the morning of May 21, 2025. GTSi also automated the system such that the sirens are now activated based on alerts from the National Weather System rather than the previous system's requirement that a button be manually pressed by an individual. In addition to the work at Fire Department headquarters, GTSi began working to repair the 22 non-functional sirens.¹⁰ As of the date of this report, 46 sirens are functional, and 5 sirens are partially functional.

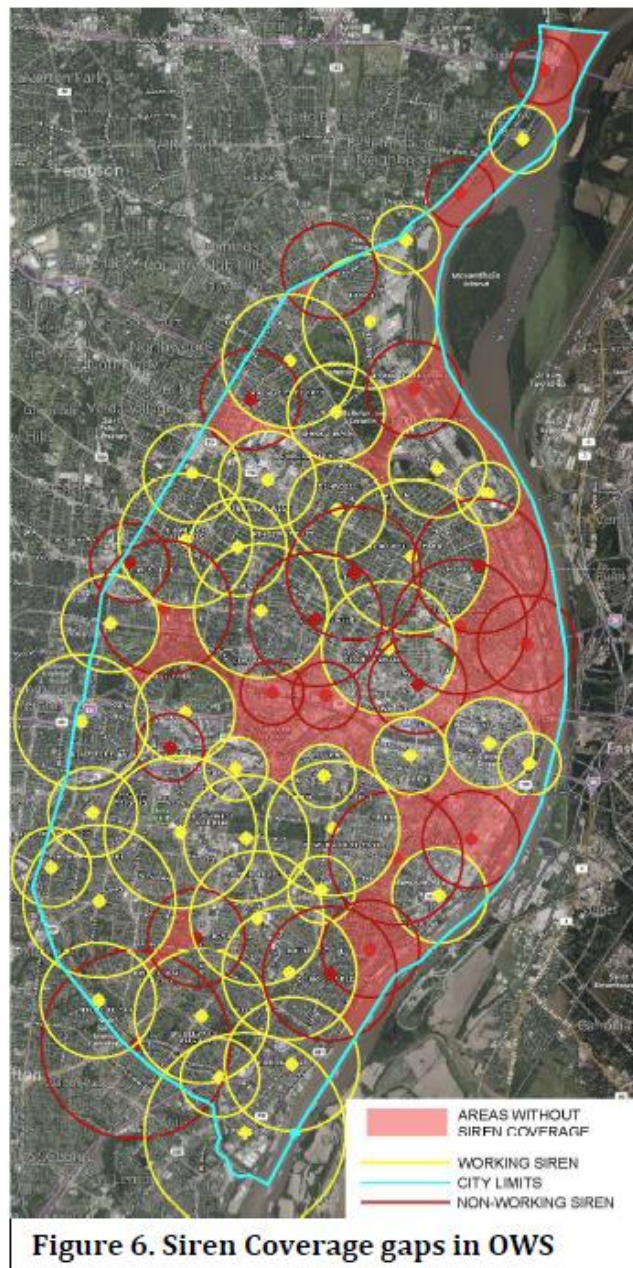
⁹ RSMo 44.090(8) specifically states: "It shall be the responsibility of each political subdivision and public safety agency to adopt and put into practice the National Incident Management System promulgated by the United States Department of Homeland Security."

¹⁰ May 19, 2025, Commissioner Russell received an email from ABNA indicated that, as of the day before the tornado, 22 of the City's 60 sirens were not functional for various reasons. 11 of those 22 were located in North St. Louis in the path of the tornado. See 2025_STLTornadoInv_000556.

IV. FINDINGS

System Design and Functionality

Our investigation determined that even if the tornado warning sirens had been manually activated, a substantial portion of the affected area would have been outside the range of any active sirens. On May 15, 2025, the day before the tornado, ABNA conducted a City-wide test of the entire siren system and determined that 22 of the 60 sirens in the City were not functional for various reasons. The map below indicates the lack of siren coverage due to those non-functional sirens.



Of the 22 non-functional sirens, 15 were located north of I-64, resulting in the vast majority of the area not covered by any siren being located in downtown and North St. Louis. ABNA found that there “were geographic areas with insufficient siren coverage, especially in high-density residential sectors and economically marginalized neighborhoods.”¹¹ Further, in an email to Commissioner Russell on May 19, 2025, Mr. Adewale indicated that 11 of the 22 non-functional sirens were located in the corridor impacted by the tornado.¹²

After the tornado, Mayor Spencer delegated responsibility for the siren system to the Fire Department. On Tuesday, May 20, 2025, as announced during a press conference, the Fire Department attempted to activate the siren system from the Fire Alarm Office. The sirens did not activate. To verify that an error in using the activation panel had not occurred, a representative from Fire Department picked up Vanden Berg from CEMA to have her attempt to activate the system. That test was also not successful. Eddie Quinn from the Fire Department called Ginder of GTSi to request help with the system. GTSi techs were immediately dispatched to work on the siren system. Ultimately, they discovered that the antenna for the activation point in the Fire Alarm Office was not connected to the repeater. In attempting to diagnose the issue, GTSi discovered that the antenna had been moved from the top of the hose tower and into the ceiling of the Fire Department Headquarters. Because the April 7, 2025 siren test was successful after the repeater was moved, it is unclear to us why the sirens did not activate on May 20, 2025. Both the change in location of the repeater and the location of the antenna in the ceiling would prevent the antenna and repeater from being in line of sight and impacting their ability to transmit signals to each other.

GTSi worked that evening to reestablish the connection between the repeater and the activation point in the Fire Alarm Office. In the meantime, a Fire Department employee was present around the clock at the CEMA office to activate the siren system if necessary. Ultimately, the connection between the antenna and the repeater was established in the early hours of the morning of May 21, 2025.

Thereafter, the Fire Department, with authorization from the Board of Public Service, hired GTSi to inspect and repair each of the 22 non-functional sirens. From June 2, 2025 to June 4, 2025, GTSi inspected 13 of the 22 non-functional sirens and prepared a status report that is included in the Appendix. Between June 9th and 10th, GTSi returned to three of the original 13 sirens and reviewed the remaining nine. GTSi’s status report regarding that assessment is included in the Appendix.

The siren system was installed in 1999 making it more than 25 years old. Opinions differ as to the expected remaining lifespan left in the system. Commissioner Russell stated that the system was outdated and required full replacement. Mr. Ginder, of GTSi, stated that with some upgrades and updates, the system still has significant expected useful life. In any event, the City has already decided to refurbish the entire system thereby resolving any issue regarding the age of the system.

¹¹ 2025_STLTorandoInv_000370. Commissioner Russell’s response to the ABNA report can be found at 2025_STLTornadoInv_001019.

¹² 2025_STLTornadoInv_000556.

Failure to Activate the Siren

The events of May 16, 2025 revealed an utter lack of policy and procedures regarding both the activation and maintenance/repair of siren system, as well as a breakdown in leadership and responsibility for responding to a disaster scenario.

The only written documentation of a policy regarding activating the siren system that we uncovered is a document on the CEMA website titled “Outdoor Warning Siren Activation Standard Operating Procedure” which states that “[t]he outdoor warning siren system is to be activated at the primary activation point, the Fire Alarm Office at St. Louis Fire Department Headquarters.”¹³ This document clearly states that the OWS is to be activated by dispatchers in the Fire Alarm Office and was last updated in 2021. However, the interviews we conducted support our finding that in practice there was no clear policy regarding who was responsible for activating the siren for either the monthly tests or during severe weather.

First, based on conversations with various Fire Department Personnel the above-referenced document was never shared with anyone at the Fire Department. No CEMA personnel recalled specifically sending this policy to the Fire Department. Additionally, Fire Chief Dennis Jenkerson stated that he was told in 2021 that CEMA was now responsible for triggering the sirens based on CEMA’s request. Moreover, CEMA employees took actions inconsistent with this policy by calling the Fire Alarm Office to state that CEMA (and not the Fire Department) would activate the sirens on various occasions.

Second, the Fire Department and CEMA cannot agree whose responsibility it is to activate the siren in the event of severe weather. Fire Department personnel maintain that they were only to activate the siren when directed to do so by an employee of CEMA. On the other hand, CEMA employees contend that the Fire Department was supposed to activate the siren unless they were directed not to by a CEMA employee. However, there were also CEMA employees who believed that it was CEMA’s job to tell the Fire Department when to activate the siren system. Conversely, there were also Fire Department Dispatchers who believed they were responsible for activating the siren without a call from CEMA. This lack of mutual understanding is only compounded by CEMA’s previous actions inconsistent with the foregoing policy in telling Fire Alarm Office that CEMA would be activating the sirens. This occurred both for monthly tests and for storms. By way of example, on March 14, 2025, Commissioner Russell called to say that CEMA would activate the siren as necessary that evening during severe storms.

Third, despite claiming the Fire Department was primarily responsible for activating the sirens, it was CEMA who was in direct communication with the National Weather Service regarding the potential for severe weather. Commissioner Russell and another CEMA employee were members of a Slack chat with members of the National Weather Service (“NWS”) St. Louis Office. This chat included other emergency management agencies, first responders, and members of the press. Prior to the tornado, the Fire Department was not a member of this Slack chat. Commissioner Russell, despite their established relationship with the NWS, did not attempt to

¹³ 2025_STLTornadoInv_000048.

connect the Fire Department with the NWS to ensure that the Fire Department knew when warnings were issued.

Because there was no clear policy regarding activation and because CEMA at times took the responsibility of activating the siren away from the Fire Alarm Office, there was no clear delegation of authority to either the Fire Alarm Office or CEMA. As a result, at least some of the Fire Department Dispatchers did not understand themselves to be responsible for unilaterally activating the sirens. This lack of policy became apparent on May 16, 2025 when the sirens were not activated after the NWS issued a tornado warning at 2:34 p.m.

In speaking with the dispatcher who answered Commissioner Russell's call, the dispatcher said that she believed that when Commissioner Russell asked if she "got the sirens," the Commissioner was asking whether the dispatcher was aware of the WEA that had just sounded off only seconds prior. The dispatcher did not understand Commissioner Russell to be asking her to activate the OWS. As a result, the dispatcher did not activate the OWS. Ultimately, the failure to activate the siren system was a result of a lack of clear communication between CEMA and the Fire Department. Given the gravity of the situation, both Dispatcher Erricka Moorehead and Commissioner Russell should have ensured clarity in their communications. Further, as discussed above, subsequent testing confirmed that the Fire Department's activation point was not functional on the day of the tornado such that even if a dispatcher had attempted to activate the siren system, the sirens would not have sounded.

Failure to Implement ICS and NIMS and Failure to Direct and Control Emergency Operations Center

As an initial matter, we want to applaud CEMA employees Kristen Capps-Jones, Kim Vanden Berg, and Bridget McKenna, who, by all accounts, did their jobs to the best of their abilities in the aftermath of the tornado. Although they were operating in a leadership vacuum without the benefit of an effective EOP, they acted decisively to minimize harm to life and property following the storm.

Additionally, those interviewed also noted that the Mayor and her staff worked tirelessly to establish leadership and to support and coordinate response operations. All of the aforementioned spent countless hours in the EOC to ensure the City's organized response, that it prioritized resources, and made critical decisions that were communicated without delay to the community.

Despite this, our investigation determined that the failure to activate the siren system after the tornado warning was perhaps not the most consequential failure on May 16, 2025. Of particular concern was the lack of executive presence and command by Commissioner Russell at the EOC during the critical early period of the response. Although the tornado touched down at approximately 2:39 p.m., Commissioner Russell did not arrive at CEMA until about 4:00 p.m. – well after the tornado exited the City. This was not because it was unsafe to travel during that time. By Commissioner Russell's own description, rather than coordinating the disaster response from the EOC alongside the other CEMA employees, Commissioner Russell chose to dither in North St. Louis for the purpose of conducting her own "windshield assessment." By that time, a

“windshield assessment” of the type typically conducted by police officers was of limited value given the readily apparent nature of the property damage and risk to of human life—century-old trees were scattered across the roads and many homes had been completely demolished. Thereafter, Commissioner Russell was intermittently present in the EOC until being placed on administrative leave on May 20, 2025.

Interviews with experienced emergency management personnel consistently confirmed that, during a significant incident, the head of the emergency management agency (or a designated deputy) is expected to be in the EOC continuously to provide direction, set priorities, and resolve issues. Field damage surveys are ordinarily conducted by first responders (e.g., law enforcement or fire) with information reported back to the EOC.¹⁴

Commissioner Russell’s job after the tornado was to implement NIMS and follow ICS documentation protocol. Instead, Capps-Jones, CEMA’s grant administrator, was left to coordinate with those in the EOC and take the lead with ICS documentation. ICS mandates the creation of an IAP for each operational period, which can range from 8-24 hours (12 hours is standard). Teams should be developing the next period’s IAP while current operations proceed. Here, no complete IAP was in place until the plan was drafted five days later, on May 21, 2025 for the May 22, 2025 operational period.

An IAP typically includes, as applicable, ICS forms such as: Incident Objectives (ICS-202), Organization Assignment List (ICS-203), Assignment List (ICS-204), Communications Plan (ICS-205), Medical Plan (ICS-206), Organization Chart (ICS-207), Safety Message/Plan (ICS-208), Resource Request(s) (ICS-213RR), and Activity Log(s) (ICS-214) along with situation reports and maps. Given the tornado’s severity, such documentation was necessary for effective coordination and for FEMA reimbursement. Nevertheless, for more than 72 hours after the incident, the only documentation maintained was the sign-in sheet and ICS-214 Activity Logs.

While certain NIMS/ICS elements began to be used prior to administrative leave, full implementation did not occur until after Commissioner Russell was removed from day-to-day oversight and outside emergency management professionals were brought in to organize operations. Multiple witnesses reported that the EOC was chaotic during the first several days, and that Commissioner Russell was not physically present and frequently unreachable by phone. The situation was further complicated by a recent change in City administration, which resulted in EOC representatives from several departments lacking the decision-making authority necessary for a fully functional EOC.

¹⁴ Additionally, the Fire Department performed an extensive assessment of damage and recovery needs across the impacted areas following the tornado.

Lack of Communication Between CEMA and the Fire Department and the Police Department

After several interviews with both St. Louis City CEMA employees and outside municipalities Emergency Management we learned that CEMA's mission is to educate the public on preparedness and to support first responders in the field by:

1. tracking and procuring resources and supplies;
2. coordinating with City agencies to fulfill operational requests; and
3. working with community partners to meet short- and long-term needs of displaced residents.¹⁵

To accomplish its mission, strong working relationships with the Fire Department and the Police Department are essential. Our interviews have determined that this was not the case. Rather, our interviews indicate that those relationships were weak prior to, and during, the tornado response. Instead of integrating itself into the broader emergency response infrastructure within the City, CEMA operated in a silo. There was little to no relationship between Commissioner Russell and Fire Department leadership. Consequently, during the tornado response, efforts were disjointed: instead of CEMA producing a unified, response-wide IAP informed by all departments, the Fire Department and Police Department developed and followed their own independent IAPs. The absence of a shared IAP led to inefficient use of personnel and resources.

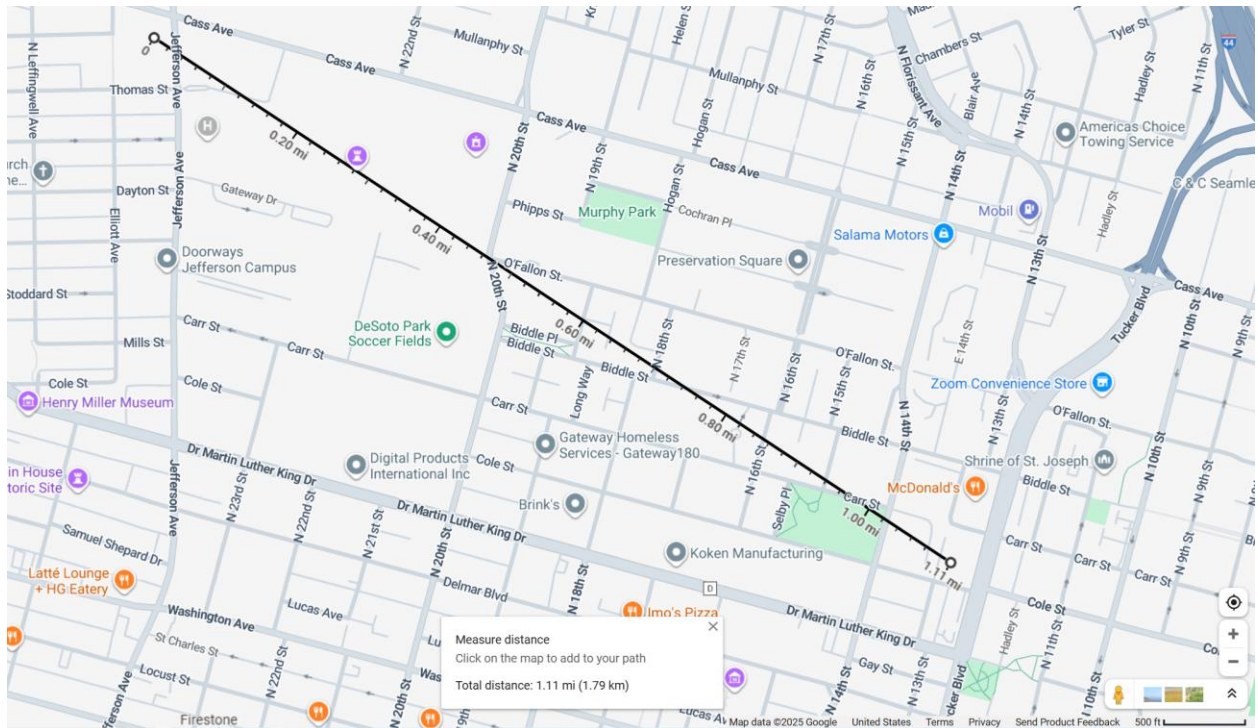
Consistent with the communication failures described above, interviewees also reported minimal coordination between CEMA and the Fire Department regarding the siren system long before May 16, 2025.

Representative Example: Uncoordinated Repeater Move

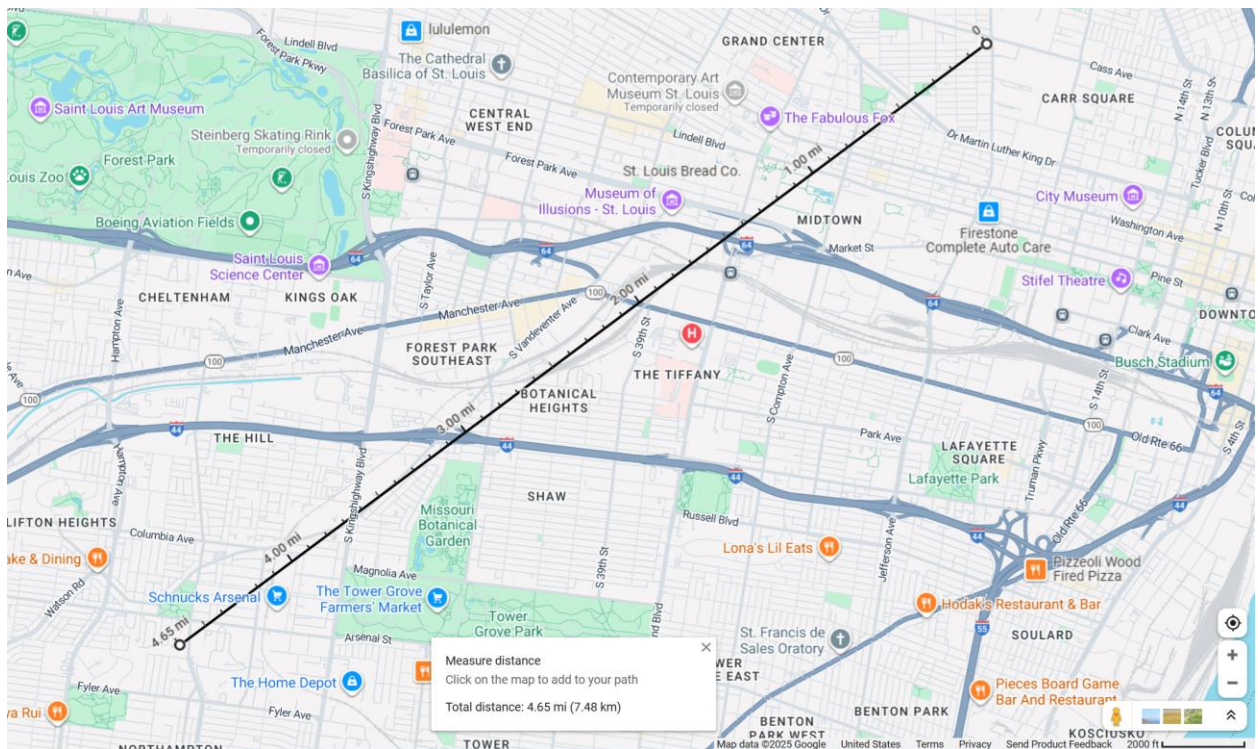
Commissioner Russell authorized the installation of a new repeater and it was installed and brought online on March 31, 2025. After it was installed, the system was tested by the Fire Alarm Office on April 7, 2025 and was successful. When the siren system was tested after the May 20, 2025 press conference, the test was not successful. At the time, the Fire Department was unaware that the repeater had been moved. Originally, the repeater was located about 1.11 miles from the activation point at Fire Headquarters. Once it moved to South Patrol, it was located 4.65 miles from Fire Headquarters.

¹⁵ It also includes providing training for City staff, schools, and community organizations.

Old Location of Repeater - Fire Department to KDNL: 1.11 miles



New Location of Repeater - Fire Department to South Patrol: 4.65 miles



Despite quadrupling the distance between the Fire Department activation point and the repeater, Commissioner Russell did not notify anyone at the Fire Department that the repeater had been moved. When asked during an interview with Deputy Director of Public Safety Levaughn Smart, Commissioner Russell stated that Fire Department had no need to know that information. However, in not telling the Fire Department about that equipment change, the Fire Department had no reason to look for any issues with the equipment.

Commissioner Russell reported sending letters and requests to take the siren system offline due to reliability concerns. However, those communications were not shared with the Fire Department. Nor was the Fire Department informed when specific sirens were nonfunctional. During monthly tests, several firehouses called or emailed the Fire Department dispatch to report whether sirens sounded; each dispatch forwarded those reports to CEMA to help identify inoperative units for repair and replacement on the belief that CEMA was responsible for maintaining the siren system. Despite CEMA's position that Fire Department was primarily responsible for system activation, CEMA did not synthesize and return status information or offline determinations from these reports and subsequent remediation efforts to the Fire Department.

Failure to Maintain a Current Emergency Operations Plan

CEMA is responsible for drafting and maintaining a current EOP that outlines how the City organizes, coordinates, and supports incident response. The most recent EOP located was last updated in 2003 (included in the Appendix). It is outdated and does not reflect current organizational structures, mutual-aid arrangements, or modern technologies (e.g., IPAWS, wireless alerts/smartphones, GIS-enabled damage assessment, resource tracking platforms).

NIMS-aligned planning doctrine (e.g., FEMA's CPG 101) calls for a recurring cycle of plan development, training, exercises, and after-action improvements, with scheduled reviews and updates. The absence of an updated EOP indicates a gap in the City's preparedness and governance processes and likely contributed to the ad hoc coordination during this incident.

No CEMA employee or City-department representative had been trained on an EOP – this training should occur annually. Further, the EOP should be developed with cross-departmental input to produce a cohesive plan. If done properly, EOC personnel should not have to consult the document during an activation because they would already know their roles.

FCC License Expiration

FCC License KJD937 expired in April 2024. The City has had a number of radio licenses through the FCC, and Commissioner Russell has made efforts throughout the years to manage all of the licenses, despite being told by previous employees that they were not necessary. Commissioner Russell explained that they have had difficulty keeping licenses current because the FCC's online portal does not always function, and the FCC is difficult to reach for support. Commissioner Russell did not know how many FCC licenses have lapsed. A former employee of CEMA previously managed these licenses, and he was trying to teach Commissioner Russell, but

Commissioner Russell struggled to understand them because the relevant system became difficult to work with after it was digitized.

CEMA was Understaffed, Underfunded, and Under-Resourced.

On May 16, 2025, CEMA's staff comprised Commissioner Sarah Russell, Grants Manager Kristen Capps-Jones, Public Information Officer Kim Vanden Berg, and Administrative Assistant Bridget McKenna. None of these positions were designated Emergency Management Specialist roles. This structure limited capacity for core emergency management functions (e.g., planning, training and exercises, logistics/resource tracking, situation status/Intel, public warning/IPAWS operations, finance/admin for incidents).

Funding and sustainment were also insufficient. Since 2021, CEMA reportedly lacked funds for a vendor maintenance contract previously used to support the siren system. Multiple budget cycles were required to secure replacement funding. As of May 16, 2025, more than one-third of sirens were inoperative.

Finally, CEMA's practical effectiveness depends on both enabling authority and sustained relationships. While CEMA cannot compel other departments to act, it is expected to lead preparedness through training and ICS/NIMS integration. In practice, Fire Department and Police Department personnel received their ICS exposure primarily from outside organizations rather than from CEMA. That dynamic is inconsistent with NIMS expectations for coordinated preparedness, common doctrine, and interoperable operations.

The City is Making Necessary Upgrades to CEMA's Capabilities and the Siren System

In October 2024, the City broke ground on a new 911 Dispatch Center, which—in addition to housing all dispatchers for Fire, Police and EMS—will also house CEMA upon its completion. It is our understanding that the new building will also contain an upgraded and larger EOC. This is particularly necessary as many of the external emergency management professionals who volunteered to help in the aftermath of the tornado explained that the City's current EOC was insufficient for responding to an emergency of that magnitude. Further, it is our understanding that the floorplans for the 911 Dispatch Center will be changed based on the events after May 16, 2025 to ensure that it is fully operational and not a hindrance to future EOC activations.

In addition to the foregoing, in the immediate aftermath of the tornado the City upgraded the siren system to a system which is automatically activated based on alerts from the NWS. With this upgrade, the system is now no longer entirely dependent upon an individual manually entering the activation sequence, but it does include a backup manual switch whereby it can be hand-activated in the event that it is not automatically activated. In addition, the City has implemented a Rapid Warn System ("RWS") that checks all systems twice daily. By investing in this upgrade to the siren system, the City has already solved one of the issues above in that a lack of policy or clear communication can no longer impede the activation of the siren system. Moreover, the City has recently decided to refurbish the entire siren system. The project will make the entire system functional and reliable in ways it has not been for years.

V. CONCLUSIONS

Ultimately, many if not all the failures of May 16, 2025 were largely preventable. The siren system was not activated after the tornado warning largely due to an ongoing lack of communication between CEMA and the Fire Department, coupled with a lack of clear policy that was clouded by inconsistent actions taken by CEMA. However, due to the subsequent discovery that the Fire Alarm activation point was not connected to the repeater at its new location and the 11 non-functional sirens in the path of the tornado, any attempt by the Fire Department to activate the sirens likely would have at most, only been partially successful in areas outside of the path of the tornado. Thus, based on the information now available, the only way to successfully activate all the functional sirens during the tornado would have been from CEMA headquarters. However, despite being aware of the potential for tornadoes and severe weather, no CEMA employees were present in the office at the time. Further, there was no attempt to return to CEMA headquarters despite having sent and received warnings regarding potentially severe weather that day and at least one employee's suggestion that the team should return.

In the aftermath of the tornado, the Fire Department was delegated responsibility for the siren system, at which point the issues with the repeater and the extent of the sirens that were non-functional became widely known. The connection to the repeater was immediately established and to date, many of the non-functional sirens have now been repaired. The City has elected to refurbish the entire system with and that project currently pending with the Board of Public Service. Moreover, the City's siren system was upgraded to an "EarlyWarn" system such that it is automatically activated based on alerts issued by the NWS thereby limiting the potential for a failure to activate based on human error. The implementation of RWS now also means that there is additional twice-daily status checks against each of the sirens in the network.

Unfortunately, the failure to activate the siren was not the end of the issues. During the course of our investigation, we determined that under Commissioner Russell's leadership, CEMA failed to implement NIMS and ICS as required by federal law. While the CEMA employees who were present in the EOC performed to the best of their abilities, they were left to function without Commissioner Russell for the majority of the three days following the tornado. This is because—in direct contradiction of their role as CEMA Commissioner—Commissioner Russell was often out in the field rather than in the EOC. We were also troubled by Commissioner Russell's refusal during her interview to recognize the multiple failures or to take any personal responsibility for them. CEMA's ability to run the EOC was further impeded by the failure to maintain an updated EOP. The EOP in place at the time had not been updated since 2003.

Additionally, while it was clear CEMA was understaffed, underfunded, and under resourced leading up to the May 16, 2025, nothing we have discovered suggests that the lack of staff, funding, and resources explains the failures. Instead, it appears that CEMA's leadership did not correctly prioritize CEMA's responsibilities, opting to focus too much on external networking rather than training, policy creation and maintenance, and relationships with City agencies, namely the Fire Department and the Police Department.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

Short-Term (Immediate Actions)

- **CEMA Staffing**
 - CEMA needs to be fully staffed as soon as possible. Such staffing should include the following
 - Commissioner
 - Deputy Commissioner & Operations
 - PIO & Planner
 - Emergency Management Specialist & Logistics
 - Grants Manager & Finance/Admin
- **Incident Response**
 - Until CEMA has a functional CEMA staff, the City needs to establish an incident response protocol to ensure that in the event of any other natural disasters there is a command structure that is following ICS protocols. The command structure should primarily involve a representative from the Office of Public Safety, the St. Louis Fire Department, and the St. Louis Police Department. In the event of a future emergency, this command structure should be put in place immediately to coordinate the City's response to that emergency.
 - After CEMA is fully staffed as outlined above, and has a Commissioner in place, that individual should replace the representative from the Office of Public Safety and work with the representatives from St. Louis Metropolitan Police Department and the St. Louis Fire Department to aid the PD and FD in their work in the field.
- **Siren System**
 - We recommend the City pursue zoning regulations that prohibit construction to prevent another situation like that of the Siren 6631 located behind Fire Station 21 at the corner of South Vandeventer Avenue and Forest Park Avenue.
 - Consistent with what has been done since the tornado, both the CEMA and Fire Department activation points should be tested each month, and all Fire houses should report whether the sirens were audible during the test. To ensure that the testing is conducted and the results are assessed, CEMA and the Fire Department should each independently conduct an annual audit of the siren testing results.
 - This should be memorialized in a formal written policy.

- Policy Creation – there should be a written policy agreed to by both the Fire Department and CEMA as to whose responsibility it is to activate the siren for monthly tests, in the event of inclement weather, or for any other purpose. We recommend that this Policy be given to all new CEMA employees and Fire Department Dispatchers. Additionally, this policy should outline whose responsibility it is to maintain and repair the sirens as well as a policy that any such repairs and maintenance need to be communicated to the other agency.
 - The Policy should also address the protocol for testing both activation points after any repairs are made to the system to ensure that the system is still functional.
- The Repeater – we understand that the City has decided to refurbish or replace the current siren system. Whether a new system or the current system, the system’s reliance on one repeater represents a single point of failure that jeopardizes the entire system. As a result, any siren system needs to have more than one repeater that supports the system. Further, to the extent that a repeater(s) remains necessary for a newer system, any such repeater(s) should be placed in locations that result in 100% coverage for the entire City.
- CEMA Reporting Structure
 - Currently, CEMA is under the Department of Public Safety, however, there is no indication that there is any supervision, oversight, or communications with the Department of Public Safety. In the future, oversight of CEMA should be integrated through the Fire Department or the Police Department such that there will be an established chain of command with guidance and training between CEMA and first responders to ensure accountability, responsiveness, and operational cohesion. Given the Fire Department’s familiarity with and use of NIMS/ICS, we believe that the Fire Department would be a logical placement for CEMA.
- Emergency Operations Plan
 - In order to be in compliance with federal and state law, CEMA needs to update its Emergency Operations Plan (“EOP”). The EOP should be updated on a regular basis and ideally on an annual basis.
- CEMA Policy
 - In the event that inclement weather is anticipated, at least one CEMA employee should be in CEMA’s offices during normal business hours. If CEMA employees are out of the office, when it is safe to do so, at least one CEMA employee should return to CEMA headquarters for the remainder of the day.
 - Such policy should specify that events hosted by CEMA either individually or in conjunction with another organization should be cancelled in advance to facilitate CEMA employees’ return to the office.

Medium-Term (next 6 months)

- Siren System
 - Maintenance: After installation of the new siren system, the City needs to establish a regular maintenance contract with a vendor similar to what was in place prior to 2021 with GTSi.
- City Policies
 - Each Department which could be implicated in response to a natural disaster must have at least 2 employees, who, in addition to the Director/Commissioner of the agency, in the event of an emergency can be delegated full decision-making authority.
 - Such policy needs to reflect that in the event that one of the 3 employees is no longer with the City, another employee needs to be identified and trained within two weeks.
- Those three designated individuals should attend an ICS 100 class to be taught by a CEMA employee.

Long-Term (6-18 months)

- CEMA Staffing
 - At all times, CEMA should have at least two certified ICS instructors on staff to train other City employees.
- Training
 - The City should establish a training policy whereby police officers and firefighters who are promoted to leadership positions are required to complete higher-level ICS courses to improve ICS proficiency amongst all first responders.
 - The City should establish a training policy whereby Police Academy and Fire Academy recruits are introduced to ICS and participate in an ICS-100 course.

EXHIBIT A - INTERVIEW SUMMARIES

City Emergency Management Agency (CEMA) Personnel

Sarah Russell – CEMA Commissioner (on administrative leave) – July 23, 2025

Commissioner Russell is the Commissioner of Emergency Management – CEMA. Duties of the Commissioner include managing an agency before, during and after an emergency. This encompasses 5 major areas: prevention, preparedness, response, recovery, and management. Commissioner Russell reports to the Director of Public Safety.

There are 6 total people under Commissioner Russell at CEMA. Kim Vanden Berg – Public Information Officer, Commissioner Russell also does communications. Kristen Capps-Jones is the Grants Manager and Bridget is the Administrative Assistant that reports Kristen.

Commissioner Russell started at CEMA in February of 2010 as a program specialist – they did a variety of things. In May of 2021 Russell became the Commissioner but was a communications specialist before then. There was no formal training when they became Commissioner. They explained that it was all learned from 2010 to the date that they took over. Commissioner Russell was acting Commissioner when their predecessor retired in 2021 but was given the title as Deputy Commissioner prior to that as they were always second in charge. As the years progressed, Commissioner Russell gained more knowledge and responsibility in the job. Kim has some of the same duties that Commissioner Russell previously had but not all, and Kim has a different title and position.

Document: Emergency Plan for the City Hall Building – this document is the internal plan for people in City Hall during emergencies. The document says “draft” because all of the documents are “live” and in progress (Contained in Google Documents). This document predated Commissioner Russell but was being worked on by Mr. Sam Stephens at CEMA before he resigned to go to FEMA. Commissioner Russell drafted documents regarding protocols and procedures –there are a few documents out there. They describe the process as an all-hands-on deck approach. Prior to 2021 the Commissioner also drafted emergency plans for other City buildings.

Drafts of the building emergency plans for all of the City buildings live in the Google drive. Each building has an emergency ambassador – one person per office and the ambassador is the liaison between their office and CEMA.

Outdoor Warning Siren Fact Commissioner Russell (STLTornadoINV 50) – created by Commissioner Russell on behalf of Alderperson Tyus. Commissioner Russell emailed this fact sheet to the entire Board of Alderman. Information was pulled from different sources to put into this one document.

Siren System - July of 1999 system was put in place – same system today. Commissioner Russell knew that some sirens were not working. One of the Commissioner’s focuses has been getting information to the public. Residents have reported that some of the sirens are not working. CEMA relies on residents to tell them which sirens aren’t working. CEMA crowdsources information. They have tried to pull information from the Fire Department, but they don’t always get it. The

Fire Department has emailed CEMA to tell them which sirens are working as reported by the various fire houses in the City.

The Commissioner has made work orders to fix the sirens. Typically, CEMA only gets a budget of \$20,000 per year which is enough to replace the batteries on 20 of the sirens. Therefore, every three years the siren batteries are replaced. They have received a little bit more money in the past couple of years. At \$20,000 it has been difficult to get parts for the sirens because of the budget. Parts of the system have been increasing rapidly in price and this particular system stopped production in 2006. Therefore, trying to get the right parts for what they have is very difficult. The closest contractor who works on them is in IL (GTSi).

The Commissioner has tried to troubleshoot the system locally, then the next step is trying to get the street department to go out and check the batteries. Since COVID, it has been more difficult to have the Street Department help because of staffing issues and the Street Department's other priorities. CEMA is not the Street Department's priority. The Street Department checks the batteries. In 2020 to 2021 – the Street Department had been hooking up the batteries wrong causing two of the sirens to catch fire.

Neither Commissioner Russell, nor the former Commissioner Gary Christmann, had confidence in the system. Commissioner Russell had conversations with Mayor Jones' Administration and requested that they take the siren system out of service. The City would have used all of the other tools to get the messaging out. (NotifySTL, apps, and sirens on the phone.)

There are two activation sites – one at CEMA and one at the Fire Department. There are no regularly scheduled meetings between the two departments. When the Commissioner is at the Fire Department for various meetings, Commissioner Russell will check in and ask how the panel/system is. Commissioner Russell will look at the panel and that is the extent of Russell's communication with the Fire Department. Now, Kim will let the Fire Department know if there is going to be testing. There is a phone call once a month to talk about the testing. The Fire Department is in charge of activating the system if there is a weather-related issue. March 14, 2025, was the only time CEMA activated the siren during a weather-related issue.

In 2024, \$3.9 million was approved to replace the system. Commissioner Russell reached out to BPS, Rich Bradley, and then worked with BPS to send out an RFP to find a vendor to replace the system. Commissioner Russell pulled for on-site siren testing. It took a little while for ABNA to get engaged because BPS had to draft the RFP and go through the process.

The Commissioner and Rick Evers from BPS coordinated with Abe from ABNA. ABNA did go on-site looking for placement of sirens. There are issues with placements of some of the sirens so Commissioner Russell wanted them to look at poor placements that could be relocated.

FCC license expiration – The City had a number of radio licenses and Commissioner Russell has tried throughout the years to understand all of the licensing. Commissioner Russell was told by previous employees that they were not necessary. Commissioner Russell's understanding is that the support from the FCC with the system has been difficult to get through. Commissioner Russell doesn't know how many licenses have lapsed. There was an ex-employee who managed them,

and he was trying to teach Commissioner Russell, but the system was getting more digital and it was more difficult.

Kim, the Public Information Officer or Communications Officer, and Commissioner Russell are the ones that are trained to press that button. Typically, inside of CEMA they do on-the-job training where they go through the different systems. This would be one of the systems everybody gets introduced to, and knows what this thing is, but there are some roles that should not be issuing mass alerts for the City as part of their job. That is a high responsibility and should be built into the structure. It shouldn't be an administrative assistant to make a decision like that.

Russell does not know what training the Fire Department does for their system. They have never been asked or allowed to train any of their staff at the Fire Department.

Repeater – system [siren] works on radio signals. When you press the button it sends and calls out the signal to the repeater – then the repeater takes the message and amplifies it to the 60 siren sites. Russell had to get the repeater off the old site because the new owner of the building wanted it moved. New repeater equipment was purchased and installed at the South Patrol Police Station.

Between the Commissioner, Chuck Gastler and Chris Ginder (owner and CEO of GTSi), they were going to be able to pick the best new site for the repeater. Ginder ran tests on each of the potential repeater locations and sent files that showed the different coverage. The three of them made the decision as to where to put the repeater equipment. They knew that there were two activation sites – the repeater had to reach both.

March 31, 2025, was the installation date. That day GTSi did the installation – when they were complete and Commissioner Russell was told everything is operational and installed by the technician that did the installation. The monthly test was the following Monday, April 7, 2025 was done by the Fire Department. Russell did not see or receive any notification that there was an issue.

CEMA is unable to hear the sirens from its offices. There have been times that Commissioner Russell has gone to monitor a specific siren if there is a report that it is not working.

ABNA- Commissioner Russell wanted them to do audio testing to make sure there was coverage for the whole City. The Commissioner wanted to see if the City's siren sites were good or if they needed new locations. Commissioner Russell didn't want ABNA just coming in and replacing the sirens in the same location if they weren't in good locations. Commissioner Russell wanted to make sure that the City got the best coverage.

The ABNA report regarding the system was due at the end of May. Commissioner Russell conveyed concerns to ABNA specifically about 6 sirens that were not working. ABNA did not try to do any additional testing on the sirens until May. In fact, May 15, 2025, was the last day that ABNA did testing. Neither Commissioner Russell nor Rick Evers from BPS knew why ABNA was not going to the monthly testing siren sites prior to May.

Commissioner Russell never spoke to Ginder regarding the Rapid Warning System wherein there is no button, but rather the National Weather Service can automatically activate the siren system

without physically pushing a button. In 2014 – Commissioner Russell had a little money in the budget and was working with GTSi to get a walkie talkie that could activate the system wherever if Commissioner Russell was out in the field. This never ended up happening.

Part of what CEMA does is training and meeting out in the community. Therefore, they could have used the walkie talkie when they weren't in the office. CEMA does meet regionally with other CEMA groups. CEMA put in for grants for the region, it contributes to exercises, and also contributes to training.

St. Louis County has a newer version of the system. The ECC manages the County system. In the City, CEMA was in charge of maintaining the system.

Week of the tornado:

CEMA is always watching the weather. When things start to appear that are concerning – they work with the National Weather Service. CEMA is constantly communicating with SLACK. SLACK does daily briefings, and they are constantly reviewing the weather – looking at timing of weather.

May 16, 2025 – Some of the CEMA employees were off site at the workshop. The workshop began between 7:30 and 8 am. Commissioner Russell and Kim had their laptops and phones out at the workshop monitoring the weather. Kim was also monitoring Notify STL. The workshop was for internal City partners. From a CEMA prospective, the workshop focused on how to be supported and utilize other City departments. Kim and Commissioner Russell were trained facilitators for the program – this day they were more of spectators rather than facilitators.

When Commissioner Russell and Kim were at the workshop, they were monitoring SLACK and getting information about the storm system and damage reports at other locations in the area. They were able to watch the storm as it was coming towards them. Kim had NotifySTL up so that Commissioner Russell could notify the public – reach over 200 individuals. They were doing everything that they would have been doing back at CEMA aside from activating the sirens. When the tornado watch came out Kim updated NotifySTL and Commissioner Russell was updating social media.

Kim and the Commissioner did not discuss going back to the office – they were in a position that they felt that they were doing everything that they would normally be doing. If they were in the office, they would be doing the same thing. Commissioner Russell felt that there was no need to go back to the office. Commissioner Russell said that there was never a discussion with Kim regarding leaving and going back to the office.

Commissioner Russell and Kim continued to watch the weather – the tornado watch came out at approximately noon. It was really status quo the majority of the time. They do these type of storm systems routinely, especially in the springtime.

Commissioner Russell did not make a determination that the sirens needed to be activated. The severe thunderstorm warning goes out, which means that now they have more serious things going on than just a tornado watch. They're pushing out that message on NotifySTL and the

accompanying social media messages as well. Once that was released (Kim and Commissioner Russell were working on that), Commissioner Russell stated they were going outside and checking the conditions. Commissioner Russell went downstairs and walked out onto the mezzanine level, and when Russell came through the doors the atmosphere was very concerning. The atmosphere was very heavy and warm and it was turning a very green color. To the west Commissioner Russell saw a cloud formation starting to form coming around the corner of the building. Russell saw a Health Department employee sprinting out of the building, and Commissioner Russell's phone went off and that was the wireless tornado warning. Russell walked right back inside the building, got in the elevator to the second floor and started dialing fire alarm. They had a tornado warning; Commissioner Russell saw the clouds coming and called to confirm fire alarm was setting it off. The call was a confirmation; Commissioner Russell doesn't call and tell fire alarm to set the sirens off. The procedure is when there is a tornado warning fire alarm sets the sirens off, that is the base understanding of those sirens. There is, and has been since 1999, in the original procedure language that says the Fire Department, Commissioner, and police officer or fire fighter that sees a tornado that is on the ground can call in and activate the sirens. Commissioner Russell knows that Chief Jenkerson did call once or twice and have fire alarm activate the sirens, it didn't happen that day. If you get the tornado warning you set off the sirens, that has always been the deal with the dispatchers.

There was never a time in 2021 when the Mayor's Office told Commissioner Russell that CEMA was taking over the sirens.

Commissioner Russell's understanding was that Moorehead was – as fire alarm always has – going to press the button to activate the sirens. When asked if Commissioner Russell was concerned that they did not hear the sirens, Commissioner Russell stated that Commissioner Russell was inside a building and had no expectation to hear the sirens. On that day, Commissioner Russell got no indication that the sirens were not working until that night when the Mayor asked: "what happened with the sirens?" That was the first time Commissioner Russell had heard that they were not deployed.

Kim told Commissioner Russell later that she had called to see if the sirens were activated. The Mayor told Commissioner Russell at the Incident Command Post before the press conference that the sirens didn't go off. Commissioner Russell informed the Fire Chief that the sirens didn't go off, and he said that he was at fire Headquarters for graduation and at 3:15, and it would have been too late to sound them. Commissioner Russell doesn't know what happened at fire with graduation or in the dispatch room. The majority of the time Commissioner Russell speaks to the dispatch supervisor regarding the siren system. Commissioner Russell gets the firehouse feedback regarding sirens at the stations from Chief Richardson.

On Monday after the tornado there was a test, but Commissioner Russell wasn't included in conversations about the testing. The Mayor put together an Executive Order regarding the sirens stating that the Fire Department was to take over the warning system. Commissioner Russell was approached by the Mayor's policy person and told that the Fire Department was taking over the system. Commissioner Russell stated that it was fine because that is what the policy has always been.

Commissioner Russell was only made aware of the testing on Monday because the Chief said at a press conference that they were going to do siren testing. Commissioner Russell had problems with that [the testing] because the Commissioner had Chris Ginder driving up a portable siren from Alabama to St. Louis. They were trying to identify a place to install that siren so that there would be a siren somewhere in the damage zone that was functioning. There was incredible damage, and they needed a working siren that could notify the citizens. Another concern was that the weather was coming into the area and it would cause confusion and panic if the sirens were deployed. Commissioner Russell felt that bad decisions were being made from the Commissioner's perspective in that moment.

Other Issue – Executive Order was specific to activating the sirens during weather but did not speak to maintaining or doing diagnostic testing. When Commissioner Russell heard that was going down, Commissioner Russell found the Chief of Staff and started questioning her – nobody mentioned anything to them about testing. Everyone was shutting them [CEMA] out.

CEMA is in charge of maintaining the system, but fire has been in charge of activating it. There are not a lot of documents about maintenance of the system. Commissioner Russell was trained that if there was a siren that had issues – get it to street department.

Commissioner Russell knows nothing about the repeater not working from the Fire Headquarters. Commissioner Russell was never informed that there was going to be any issue with the repeater not reaching the Fire Department.

There are things the Emergency Management and CEMA Commissioner do after a tornado, roughly everything: starting up the incident command, making sure the EOC is open and available, receiving resource requests from the field from any other City Agency – they are to report those requests to the EOC and then Emergency Management and CEMA Commissioner make those requests while other City Agencies are doing what they need to be doing, it also allows whatever is being requested to be tracked.

While the tornado was still on the ground, the weather service was saying, yes, it is a tornado we are seeing damage. The first thing Commissioner Russell does is head out to do a windshield assessment to actually see what is left. Preliminary and general assessment of the damage. The weather service needed to know from a broad spectrum what happened. It was clear that it was going to be all hands-on deck. It was clear that it was an EF3.

As Commissioner Russell was leaving, the Commissioner told Kim and Kristen to get everyone into the EOC to be able to start their response recovery. Commissioner Russell stated that “for a few days [after the tornado] they we were really into that getting things set up to see how we were going to function.”

Within the EOC there is finance and administrative function trying to get people in from City procurement, people who have the money, to have a function operating so when someone says, hey, we need this, and it is something that we have to buy we have a capability to do that. There are a lot of people that just come to the EOC, this is a hard timing one because it's a new administration, and again, short staffed, there are not a lot of capabilities to grab ahold of new

people and bring them in and to get them to prioritize training with the EOC. Bring them in and say this is the EOC, and this is what we do. Then people that have been through that and have that understanding, they just know to go to the EOC. There is some contacting at those points, and CEMA is looking at setting up finance and admin, talking to the supply commissioner Chris Carter, hey, who can you send over? Try to start to establish who is going to fill out some of these rolls. It is not just going to be a short-term duration where four to five people are staffed, it will be months and longevity is needed.

Commissioner Russell was doing that for parts of the weekend of the tornado, but it's literally drinking from the fire hose, it's everything. Russell's phone doesn't stop ringing; emails don't stop coming in. From Commissioner Russell's standpoint, it's trying to filter those to people that can immediately help to manage that as much as possible.

Commissioner Russell did not have the capacity to go to dispatch and ask what happened regarding the sirens. Commissioner has made multiple attempts to contact leaders of the Fire Department and asked if they knew or could figure it out because they were their employees. They are not her employees – dispatch.

Chief Jenkerson was Russell's first stop, and he did not give Russell a favorable response that could help. Chief Erris was sitting at the command post and Commissioner Russell asked him if he knew anything about it [sirens not going off]. Commissioner Russell also reached out to Mosby the Public Information Officer, and he didn't provide any information regarding the sirens not going off either. The Commissioner was pretty shut out of getting any information from any of them.

The majority of the time the monthly test is conducted by the Fire Department. But, because it is a backup piece of equipment, CEMA also wants to test that secondary site. Periodically, and Commissioner Russell thinks that Kim has now done this, in March and May, she said that she wanted to active from CEMA's equipment to check that capability as well.

Periodically Commissioner Russell, when running the test, would run it from the CEMA site a couple of times a year.

The 20th was the last time that Commissioner Russell worked at CEMA.

Commissioner Russell provided training to the police dispatchers on another topic – not the warning system – to provide them with an update and overview of what CEMA does and the changes. Commissioner Russell offered to do the same training to Chief Phillips at the Fire Department, and he said just email it to me, I'll look at it when I get back into town.

The system has printed directions next to it where it tells you what to do and what button to press, step by step. Directions are laid out on the sheet for monthly tests, severe thunderstorm testing, and tornado warnings. Commissioner Russell programed new buttons and added the activation of the sirens and added a button for severe thunderstorm warning.

CEMA isn't in charge of activating the sirens because they don't have the staff and they aren't at the office 24 hours a day 365 days a year. Commissioner Russell said that CEMA doesn't have the staffing to be able to do that.

CEMA does a lot of community outreach, so they are not always at the office, and it makes it easier for the Fire Department to conduct the testing.

Silent testing is different than the monthly testing. You can run the silent test on individual sirens – if it works, it should give individual siren diagnostics.

Commissioner Russell is the most familiar with the system as Commissioner Russell has been doing it for the last 15 years. Commissioner Russell has tried to do everything to keep track of the working sirens, but as the function of the diagnostic side, it's like they are flying blind – they can't pull it up and automatically get information.

This is why Commissioner Russell asked Mayor Jones' Administration to take it out of service, why Russell's predecessor said that he didn't trust the system. Russell was trying to get people to say we are done with having sirens or we need a new service. Russell didn't get the funding until Mayor Jones allocated funds for it. Trying to hold it together with \$20-40,000 per year isn't okay.

Jones' staff didn't want to take it out of service until there was another plan in place.

Staffing – in a perfect world Commissioner Russell would ask for – 4 emergency specialists and an executive assistant would become a Deputy to try to split out some of the work and create separation. Even if they had more CEMA staff, CEMA shouldn't be in charge of the siren because there is not 24-hour staffing.

Most important parts of her job at CEMA – If Commissioner Russell were going to give an elevator pitch to a child: “tornado police.” Primary jobs: to keep and maintain the relationships that the City has and needs to deal with the faces of emergency managers, planning, first responders, Red Cross, Salvation Army, Catholic Charities, clergy groups, corporate partners, neighborhood groups and other emergency managers around the area. Planning before, coordinating during, and planning in the recovery process – immediate and long-term recovery. Working with planning division – how do we build back this area so that they are more resilient?

Commissioner states that this is part of the reason why the Air Collaborator workshop was so important – as to maintain these relationships.

Trying to make sure everyone has who they need, and they know what they need to know – trying to track resources, that is tough because no one wants to talk about their toys because people will ask to use them. Training and education – encourage people to take training for what they have to do, before, during and after.

Because CEMA is so small they have to divide and conquer. Gary and Commissioner Russell divided and conquered a great number of things.

Training and exercises happen all the time. CEMA has requirements that they have to participate in because of the grant.

CEMA doesn't have the staff to fill all of the positions.

System – when a combination of buttons are pressed it makes a sound. Three pieces to the system – type in the code and then hear the dial- up. If it doesn't work – then you won't hear that sounds.

On the April test – no one from Fire Department said that there was any issue with the testing.

Prior to the repeater being installed Commissioner Russell went with Ginder to Fire Headquarters to look at their equipment because they thought there may be an issue with their equipment. The power switch was turned off and the dial had been turned from repeater to direct – the Commissioner is not sure how or why that happened. There was no power to the radio. It was turned to direct so it wouldn't reach the repeater. Ginder turned it back on while they were sitting there. This was in March, and Deanna Powderly [dispatcher] was also there.

GTSi installed the repeater to the temporary location and Commissioner Russell asked “is everything good to go” – Commissioner Russell was told yes.

March 14, 2025 – CEMA let fire know that they would handle the button if the weather got bad because they were in the office and it was 314 so there were a lot of events going on.

When Commissioner Russell found the power was off [when the Commissioner visited with Ginder] it was an indication that something at the Fire Department was off. Russell wanted to let fire know that Kim was at CEMA, and she could activate the system and that they had the coverage.

**John Walk – Acting CEMA Commissioner, Captain St. Louis Fire Department –
August 7, 2025**

On August 7, 2025, Acting Commissioner Captain John Walk gave members of the investigative team a tour of the CEMA offices located at Police Headquarters. During that tour, we were also given access to the binders of IAPs created in the EOC in the days after the tornado. Our review of the IAPs determined that the first full IAP was drafted on May 21 regarding the operational period of May 22. Prior to that, since May 16, the only documentation were sign in/out sheets and ICS Form 214. The sign in/out sheet for May 16, 2025 revealed that Commissioner Russell did not arrive at the EOC until 4:00 p.m. which was nearly an hour and a half after the tornado first touched down. Our tour of the facilities revealed that the City's EOC was too small for such a large-scale emergency.

CEMA has hired an Administrative Assistant and is currently interviewing for an Emergency Management Specialist and a Program Coordinator to round out staffing. In the days after the tornado, a proposed staffing of CEMA was created which would include the following positions:

- Commissioner
- Deputy Commissioner
- 2 Planners/Administrative Coordinator
- Logistics Specialist
- Training & Exercise
- Community Engagement
- Public Information Officer
- GIS/Data

Captain Walk expressed his belief that CEMA should be under the Fire Department. He stated this belief was based on the fact that the Fire Department had to take over the EOC in 2022 after a week to bring implement NIMS and because CEMA has no authority to force any of the other City departments/agencies to cooperate. Further, the Fire Department is trained in NIMS/ICS.

Kim Vanden Berg – CEMA Public Information Officer – August 4, 2025

Kim Vanden Berg is the Public Information Officer for the City of St. Louis Emergency Management Agency. Her role includes communications both internal and external – internal being City communications from the CEMA office as well as external – social media, emails to and from the public, communications to the public. She does not communicate emergency management plans to City agencies but does alert multiple agencies when severe weather is coming in.

Kim has been at CEMA for 13 months – she has only had to deal with sending weather alerts to City departments. Kim came from the Department of Health. She took FEMA courses that needed to be done for grants. There are training courses that she has to complete within 24 months due to a grant that supports a portion of her salary. She doesn't think that there is a requirement for ongoing education, but it is highly encouraged to stay up to date on current emergencies and updates to the courses.

No one reports to Kim, but she reports to Sarah Russell and always has. Kim requested a transfer from the Health Department to CEMA with communications. Kristen Capps-Jones is a grants manager, but Kim doesn't report to her. Bridget is the Administrative Assistant who reports to Kristen.

City of St. Louis, City Hall Emergency Draft – Draft emergency plan for City Hall. Kim doesn't know who wrote the plan. She has never written an emergency plan she is just communications.¹⁶

She has seen these documents on her Google Drive, but to her knowledge it is not on the website. **Outdoor warning siren fact sheet** – Kim has seen something similar to this sheet but doesn't know who wrote it.¹⁷

CEMA has an agency specific handbook – she doesn't recall signing anything when she moved to CEMA.

Monthly meetings with CEMA – They give updates about what they are doing. For example, Kim would give updates on communication opportunities and outreach opportunities such as running an educational table.

Kim believes that SEMA tries to coordinate quarterly meetings, but she has not attended any because of her schedule. The Registry Urban Liaison is James Farmer.

They are required to take online FEMA courses as part of the grant and there are in-person classes that are highly recommended as well. There is not a set number of hours of classes with CEMA that she recalls, but professional development is encouraged.

¹⁶ 2025_STLTornadoInv_000001

¹⁷ 17 2025_STLTornadoInv_000048

Email regarding ABNA doing an analysis of the system. Kim said that Commissioner Russell was concerned about the system which is why CEMA brought ABNA. She has had calls with Chris Ginder but had never had calls prior to the tornado regarding fixing a siren.¹⁸

On page 3 of the email, Commissioner Russell says “Kim oversees the system.” She doesn’t know that she would call her roll as “overseeing” the system. She participated in activation. She doesn’t recall ever being told that she was “in charge of the system.” Both she and Sarah have pressed the button to activate the system.

In April Kim asked the Fire Department to run the monthly test. She believed that it was run, but she wasn’t in a position to hear the sirens. There were always supposed to be communications with the Fire Departments to discuss if the test was going to go forward – because of weather. It is decided by Kim, or it was a combination of both Kim and Sarah deciding who is going to run the monthly testing. Prior to the past couple of months when Kim decided who was going to do the testing, Sarah decided.

CEMA is not a 24/7 operation. If they know that bad weather is coming, they will try to be onsite. However, if there is a system in the middle of the night and there is not significant warning that they can be in the office, CEMA depends on the Fire Department. It is her understanding that the Fire Department is in charge of activating the system in bad weather unless CEMA informs them that CEMA will do the activation. March 14, 2025, CEMA communicated with the Fire Department that they were in the office and would activate the system in bad weather. This was communicated to the fire dispatcher line.

Kim doesn’t know if the Fire Department had SLACK before the May 16, 2025 tornado but believes that they have it now.

On Friday, May 16, 2025, CEMA was aware of the potential of severe weather. Kim cannot recall a situation previously where the weather was coming and they were going to be out of the office but there was a decision to stay back because the weather was coming in. On the 16th Kim was concerned as the storm progressed and thought it would be good to have a conversation about sending someone back to the office. She recalls saying something similar to the Commissioner, but the decision was made to stay at the workshop. She asked the Commissioner if she should go back to CEMA, but the decision was made to remain. They were the only two from CEMA that were trained on the pressing of the button.

The tornado warning went up at 2:34 pm – Kim was sending out the messages through mass communications. She believes that she said something to the Commissioner – “can we make sure the Fire Department is pushing the button.” Kim wanted to ensure that they were getting all the notifications out. Kim didn’t hear the sirens go off, but she was in the middle of the building. She did not shelter until she pushed out all of the communications.

¹⁸ 2025_STLTornadoInv_000082

The purpose of the workshop was to start communication to foster relationships with other City departments first as well as an effort to build out with community and organizations. Kim doesn't know why it was more important for her to stay at the workshop than it was to get back to CEMA.

Kim doesn't know why she and the Commissioner were the two that went to the workshop. She was told to go.

Kim does feel that she fulfilled her job pushing out the tornado warning notifications. She did her job the same way she would have done it if she were sitting at her desk in CEMA. Kim called Moorhead at the Fire Department back because someone asked her if the sirens had gone off. She doesn't recall if she spoke to Sarah about the sirens going off.

As soon as it was safe to leave the building, Kim went to the EOC. She arrived moments before Kristen arrived – Sarah was not there.

Emergency Operations Plan (“EOP”) – she has seen an older version of one but doesn't know if there is a more updated version. The EOP provides a framework for how CEMA responds to disasters. When Kim got to the EOC she did not receive an EOP. She never received a CEMA EOP. On May 16, 2025, Kim had a lot of people coming to her with questions and she was trying to field them as best she could. She wouldn't say that she was in charge back at the EOC, because she is just the communications person, but she was trying to facilitate communication and get answers back to people the best she could. Kim said that when you have an incident like this there is an incident commander. Kim said that there was no plan and no one from CEMA to help implement the plan, as there likely should have been.

Kim cannot recall a time when she was in a CEMA meeting, and they discussed an Emergency Operation Plan. However, she said that she was only in about 10 meetings since she joined CEMA. She was never told about an EOP or where it was.

In the aftermath, she said that “there were challenges to those initial hours of recovery” in meeting the basic needs of the residents of the City. In the initial hours she was fielding questions, and she doesn't remember everything that happened. Kim said that organization was one of the challenges in the initial hour and a half after the tornado.

In April, Kim was not involved in the conversations with the repeater being moved. She heard that it had to be moved but it was above her level. She doesn't know anything about the repeater not reaching the Fire Department.

In case of a disaster Kim's role was communications and pushing out notifications to the public – asking people to avoid areas and where they could get help. ICS – She was trained in her discipline – communications – so that you can respond to an incident in your jurisdiction and help in other jurisdictions.

There is no rhyme or reason to who does testing – March, she made that determination with Sarah. In April, Kim knew that she was not going to be in the office that day, so she called the Fire Department and asked them to run the test. In May, Kim volunteered to do the test because she was at the office. In May, Kim told the Fire Department “I am in the office, and I can run the test.”

Kim knew that some of the sirens were out. She said that it's an older system and there were challenges. They asked residents in the neighborhood to report if they didn't hear the sirens.

Kristen Capps-Jones – Grants Manager – July 25, 2025

Kristen Capps-Jones is the Grants Manager at CEMA. She manages disaster and non-disaster grants. She has been at CEMA since February of 2024 and was hired by Commissioner Russell. Her duties vary regarding the grant. She manages procurement for professional services, developing scopes of work.

They all attend training and attend workshops to be trained on various topics – it is all part of the collaboration. She attends less than one workshop a month.

As far as Kristen knows the activation equipment is still in CEMA. It was not mandatory that everyone who worked in CEMA to be trained on that equipment. She knows that there are people who are authorized to use the equipment, but she doesn't know how they were trained. There isn't an officewide mandate to be trained on the emergency warning system. She has not seen anything written regarding training. If CEMA had to press the button to activate the system, there were two people in CEMA that could do it – Commissioner Russell and Kim Vanden Berg.

Kristen never heard conversations before the tornado regarding who oversaw pressing the button. After the tornado the only discussions that she heard regarding which department was supposed to press the button were people pointing fingers at each other.

There is a Fire Capt. that is currently in Commissioner's role.

The day of the tornado she was at the workshop with Commissioner Russell – the Air Collaborative. The idea was to be collaborating with other City departments and start discussing small projects of no costs or under \$10,000. The workshop was at SLDC. Kristen was aware that there was going to be bad weather. Kristen generally spoke about the weather to Kim and Sarah.

When the weather got worse the three of them were continually monitoring the weather. She never had any discussions with the others regarding not attending the workshop because of the weather.

CEMA has monthly staff meetings – they all discuss what they are working on and what issues have come up regarding what they are working on.

May 16, 2025 – Kristen did see commissioner Russell get up and step away several times. She said that she saw Commissioner Russell on the phone, but she didn't know who she was talking to.

There were less than a dozen people at the workshop, some from the Mayor's Office and she thinks SLDC. Air Collaborative had been working with CEMA to put on the workshop. Kristen said that the idea was to increase collaboration and working with other City departments. Everyone was sitting around a U-shaped table and Kim and Sarah had their laptops out looking at the weather. The workshop was from 8-5pm.

After the tornado moved through Kristen went straight to the EOC – to activate it, to start monitoring what is going on, getting reports in on the field. Once they heard that it hit the City proper, she knew there was an incident, so she activated the EOC. No one else from her office was there. Bridget was offsite attending a training.

Kristen isn't technically listed as operational staff so she does not normally open and activate the EOC so she can't say what they are typically supposed to do. She had never done this before. On May 16th she went to the EOC and turned on all of the lights, turned on the T.V. – she started a 214-activity log and was tracking and timestamping as things came in. Then, several people from the Mayor's Office came. Once the Mayor's Office came in and they started coordinating.

CEMA is an office of 4 and its all-hands-on deck – you are in the EOC whether it is your job or not. Currently, her role has not been made clear to her – trying to get back to her daily work. Not sure what she is going to be doing going forward.

There is no written protocol which tells you what to do in CEMA. She tried to implement ICS which is what she is supposed to do based on her training. ICS is well defined.

Kristen worked at STARS before coming to CEMA. Kristen is still doing tornado related things but trying to get back to her grant work.

Kristen has spoken to Sarah a few times – Sarah has vented regarding the whole situation in general. Kristen doesn't know who was in charge of the system activation.

This was her first time activating the EOC after disaster. She has worked there before, for example, on Mardi Gras they work in there and monitor, but nothing like this. The EOC is a conference room. Kristen doesn't know who normally is supposed to open the EOC.

Bridget McKenna – CEMA Administrative Assistant – July 25, 2025

Bridget McKenna is an Administrative Assistant for the CEMA department. She works in the office every day. Half of her salary is paid for by grants, so she has to do Incident Command training because of the grant.

On May 16, 2025, she was at training in Arnold. Kristen does payroll, answers phone calls and talks to citizens.

Regarding the new tornado system, she spoke to Matt Poirot regarding funding and invoicing – the administrative side.

Bridget has been in CEMA for 3 years. She requested a transfer to the Airport because of all of this. She is 54 years old and doesn't have the energy to re-invent the whole department.

Prior to the tornado, she was happy with her job. She liked that she was an admin but got to learn different things. She liked the Incident Command System, and she was getting training to be the finance and admin section chief. They put it together in the EOC so that there is an incident command chief – different sections – planning, logistics, and finance and admin. It breaks it down so that you are only reporting to one person. You only have one leader and not 15. If they want to get reimbursed by FEMA they have to follow ICS.

Bridget doesn't know when the workshop was scheduled – she didn't have a lot to do with it. The only thing that Bridget knew how to do was stop the emergency siren system from making noise. When she was hired there was an emergency management specialist and from her understanding they were in charge of the sirens – that was their job to maintain the sirens. They were at CEMA. At some point the City eliminated those positions. Bridget is not qualified to run the system.

When weather comes in CEMA monitors it the whole time – they put it up on the TV. Her understanding was that the Fire Department activated it. If they were in the office, then CEMA may activate it. If they were in the office and Sarah could press it, she would press it. If they weren't there, then Sarah would call the Fire Department and have them press it.

Commissioner's day-to-day duties – a lot of community engagement, getting a grant to purchase houses in floodplain (mitigation), a lot of education.

After the tornado everyone was in the office trying to put out fires, trying to make decisions on what needed to be done or what was to happen next. They had a command post set up. They were answering phones and getting messages to the right place.

Bridget found out a couple of days later that the sirens didn't go off. They were so busy there was no time to actually talk about what happened. CEMA is still waiting for something in writing stating that the Fire Department is now in charge of the sirens. She knows there was an Executive Order. She doesn't know who is in charge of the sirens now.

The Mayor's Office set up a task force because they decided that CEMA is incompetent, so they created a task force and took apart CEMA. It feels like CEMA is being disbanded – there is a

misunderstanding about what CEMA and just because they don't understand what they do doesn't mean that they don't do anything.

SLACK is operated by different Emergency Management People around the region, and it is an easy way to communicate regarding emergencies.

Bridget has no idea what Air Collaborative is. Her main job was to do all of the public assistance – all the FEMA stuff but the Mayor's Task Force took that.

Activate the EOC for loss of life – when it is City wide. They didn't stand up the EOC immediately. She got the first calls and texts from Kristen at 3:30 pm. She said that we are going to stand up the EOC – standby we are going to let you know what you need to do. The next text from Kristen was to come in. Bridget got in at 5 pm and stayed until 10 pm. Then she worked 16-hour days for the next week.

As soon as they got reports of the tornado, they called the Fire Department – that is why they have a backup. Supposedly Sarah or Kim can walk people through pressing the button on the phone, but this happened so quickly.

Bridget's understanding is that Fire Department will activate the system after Sarah calls them and tells them to do it. She said that she could be wrong, but that is her understanding.

City Employees

Dennis Jenkerson – Fire Chief, St. Louis Fire Department – July 3, 2025

Chief Jenkerson is the Chief of the Fire Department in the City of St. Louis. He has been the Chief for the past 18 years. The activation system has a series of entries that you have to do to make the siren sound. It is located in the dispatch center and dispatchers were trained on the activation. There are 15 total dispatchers. There are only 3 on duty at a time.

If they get notice that there is tornado warning and they get told to activate the sirens, they activate the sirens. Training – just have to be trained on the actual console when they are doing the monthly tests. There is no training between the Fire Department and CEMA. CEMA has never activated the sirens from the Fire Department location.

Chief has a standard working relationship with Commissioner Russell – just like he has with other departments. No longer a button at the Fire Department. There is no longer a console – when the Mayor said to “fix it” he made calls and had discussions with his communications people as well as the National Weather Service and they found out that they didn’t need a button.

He had discussions with the technician [Ginder] and they started checking the Fire Department system and they learned that they didn’t need a button and also that a third of the sirens were non-operational. The Chief said that he is not in charge of maintenance, so he doesn’t know how it was not known that so many of the sirens didn’t work. The Chief said that responsibility was taken away from him. He said that the Fire Department used to have total control over the system and activating the sirens. There is a document that still says that the Fire Department is in charge of the siren system. 2021 – CEMA wanted total control of the emergency warning system – took it over and away from the Fire Department.

He said that he got a call from Mary Ellen Ponder and she said: “they finally got it, and they messed it up.” When the Chief asked her what she was talking about she told him that “CEMA used to come into the Mayor’s Office and continually discuss that they wanted to be in charge of the Emergency Management System.” Then, under Mayor Jones CEMA got total control of the system. CEMA would call the Fire Department and tell them who was going to do the monthly testing.

The Fire Department did not know about the repeater being moved until after the tornado. Ginder with GTSi came to Fire Department because the sirens didn’t work. Ginder sent a technician over and they showed up the third day after the tornado. They went up onto the roof to check the signal and they had none.

No one from CEMA told the Fire Department to activate. An announcement was made to all of the fire houses that there was a tornado warning.

Chief got a call from CEMA that CEMA is in charge of the sirens. The Fire Department would be told even on monthly testing when to press the button.

The Fire Department went after the tornado to test the sirens, and they didn’t work. On May 20th, the Fire Department tried to test the system and didn’t work. Ginder told the Chief that the antenna

was too far away from the Fire Department work. When they moved the repeater they moved it south and the Fire Department didn't hit the antenna – so even if they would have activated the siren that day, it would not have worked.

GTSi was the company that moved the repeater. Chief knew nothing about the repeater being moved and was never told about it being moved. Approved 12-23-24, but the repeater was moved on 4-9-25.

After the tornado, Chief learned that the Fire Department system didn't work, several of the sirens weren't working – some had a simple fix – trimming branches back, others had bigger problems. There were quite a few sirens that only needed the batteries replaced.

Sirens are all the same – battery powered and kept charged by a solar panel. There is no electric and they are all self-contained.

The purpose of the siren system is a public address system that alerts people to the weather. There is also PA system that can make announcements.

First thing fixed was the antenna so that it would hit the repeater the next time the sirens went off. Ginder said that they could move to the alert warning system by just adding two wires to the system. Also added the early warning system that replaced the button. This system connects with the National Weather Service so that they have access to the warning system. Chief wanted the ability to have the sirens automatically activated. There is a small box that can override the system.

Today, there is nothing that the Fire Department needs to do to activate the siren system in bad weather. National Weather Service told the Chief that the Fire Department was “not on the call list.” The Chief believes that they were taken off the system.

There are still several sirens that aren't working and there is a plan in place from GTSi regarding updating the sirens. Some sirens have other problems – there is a building that is actually built around the siren.

Chief now has a system in place so that when the sirens are tested he will know which ones work and they record it. Several sirens are damaged by people stealing them and scrapping the metal. Previously, the Fire Department would get notice from the engine houses if the sirens worked or not and the Fire Department would convey the report to CEMA.

They did not have a FCC license because the radio frequency is wideband rather than narrow.

CEMA is now a backup site because they would have to manually hit the button and be in the office.

**Michael Richardson – Deputy Chief of Communications, St. Louis Fire Department –
July 23, 2025**

Firelaw Manager and Communications Chief - He has been in the fire department for 38 years and Chief of Communications since 2014. He oversees EMS and fire dispatch. He is also responsible for the maintenance of all the cell phones, radios and SOGs. Day-to-day he oversees the dispatch operations, scheduling for vacations and any latest equipment such as dispatch procedures. The supervisors report to him directly and the dispatchers report to the supervisors. The supervisors are Angela Williams, Deanna Powderly, James Taybrone and Keisha Montgomery. There are two dispatchers under each supervisor.

Chief Richardson says the warning system was in place prior to him joining the department. He initially started in dispatch and was not trained in using the system. He was aware of where it was and saw the instructions but, it was not his job. When he became Chief of Dispatch, he was not trained on the system. But to his understanding, it was just pressing the button and waiting for it to register. Chief Richardson has seen Deanna Powderly use the system before. The people that would be in charge when the supervisor's off are the ones responsible for enacting their duties. But the supervisor makes sure that the dispatchers are all trained in how to use the system. He has five to six people that can oversee the system in case anyone is off or on vacation.

Typically, CEMA will call and tell the department to activate the system. On the first Monday of each month, CEMA will ask the fire department to operate it at 11:00am. The fire department did it in March, CEMA said that they would do it in April and May. Chief Richardson says that the statewide test is different than the first of the month tests.

In March, Chief Richardson got an email from Kim, and she was not in the office. He rarely receives any emails from Sarah. Kim normally calls the 314-288-3820 phone line and says to active it. The phone line is recorded. The phone line goes straight to the supervisor that is in the room during the day. Deanna Powderly mentioned that there is a logbook. On May 16th, the supervisor was Erricka Moorehead since Deanna Powderly was on vacation during that time. Erricka had two other people in the room with her during that time – Rodney Edwards and Tyler Holt. Chief Richardson said that once the fire department is told to activate the alarm the logbook will show this on record. Within the last six months, he asked for two calls to occur in each district to make sure that the sirens are heard. In April, the fire department was informed that CEMA would do the monthly test which is in the logbook.

In May – the logbook does not say that there was a test done. The first Monday in May, CEMA called and told them that they would perform the test. The maintenance of the system was always done by CEMA. The extent that the fire department would know about the maintenance of the system is limited. The department found out about the antenna and that it was moved after the fact from downtown. Apparently after they moved it, they (fire department) never activated it again. The reason being, is because they did not know that they moved it and tried to activate their system and nothing happened. Chief Richardson stated that they tried to activate it following the Monday after the May 16th event, which he believes is in the logbook.

Chief Richardson had a couple of emails and texts from Sarah on May 20th while Sarah was out of the office. He asked Sarah at 4:30pm who did the maintenance on the system because they needed

to find out why it was not working. Sarah did not respond to his emails. At 6:48pm Sarah responded via text message that GTSi handles the maintenance. The test was done in conjunction with CEMA, and the Mayor was involved because Chief Richardson could not have signaled the test without the Mayor's permission. The first alarm was at noon and then the second time was at 3:00pm. GTSi said that when they moved the antenna where their antenna was stationed that it did not have a loud siren anymore according to Chris.

By the time Sarah gave him the information for GTSi, the fire department was already aware of this information relating to GTSi fixing the system. Chief Richardson rarely communicated with Sarah prior to the tornado. CEMA and the dispatch unit are trained to press the buttons for the system. There are no meetings that occur between CEMA and dispatch. Chief Richardson's understanding is that it is CEMA's responsibility to press the button.

1999 – new system put in place. The fire department oversaw the pressing of the button because someone was always here 24/7. Since Chief Richardson has been there it has always been CEMA telling the dispatchers to operate it or not. He never knew it for being their responsibility. The fire department has no control over the function of pressing the button.

Chief Richardson was in the room during the time of the phone call that took place between Sarah and the dispatch. If he had known the magnitude of the storm, he would have brought another dispatcher there aside from the three to assist. Mass volume of calls and the dispatch team worked until 10:30pm. At one point the phone lines were out and once back on, they had to make sure that all calls were handled and responded to that evening. The Chief stated that Ms. Moorehead got two different calls from Sarah and Kim. Prior to the tornado, Ms. Moorehead had asked the Chief before Sarah called if she was supposed to set off the button on May 16th. Sarah previously would go into the dispatch room if it relates to the siren, but he has no idea what Sarah is doing with the sirens. If the other departments state that the alarm did not go off, then the communication is then forwarded over to Sarah. The dispatchers should send communications to Chief Richardson and Sarah if the alarm is not working. He does not recall any phone calls.

As of today, the Fire Department oversees the alarm/system. The system is now automated, and they test it every month at 11:00am and CEMA does it at 11:15am. The test is reported to CEMA, and every person receives a copy – the Fire Chief, Captain, and CEMA. If there is maintenance, he is not aware of who keeps up with the system. He believes it is the GTSi people who handle maintenance.

**Deanna Powderly – Senior Fire Equipment Dispatcher, St. Louis Fire Department –
July 21, 2025**

Powderly is a Senior Fire Equipment Dispatcher at the City of St. Louis. She has been employed with the City for 33 years, and with the Fire Department for 28 years. She has been employed as a Senior Dispatcher since 2019. Powderly was not working on May 16, 2025, as she was responding to a family emergency. Powderly believes Erricka, Rodney, and Tyler were working as dispatchers on that day.

As a Senior Dispatcher, Powderly oversees that all of the “runs” go out with the correct equipment, answers and directs phone calls, and manages the 9-1-1 dispatchers in the fire alarm office.

Powderly said all dispatchers are trained on how to activate the tornado warning sirens. To activate the sirens, there is a certain keyboard with instructions written underneath, specifying the steps to take if it is a siren testing activation or tornado warning. After these steps are taken, the dispatcher is to go outside to make sure they can hear the sirens.

In determining whether to activate the siren for a tornado warning, the dispatchers monitor warnings on TV or through the National Weather Alerting System. Further, the dispatchers sound the sirens if CEMA directs them to do so, or if the Fire Chief directs them to do so. They are not permitted to follow the orders of anyone else. Powderly has sounded the sirens herself on multiple occasions.

While Powderly has heard many rumors of why the sirens did not activate on May 16, 2025, she does not know what exactly happened.

Powderly stated that no one from CEMA typically calls the Fire Department to tell them to activate the siren. She gave an example from the past where Sarah called the Fire Department and told Powderly not to activate the sirens anymore, but Powderly ignored this directive because she could see there were still tornado warnings.

The Fire Department dispatchers have a written logbook where they are to make notes of any events that take place during a shift. Writing down who would be handling a siren testing would be a typical entry.

For the monthly tests (which Powderly always handles for the Fire Department), Sarah typically would call the day-of around 10:00 a.m. to confirm which entity would be running the test. Sometimes, CEMA would send an email to firealarm@stlouis-mo.gov instead. Powderly described conversations with Sarah that were not always clear. In these conversations, Powderly would ask Sarah for more clarity as to which entity was going to bear which responsibilities. Powderly and the dispatchers have never been trained or told that the Fire Department is not supposed to activate tornado warnings or a siren test. While Powderly was not present on May 16, 2025, she believes the sirens have to go off no matter what.

Powderly described certain changes that have been made since May 16, 2025, including a new automated siren system connected to the National Weather Service. She described the fail-safe switch should the National Weather Service fail to activate the sirens. She also discussed 20

phantom towers along the I-270 corridor that will set off the City's sirens, and how the new system should show what sirens/systems are working and not working. The Fire Department dispatchers also have a weather audio system in their office.

Powderly does not remember being told that a siren system wasn't working because of a repeater being moved prior to May 16, 2025. If this was true, she would have expected CEMA to notify them of the issue.

Powderly stated that CEMA has always been in charge of the sirens.

**Angela Williams – Senior Fire Equipment Dispatcher, St. Louis Fire Department –
July 21, 2025**

Angela Williams is a Senior Fire Equipment Dispatcher. She supervises and trains dispatchers at Headquarters. She was promoted in March of 2025, but she had been acting in that role for a while.

There is a button that activates the siren system in the Fire Department and all of the dispatchers were trained on it. You have to use a mouse to press send to activate the system – the supervisor or senior person would activate it. All of the dispatchers for as long as she has been there were told how and when to use it. There are certain times they need to activate the system. When there is a threat of a tornado, that would be a time to use it. Extreme or severe weather you would activate or some type of public address – they have never operated it for that.

Angela said that they are not told all of the time to activate the sirens, if the Nation Weather Service says that there is a tornado threat then they know that they need to activate it. She does not meet with CEMA or get training from CEMA. There have never been conversations about who is in charge of the button – CEMA or the Fire Department but sometimes CEMA would call and say that they were going to run the monthly test. So CEMA would usually call the morning of the test to say that CEMA was going to activate it.

Since Angela has been at the Fire Department CEMA has not called in a storm to say that they were going to activate the sirens. In her experience, if there is a tornado and the NWS said that there is a tornado – if they issued a warning then as a seasoned dispatcher, she would know that she should activate the system.

Angela has not been in touch with anyone regarding May 16, 2025. They have been placed on the NWS text and emails post tornado. It used to be by watching the TV or the news.

She has never been told that it is not the Fire Departments job to activate the system it is CEMAs. CEMA or Kim would randomly call to activate the monthly testing the morning of the test.

Dispatchers call the engine houses to survey to see who has heard the siren and then they would note that but nothing in place to pass the results on to anyone. Now, they send the results to Chief Richardson and they ask every house now if they had heard the sirens.

They instructed their dispatchers per shift how to activate the new system manually if it doesn't automatically work and they have all been trained on that. The supervisor and acting supervisor would be in charge of activating the system – everyone in her unit has been trained and it is written down that they were trained.

She has been here since 2005, and it has always been the case that they watch the news to see what is going on with the weather to activate the system. Angela reached out to the NWS to get the notifications and was told that the City was already on the list to get contacted and that Sarah was the City's contact. The Fire Department was not included so Angela added them.

Angela doesn't remember having any issues with the system. She did hear after the fact that the system didn't reach the repeater.

Since 2005 – the activation piece has been the same. She does feel that CEMA and Sarah were trying to take over the system, but she feels that how they activate the system has always been the same. Meaning, Sarah started calling and saying that they were going to do the testing more often. Angela doesn't know who does the system's maintenance.

**Erricka Moorehead – Fire Equipment Dispatcher, St. Louis Fire Department –
July 23, 2025**

Erricka Moorehead has been a Fire Equipment Dispatcher with STLFD since May of 2023. She is not a supervisor but can be an Acting Senior Fire Equipment Dispatcher when necessary. Her job duties include a lot of multitasking including answering fire calls, answering overflow EMS calls, dispatching fire and suppression equipment, listening to radio traffic, and deciphering the needs of each truck when they are out in the field (e.g. calling SLMPD).

Erricka was told about the siren activation machine by her supervisor (Powderly), not trained on it. From what she can remember, Powderly told her only push the button if CEMA tells you to and that was it. (It was a button then; they don't have buttons now.) Erricka never pressed the button in the past.

Erricka had not met Sarah or Kim from CEMA before the storm. She had seen them before but not met them. Erricka is not aware of a meeting between CEMA and her department (or her individually) re: protocol. She's never been in the room when anyone has pressed the button. Ms. Powderly did the March monthly testing (Erricka was not in the room) where she pressed the button and then wrote it in the book. Now certain firehouses report back and say they did or didn't hear it. Erricka doesn't recall them doing that before. Now they send an email through the fire alarm email that says who heard it and who didn't. Erricka had not seen this before now.

There is an administrative line – PD calls on it, alarm companies, any businesses, all for administrative purposes. Before May 16, Erricka does not remember answering that phone and speaking to Sarah. Erricka said Kim (CEMA) called twice: the day of the tornado, and before that it was a call saying they were going to do the test. Erricka would tell the supervisor, and then the supervisor would log it in the book.

Day of tornado – (Listened to call) Before CEMA called, all of their phones went off in the room. When they get an update like that on their phones, Erricka says she instantly tells the fire stations; that's what she was doing over the radio – she paid attention to the time it gave, and times for surrounding areas on the news and that's why you hear her say that over the radio. The administrative line was ringing, regular 911 lines going off and they were getting EMS calls.

Her phone alarm was going off when Sarah called in, and Erricka is on the radio. Erricka saw the Commissioner's name on the caller ID (Sarah never identified herself), so Erricka was finishing up over the radio when she answered Sarah's call. During the call, Erricka is listening to Sarah on the phone, listening to the room, and listening to the dispatcher, so she's hearing all of this go on while Sarah is talking about the sirens. Sarah asked if they got the sirens, and Erricka thought Sarah meant the notifications on their phones from the National Weather Service, and so she said "yes." Sarah says, "ok, thank you" and that was it.

Right after that, it was chaos. Constant chaos. Rodney Edwards and Tyler Holt were in the room with her. Powderly had called in sick. Rodney would have been the senior person, but he didn't want the responsibility of being the lead. Erricka was writing down building collapses and

dispatching. She wasn't supposed to be the dispatcher, but they were all getting so many calls she started dispatching. Rodney and Tyler knew Erricka was the lead that day.

After listening to the call again, as she sits here today, Erricka does not feel she was ever given specific direction to push the button. Right after Sarah called, during the chaos, Erricka told Chief Richardson that Sarah had called, he asked what Sarah called for. Erricka said: Sarah asked if they got the sirens and that was it. She didn't tell Tyler and Rodeny Sarah called because they were on the phone.

Kim called 10 minutes after the tornadoes hit. No one from this building came into dispatch to say they hadn't heard the sirens. Erricka found out later on TikTok that the sirens weren't activated. It was a big question mark in Erricka's head from that moment – was I supposed to do something I didn't do? She said it makes you feel like you did something wrong and it's your fault. After listening to the call over and over, if Sarah had given Erricka direction to activate the sirens, she would have told her Chief that she was calling for them to activate the sirens, but that's not what Sarah said, so that's not how Erricka interpreted it.

Erricka feels like today there are more protocols in place re: the tornado and system in general, and they are clearer. She has been trained on the "new system" – there is a fail safe where you can manually press the button on it and all of them have been trained on it. Her supervisor gave her the training, and one of the guys from CEMA came in and talked to them about it (short black hair and wears glasses). There were tests of the old system after the tornado. CEMA came in, she remembers everyone saying they didn't hear it, and Kim came up and pressed the button and it didn't work. Erricka had never met Kim before all this happened.

Matt Poirot – Chief Construction Engineer, Board of Public Service – July 22, 2025

Matt Poirot is the Deputy City Engineer with the Board of Public Service. He has been the Deputy City Engineer since July 1, 2025. Prior to that promotion, he was the Chief Construction Engineer, a position he had held since 2018. As the Chief Construction Engineer, he acted as a project manager for the City by managing construction projects in the City right of way, City buildings, and other City-owned property. His duties also included bidding out work, hiring contractors, and managing payments, change orders, and day-to-day inspections.

He has worked with GTSi for the past 5-7 years. He recalls that the City contracted with GTSi for limited small repair projects to the siren system as requested by Commissioner Russell. When repairs were necessary, Commissioner Russell would coordinate with GTSi to get quotes. Those quotes would then be sent to Matt at which point he would process the emergency contract. After the work was complete, Matt would make sure GTSi was paid and that closing documentation was complete.

Matt believes that CEMA started raising the issue of needing funding to replace the siren system approximately three years ago when discussions began regarding the RFQ for which ABNA was ultimately hired.

During the bidding process, the RFQ comes first for which interested contractors submit their Statement of Qualifications (“SOQ”). A selection committee is then formed who ultimately decides which vendor to hire. Before the funding is in place, BPS can issue the RFQ, accept submissions, and make selections. However, BPS cannot begin to negotiate the contract until the funding is in place. In this instance, the funding was in place and the contract with ABNA was executed. The selection committee met to review the SOQs and selected ABNA on July 22, 2024.

Matt had limited involvement in moving the repeater in that he issued the contract for the work to be done. Commissioner Russell stated that the repeater needed to be moved because it was located on an antenna that was going to be decommissioned. Commissioner Russell asked Matt if he had any ideas about placement of the repeater. Matt suggested the Civil Courts building due to its height but had no involvement in the ultimate selection of South Patrol. As of the date of his interview, he was unsure if GTSi had been paid yet.

Rick Evers – Civil Engineer II, Board of Public Service – July 22, 2025

Rick Evers is a Civil Engineer II with the Board of Public Service. In his role, he reports to a manager and acts as a project manager for the City. He has various projects that are considered to be in design or studies including traffic studies. As it relates to the siren system, he acted as a liaison between the consultant, ABNA, and the City/CEMA.

Initial talks with ABNA began around Thanksgiving 2024 and the contract was signed in early February.

Rick's duties as it relates to the ABNA project were to attend meetings, receive invoices, and receive the draft report evaluating the system. The intent of the agreement with ABNA was to get a report regarding the siren system. The report was to contain the status of all components of the system, status of the signals, and both overlaps and gaps in coverage.

The April 22, 2025 email from Commissioner Russell to Rick and Abe Adewale (ABNA) was about the sirens that Commissioner Russell was actively aware of as having issues. In the email, Rick expressed frustration that ABNA had not taken advantage of the monthly tests in March or April to evaluate the system as the contract had been in place since early February. Rick never received an answer as to why ABNA did not take advantage of the March and April monthly tests.

ABNA was not officially authorized to start work until this year due to the funding. The PSA had to officially go through the Board of Aldermen for approval before ABNA could be issued a Notice to Proceed.

ABNA conducted testing on May 15, 2025, the day before the tornado. The draft report was issued June 13, 2025 based upon the May 15, 2025 testing and the other information ABNA had obtained. The purpose of the May 15, 2025 testing was to determine how loud the sirens were.

The extent of the problems with the sirens were unknown before ABNA's testing and report.

Charles Gastler – Communications Service Center Manager, St. Louis Metropolitan Police Department – July 21, 2025

Mr. Gastler is the Manager of Communication Services for SLMPD. Regarding the emergency warning system, he was contacted by Commissioner Russell and told that the owner sold the building where the repeater was located and therefore the repeater had to be moved from that building.

Commissioner Russell told Mr. Gastler that the system was old and needed to be replaced. They said that the system was not supported any longer. They had a discussion about the early warning system and the three tower options that could house the repeater.

They had to temporarily relocate the system until a new system was installed. Mr. Gastler explained that there were three towers and that Commissioner Russell hired Mr. Ginder to perform a coverage analysis to see which towers would be able to reach all of the sirens.

Mr. Gastler also spoke with Chris Ginder who was the main point of contact regarding coverage analysis and provided the documentation to determine which site would be the best location for the repeater.

Mr. Gastler stated that two sites had similar coverage. Mr. Ginder did a series of predictive coverage analysis from the three locations that could house the repeater. Of the three locations GTSi found that South Patrol and one other location worked best.

Mr. Gastler had a limited roll – he was asking questions because he was trying to protect the location that he oversees. The only thing that was moved was the transmitter that transmits the signal, not the tower.

He was unaware of the FCC license lapsing. These licenses are typically renewed every 10 years. If you don't have an FCC license you are not supposed to use the radio frequency. He is aware that Commissioner Russell asked for funding and more staffing at CEMA.

The system is currently not on narrowband. There is a narrow-banding mandate by the FCC after 2012. However, he does not know if Commissioner Russell got the funding to fix the problem. Therefore, the system would have to be outdated if it is a wideband system because the FCC would not license the wideband system.

First Responders/Public Safety Officials (Outside the City)

Michael Thiemann – Division Chief, External Affairs and Emergency Management, Metro West Fire Protection District – July 25, 2025

Mike is the Division Chief of External Affairs and Emergency Management with Metro West Fire Department. He oversees all of the disaster preparedness – they work for whomever – they will go wherever.

He is the team manager of a group of people that are all trained like him, for all of, what is known as, Troop-C. They go in and support local responses when an emergency occurs. In the case of the tornado – The STLFD contacted Mike immediately and they deployed IST – they responded to the City and set up documentation, planning functions, and logistics. Most of the time EMS and police are already doing what they need to be doing. His team comes in and helps expand situations. They create a plan for situations that happen for the next 12 hours – they work under the City’s authority, but they would develop a plan for the City to sign off on.

They bring people from all over to provide specific additional staff. They are supposed to follow whatever is in the local Emergency Operations Plan, what is structured out in NIMS and ICS are their guiding principles. The local EOP is managed by the local director of Emergency Management and they have the local authority.

The City – the EOP is something that CEMA in the City would have. They did not get a copy of that when his team arrived, but they don’t have to at that point because they are working under their authority and they work under the assumption that CEMA knows their plan and they know their authority. Typically, the EOP is on the website as well in the EOC and should be carried out by the Emergency Management staff.

Mike was requested to go into the EOC – two waves they were requested. First, the STLFD requested their presence right away after the tornado occurred. They were there from 2:30-3pm until 1am. They went in with the local STLFD to set up the command post, a tracking process and documentation with an IAP. That night they tried to determine in the next operational period what resources they needed to order the next day.

Usually, what happens in most cases they have to have a unified plan – this brings together the Emergency Management function and they provide logistics, planning and financing.

They were called to assist the next week, they got a call from the Mayor’s Office on Tuesday evening. They got his information from the Fire Dept. and SEMA. Mike received a phone call from Jim Farmer – SEMA – on Sunday night expressing that there were a lot of challenges and that he believed that Mike’s team was needed there. Mike explained that they must be asked to come in to an emergency situation, they don’t just show up. IST may create the plan but then they have the local authority come in and sign off on the plan. Then, the plan becomes the local authority’s plan. This releases his team from liability. The local EM director should know their EOP and know if Mike’s team’s plan works with the local EOP. (Usually, any discrepancy deals with finances.)

When the team was with the STLFD they knew how to spend and purchase to get resources when they were there. This was not the case when his team arrived in the EOC. When Mike arrived at the EOC there were a lot of things going on. WashU EM was there, and he believes that they were called in by Sarah.

Mike texted Sarah after Jim Farmer called him with concerns. He left Sarah a VM and said that he would love to help them. He understood that big areas that needed help were finance and logistics, so he offered Sarah that support according to Farmer. He didn't get a response. Sarah just texted him and said: "hammered." He then sent Sarah another text saying that he had a plan if they needed it and asked if Sarah wanted him at the 8 am meeting, to which Sarah responded that they didn't know about the meeting.

Mike didn't hear anything from Sarah verbally regarding this emergency ever. He offered his assistance, and it isn't his job to assert himself. He heard from others that it wasn't going well so that is why he called in the first place.

Jim Farmer was there with Sarah. He got a call from Jim that it wasn't going well. When Mike arrived the WashU people were there on Wednesday. They arrived and talked to the Wash U EM (they are solid) – He got there and spoke to Ryan Nichols, and he said let's sit and talk. He said that CEMA was in disarray. Mike said, to be fair, it is not uncommon, and this was a tornado of large scale. They had a mess, and they needed to work through the system to make it better.

Mike observed tons of disconnects they were not managing well by any stretch of the imagination. He said that this happened because the people that were managing were not the ones that should have been managing. The Mayor's Office was running it, and they were managing it because there was no one else doing it. Mike said that they were doing their best and deserve pats on the back for taking it over.

Mike is taught how to manage the crisis – they are supposed to be calm and planned. Both Jim and Sarah have the same training. He knows Sarah has the training, but it wasn't implemented. Jim Farmer's complaint was that people weren't listening. People were doing what they wanted to do, and it was moving them back rather than forward.

Members of Sarah's team were continuing to work and doing whatever they could under the circumstances – they did great. He said that they were scared and nervous and scared because their boss was removed and it was apparent that they were checked out because of that.

Mike said that they have the luxury of being asked to be there so they can leave or be asked to leave. His team is not obligated to be there. If they arrive and they get a lot of push back, they can leave. They did stay in the City for 1,092 hours. He believes they were there for approx. 17 days.

Mike met with Nancy Hawes and he told her what he thought they needed to get under control and she said, "go for it." He said that the EOC was not nearly big enough for the operation. He determined what the command post needed. They also determined that he needed 60-80 people and treat it like a business. They needed and admin financing, logistics, an executive team – they all need their own spaces. Everyone was in the same space, and it was not a good working

environment because it was a mess. Mike walked in told them that they were asked by the City to provide assistance and he broke them all out into their own rooms.

They moved the joint information services into its own room and he put someone in charge that he brought so that there would be cohesive messages sent out to the public as opposed to how it was prior to their arrival.

They had a planning section that was working on the next twelve hours, and a larger room had finance. They built that up in 4 hours and started stacking them with people around the area that could fill the gaps. He tried to partner them with people in the City that had authority. Finance needs authority from the Comptroller's Office, so they had a connection to the money and get reimbursements. Usually, these things are called out ahead of time and they call them Emergency Support Functions – those are the responsibility of CEMA – building those relationships so that when a disaster happens, they are in place. That is what their team had to do, build the relationships.

In his experience, in other areas, when he has to go into St. Louis County those relationships are already formed, and they know where they fit and they know what policies exist. This was a bigger undertaking because of the mechanics of the City Office of CEMA. They didn't have a process in place to manage this. The people who were running the relief hadn't done disaster management before.

His team built the system, and it did work. He said that the Mayor's staff did a great job. According to a source: there was a lot of tension between the SLMFD and Sarah that night and Mike believes was inappropriate at that time – he said that you need to set everything aside. According to the source: Sarah came into the Command Post and demanded all of the plans that were made you don't give them to the F'ing Fire Department I didn't call you here I don't want you here. Mike reassured his team that they were called in by the STLFD and that they needed to be there. Mike was shocked by this and doesn't know why Sarah said that.

The first plan they made was the current operation so that you know where things are going. The next plan is for the next 12 hours. They were bringing in people from all over the region so that is what those plans would have detailed – where are they staying, etc.

Under the Stafford Act and laws – you are responsible for life safety and recovery and that is what the Emergency Management is supposed to do. They are responsible for those plans: they need to update the plans, train on those plans and document those plans. Siren communications – you should have a schedule on when they are tested, how they are reported on with faulty issues, and the mitigation of them. All of those things regarding the sirens should have been documented. There should be an emergency warning section in the EOP.

CEMA should be knowledgeable so that if a new person comes into a role they need to be trained as to what happens to if there is a storm or tornado and it should be in the Plan. CEMA has a plan that was “present.” By the time that he saw it the wheels were so off the car they had to create a new car... but the EOP wouldn't have made a difference anyway.

August 13, 2025 – Follow-up Interview with Michael Thiemann

Mr. Thiemann confirmed that, as of May 16, 2025, the only EOP maintained by CEMA was the 2003 version. He stated that an emergency management agency should maintain a current EOP and conduct at least annual training on its core components. He emphasized that such training should include participation from other City departments, for example, finance/approvals and public safety – to ensure the plan can be implemented effectively, evaluated, and updated as needed. Although he was unable to reach the Commissioner while at the EOC, he noted that the Mayor’s Office stepped in and worked diligently to support and coordinate response operations.

St. Louis County Office of Emergency Management – August 5, 2025

On August 5, 2025, we interviewed a group of eight employees from the St. Louis County Office of Emergency Management. Of the eight we interviewed, six were present in the City of St. Louis at various times on the day of the tornado and in the week that followed. Various members of the St. Louis County Office of Emergency Management were present at the EOC at various times during the first week that followed the tornado. Two planners were sent to the EOC at the request of Commissioner Russell. Of the two planners that were sent to the EOC, one, a recent hire, was sent home because the EOC response was so poorly managed that it would have been to her detriment to learn from it.

The purpose of a planner is to review plans and find holes and/or issues in the plans to try to make the plans as solid as possible. During an activation of the EOC, a planner's job is to create the Incident Action Plan ("IAP") which consists of documentation (including resource tracking) and demobilization planning. It operates as the playbook for the incident and contains various ICS forms which make up the packet. After the IAP is written, there is a briefing to the incident commander who then briefs those who are responding to the emergency.

When the two planners from the County arrived, there was no IAP in place and despite being specifically requested by Commissioner Russell, they were not given any responsibilities. The EOC was described as chaotic, lacking organization and structure, not displaying information, very siloed, and not following ICS. Documentation suggestions made by one of the planners were ignored and deemed a waste of time.

As the evening progressed, members of the Incident Support Team¹⁹, who were requested by STLFD, were calling one of the County employees who was present to ask questions. As explained by the County team, the job of the Director/Commissioner of an emergency management agency is to be in the EOC because that individual has the authority to say yes or no. In this case, because Commissioner Russell was absent from the EOC, no one had the authority to say yes or no. At one point, City Hall called the County Executive to get in touch with the OEM Director to ask her to get ahold of Commissioner Russell because no one had been able to reach them, and people were trapped in a building. Additionally, there was at least one time when the representative from the Missouri State Emergency Management Agency ("SEMA") was unable to reach Commissioner Russell because they were in the field rather than in the EOC.

Further, the volunteers from the County were not able to help because no one from the City was able to help or give guidance. The EOC did not become more functional and operational until after Commissioner Russell was placed on leave and Acting Commissioner John Walk brought in the IST to implement NIMS and ICS.

A representative example of the issues within the EOC was that the City requested 5 woodchippers from the County. The OEM Director coordinated with County departments to gather the

¹⁹ The Region C Incident Support Team, which is a team of emergency management professionals from across the region who can respond to aid and support during an emergency response.

woodchippers from across the County and put them all in one location for pickup. Those woodchippers were never picked up.

Contributing to the inefficiency of the EOC was that there was no food or water purchased for the volunteers. Refreshments are typically provided in an EOC to ensure that volunteers remain at the EOC for their designated shift rather than needing to leave for food and drinks. Such expenditures, if documented properly, can be reimbursed by CEMA. Volunteers in the City's EOC were forced to find their own refreshments throughout the day.

Members of WashU's emergency management team were also brought in to help implement NIMS and ICS along with the IST. In the initial days of the EOC, people were not using ICS Form 213RR which is a resource request that helps with resource tracking as well as keeping up with expenses. Instead, people were showing up with receipts for items that had been purchased in the field without a corresponding Form 213RR. These forms are required for FEMA reimbursement.

Abe Cook – Director, Franklin County Emergency Management Agency – August 8, 2025

Abe Cook is the Director of the Franklin County Emergency Management Agency. On May 16, 2025, Abe was at the command post with the IST as the IST had been brought in by STLFD. On his way home, he offered additional help to Commissioner Russell and was met with a situational update.

He worked in the EOC after the tornado on May 22 and May 23. By the time he was working in the EOC, Captain John Walk was Acting Commissioner and the IST was there. Abe is a member of the IST and understood that there was no plan in place until IST was brought in. On May 22 things were more under control but there were still challenges as IST was trying to understand how the City departments work and to implement NIMS. Abe was never told why the EOC was not originally following NIMS. On May 23, Abe was acting as Logistics Section Chief for which he is credentialed. Operations in the field were segmented because all departments were ordering as they normally operate rather than involving the EOC. Because the EOC was not involved, there might have been resources being spent on lower priority items.

He has previously observed the City as being pretty siloed in that CEMA, SLMPD, and STLFD each have their own IAP which is not common. In other jurisdictions, there is often one IAP for all three departments because the goal is to be one unit. Because the City is one political subdivision it should be easier to be unified than other places where there are municipalities within a county.

Ryan Nicholls – Associate Director of Emergency Management, WashU Emergency Management – August 12, 2025

Ryan Nicholls is the Associate Director of Emergency Management at Washington University in St. Louis. He was present in the EOC from May 19th – May 21st. He was brought in after Commissioner Russell called Ty Davisson, Director of Emergency Management for WashU, on Monday, May 19 to request staffing assistance for the EOC. Thereafter, Director Davisson called Mr. Nicholls to request that he go to the EOC with two other WashU staff members.

Upon arrival at the EOC, there were only a handful of people present. Commissioner Russell asked Ryan to implement ICS as it had not yet been implemented. Ryan has known Commissioner Russell for years and knows that Commissioner Russell understood and knows ICS. Ryan struggled to implement ICS because he could not get participation from the City officials that were present in the EOC. Further, many of the key personnel from other City departments were not present in the EOC and instead would join virtually for scheduled meetings. As a result, actions were less immediate and less effective than if everyone had been present in the EOC. Additionally, in the time that Ryan was in the EOC, there were no representatives from the Police Department or the Fire Department to coordinate with the EOC. This is unusual because public safety is necessary.

ICS was implemented after Michael Thiemann and the Incident Support Team were brought in. When the IST was brought in, Ryan handed off the ICS process to the team. Thiemann was able to successfully implement ICS because he had the staff to help get participation from all of the necessary people.

There did not appear to be the relationships/connections necessary between CEMA and City Departments/officials for the EOC to function as it is supposed to. Further, there was no clear plan in the EOC which led to chaos; until Thiemann and his team were brought in on May 21st. While Commissioner Russell was present in the building while Ryan was in the EOC, there were various meetings regarding the sirens such that Commissioner Russell was in and out of the EOC. Further, Commissioner Russell did not appear to be in charge and did not lead the daily meetings with the in-person and virtual participants. Instead, the EOC was being led by staff from the Mayor's Office who did not have the ICS training to follow and implement ICS.

During an emergency, after determining the magnitude of the impact, the role of the Director/Commissioner is to activate the EOC according to the EOP. Everyone who is needed in the EOC knows to come to the EOC. After the EOC is activated, the Commissioner should establish objectives that guide the EOC. The goal is for the Commissioner not to get too involved in any one part of the response. Instead, the Commissioner should keep the Mayor and City leadership informed and plan for the next operational period.

The value of an EOP is that it builds the emergency management program so that everyone is trained and ready in the event of an emergency. Normally during an emergency, people in the EOC don't have to reference the EOC because they helped design it and have participated in training. Writing the EOP builds the emergency management program so that when the EOC is activated there is a cohesive plan and everyone knows what to do. An EOP should include a meeting cadence

for the EOC, who should be notified when the EOC is activated, who should report to the EOC and the roles those people should perform. Before an emergency, the agency should train by participating in tabletop or full-scale exercises during which they implement the EOP. After the training exercise, the EOP should be improved based on what occurred during the training. Such training should take place at least annually in the form of a tabletop exercise. City Departments/representatives from those departments should participate in the training and in improving the EOP.

IT/System Vendors

Chris Ginder – President and CEO, GTSi – August 5, 2025

Owner of GTSi – President and CEO as well

- Electronic Public Safety and outdoor warning contractor and supports the Midwest.
 - o Municipalities are their typical customer and they design, maintain and build outdoor warning systems or communication system. GTSi also services the County.

They have responded to the City in the past two years they have never fixed anything – may have a fixed a siren but he can't remember it. The orders for the City in the last few years are very far and few between.

They are under an ongoing maintenance contract with the County, so they are in touch with the County on a weekly basis. They had an ongoing maintenance contract with Mike Sullivan when the system was put in and there was an ongoing maintenance contract with Gary. He doesn't know why there wasn't one under Sarah. He discussed the maintenance contract with Sarah, but it always came back to the budgetary constraint issues.

He believes that he had ongoing maintenance contracts prior to Commissioner Russell. If there was such a contract GTSi would do periodic inspections and preventative maintenance to all of the critical systems. They also provide support for the activation system and software, etc. GTSi has the heavy equipment when the siren needs to be repaired.

When the system is working properly, the system is fully working it should be able to send a signal that says that the batteries are low or that there are other problems -so on a daily basis the system can report on its health and maintenance can be dispatched. (Silent testing)

In the late years, the City's testing was absolutely unreliable because of the lack of maintenance of the overall system.

He is aware of the budget being passed to get a new system. ABNA is directly working for the City pre storm to do a status of the current equipment. Ginder isn't directly involved with that.

Russell asked him for a remote so that they could activate the system remotely. From the City's inception of the system there has been remote access in the late 90's it was in the City vehicle and there were a couple "footballs" as well. Sarah and Chris talked about getting new ones several times but it never came to fruition. He assumes it was because of the budget. Like most things they discussed, the money was never there to do anything. A remote system costs approximately, on the high end, \$20,000.

GTSi spoke to Sarah about twice a year. Chris does not know who was to activate the system in case of an emergency – assumed that it was coordinated through CEMA but that is just an assumption.

Sarah wanted a remote for convenience for being out in the field for testing. Was not discussed to be used for activation system wide – but is certainly could have been. Believed it was for aiding in looking at testing and what sirens work.

Repeater: looked at coverage – estimated coverage from each site that the City proposed. None of the sites were 100% covered. The City chose the one that would cover the most. He doesn't know how much it covered. He does think that the site that they chose makes the most sense.

The KDNL side had 100% coverage. Of the identified alternative sites, the one they chose was as good as any – it was not ideal because it didn't have 100% coverage. He assumed that they were looking at a no cost solution where they did not have to pay rent.

Chris' techs moved the repeater and don't test the activation point unless it is in the scope of the work the City hired them to do. It would be assumed that CEMA would have tested both activation points to make sure that they worked. For example: if they moved a repeater site in the County they would immediately test it. If it failed, they would immediately have called GTSi to discuss why it wasn't working.

In this case, the infrastructure at Fire Headquarters had completely changed. As originally designed the activation equipment was in dispatch and the activation and panel was out on the hose tower. That antenna was installed as the activation antenna but also as a backup if the repeater at KDNL failed – the FD antenna would serve as a backup for the repeater.

When GTSi was called to the STLFD they realized that the antenna had been moved and that the antenna wasn't capable of reaching the repeater. It was stuck up in the ceiling. He doesn't know when it got moved but said that there was a different company that did work in 2013. It may have happened then – system never worked right after that company worked on it.

If there is anything in between the transmitting and receiver it disrupts the system. The repeater was moved far away from the former site and the repeater couldn't be reached from the STLFD. The activation point at Fire Headquarters had moved and he had not been there to look at the equipment after it was moved.

Chris spoke to his technician and the repeater was up and running and “good to go.” He thinks that the City may have run a test from CEMA.

Sarah called after the tornado – the evening of the storm he received some text messages. Saturday May 17, 2025 – Sarah texted Chris asking questions about the sirens and sent a picture of the sirens that had been blown over – believed that the siren took a good blast but couldn't see anything out of place. They went back and forth about getting someone on site to look at sirens – would that be possible? He said “yes.” Whelan engineering called him and said that they could get a mobile siren trailer because they were off-line, they were good to go. Sarah got approval to have the mobile siren moved from Alabama to be brought into North St. Louis. Sarah did not want to move the mobile site from Washington that they had. On Monday, they were onsite looking at sirens that didn't work – most of them were already in a state of disrepair and not storm damaged.

Fire Dept. called late in the afternoon of Tuesday the 20th – Eddie Quinn called and said that they just had been assigned duty to the siren system and that they were unfamiliar with the exact functionality of the system and if it worked at all. GTSi went out there that day.

There had been a change since the tornado – National Weather Service can automatically activate the system. This is new technology. The City now is ahead of the County. Ginder assumes that the technology was going to be wrapped into the new system.

Ginder did a cursory repair to see the sirens that could be brought online – brought them back with batteries or equipment from county, but some were damaged beyond repair.

City has a sound system that has a lot of life left and needs some changes.

Antenna at Fire Headquarters was supposed to be on the hose tower but it was tossed up, stuck to the top of a ventilation duct and if the repeater was close enough it worked, but for a backup function, it is inadequate.

Still today the repeater is a single point of failure. If that repeater stopped functioning the whole system would be offline.

By moving the repeater South – some of the sirens are not covered in the areas that they should be.

Abe Adewale – Principal, ABNA

ABNA is an engineering firm headquartered in St. Louis. On July 22, 2024, ABNA was selected to evaluate the City’s outdoor warning siren system and a contract was entered into with the City of St. Louis to evaluate the City’s siren system and provide a full analysis of the system and recommendations regarding an upgrade or replacement. We repeatedly reached out to Abe Adewale at ABNA to discuss ABNA’s evaluation of the siren system to no avail. As a result, the only input from ABNA is in the form of a draft report issued on June 13, 2025.

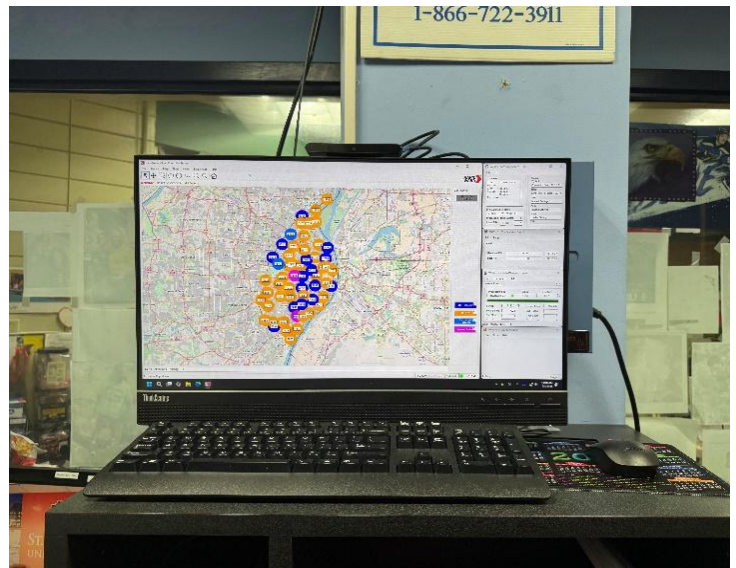
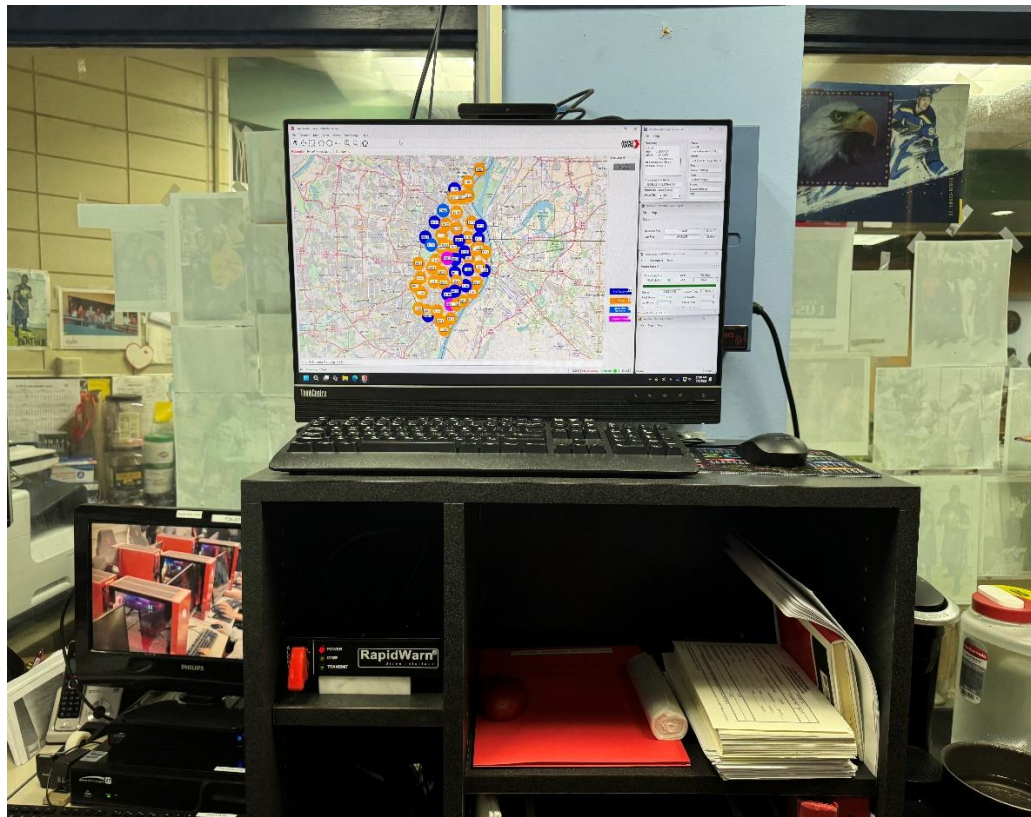
Additionally, based on other interviews, we understand that on May 15, 2025, the day before the tornado, ABNA, in conjunction with CEMA, ran six tests of the sirens to evaluate the functionality of all the sirens in the City. Based on those tests, ABNA determined that 22 of the 60 sirens were not functional for various reasons.²⁰ Half of the non-functional sirens were located in path of the tornado. In notifying CEMA of the non-functional sirens, ABNA noted that “[t]hese failures reflect systemic vulnerabilities – including damaged solar panels, outdated DTMF signaling, dependency on a single repeater, and lapsed FCC licensure – that left significant portions of the City unprotected during this life-threatening event.”²¹

²⁰ 2025_STLTornadoInv_000552; 2025_STLTornadoInv_000556.

²¹ 2025_STLTornadoInv_000556.

EXHIBIT B – SIREN SYSTEM ACTIVATION POINTS

STLFD (as of July 3, 2025)



CEMA (as of August 7, 2025)

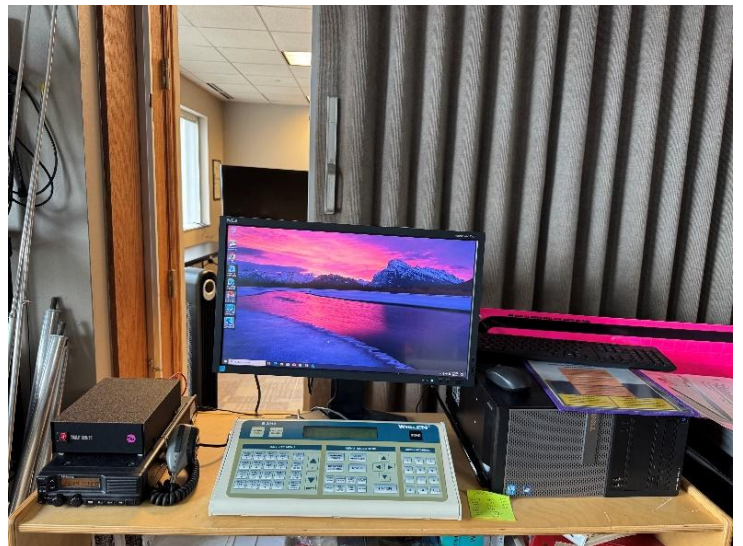
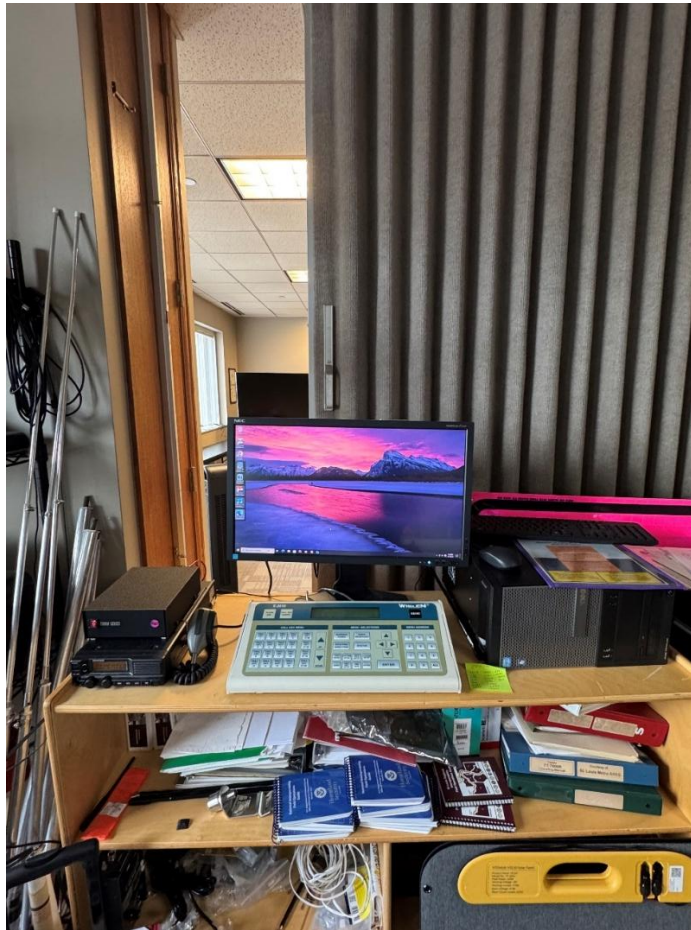
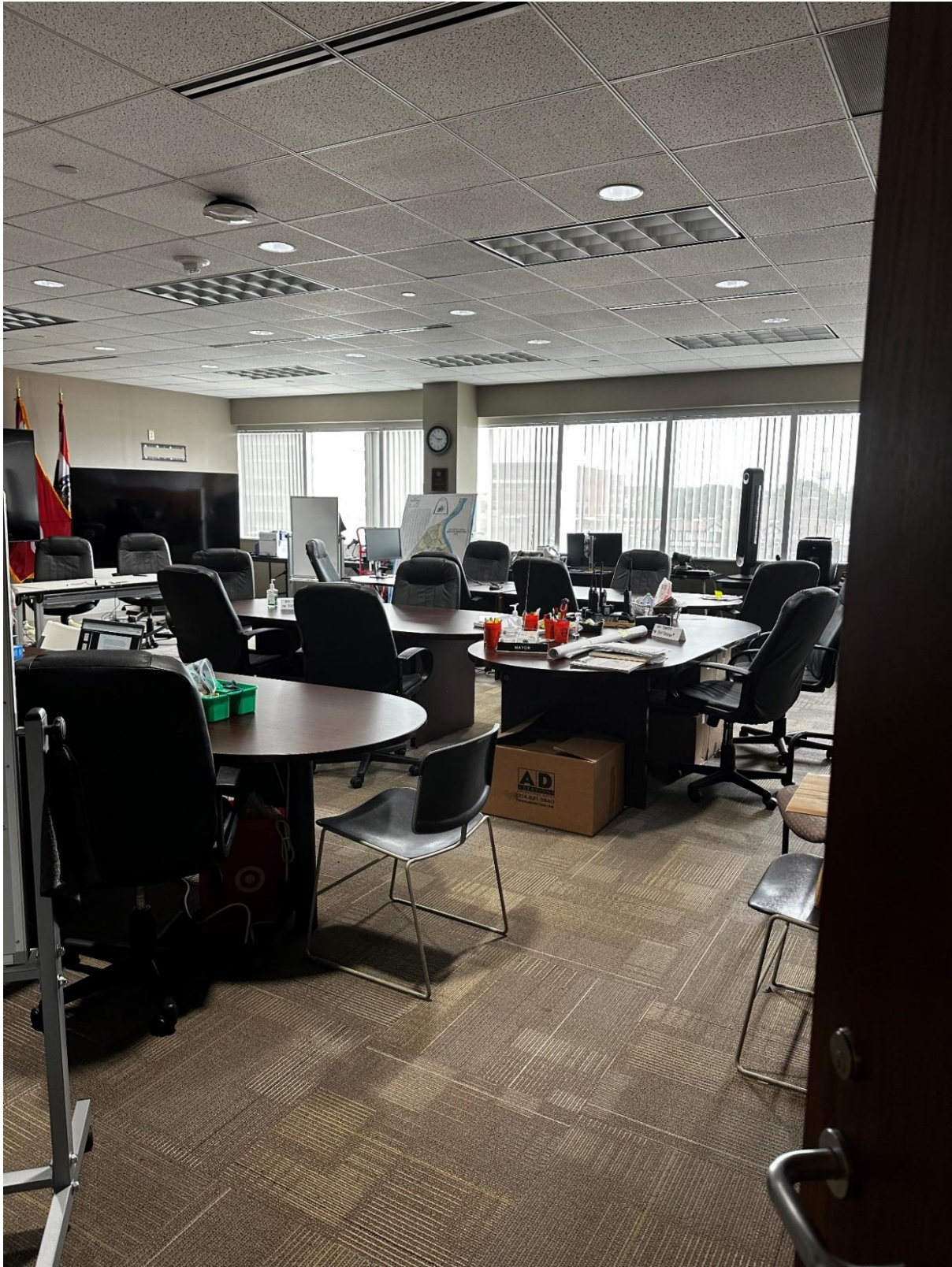


EXHIBIT C - EMERGENCY OPERATIONS CENTER



Emergency Operations Center (Picture No. 1)



Emergency Operations Center (Picture No. 2)



Emergency Operations Center (Picture No. 3)



Joint Information Center (Picture No. 1)



Joint Information Center (Picture No. 2)



Joint Information Center (Picture No. 3)

APPENDIX

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3.	CEMA Standard Operating Procedures	2025_STLTornadoInv_000048-2025_STLTornadoInv_000053
4.	NTP 90041-23 Riverview Siren Replacement	2025_STLTornadoInv_000071-2025_STLTornadoInv_000075
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