RC/PIO News & Notes

October 9, 2026

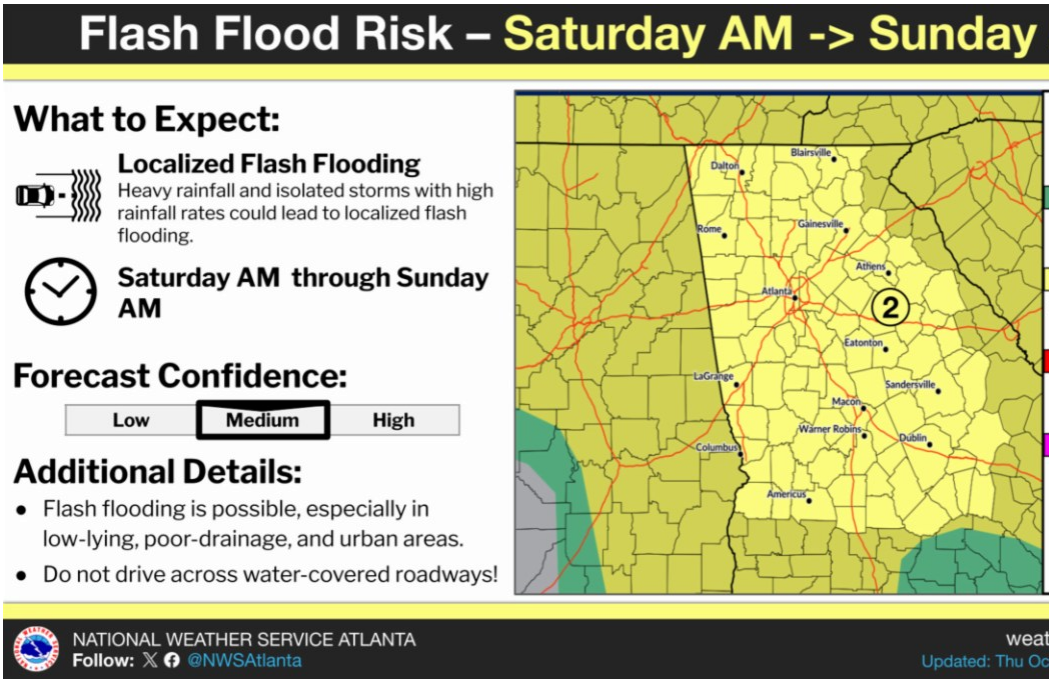
A Weekly Update from **Eric Jens, *Risk Communicator*** – Georgia Department of Public Health. Contents may be FYUO – For Your Use Only

News & Notes

This week's highlights include a state EPR staff training, a disaster response symposium, and weekend weather.

Hurricane Isaias

Tropical Storm Isaias became a Category 1 Hurricane early Thursday and is expected to continue strengthening ahead of the anticipated landfall late tonight or early Saturday morning. The Georgia Emergency Management Agency has announced full activation of the State Operations Center beginning at 1:00 PM today. The greatest threats in Georgia are heavy rainfall and strong winds, especially in the western portion of the state. Governor Kemp issued a State of Emergency yesterday to facilitate emergency operations and resource coordination. This declaration covers the entire state through 11:59 PM on Thursday, pending renewal.



Disaster Response Symposium

More than 100 Emergency Management, Public Health, Fire Rescue, Police, and other emergency response professionals gathered on Wednesday at the Rome Forum for the inaugural Disaster Response Symposium. EMA officials from Tennessee shared how they were trapped by floodwater for hours atop a hospital roof during Hurricane Helene storms. National Weather Service representatives discussed what to expect regarding Hurricane Isaias, and how the next few months could be impacted by a strong El Niño. Rome-Floyd County firefighters discussed their experience responding to the historic courthouse fire last March. They said the blaze damaged six surrounding buildings, nine nearby vehicles, and gutted much of the courthouse originally built in 1892. No injuries were reported.

State EPR Training

On Tuesday, state DPH EPR staff met in the EOC for a training event organized by Sean Graham. Small teams completed After Action Reports analyzing response actions based on the movie Contagion. Each group reported on what they saw as strengths and areas for improvement, and discussed what anticipated response actions would look like if it were a real-world event impacting Georgia.

CERC Class Reviews

We compiled metrics for the DPH Media / Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication classes held last month.

For the LaGrange class held on September 22, based on self-assessment confidence scores, we've determined:

· There was a 64.3% increase in knowing the roles related to message dissemination.
· There was a 63% increase in knowledge of elements in message development.
· There was an 84% increase in knowing the Public Information Officer – Subject Matter Expert relationship.

Open comments included:
·"This class helped me better understand how to develop clear, effective public messages and how PIOs work with subject matter experts. I learned the importance of using accurate information, knowing the audience, and communicating in a way that is clear, timely and easy for the public to understand."
·"I learned a lot about how communication efforts are a team effort, and I also liked that I got live feedback on my communication skills."
·"One of my biggest takeaways was learning how important it is to adapt your communication approach depending on the situation. Leading with empathy matters during a crisis, but a PIO should never speculate and should always stick to the facts. Instead of simply saying, "I don't know," we can explain how we are working to get the information and let the audience know that we will share it once it becomes available."
·"I learned to follow the six core principles of CERC - Be First, Be Right, Be Credible, Express Empathy, Promote Action, Show Respect. I also learned the importance of making sure our body language/tone of voice/facial expressions match the event we are speaking about. This was a very enjoyable and informative training. Even though I was a nervous wreck to participate in the mock interviews, the experience was very rewarding and I learned so much! Thank you!! :)"

For the Georgia Poison Center class held at Grady Hospital on September 30, based on multiple-choice tests, we saw an average pre-test score of 62.5% correct answers compared to the post-test average score of 81.3%.

Next Week Preview

Next week's meeting topics include exercise planning, community partnerships, and mental health.

About "News & Notes"

"News & Notes" is a weekly communication for risk communicators and public information officers across Georgia's 18 public health districts. This communication aims to enhance preparedness by exchanging information on significant events, training, and other planned activities. Some information herein may be considered FYUO (For Your Use Only). Please be judicious when forwarding. For questions, comments, or to submit information for inclusion, contact Eric Jens at **Eric.Jens@dph.ga.gov**.

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