



## RC/PIO News & Notes |

April 24, 2026

A Weekly Update from **Eric Jens, Risk Communicator** – Georgia Department of Public Health

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### News & Notes

Wildfires that many are struggling to contain are impacting more than half the state. Due in part to the extreme drought conditions, the Georgia Forestry Commission instituted a burn ban on Wednesday for 91 counties, primarily in South Georgia. Likewise, Governor Kemp issued a State Of Emergency for those areas aimed at maximizing response efforts. State DPH issued a [news release](#) addressing the health threats related to smoke from the fires, with health districts addressing those same issues plus potential evacuations closer to home.

A volunteer training meeting, state EPR monthly meeting, CERC class review and more are in store for highlights this week.

### MRC Training

The 2026 Medical Reserve Corp Leaders and Partners Training Meeting is being held in LaGrange this week, concluding today. Speakers helped open discussions on an array of topics related to emergency response situations. Such topics included disaster mental health volunteer roles, healthcare ethics for volunteers, and proper support for those impacted by autism. There were also numerous opportunities to establish new relationships or strengthen existing ones. This was an aspect well organized and emphasized by LaKieva Williams and Blanca Lewis throughout the week.



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## CERC Training Review

Thanks again to everyone who helped plan, attended and in many other ways made possible the DPH Media / Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication training in Macon two weeks ago. Based on pre and post test feedback we can summarize:

There was 54% improvement in knowing how individual roles work together in developing messages for public dissemination.

There was a 65.7% improvement in knowing the elements that go into effective public messaging.

There was a 73.1% improvement in understanding the working relationship between Public Information Officers and Subject Matter Experts.

Other comments:

"Learned about bridge statements and limiting "filler" words. Also learned not having an answer is ok as long as you can follow up."

"Overall, I feel like the class was very informative and entertaining. I really did not (know) what to expect. Prior to the training class, I really did not have any knowledge of Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication, especially being called to be the communicator. I now have a better understanding of the working relationship between the PIOs and SMEs."

"This was a great use of time, even with how busy things are right now. The most valuable part for me was connecting with other communicators and PIOs and learning from their perspectives. I would absolutely support offering this annually at a minimum, and more often if possible."



## State DPH EPR Monthly Meeting

Tuesday was the April meeting for the state DPH EPR team. Frederick Dobard talked to the group about Accessibility standards, and that the requirements that would have gone into effect last week have been extended for a year. "Every document. Every time," he said is his mantra. That way all documents from now forward that are posted on-line will have been checked for accessibility, and not be in need for further review of these standards. Keith Goodman talked about Points Of Distribution, and how they will be in play for the BioWatch Full Scale Exercise in May. Leadership updates were provided by Leah Hoffacker at the end of the meeting.



## Retirement

Following the May 19 state DPH EPR monthly meeting, there will be a retirement celebration for Valerie Attell. Valerie has kept up with improvements and maintenance of the state DPH Emergency Operation Center first at 2 Peachtree and then the Twin Towers location. She has led numerous workgroups from Information Management in support of the Healthcare Coalitions to the Tactical Communications workgroup and dozens in between. Her accomplishments over the years are too numerous to cite in their entirety. We will have more to convey in the May 22 newsletter. For now, mark your calendars, stop by if you can, and send pictures that can be used in the slideshow we are putting together.



## Next Week Preview

More FIFA planning meetings are in store for next week. We will host a state DPH EOC tour Thursday afternoon, and there will likely be a multi-agency meeting earlier in the day spearheaded by the State Department of Agriculture.

### About "News & Notes"

"News & Notes" is a weekly communication aimed at risk communicators and public information officers within Georgia's 18 public health districts. The goal of the communication is to increase preparedness through the exchange of information

about significant events, training and other planned activities. Some information herein may be considered FYUO or 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](mailto:Eric.Jens@dph.ga.gov).

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