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JAN NFL Wild Card game was relocated from Los Angeles to Glendale on 72-hour notice

High winds in the Colorado River Valley caused localized power outages

FEB Record attendance at the Waste Management Phoenix Open
Fatal mid-air collision at Scottsdale Airport

MAR Late-winter storm triggered a tornado in Mesa
Shriners Children's 500 at Phoenix Raceway required a coordinated traffic and safety operation

APR Dry winds fueled the Stronghold Fire in the Dragoon Mountains
The state shifted to a "Heat Kickoff" posture as drought conditions persisted across 50% of the state

MAY Wildfire season began with the Greer Fire and the Cody Fire
FEMA issued Fire Management Assistance Declarations
Bryce Fire in Graham County destroyed 3,000+ acres and damaged critical utility infrastructure

Major shooting in Glendale required a large-scale police response

Firefighter fatality from heat-related causes during the Copper Ridge Fire

JUN Basin Fire near Flagstaff and Oak Ridge fires required multi-agency evacuations

Southwest Measles Outbreak

Legislature passed the FASTER Act for school emergency response

JUL Dragon Bravo Fire forced the evacuation of the Grand Canyon's North Rim

Bubonic Plague death in Coconino County triggered a localized public health alert

AUG Mega-Haboob caused 60,000+ power outages in Pinal and Maricopa Counties, forced PHX Sky Train offline, the FAA control tower to be evacuated, and grounded flights

Severe thunderstorms overturned semi-trucks on I-8 and I-10

Navajo Nation medical transport plane crash

SEP Catastrophic flooding in Globe-Miami

Record flash flooding in Scottsdale

Over 90,000 people attended a memorial for Turning Point USA's founder Charlie Kirk in Glendale

OCT Record rainfall in Phoenix caused flooding on the Loop 202 and I-10

Flooding stranded tourists at Havasu Falls in the Grand Canyon

NOV NASCAR Cup Series Championship brought 100k+ fans to Avondale

DEC FEMA denied Arizona's request for disaster funds for the Sept. floods

Disrupted holiday travel at PHX Sky Harbor

AzEM JOURNAL

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Mission Statement

The JOURNAL is dedicated to providing high-level education, advocacy updates, and community connection to emergency management professionals. Our goal is to empower our members through shared knowledge and innovation.

Submission Policy

We welcome original articles, case studies, and member news. Please submit articles as Microsoft Word documents following APA Style for citations. While word counts vary by topic, please contact the editor for specific length requirements before drafting.

Legal Disclaimer

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Editor's Letter: Welcome to the Inaugural Issue of our New Quarterly Journal

As we step into 2026, the landscape of Emergency Management in Arizona is evolving more rapidly than ever. From managing the massive logistical footprints of the WM Phoenix Open and NASCAR to devastating wildfires and catastrophic floods, our members have proven that Arizona is a national leader in operational excellence.

This journal was created to be more than just a newsletter; it is a dedicated space for Arizona-specific case studies, regional news, and professional growth. Our debut theme, "**Looking Back, Looking Ahead**," allows us to review the challenges we have faced while pivoting toward a strategic vision for the year to come.

While we celebrate our past victories—including the resilience shown by **Gila County** and the success of our **Annual Conference**—our primary mission this year is to professionalize and strengthen our network. Our 2026 roadmap is built on four pillars:

- **Structured Collaboration:** We are formally establishing **Specialized Working Committees**. We need your expertise. By joining a committee, you aren't just volunteering; you are taking ownership of our Association's future.
- **Professional Advancement:** We are committed to lowering barriers to success. This year, we are activating our **2nd Certification Cohort**, expanding our mentorship program, and increasing the number of grants available for professional training and higher education.
- **Building a "Warm" Network:** Resilience is built on relationships. Expect more regional networking mixers and seasonal volunteer opportunities. We want to ensure that when a crisis hits, you already know the person on the other end of the radio.
- **Continuous Education:** We are launching a **Quarterly Webinar Series** to keep our "primary currency"—knowledge—flowing between conferences.

This journal belongs to you. We welcome original articles, case studies, and member news. By documenting our unique Arizona challenges and successes, we ensure that every emergency manager—from our rural counties to our tribal nations—has a powerful voice. Thank you for your tireless service to the Grand Canyon State. I look forward to growing together in 2026.

For a Safer Arizona,

Kelley Mure
Managing Editor
Arizona Association of Emergency Managers

WM Phoenix Open

The "Greatest Show on Grass" at TPC Scottsdale continued to be the best-attended golf tournament in the world, with an estimated between 500,000 and 600,000 fans throughout the week. requiring the year's largest coordinated municipal security effort.

NASCAR

The NASCAR Cup Series Championship returned to the Phoenix Raceway in Avondale, serving as a high-visibility operation for regional law enforcement, fire, and EMS that tested track-side emergency response and spectator heat-management protocols.

Cactus League

Arizona Spring Training presented a unique "distributed" mass-gathering challenge: 15 Major League teams playing across 10 different stadiums in the Phoenix metro area simultaneously. It is not just a series of games—it is a 30-day continuous activation. With sustained 30-day strain on local EMS, traffic control, and public works across multiple jurisdictions. Managing outdoor, day-game crowds requires a proactive shift in hydration staging, medical tent staffing, and traffic incident management (TIM).

To learn more about how to manage these types of large-scale events:

FEMA IS-15.b: Special Events Contingency Planning for Public Safety Agencies at <https://training.fema.gov>

From the Fairway to the Arena

2025 was a landmark year for high-profile events. From the Waste Management (WM) Phoenix Open to the Charlie Kirk Memorial Service unprecedented crowds descended on the Valley. These events required a sophisticated level of public safety coordination, complex logistics including crowd flow, emergency medical response, and real-time communication between multiple jurisdictions. From the tech-heavy surveillance at State Farm Stadium to the tactical deployments in Scottsdale, Arizona's emergency managers proved that proactive planning is the difference between a successful celebration and a public safety crisis.

The 72-Hour Flip: How Arizona Saved the NFL Wild Card Playoff Game

In early January 2025, as the Palisades and Eaton Fires devastated Southern California, the NFL was forced to make a historic call: moving the Rams vs. Vikings Wild Card game from SoFi Stadium to State Farm Stadium in Glendale. While SoFi Stadium remained untouched by flames, the surrounding air quality plummeted to hazardous levels, and Los Angeles public safety resources were fully committed to life-saving evacuations. On Thursday, January 9—just four days before the Monday night kickoff—the relocation was made official.

Interagency Cooperation

The relocation served as a masterclass in rapid-response logistics and inter-agency cooperation. State Farm Stadium and Glendale officials executed a "72-hour flip," managing a series of high-stakes challenges:

- **Public Safety:** Glendale Police and Fire departments surged staffing on a holiday weekend to secure a 70,000-seat venue on short notice.
- **Logistics & Broadcast:** ESPN production trucks were staged at the California-Arizona border, rerouting to Glendale the moment the ink was dry on the agreement.
- **Ticketing:** In an unprecedented turnaround, thousands of tickets were re-issued via SeatGeek in under 24 hours.

Operational Reflection: The Kirk Memorial Service

Glendale became the focal point of national attention once again as the Desert Diamond Arena hosted the memorial service for Charlie Kirk. This event represented one of the most complex "planned disasters" of the year, requiring a massive footprint of local, state, and federal resources. The logistics involved a Tier-1 security environment. The presence of FEMA Mobile Communications Office (MCO) vehicles and specialized regional assets alongside the Glendale Police Department's Mobile Command underscores the scale of the operation. Managing an arena at full capacity while simultaneously coordinating high-profile dignitary protection and massive peaceful assemblies outside the Westgate district tested our regional interoperability.

Lessons Learned: Best Practices for Mass Gathering Events

Successful mass gathering operations—whether at a stadium, raceway, or public arena—depend on a "Whole Community" approach to safety. Below are the key takeaways and best practices identified from major 2025 activations.

Scalable Federal/Local Integration

- **Best Practice:** Establish "Unified Command" early in the planning phase. Integrating federal resource allocation with local subject matter expertise allows for real-time intelligence sharing that a single agency cannot achieve alone.
- **Takeaway:** Ensure that local EOC staff are trained on the specific capabilities of federal mobile assets *before* an event begins to maximize their utility during a crisis.



Holistic Monitoring of Crowd Dynamics

- **Best Practice:** Utilize a "Zone-Based" monitoring strategy. By tracking density and movement in the area surrounding a venue, EOC staff can identify potential bottlenecks or surges before they reach a critical point.
- **Takeaway:** Safe ingress and egress are just as important as the safety inside the arena. Monitoring pedestrian "flow zones" ensures a predictable pattern of movement and reduces the risk of crowd crush.



Photo Credits: City of Glendale Emergency Management

Resilience through Interoperability

- **Best Practice:** Standardize encryption protocols across all participating agencies. Utilizing common mutual aid channels and pre-vetted encryption keys ensures that law enforcement, fire-medical, and federal partners remain in constant contact.
- **Takeaway:** Technical interoperability is only as strong as the human network behind it. Clear communication across encrypted channels prevents "information silos" and ensures that every responder—from the rural county volunteer to the federal agent—is operating from the same Common Operating Picture (COP).

Professionalism through "Warm" Networks

- **Best Practice:** Maintain "warm" relationships through quarterly mixers and joint training exercises.
- **Takeaway:** When a major event occurs, the time to exchange business cards has already passed.

Leadership in Action

In September, AzEM President Ericka Huston represented our association as a featured presenter at the AZDEMA 2025 Statewide Whole Community Summit, emphasizing the importance of inclusive planning.

On-the-Ground Support

When the September floods struck, members from the Association stepped up to provide direct support for the Gila County Response, embodying the spirit of mutual aid.

Regional Collaboration: Western States EM Task Forces (EMTFs)

AzEM stayed connected through the Western States EM TF, participating in:

- **WGA Collaborative Conservation Task Force:** Coordinating with federal partners on wildfire, drought, and infrastructure resilience.
- **Wildfire Response Coordination:** Improving resource deployment speed (air tankers and crews) alongside the WGA and partner agencies like Cal Fire.



A Milestone Success: 2025 AzEM Annual Conference

The desert heat of September was no match for the energy at the Great Wolf Lodge in Scottsdale, as emergency management professionals from across the state gathered for the 2025 AzEM Annual Conference. This year's event was a powerful testament to the growing strength and resilience of Arizona's emergency management community.

Our attendance data tells a story of a rapidly expanding field:

- **52.5% First-Time Attendees:** A surge of new energy and emerging leaders joined us, bringing fresh ideas to the table.
- **47.5% Returning Participants:** The steady presence of our loyal members provided the mentorship and historical knowledge that anchors our association.

Measuring Our Impact

We do not just aim to host an event; we aim to provide transformative value. The post-conference data confirms that we are hitting the mark:

- **95% Retention Intent:** Nearly every attendee surveyed expressed their plan to return for our next gathering.
- **Industry-Leading NPS:** Our Net Promoter Score (NPS) reached 50, a remarkable achievement that places AzEM well above professional association benchmarks.

This high score reflects the high value you found in the sessions, the networking, and the unique collaborative environment that only our Arizona community can provide.

Looking Ahead to 2026 Conference

The Board of Directors officially begins the 2026 planning cycle this month. We are taking your insights regarding session topics, venue logistics, and networking opportunities to heart as we design a program that meets the evolving challenges of emergency management. Although the date has not yet been finalized, it will be a Fall event with a "Save the Date" coming soon.

Emergency Associate (AZ-EA)

- 1+ year(s) EM experience or 90 credit hours in EM-related degree
- Participation in activation/exercise
- Letter of recommendation
- FEMA & disaster/EM trainings
- 4+ professional contributions

Emergency Manager (AZ-EM)

- 4+ years EM experience
- Participation in activation/exercise
- Letter of recommendation
- FEMA & disaster/EM trainings
- 6+ professional contributions

Master Emergency Manager (AZ-MEM)

- 8+ years EM experience
- Lead participation in activation/exercise
- 2 letters of recommendation
- FEMA, disaster/EM, and leadership/management trainings
- 10+ professional contributions

See Guidebook for full requirements:

<https://azemergencymanagers.org/certification/>

Special Honors: The Inaugural Certification Cohort

The launch of the New Statewide Emergency Management Professional Certification marks a new era for AzEM. The Board of Directors extends a **SPECIAL CONGRATULATIONS** to our inaugural cohort for their commitment to advancing our profession and for investing the effort required to achieve this statewide credential.

AZ-Master Emergency Manager (MEM)

- **Kimberlee Battaglia** – Salt River Project (SRP)
- **Kimberly Campbell** – City of Surprise
- **Robert Campa** – City of Mesa
- **Tim Carter** – Coconino County
- **Eliza Coll** – Coll Consulting
- **Ericka Huston** – City of Chandler
- **Gabe Lavine** – DEMA
- **Richard Peel** – Maricopa County
- **Rachel Porter** – Arizona Public Service (APS)
- **Kirsten VanDeventer** – Salt River Indian Community

AZ-Emergency Manager (EM)

- **Ashley Ahlquist** – Yavapai County
- **Kelsey Neilson** – Coconino County

AZ-Emergency Associate (EA)

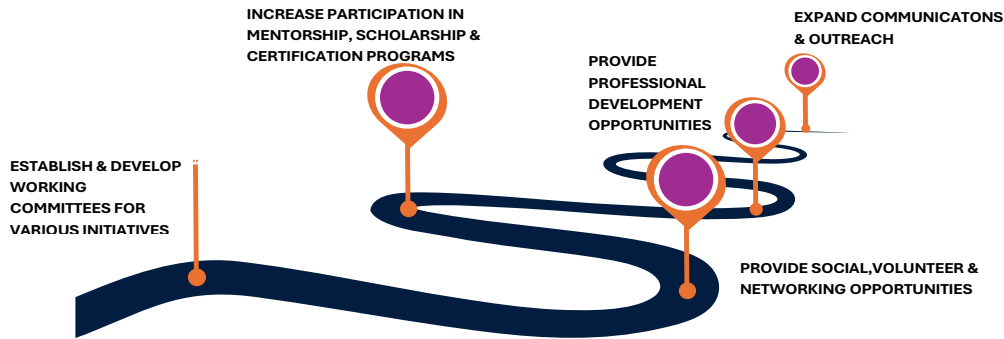
- **Andrew Sevillano** – Bullhead City

2026 Certification Process

For those ready to validate their expertise and elevate their standing within the Arizona emergency management community, the 2026 application window will officially open in January and remain active through March. Following the submission period, our specialized review committees will conduct thorough evaluations from April through June. To ensure a seamless application experience, we encourage all prospective candidates to begin auditing their professional credits and organizing their supporting documentation now. Do not miss this opportunity to join a growing lineage of certified leaders dedicated to the safety and resilience of the Grand Canyon State.

Key Initiatives for 2026

As we enter 2026 for the Arizona Emergency Management community, our focus shifts toward sustainable growth, structured collaboration, and the continued professionalization of our field.



Establish & Develop Working Committees

Central to every initiative listed below is the formal establishment of specialized Working Committees. These collaborative committees will allow more collaboration between subject matter experts and passionate volunteers to take ownership of specific projects. By joining a committee, you will be helping build our Association's future. Look for more information in your inbox on committees soon!

Increase Participation in Mentorship, Scholarship, & Certification Programs

We are committed to lowering the barriers to professional advancement in 2026. This includes:

- Activating the 2nd Certification Cohort
- Promoting the mentorship program
- Increasing the number of grants available for professional training and higher education in emergency management

Provide Social, Volunteer, & Networking Opportunities

Resilience is built on relationships. To foster a "warm" network of responders across Arizona, we will host:

- Regional Networking Mixers
- Seasonal Volunteer opportunities for members to assist in community projects
- More dedicated space and time for peer-to-peer networking and collaboration at Annual Conference

Provide Professional Development Opportunities

Education is our primary currency. This year, we will introduce:

- Quarterly Webinar Series: Spotlight on federal webinars and hosted webinars by members

Expand Communications & Outreach

To ensure every emergency manager in the state—from rural counties to tribal nations—has a voice, we are expanding our engagement strategy that includes:

- A new quarterly journal dedicated to Arizona-specific case studies and regional news
- Unified Digital Presence: Streamlining our social media and web platforms

Gila County Strong

In late September, the historic communities of Globe and Miami in Gila County were tested by catastrophic flash flooding that transformed downtown streets into raging rivers of debris and silt. Fueled by intense tropical a "wall of water" swept through the region, inundating beloved local landmarks like La Casita Cafe and disrupting vital infrastructure. Yet, as the waters receded, they revealed something even more powerful than the storm: a community that refuses to be defined by disaster.

From neighbors wielding shovels in the mud to the tireless coordination of local emergency managers and volunteers, the spirit of "Gila County Strong" was on full display. The following images capture the raw reality of the incident, but more importantly, they showcase the grit, determination, and unwavering resilience of a community already rising to rebuild.

Photo Credits: Carl Melford

