



EHPC Quarterly Meeting Minutes

Meeting Date: Tuesday, August 25, 2026

Attendees:

Chris Cieszko, Stephanie Seals, Charles Tripp, Jonathan Adams, Mark Bennett, James Williams, Richard Lane, Bruce Perkins, Lorr Kutchins,

I. Call to Order, Introductions, and Housekeeping

- a. The meeting was called to order, and attendees were welcomed.
- b. The minutes from the previous meeting were reviewed and approved.
 - i. **Motion:** Terry
 - ii. **Second:** Mike Simmons
- c. The group paused to recognize and remember Dale Griffin.

II. Introduction of Charles Tripp

- a. Charles Tripp was introduced to the committee.
- b. Charles retired from North Carolina Emergency Management in July and has joined the Coalition team part-time to support logistics.

III. Coalition Updates

a. SMAT/MRC Changes

- i. The State is functioning as the sole statewide coalition, while regional groups are increasingly expected to operate as response agencies within the State Medical Assistance Team. The Coalition discussed its role in retaining awareness of regional needs and assets while the State contacts EMS agencies and hospitals directly for readiness information.
- ii. The Coalition emphasized the need to clarify where coordination should occur while avoiding duplicate documentation or communication with both the Coalition and the State.
- iii. The State temporarily disabled new SMAT enrollment and is targeting October 2026 for the new registration process. Existing members and new applicants will receive instructions when the system goes live,

have approximately one month to respond, and will receive follow-up if they do not reapply. Joseph confirmed that October remains the working target.

- iv. The Coalition will compare the updated October list with the previous roster to identify inactive members and clean up the list. A ReadyOp form will route directly to the State.
- v. Applicants for the official SMAT must work for an agency or facility with a signed memorandum of agreement with the State. People employed by agencies without an MOA, retired personnel, and non-clinical participants may complete the same screening process and be placed on the Medical Reserve Corps list.
- vi. Members who are retired or employed by an organization without an MRO will be placed on the Medical Reserve Corps list, and a background check will be required (paid by the State).
- vii. SMAT members are automatically registered as MRC members. Both groups may deploy together when participants are legally and clinically qualified, and the Coalition's VFIS insurance provides liability coverage; however, workers' compensation and job protection are not guaranteed for MRC deployments when an employer is not paying the participant.
- viii. Stephanie emphasized that the Coalition will not verify whether employers are paying personnel during deployment. Payment status and any resulting workers' compensation questions remain between each employee and employer, and participants must understand the distinction before deploying.
- ix. The Coalition will maintain two lists: MRC and MOA.
- x. A concern was raised that, during rapid deployments, the Coalition may not have enough time to notify each member about pay or workers' compensation coverage.

b. Coalition Representation

- i. The Coalition will continue serving as a regional connection point, especially because it manages regional assets and can link facilities that do not have established relationships. Members may contact any Coalition staff member, and each organization is encouraged to maintain multiple points of contact, including access to the 24-hour emergency number.
- ii. Members who need more than one Coalition contact should reach out to Stephanie or any Coalition staff member.

IV. Coalition Leadership Transition and Nominations

- a. Stephanie recognized Dale Griffin's passing and the significant regional impact of Dale's service as coalition chair, Nash County EMS leader, State Medical Assistance Team contributor, and longtime coalition partner. Out of respect for Dale and the leadership transition underway, the committee deferred the regular nomination process.
- b. Terence Sheehy announced that September 30 will be his last day with Dare County after 31 years in the North Carolina retirement system. He will join Virginia Beach on October 1 as Deputy Chief of EMS Support Services, overseeing training, education, logistics, lifeguards, and related responsibilities, and will leave his coalition chair position.
- c. Stephanie asked Jennifer O'Neal and James McArthur to remain in their chair roles and asked Steering Committee members to continue serving while the Coalition updates its governance structure. Members who cannot remain during the interim should notify the Coalition so alternatives can be arranged.
- d. Nominations will be deferred until February to allow members to review the proposed Strategic Plan and Bylaws at the November meeting before deciding on leadership nominations.

V. Strategic Plan and Bylaws Review

- a. Stephanie Seals reported that the Strategic Plan and Bylaws need to be revised due to changes in State expectations.
- b. Coalition staff will use member input to draft revised Bylaws and a new Strategic Plan, present both to the Steering Committee first, and then bring them to the full Coalition for review and approval at the November meeting.
- c. Jennifer O'Neal, Jim McArthur, and the Steering Committee will be asked to remain in their current roles until the revised bylaws are presented in November.
- d. The committee discussed its forward vision and priorities, including which practices should continue and which should be modified or discontinued.
- e. State funding is insufficient to cover the Coalition building, utilities, vehicle maintenance, supplies, and other readiness costs. ECU Health is supplementing the funding gap and continues to support regional educational opportunities, including the Certified Hospital Emergency Coordinator course.
- f. Chris Starbuck noted the need to review the structure of the bylaws and related activities.

- g. Jim McArthur noted that counties may need recommendations and context to better understand the bylaws. County and local partners remain interested in supporting the Coalition and reviewing suggestions.
- h. The committee discussed whether to continue pre- and post-weather coordination calls or texts now that the State contacts agencies directly. Terence supported continuing regional outreach because Coalition staff provide relationship-based follow-up and can identify shared needs. Stephanie clarified that members are not required to respond immediately and that the purpose is shared awareness and resource coordination.
- i. Sissy from Jones County indicated agreement via chat.
- j. The committee discussed the prior requirement for two in-person and two virtual meetings, and all present were in favor of this approach.
- k. Members supported continuing quarterly meetings in a combination of virtual and in-person formats, with at least one regional tabletop exercise annually. Functional exercises remain desirable but are difficult to conduct regionally because hospitals have limited sites for functional testing and EMS agencies face staffing constraints.
- l. The Coalition previously coordinated Ambulance Strike Team requests; the State is now responsible for this process. Members are asked to still notify the Coalition if a request is made or if additional help is needed navigating the State response.

VI. Communications Update

- a. Matt McMahon reported that VIPER transitioned to TDMA in July.
 - i. Some EastCare ambulances were initially not programmed correctly; the issue has since been resolved.
- b. Coast Guard aircraft can no longer use most State event talk groups, creating an operational limitation during activities such as hurricane response. Agencies that work with the Coast Guard should coordinate alternate channels, including air-operations options, with local Emergency Management and area coordinators.
- c. Starlink is being installed at all ECU Health facilities, and wiring remains in progress.
- d. Weather stations have been installed, although not all stations are currently connected.
- e. The team expects another, smaller communications update in the October-November timeframe.

VII. Regional and Partner Updates

- a. **Regional SMAT III:**

- i. No update or report.
- b. **Hospital Epidemiology:**
 - i. The Cyclospora outbreak is nearing its close, with approximately 900 cases reported this summer.
 - 1. The peak occurred in early July, and cases are trending down. The outbreak was linked to parsley and cilantro.
 - 2. Pitt County reported 6 cases, while Wake County reported more than 500.
 - ii. The Infection Prevention team conducted high-risk pathogen preparedness education, including a tabletop exercise and training on setting up and using the isolation pod. Thanks were extended to Craig and Murry for support with training.
 - iii. The team is monitoring respiratory illness trends to determine whether masking will be implemented this fall/winter.
- c. **ECUHMC Trauma:**
 - i. Erika announced the upcoming Trauma Symposium on October 16. Registration is open through Eastern AHEC, and a QR code is available for registration.
 - ii. ECU Health is preparing for an ACS site survey in early 2027 to seek re-verification as a Level I pediatric and Level I adult trauma center. Emergency Management and EHPC team members may be contacted for information in preparation for the survey.
- d. **EastCare:**
 - i. Julie reported no major issues. Staffing is improving.
 - ii. She thanked the group for its support following Dale's passing.
- e. **PHPR ERO:**
 - i. Krista reported that a statewide HPAI exercise was conducted during the first week of August
 - ii. August 27, 2026- statewide Ebola tabletop exercise is scheduled
- f. **NCOEMS:**
 - i. Joe reported that workforce management efforts are underway and that new requirements are confirmed for October.
- g. **Regional Response Team:**
 - i. No update or report.
- h. **42nd CST:**
 - i. No update or report.
- i. **DPR Update:**

i. Jared Masker introduced himself as the new Area 2 Coordinator, having started approximately four weeks earlier, and noted that he has a meeting with Joy for DPR updates.

ii. Jared shared his contact information

Jared Masker (Area 2 Coordinator)

(919)214-4715

Jared.Masker@ncdps.gov

j. **NCHEMC:**

i. No update or report.

k. **Emergency Management:**

i. Jared Masker stated there were no updates.

VIII. **Future Meeting Dates**

a. The November 10 meeting will be held virtually and is planned as the venue for presenting and voting on the proposed Bylaws and Strategic Plan.

b. For 2027, the Coalition reserved dates in advance because the Monroe Center fills quickly. November will be virtual because no November venue date was available; May is likely to be virtual due to its proximity to the Airshow; February and August are expected to be held in person.

c. The May 5 meeting may be held virtually due to its proximity to the Airshow.

IX. **Action Items and Follow-Up**

a. **Coalition Governance:** Stephanie and Coalition staff will draft revised Coalition Bylaws and a new Strategic Plan incorporating member feedback, submit both to the Steering Committee for review, and present them to the full group for a vote.

b. **Coalition Leadership:** Stephanie, Jennifer O’Neal, and James McArthur will confirm whether current chair and Steering Committee members can remain in their roles during the transition and identify interim coverage for any vacancies.

c. **SMAT/MRC Enrollment:** Stephanie and the Coalition team will send current SMAT members the State enrollment instructions and forms when the system reopens, reconcile responses with the existing roster, and follow up with members who do not reapply.

d. **Regional Coordination:** Regional EMS agencies should notify the Coalition when an ambulance strike team is requested from the State and escalate unmet assistance needs so the Coalition can help coordinate support.

e. **Communications Infrastructure:** Matt and the communications team will complete remaining wiring for Starlink installations and activate weather stations at ECU Health facilities.

- f. **Coast Guard Communications:** Affected regional agencies should coordinate alternative communications channels with local Emergency Management and area coordinators for Coast Guard aircraft that cannot access most State event talk groups.
- g. **Trauma Symposium:** Erika, Elizabeth, and Tori will share registration information for the October trauma symposium and encourage regional participation.

Adjournment: The meeting adjourned at 10:46 a.m.