

Carbon County, Montana LEPC

Nestled between the Beartooth Mountains to the southwest and the Big Horn River to the east, Carbon County is named after the abundant amounts of coal in its 2,000 square mile area; it also produced the state's first oil well. Due to its awe-inspiring beauty, Carbon County transformed into a vacation spot. Visitors experience spectacular vistas visible from the Beartooth Highway running from the county seat of Red Lodge to the northeast entrance of Yellowstone National Park. Residents and tourists take advantage of the opportunities for hiking, camping, skiing, golfing, hunting, and wildlife viewing.



Tom Koley, Emergency Manager for the county and the appointed LEPC chair, shared details of this successful LEPC. The Carbon County LEPC has a diverse membership consisting of emergency management, law enforcement, EMS, school officials, hospital staff, fire, pipeline and mining industries, and elected officials. They even have a participant who runs a local radio station. Pleased with the diversity of the committee, the LEPC would none the less like to see more of the public involved.



Tom Koley, Carbon County
Emergency Manager

The LEPC moves the monthly meetings to four different communities around the County, staggering the times between day and evening to accommodate both professional and volunteer participants. Tom typically sets the agenda and manages the meetings.

“Emergency management is all about personal connections and knowing what resources and capabilities exist within and outside the County. As funding and resources become increasingly limited, we must rely on mutual aid in almost every incident. However, mutual aid is best accomplished when you know who is responding and what resources and capabilities they are bringing to the incident. As someone once told me, you don't want to hand out business cards during an incident.” Koley stated. He added he considers the LEPC as the forum to bring everyone together prior to the emergency. Because communications are a possible weak link during an incident, the County just completed a major enhancement to its VHF radio communication system. The LEPC has worked to ensure all agencies are on board with the new communication plan.

Tom feels that one of the key elements to any successful LEPC is keeping members engaged. Given that the county hasn't had many major incidents in the past couple years, being prepared to respond to the next incident is somewhat of a challenge. He suggests a mini-tabletop exercise, simulating potential emergencies allows the LEPC to discuss roles and responsibilities for the low-frequency, high impact disasters that may occur. Tom also schedules field visits to various locations around the County to help educate our members of the assets that exist in the area. In the past, they visited a pipeline, natural gas storage facility, limestone quarry and 911 Dispatch Center.

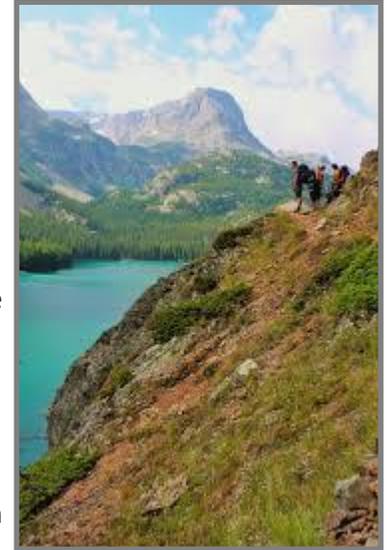


Red Lodge, Montana

From a preparedness perspective, in addition to ensuring the emergency plans are kept up-to-date, Tom would like to regularly exercise elements of the plans, and train or procure resources where deficiencies are identified. "Plans are great, but if they're not continually exercised, they are not nearly as effective."

Using Homeland Security funding, the LEPC created a disaster preparedness display to encourage enrollment in the County's emergency notification system and to assemble emergency kits for home and auto. They displayed the booth at a health fair, a volunteer fire fund raiser and a community open house and hope to participate in more events this coming year.

"Preparing for LEPC meetings every month is time consuming but worth the effort. I attempt to have a full agenda at every meeting engaging members using visual aids such as pictures, maps and graphs. I like when we engage in honest discussions about past or future incidents and how we might prepare, respond and recover more effectively. When this happens, I feel that we are succeeding as a LEPC."



Quinnebaugh Meadows Trail



Beartooth Highway