

SEC Bulletin 002 – 12/21/25

Last Monday December 15th, was an interesting day in the Front Range area of Colorado. It began with Excel Energy advising numerous Front Range counties that a potential widespread PSPS (public safety power shutoff) may be implemented starting Wednesday at noon. The potential PSPS was due to the extreme threat of wildfire caused by forecasted high winds, dry fuels, and warm temperatures.

Many offices of emergency management leaned forward to this notification and responded by opening their emergency operation centers on Wednesday and placing several Front Range ARES districts on standby. In addition to Excel Energy's notice of potential PSPS, on both Thursday and Friday extreme fire weather conditions existed causing the National Weather Service to issue their first ever for Colorado PD Red Flag Warning. PD stands for "Particularly Dangerous."

Wednesday afternoon Boulder and Jefferson Counties experienced 30 – 50 MPH winds with gusts to 100. These winds resulted in snapped power poles and fallen trees, downed power lines, and a few small fires. One fire near Wellington Lake in Jefferson County was over an acre and another on the west side of Conifer was about a quarter acre. One home in Conifer was a complete loss because a generator being used in the home malfunctioned. Clearly conditions existed for large fire behavior on the scale of the 2021 Marshal Fire where 6,026 acres burned along with 1,084 structures, and two lives were lost. We were fortunate that no large fire broke out during this week's extreme weather conditions.

R1D1 ARES (Larimer & Weld Counties) was activated by Larimer County OEM and provided two ARES operators in the EOC for situational awareness along with R1D1 field observers in Red Feather Lakes, Estes Park, Nunn, Fort Collins, Loveland, and Pinewood Reservoir. These ARES operators actively monitored public safety, ham radio, and GMRS frequencies. Nine R1D1 members were active on Wednesday, and three members were active on Thursday totaling approximately 130 man-hours served during this incident.

R1D3 ARES (Boulder & Broomfield Counties) was activated by the Boulder County Office of Disaster Management and provided ARES operators in the EOC and at two remote locations. The mission of R1D3 ARES operators was to improve situational awareness in the EOC by logging reports of power outages, fallen trees, and down power lines as well as establishing live video streams that helped OEM personnel establish if reports of smoke were fire or dust clouds caused by the high winds. Reports were posted by ARES operators to County's instance of WebEOC, which helped to create a directory of significant events.

R1D3 ARES provides robust ATV and video streaming services to their served agencies. In addition to Winlink and Video communications, R1D3 operators maintained a net to

receive reports from the mountain emergency radio network (MERN). MERN is a program that was developed following the 2020 Lefthand Canyon fire that impacted mountain communities within Boulder County's boundaries. To establish MERN, ham radio licensing classes were offered to mountain residents, and repurposed VHF public safety radios programmed with amateur frequencies were provided to licensed residents. During this week's severe weather event, R1D3 ARES members served approximately 168 man-hours.

R1D6 ARES (Jefferson, Clear Creek, Gilpin Counties) was activated by Jefferson County's Office of Emergency Management. They provided ARES operators in Jefferson County's EOC, operating out of the EOC's radio room, with the mission of providing the EOC with situational awareness. R1D6 operators were directly impacted by the power outages as their primary repeater was knocked off the air along with several other repeaters that serve the Greater Denver area. They had to practice repeater agility as well as implement some non-repeater-based voice communications. Three R1D6 members served on Wednesday, and three operators served on Friday for an approximate total of 54 man-hours served.

During the high wind incident, 50,000 homes and businesses lost power due to the public safety power shutdown, and an additional 75,000 homes and businesses lost power due to downed power lines. At the time of this writing, approximately 57,000 customers are still without power. The commonality between the activated ARES districts was their mission to provide additional situational awareness to EOC staff. For all ARES districts who serve within an EOC, this is an important service that we can provide.

Perry Lundquist | W6AUN
Colorado Section Emergency Coordinator