The regional Tropical Training, Exercise, and Integrated Warning Team (IWT) Workshop took place in Columbia, SC in June 2023, with planning beginning in the late summer of 2022. NWS and multi-agency planning included participants from:

- Federal Emergency Management Agency Region IV
- Six Weather Forecast Offices (WFOs) serving NC, SC, and GA
- South Carolina Emergency Management Division
- Georgia Emergency Management and Homeland Security Agency
- National Hurricane Center
- NWS Eastern Region Headquarters
- NWS and multi-agency planning included participants from:
  - Federal Emergency Management Agency Region IV
  - Six Weather Forecast Offices (WFOs) serving NC, SC, and GA
  - South Carolina Emergency Management Division
  - Georgia Emergency Management and Homeland Security Agency

Key public safety decision makers need to make critical life safety and economic decisions well in advance of an approaching tropical cyclone.

Participants need to properly interpret NWS tropical forecast information in order to make effective decisions and message the information to get the needed public response.

One way to enhance collaboration and improve communication is through an Integrated Warning Team, which enables public safety partners to test incident action plans and to strengthen relationships between the organizations before extreme weather events occur.

Day 1: FEMA Training

The first day consisted of FEMA’s L310 and L311 courses, which cover Hurricane Readiness for Island and Coastal Communities, respectively. In fact, this was the largest offering of L310 that FEMA has ever conducted!

Both of these courses provided detailed training on the use of NHC and other NWS tropical-related products and services.

Attendees were split into island and coastal classrooms, allowing for more relevant instruction for each group.

Instruction of the courses was divided among several meteorologists, including those from local WFOs, SERFC, NHC, and FEMA.

Day 2: Tabletop Exercise

Participants were broken into small groups facilitated by NWS staff and given a suite of NHC and other NWS forecast products of a simulated Hurricane approaching the Southeast U.S. coast.

Participants received a briefing from NHC during each phase of the event, and had to determine the best NWS products to use in their decision-making process.

The smaller groups discussed the types of actions they would take based on their responsibilities.

Key actions and decision thresholds were shared with the larger group, prompting follow-up discussions.

Day 3: IWT Meeting

The last half-day consisted of an Integrated Warning Team (IWT) meeting.

Presentations were provided by NWS Weather Prediction Center, National Water Center, and the Social, Behavioral, and Economic Sciences program.

A large panel discussion with all of the national and regional centers, including National Hurricane Center, allowed for interaction with all participants.

State EM partners in SC and NC discussed tropical best practices and shared their experience messaging to partners and the public.

Background/Motivation

Historically, hurricanes tend to be one of the most impactful natural disasters to affect the Carolinas and Georgia in terms of economic loss and fatalities.

One way to enhance collaboration and improve communication is through an Integrated Warning Team, which enables public safety partners to test incident action plans and to strengthen relationships between the organizations before extreme weather events occur.

Outcomes/Results

Attendance far exceeded expectations, with over 150 total in-person participants, including:

- State and local emergency management
- Federal agencies (USGS, FEMA, USDA, DOL, DOD, etc.)
- State and local agencies (DOT, Public Health, Police, Fire, etc.)
- Media (Charlotte, Columbia, Florence-Myrtle Beach and Raleigh markets)
- Schools/Universities
- Over 130 participants received FEMA L310 or L311 certification through Emergency Management Institute
- Media interviews conducted during the event highlighted the planning and cooperation between public safety agencies that take place well before a tropical event
- Media is a critical component of risk communication and they achieved a better level of understanding of how to effectively message tropical hazards
- Relationships fostered during this workshop will help to facilitate communications before, during, and after real-world events.

Feedback

"Both the 310 classes and exercises were extremely valuable. I am more familiar and comfortable with NWS products."

--Safety and Emergency Services Coordinator, Public School District

"This was one of the most informative trainings/exercises I have attended in a while. It was a lot of information in 3 days, but it was more than worth the time! I appreciate that the time was spent full of information." -- John Quagliariello, NWS Columbia, SC

"This was one of the most informative trainings/exercises I have attended in a while. It was a lot of information in 3 days, but it was more than worth the time! I appreciate that the time was spent full of information." -- NWS Eastern Region Tropical Program Manager Chris Birchfield providing a media interview

"I was actually impressed with the variety of topics covered and the attention to problems we really need to focus on/off. The food presentations were very informative and helpful even afterwards." -- Safety and Emergency Services Coordinator, Public School District

"I now have a better understanding of our roles associated with tropical weather and of forecasting more-informed decisions. We will also be reviewing our state’s procedures in light of what was learned." -- John Quagliariello, NWS Columbia, SC

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The exercise was fantastic! Great discussion in our group, and the interaction with NWS professionals in each small group was tremendously beneficial." -- Chris Birchfield, NWS Eastern Region Tropical Program Manager

"I have refined our internal and external messaging (and timing) associated with tropical weather and of forecasting more-informed decisions. We will also be reviewing our state’s procedures in light of what was learned." -- J.