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SEATTLE OFFICE OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

**2020**  
**ANNUAL**  
**REPORT**



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# A NOTE FROM DEPUTY DIRECTOR LAUREL NELSON

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*The gem cannot be polished without friction, nor people  
perfected without trials.” – Chinese proverb*

*Colleagues, Stakeholders & Friends -*

*In emergency management we pride ourselves on consistently focusing on preparing our community, ourselves and overall networks for a myriad of disasters. In my 25-year career in emergency management, I, like some of my close colleagues did not envision the last 12 months. In 2020 all the stars seemed to align producing a perfect storm that created an unprecedented series of events with monumental novel challenges, significant loss of life and unexpected shifts in how we function day to day professionally and personally. And, through all of the days, weeks and months of 2020, I saw and experienced the realism of adversity and the authentic strength of this wonderful profession I have been so fortunate to be a part of. Our colleagues, partners and community convening, collaborating, communicating, innovating, problem solving, giving, and caring. Working together.*

*Recently the Office of Emergency (OEM) staff had the opportunity to join the year-end celebrations with our communications volunteers (who are amazing and so dedicated to the mission!). In preparing for a talk reflecting back on the year, I humbly started to realize just how much our OEM team and we as individuals and community members experienced in 2020. For OEM, we had: Barb's retirement and vacant director position, fast-pace updating of our existing Pandemic Influenza Plan and continuity of operations plans (COOPs), activating the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) and responding to COVID over several months, establishing the first-time-ever virtual EOC operations, responding to the West Seattle Bridge closure and planning for warnings to evacuate an immediate area, activating the EOC for the death of George Floyd and Seattle events, supporting the multi-departmental work to address the social inequalities and economic adversities, implementing citywide teleworking and conducting daily meetings over virtual platforms, facing revenue impacts and budget shortage, preparing plans for both smoke and winter weather seasons during a health pandemic, hiring a new team member as well as welcoming several loaned city staff who helped with critical work, managing an unprecedented and complex FEMA disaster recovery process, separating from the Police Department and establishing an independent Office of Emergency Management, preparing for election concerns and events, and finally onboarding a new director.*

*All of that is shadowed by the extraordinary hurdles our community and many of us have faced personally, and we all are so very aware of those. I saw dedicated colleagues who are parents working hard to balance work as they also helped their children struggle to learn remotely. When I was in the ICU with my dying mom, I saw the compassion of the nurses while also seeing one of them quietly cry as they lost a patient. I joined several of my OEM team members to volunteer time to help package needed food for people struggling to feed their family.*

*I am proud of and thankful for my OEM team members, all the department directors and your committed staff, Mayor Durkan and her leadership team, and ALL of our partners and stakeholders for your unwavering collaboration and support in 2020 and going forward. I am also so appreciative and grateful for the incredible dedication of ALL our volunteers who selfishly help in our preparedness mission and actively work within the community to build resiliency.*

*“There are no great people in this world, only great challenges which ordinary people rise to meet.”  
– William Frederick Halsey, Jr.*

*As 2020 closes, I am excited and so pleased to welcome our new OEM director, Curry Mayer. As we step into 2021, I am looking forward to supporting her vision and all working together to demolish COVID and also taking our OEM program to new heights. In the following pages you will see your OEM team and volunteer's accomplishments and successes for 2020. I hope you are just as proud of them as I am!*

*Sincerely,  
Short Timer Acting Director Laurel Nelson (officially back to being Deputy Director)*





## AN INDEPENDENT OFFICE OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

In response to community calls to rethink public safety in Seattle, the Mayor and City Council transitioned the Office of Emergency Management out of the Seattle Police Department, creating an independent, stand-alone Office Of Emergency Management. The process to establish our new department began in 2020 and will continue into 2021. This change is noteworthy because emergency management as citywide function has been embedded within other departments since the 1990s. As an Emergency Management Accredited Program, Seattle OEM joins many other successful emergency management programs across that nation that are thriving as independent departments or programs.

## HIRING A NEW DIRECTOR

After the retirement of former director Barb Graff in early 2020, OEM began its search for a new director. The search for the perfect candidate, one who was both experienced in emergency management and dedicated to the social justice priorities of the City, was challenged by the realities of COVID-19. In late 2020, OEM finally found its new director: Curry Mayer. Curry previously served as the emergency manager for Bellevue. Prior to her emergency management work in Washington, Curry worked throughout the state of California in a variety of emergency services roles.

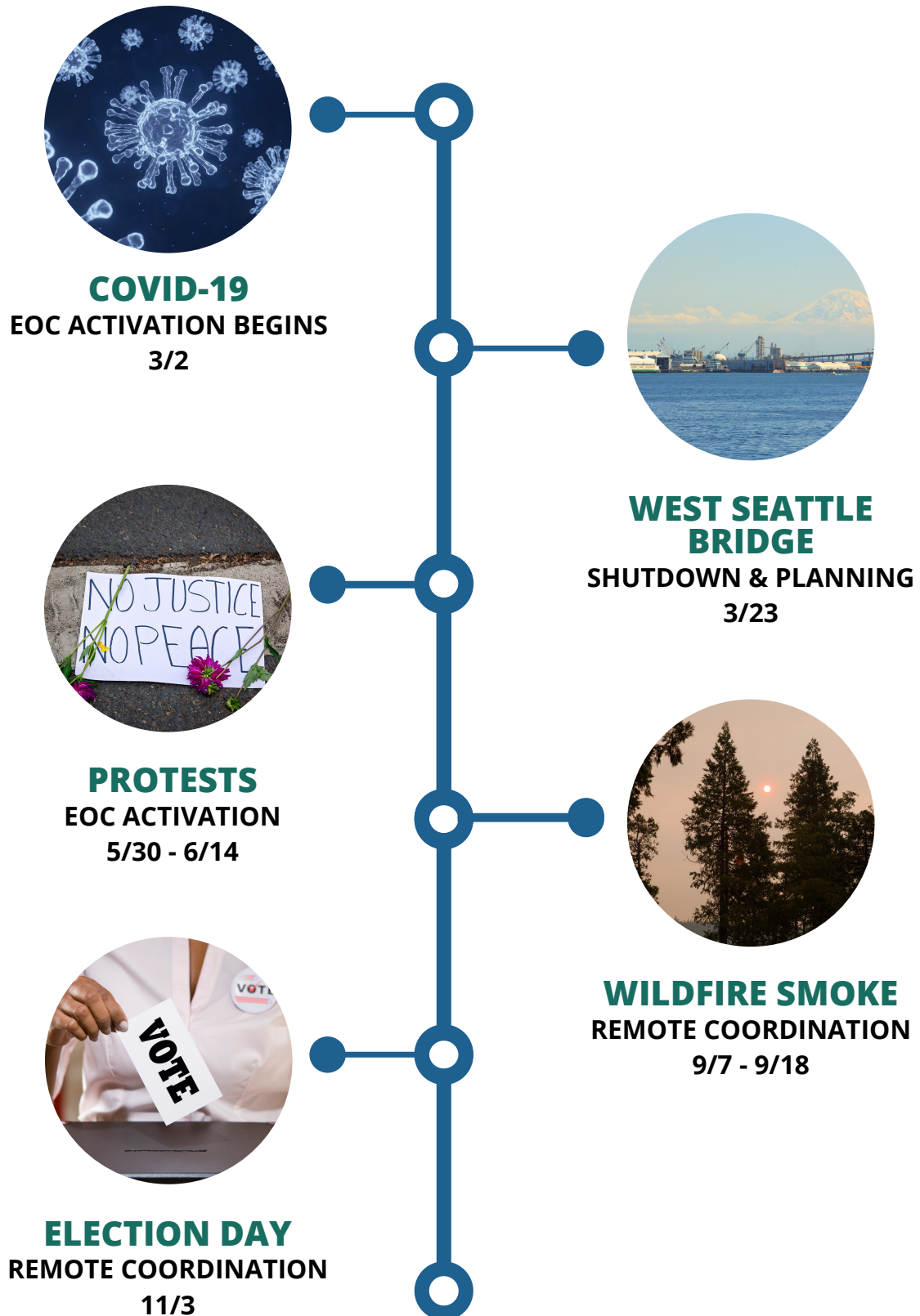


## NEW STAFF - KATE HUTTON, COMMUNICATIONS COORDINATOR



Kate Hutton joined OEM in July as the new Communications Coordinator. She came to the City of Seattle, from the City of Los Angeles where she worked in various emergency management capacities for both the Mayor's Office and Emergency Management Department, handling everything from grants management to EOC operations to public information. She has a Bachelor of Science in Criminal Justice - Public Safety Management from the Indiana University School of Public and Environmental Affairs.







# WEST SEATTLE BRIDGE

On March 23, 2020, the Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT) began a long-term closure of the West Seattle Bridge for emergency repairs after cracks in the deck were discovered during a routine inspection. The inspection also revealed a slight risk of an uncontrolled collapse.

While SDOT worked on managing actions associated with monitoring and securing the bridge, OEM began planning to ensure the EOC was ready to support consequence management and interagency coordination needed in the event of a risk of collapse of the center span over the Duwamish River. This includes support for evacuations, scene stabilization and reentry planning for businesses impacted on Harbor Island and on the western shores of the Duwamish in the immediate vicinity of the bridge.

OEM also conducted the City's first test of the Wireless Emergency Alert (WEA) system for the area impacted by the closure of the West Seattle Bridge. OEM, with the assistance of volunteers from Seattle Auxiliary Communication Service, conducted two limited tests which provided a greater understanding of the activation process and limitations of utilizing WEA to warn a small target area such as underneath the span of the West Seattle Bridge.

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An aerial photograph of a large crowd of people at a protest. Many people are holding umbrellas in various colors, including black, grey, red, and blue. The crowd is dense and fills the lower two-thirds of the frame. In the upper third, there are rows of police officers in riot gear, some standing and some kneeling. The text "PROTESTS FOR RACIAL JUSTICE" is overlaid in large, white, bold, sans-serif capital letters across the center of the image.

# PROTESTS FOR RACIAL JUSTICE

In May 2020, the nation witnessed the death of George Floyd and the long-standing impacts of systemic racism in our city and country. In the months that followed, a series of first amendment rallies and marches occurred in the city. As the events on May 30th unfolded, the EOC stood-up to facilitate cross-departmental coordination and communication.

Over the next 15 days, the EOC supported city departments, agencies and organizational stakeholders working to manage impacts and ensure continuity of essential services throughout the city. In collaboration with several city departments, the EOC supported:

- Coordination of debris and graffiti cleanup
- Securing damaged storefronts in the Downtown and International Districts
- Direct assistance to businesses to mitigate the risk of damage to storefronts from future acts of vandalism
- Coordination of logistical support (such as port-a-potties, water, and dumpsters for refuse) for protesters in the vicinity of Cal Anderson Park

On June 12th, many city departments and stakeholder partners staffed the EOC to ensure safety of the 60,000 people who silently marched in support of racial justice organized by the Black Lives Matter of Seattle-King County.



A wide-angle photograph of the Seattle skyline at sunset. The city's lights are on, and the sky is a mix of orange, yellow, and grey. The water in the foreground reflects the city lights and the sky. The title "WILDFIRE SMOKE & AIR QUALITY" is overlaid in large, white, sans-serif capital letters.

# WILDFIRE SMOKE & AIR QUALITY

A series of large wildfires in California, Oregon, and Pierce County created very unhealthy air quality for a period of two weeks.

Starting on September 8th, OEM began to collect and share information gathered from key partners including the Puget Sound Clean Air agency, Public Health Seattle/King County, the National Weather Service, and meteorologist Cliff Mass.

The Human Services Department worked with local providers to ensure that vulnerable populations including those experiencing homelessness had options for getting away from the smoke.

Information on the threats posed by the smoke and recommended protective actions was shared with the public using AlertSeattle.

Over the course of the event, OEM conducted four conference calls and provided 19 situation updates to OEM partners.

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# COVID-19 RESPONSE

In 2020, the coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic transformed Seattle, the nation, and the world. From the first case in Snohomish County in January, the Mayor provided immediate direction and OEM led the citywide efforts to prepare for a potential pandemic. The entire month of February was focused on citywide departmental preparation and planning. Leveraging the city's existing Pandemic Influenza Plan, OEM hosted twice weekly preparation sessions through the month focusing on the areas of human resources, Continuity of Operations Plans (COOPs), public information communications, and interactions with Public Health – Seattle and King County (PHSKC).

In the first few weeks, OEM provided staffing assistance to the PHSKC Health and Medical Area Command (HMAC). OEM team members and other city staff in the HMAC assisted with situational awareness, informing the roll-out of the COVID guidance, data collection and metrics, and ensuring key operational staff and decision makers were kept apprised.

On March 2nd the Seattle Emergency Operations Center opened with dozens of city department and agency representatives physically present. From the start of the EOC activation, the City structured operations around four functional areas that has stayed in place and continues to be operational today.

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**PUBLIC  
SAFETY**



**CITY OPERATIONS &  
INFRASTRUCTURE**



**HOMELESSNESS &  
HUMAN SERVICES**



**COMMUNITY  
NEEDS**

These four functional areas engaged all city departments, and also leveraged the partnerships with external organizations, agencies and the community. During the initial weeks of the activation, OEM took steps to appropriately social distance and by mid-March as more cases appeared in our communities, we pivoted to virtual EOC operations.

Pivoting a traditional brick and mortar EOC to virtual is no small task, especially during a very complex, dynamic and fluid emergency like COVID-19. Leveraging a past history of conducting operational coordination via conference calls, OEM staff successfully transitioned the EOC to remote operations and began to leverage the suite of tools (SharePoint, Skype, WebEOC, MSTEams, and other platforms) that are now common place for all us today.

Throughout the COVID-19 activation, OEM staff established new creative mechanisms to gain situational awareness. Over 50 EOC coordination conference calls were held and over 110 COVID-19 briefings were provided to the Mayor and her leadership. COVID-19 tested the abilities of our Logistics Section and our department colleagues in Finance and Administrative Services to obtain an inventory mask, gowns, gloves and other types of personal protective equipment. Seattle Information Technology Department and several other departments also rose to the resource management and supply challenges during COVID-19. These challenges required significant coordination with our colleagues at all government levels – Public Health – Seattle & King County, King County, State of Washington and FEMA.

OEM also assisted departments in the process of cost recovery through FEMA, working with Seattle Fire, Police, Public Utilities, Finance and Administrative Services, Human Services Department, and other departments to navigate a new and constantly shifting policy landscape to maximize the City's reimbursement of up to \$15 million in COVID response expenditures in 2020.



## MOBILE FIELD HOSPITAL AT LUMEN EVENTS CENTER



In late March, Seattle OEM assisted with coordinating activity to establish a mobile field hospital inside the Century Link (now Lumen) Events Center. The hospital served as a safety net for ensuring hospital capacity in the Puget Sound region during a time of soaring COVID cases.

OEM worked with representatives from Century Link along with elements of the US Army including the 62nd Medical Brigade, The 10th Field Hospital ("Mountain Medics"), the 902nd Contracting Battalion and the State Emergency Management Division to get the 171 bed hospital up and running.



*Top: Inside the mobile field hospital established at Lumen Center. Bottom: National Guard soldiers are briefed before staffing the mobile field hospital.*

Several City departments also provided direct support including Police, Fire, Finance and Administrative Services, and Seattle Department of Transportation. The Field Hospital was officially closed on April 16th, 2020 after successfully completing its mission.

Unlike any other EOC response in our history, COVID-19 presented an incredible number of novel challenges. In the true essence of a citywide coordinated response, OEM partnered with a number internal and external stakeholders in addressing and managing numerous missions. COVID-19 continues to impact our community and OEM will continue to be a team player in the ongoing response and recovery work, while also keeping the city prepared for the other myriad of emergencies and disasters we will face.

## IMPACTS TO CITY OPERATIONS

OEM coordinated with operating departments to assess the impacts of COVID-19 on daily operations as well as critical emergency functions like emergency response, congregate sheltering, and EOC operations. Operational plans were adapted and updated based on these assessments so that the City could continue to protect life and property during emergencies. OEM also led departments in planning for an eventual return to normal or post-COVID staffing models.



### SERVING THE SEATTLE COMMUNITY

In May, OEM was asked to help distribute face coverings to BIPOC small businesses in Seattle. Community Safety Ambassadors (CSAs) trained in safety protocols distributed masks and hand sanitizer to complete their outreach. CSAs were able to reach approximately 100 businesses by early June, before Governor Inslee issued a mask mandate on June 26th.



## AFTER ACTION REPORTING

OEM embarked on a comprehensive COVID-19 After Action Reporting (AAR) process with Berk Consulting. While this work will continue into 2021, it was important to begin to capture best practices to continue and codify, as well opportunities for improved planning and training, stemming from the extensive COVID-19 response and coordination undertaken by City departments. OEM surveyed response and coordination partners about what worked and what didn't, and adapted plans and procedures based on the feedback. Findings from the AAR process and final report will be used to improve our response to COVID-19 as well as future emergencies.







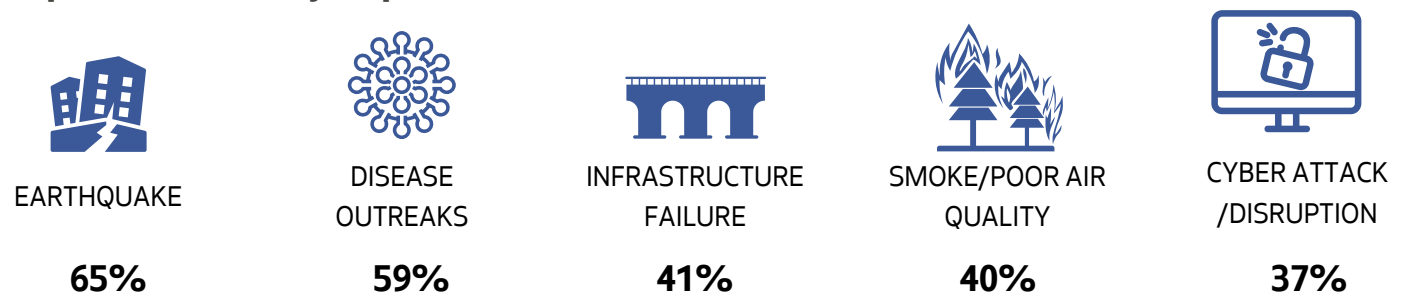
# HAZARD MITIGATION PLANNING

OEM completed an update of the All-Hazards Mitigation Plan (HMP) in 2020. The HMP provides guidance on ways to minimize risks to people, property, and the environment from disasters. The plan is developed with input from experts as well as the community.

The HMP is a comprehensive planning document that contains detailed information about the types of hazards we face and the actions we can take before disaster strikes to reduce our vulnerability.

In November 2020, OEM launched a Community Mitigation Survey as part of the Hazard Mitigation Plan update process. We received valuable feedback from the community about which hazards are the biggest concern, which mitigation strategies are most valued, and which community resources should be protected through mitigation efforts.

## Top 5 hazards survey respondents were "VERY CONCERNED" about:



## Top 4 community services respondents think should be protected through mitigation efforts:





## BREMER APARTMENTS

OEM partnered with Office of Housing and Community Roots Housing (formerly Capitol Hill Housing) on a grant application to fund the seismic retrofit to the Bremer Apartments, an affordable housing property located in the Belltown neighborhood.

The City was awarded a FEMA Hazard Mitigation grant in May of 2020 totaling just over \$5 million for the project. This is the first time OEM has applied for a grant on behalf of a community partner. The Bremer, built in 1925, has a construction type similar to unreinforced masonry buildings (URMs), and is expected to perform poorly in an earthquake. This seismic retrofit project will protect the residents in this 49-unit building as well as preserve affordable housing in downtown Seattle.

## 8TH AVENUE NORTHWEST BRIDGE

OEM collaborated with SDOT using a FEMA Hazard Mitigation grant to fund the seismic retrofit of the 8th Avenue NW Bridge. This bridge is a 180' long cast-in-place concrete bridge located in a residential area of NW Seattle. It was constructed in 1950 and carries 8th Ave NW across a steep and wooded ravine. The construction of the bridge pre-dates the development of the modern engineering design code and has been assessed as vulnerable to collapse in a design-level earthquake. SDOT's proposed plan is to enhance the seismic performance of the bridge by seismically retrofitting the various structural elements. A grant of \$2.7 million was awarded in October of 2020. The primary goals of this project include protecting lives and reduce exposure to risk that could result from an earthquake-induced catastrophic bridge failure and maintaining bridge functionality after an earthquake to preserve vital transportation links for residents, commerce, and emergency services.



# PUBLIC MARKET CENTER



MEET THE PRO

## FARMERS MARKET





## ADAPTING OUTREACH TO A NEW (VIRTUAL) NORMAL



2020 and the COVID pandemic forced people and organizations around the world to change the way they operate and interact. The OEM Outreach team was not exempt from the sudden demand for a change to how we operate, and took it as an opportunity to find new ways to bring preparedness information and training to the public.

OEM now offers virtual versions of our training courses like SNAP and Disaster Basics, and added new languages to our catalog of recorded disaster skills courses:

- Water Shut Off: English, Cantonese, Spanish, Vietnamese
- Fire Extinguisher: English, Cantonese, Spanish, Vietnamese
- CPR: English, Lao, Thai

The OEM Outreach team also delivered webinars on excessive heat and wildfire smoke preparedness, and created tutorial videos for our preparedness tools like the Seattle Hazard Explorer.



INCREASED ALERT SEATTLE  
PUBLIC OPT-INS BY

**14,429**

## VOLUNTEERS

Volunteers are a vital part of our outreach efforts at OEM, and 2020 presented unique challenges for their work. Hands-on emergency preparedness classes usually delivered in person were adapted for virtual delivery. Our volunteers met this challenge admirably, donating over 10,000 hours of their time to making Seattle a safer and more prepared place, finding socially-distanced ways to engage with small businesses and communities to promote vital programs like AlertSeattle, Stop the Bleed, and other emergency preparedness training. OEM is forever grateful to our dedicated volunteer force.



## YOUTH PREPAREDNESS VOLUNTEERS

OEM onboarded the newest cohort of high school volunteers in late October.



This exceptional group of young volunteers learned about emergency preparedness and response while building skills in community outreach by promoting the AlertSeattle program, the City of Seattle's free emergency alert system.





# SEATTLE AUXILIARY COMMUNICATIONS SERVICE

Seattle ACS volunteers accomplished much in 2020 because the team swiftly and expertly moved to virtual operations.

Accomplishments include staffing planning roles during EOC activations, led 5 exercises including, WEA Test Exercise for the West Seattle Bridge, Safe at Home Exercise, 2020 Field Day, Damage Reporting Exercise with the Seattle Fire Department, and Alert Seattle impromptu Shake out drill radio check.

Additionally, the team installed and upgraded receivers and repeaters at several sites citywide, HAMWAN at one site, extended existing networks to support several City sites, and much more. Learn more about the program at [seattleacs.org](http://seattleacs.org).

**8****NEW  
MEMBERS****143****TOTAL ACS  
MEMBERS****9,259****SERVICE HOURS  
DONATED**

# STOP THE BLEED

The Stop the Bleed program prepares people to save lives by teaching them how to recognize and treat life threatening bleeding. OEM adapted the Stop the Bleed curriculum in 2020 for safe, virtually-delivered training in this important skill.



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### BLEEDING CONTROL KITS DEPLOYED AT SEATTLE CENTER

Having bleeding control supplies accessible in public places will also help to save lives. People with the skills and knowledge to treat life threatening bleeding will be able to do so more effectively if they have quick access to tourniquets, gauze and other supplies.





## COMMUNITY SAFETY AMBASSADORS

The Community Safety Ambassadors (CSA) Program provides emergency preparedness and safety skills training to Seattle and surrounding communities that are disproportionately impacted by emergencies.

Community Safety Ambassadors (CSAs) faced a major challenge this year as COVID restricted their usual method of outreach: face-to-face conversations and gatherings with members of their community.

The CSAs adapted, leveraging digital platforms for virtual meetings to continue preparedness outreach as much as possible, translating emergency skills training videos, distributing face coverings to local businesses, and gathering important community feedback on the City's Hazard Mitigation Plan.

**15**  
**TEAM**  
**MEMBERS**



**13**  
**LANGUAGES**  
**SPOKEN**

**1,666**

**COMMUNITY**  
**MEMBERS**  
**CONTACTED**



## INTERNATIONAL RESCUE COMMITTEE

OEM continued our partnership with the International Rescue Committee (IRC) for the second year.



The program provided fire safety, earthquake, and winter preparedness education and outreach to elementary, middle, and high school students. IRC assists the Office of Emergency Management in providing outreach to emerging refugee populations from, Dari, Pashto, Ukrainian, and Nepali speaking communities.



## VILLA COMUNITARIA

Villa Comunitaria became the 2nd community-based organization to join the Community Safety Ambassadors program in 2020. VC focuses on leadership development, healthy communities, community engagement, and systems navigation for the Latinx community.

Their MOU with OEM focused on outreach around disaster preparedness in January and February 2020, in July and August the outreach pivoted to outreach around neighbors helping neighbors in their time of need., by helping help dispersed the Hola Vecino! Cards to their local businesses. As well as provided phone to phone outreach to Spanish speaking communities for the OEM Community Covid Survey.



## OEM TEAM VOLUNTEERS AT NORTHWEST HARVEST

The COVID-19 pandemic impacted Seattle in many ways in 2020. One of the most significant impacts was economic.



The OEM team spent an October afternoon volunteering with Northwest Harvest, a non-profit organization supporting food banks in Washington state. Northwest Harvest distributes food to a network of more than 370 food banks, meal programs, and high-need schools throughout Washington State. Their work helps keep Seattle fed and nourished, even in the midst of a pandemic.

OEM staffers donned protective gear to maintain COVID safety protocols to help the foodbank repackage potatoes and pasta for distribution to the community.





