

FEMA and FLASH Partner with Wyoming Leaders for Earthquake Tabletop

State and local officials from across Wyoming met on November 2 to conduct a tabletop exercise and help leaders prepare for earthquakes. Afton, a small western Wyoming town near the Idaho border, served as the site for the meeting as it is a potential hotspot for geologic activity.

Twenty-four participants, from law enforcement officials to faith-based organizational representatives, spent the day conducting a mock exercise of a seismic event occurring in the region and discussed the appropriate response in detail. The agenda included first responder emergency services and how the public would commute should primary transportation routes be closed following an earthquake. Participants also developed plans for backup lines of communication. All benefitted from the modeled scenario as well as the networking with new and existing colleagues.

Wyoming Geologic Manager Seth Wittke gave a presentation on the historical, scientific aspects of seismic activity in the region and shared thoughts on what is expected should an earthquake occur. "The Afton area has significant Late Quaternary-aged faults nearby—the Grand Valley and Greys River faults, that are capable of producing damaging ground motions," Wittke said. "The faults coupled with nearby historic earthquakes, a M 4.8 in 1992 and a M 5.3 tremor on September 2, 2017, point to the benefit of such exercises to prepare local communities for seismic events."

The daylong event inspired many to act and prepare for the next earthquake. The exercise reinforced how a great deal of planning is necessary to be ready for a seismic disaster. It also highlighted compounding challenges when an event hits a state like Wyoming due to the wide geographic area with residents in remote locations who are difficult to reach.

FEMA Building Science Branch provided the resources for this tabletop exercise through the state support component of the National Earthquake Hazard Reduction Program.