

REQUEST FOR BOARD ACTION

HENDERSON COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

MEETING DATE: October 15, 2025

SUBJECT: Hurricane Helene After Action Report (AAR)

PRESENTER: Jimmy Brissie, Public Safety Director

ATTACHMENTS: (1) AAR Executive Summary

SUMMARY OF REQUEST:

In November of 2024 Henderson County Staff engaged our recovery consultant, iParametrics, to assist with the facilitation of a comprehensive After Action Report (AAR) for the initial response and recovery to Hurricane Helene. During December 2024 and January 2025 iParametrics staff conducted online surveys and two days of in-person work sessions to gather feedback on the county's strengths as well as areas of improvement for the next large-scale event.

For the past few months staff have been working with iParametrics to incorporate this feedback into a full report which summarizes the findings and presents areas of improvement. Staff will provide an overview of the key findings of the report for the Board and discuss the next steps anticipated.

BOARD ACTION REQUESTED:

No specific Board Action is requested; this item is for informational purposes only.

Suggested Motion:

No motion suggested.



Executive Summary - Henderson County After-Action Report: Hurricane Helene (2024)

Lessons Learned & Path Forward

1. Event Overview

Hurricane Helene struck Henderson County in late September 2024, bringing 15–22 inches of rain and winds up to 100 mph. The storm caused catastrophic flooding, debris flows, power outages, and communication loss, resulting in 8 fatalities during the storm. Despite the devastation, Henderson County's preparedness culture allowed a rapid and coordinated response, with areas for improvement. Following the storm Henderson County engaged staff from iParametrics to facilitate an After-Action Report. This process included an online survey, and five in-person focus groups, engaging over 158 responses from individuals across 38 agencies. This document summarizes the full report.

2. Key Strengths

- Strong culture of preparedness across departments.
- Interagency collaboration and community partnerships.
- Shelter activation and medical evacuations saved lives.
- Strategic investments in Public Safety improved emergency response efforts.

3. Challenges

- Communication collapse – public phone and internet failures.
- Infrastructure damage – roads impassable, widespread power loss.
- Shelter strain – not equipped for complex medical needs or numbers of clients.
- Resource management issues – manual tracking, donation overload.
- Public messaging gaps – battling misinformation, translation delays.
- Staff stress – long hours, trauma, and burnout.

4. Summary of Capabilities and Future Actions

Capability	Number of Actions	Focus Areas
1. Planning	8 actions	Update EOP, improve notification, enhance personal preparedness, ensure printed plans are available
2. Infrastructure Systems	6 actions	Improve communications with providers, add redundancy, increase transparency
3. Logistics & Supply Chain Management	16 actions	Develop resource tracking, donations management, fuel plans, housing logistics
4. Mass Care Services	7 actions	Expand shelter training, clarify roles, strengthen medical and security protocols
5. Operational Communications	9 actions	Pre-stage satellite devices, expand radio capacity, formalize communications plans
6. Operational Coordination	11 actions	Improve resource management, debris planning, CAD training, transition to recovery
7. Public Information & Warning	8 actions	Improve multilingual communication, translation services, misinformation response
8. Situational Assessment	7 actions	Enhance data sharing, call center integration, liaison tracking, staff wellness programs

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Summary Insights

- Total Capabilities Evaluated: 8
- Total Corrective Actions Developed: 72
- Primary Focus: Communication resilience, logistical coordination, staff readiness, and community preparedness.

The improvement actions will be implemented from July 2025 to July 2026, with cross-departmental coordination led by Henderson County Emergency Management.

5. Selected Actions

- Update Emergency Operation Plan (EOP) and Continuity of Operations Plans for large-scale disasters.
 - Provide training and exercises for all county staff regarding their role in the revised and updated EOP upon completion.
- Pre-stage satellite communication systems.
 - Prior to Helene Henderson County maintained a small cache of satellite communication devices (10). This has been expanded to more than 50 devices and will pre-deploy the devices to shelters and areas known to be cut off as well as critical partners before an event.
- Create donations and resource tracking programs.
 - As part of the overall EOP update plan the County will evaluate the best process and system for tracking resources and resource requests.
- Expand medical and security training for shelters.
 - We have mitigated this by assigning a Human Services Branch Director. As well as providing more detailed training for all staff that may be asked to work in a shelter. Additionally, we have expanded medical supplies, such as the cache of oxygen cylinders and other over-the-counter medications and supplies that can be used to support shelter clients.
- Produce multilingual, printed emergency materials.
 - We have hired additional staff to enhance this area for improvement. Additionally, we have increased capacity and outreach in multiple languages, and we can now send IPAWS (Integrated Public Alert and Warning System) messages directly to phones.
- Support and prioritize mental health and staff wellness programs.
 - Early in the storm the County requested additional mental health support from the NC Responder Assistance Initiative. This process will be continued for future large-scale incidents to include providing services to a broader segment of staff than just emergency responders.

6. Closing – Lessons Learned

Hurricane Helene tested every system in Henderson County. The County's strong planning foundation and community partnerships enabled an effective response — but communication, medical sheltering, and logistics require modernization to meet future climate-driven disasters. Moving forward, Henderson County is strengthening resilience through coordination, technology, and care.