



**OFFICE OF STATE
FIRE MARSHAL**
NC DEPARTMENT OF INSURANCE

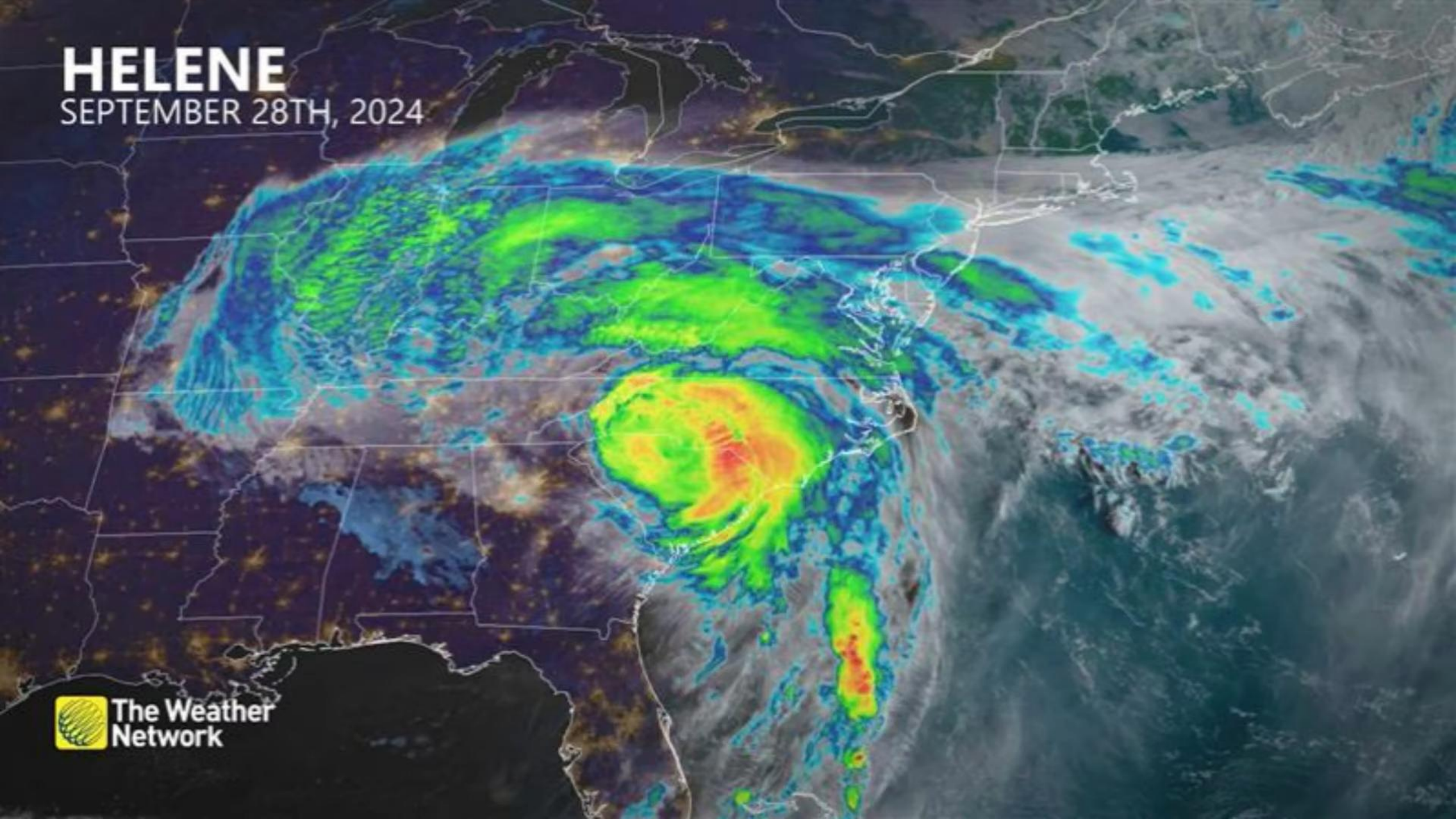
Joint Legislative Emergency Management Oversight Committee

Thursday, March 12, 2026

Brian Taylor
State Fire Marshal

HELENE

SEPTEMBER 28TH, 2024



OSFM's Role in Disaster Response



Statutory authority over fire service regulation and coordination

Leads structural fire protection during disasters

Supports 1,200+ local fire departments statewide

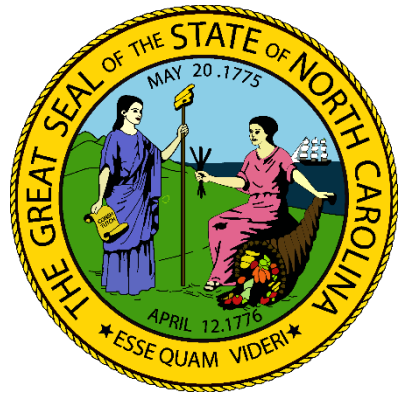
Strengthens statewide emergency response authority

OSFM's Response to Hurricane Helene



- Coordinated structural fire protection in impacted areas
- Supported mutual aid deployment across counties
- Assisted with life safety operations & infrastructure protection
- Maintained communication between state and local fire leadership
- Provided technical guidance and situational coordination

Clarifying Federal vs. State Response Role



FEMA and Emergency Management(EM)

Focuses on:

- Planning
- Mitigation
- Recovery

Fire departments are the primary responders.

Advocacy of FEMA Overhaul



FEMA and US Fire Administrator Reform



BRIAN TAYLOR
STATE FIRE MARSHAL

FEMA Review Council – Disaster Response and Recovery Sub-Committee

Submitted by: Brian Taylor, State Fire Marshal of North Carolina

On behalf of: North Carolina Office of State Fire Marshal (OSFM) and the National Association of State Fire Marshals (NASFM)

Introduction

Thank you for the opportunity to share input with the FEMA Review Council's Disaster Response and Recovery Sub-Committee.

FEMA plays a vital role in keeping Americans safe, but its success depends on recognizing the critical role of the U.S. Fire Service. Firefighters are the first to respond when disaster strikes and the last to leave during recovery. They are trusted in every community, trained across multiple disciplines, and essential at every stage of disaster operations.

Despite this, the fire service currently has no dedicated voice on the FEMA Review Advisory Council. This is a serious gap, and I offer the following recommendations to strengthen FEMA's structure and effectiveness.

Recommendations for FEMA Reform

1. Elevate the U.S. Fire Administrator

- The U.S. Fire Administrator should report directly to the Secretary of Homeland Security.
- This ensures FEMA decisions reflect real-world operations and frontline realities.

2. Give the Fire Service a Seat on the Council

- Firefighters are the nation's largest and most widespread emergency response network.
- A permanent fire service seat ensures FEMA reforms include the experience of those who lead disaster response every day.

3. Build Public-Private Partnerships into FEMA's Framework

- FEMA should have clear processes to integrate private resources—such as communications systems, helicopters, and heavy equipment—without delay.
- During Hurricane Helene, private partners restored communications and delivered lifesaving aid to isolated communities.

4. Cut Through Bureaucratic Delays

- FEMA must simplify approval processes for resource deployment.
- Local responders often wait days or weeks for federal approval, even when private or state resources are available immediately.

OFFICE OF STATE FIRE MARSHAL

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BRIAN TAYLOR
STATE FIRE MARSHAL

September 10, 2025

FEMA Review Advisory Council
Federal Emergency Management Agency
500 C Street SW
Washington, D.C. 20472

Dear Secretary Noem, Secretary Hegseth and Members of the FEMA Review Advisory Council:

On behalf of the North Carolina Office of the State Fire Marshal (NC OSFM) and the National Association of State Fire Marshals (NASFM), I would like to begin by expressing our gratitude to President Trump, Homeland Secretary Noem and Defense Secretary Hegseth for their leadership in restructuring and strengthening Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). The President's establishment of the FEMA Review Advisory Council earlier this year highlights how critical this moment is for our country. We are grateful for the Administration's commitment to ensuring FEMA is more effective, efficient, and resilient for the American people.

FEMA has long been viewed as a planning, mitigation, and recovery agency. Yet every disaster response begins with the U.S. Fire Service, which is uniquely positioned as the nation's frontline response and recovery element. From search and rescue, emergency medical response, fire suppression, and hazardous materials incidents to supporting communities in long-term recovery, the fire service is central to every phase of disaster operations.

Currently, there is no dedicated fire service voice on the FEMA Review Advisory Council. This leaves a significant gap in expertise and perspective, as firefighters not only provide the first line of defense but also carry the trust of local communities—trust that federal and even state agencies sometimes struggle to earn.

The U.S. Fire Service operates under the framework:

Local Fire Chief → State Fire Marshals → U.S. Fire Administrator

This framework ensures both accountability and coordination, which is why we believe the U.S. Fire Administrator position must report directly to the Homeland Security Secretary and sit in the Emergency Service Function (ESF4) for fire and emergency services.

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Wildfire Preparedness & Collaboration

NC Forestry Service is responsible for wildfires and preparedness

NC OSFM Responsible for structural fire protection and protecting communities

Hurricane Helene debris elevated wildfire risk for years to come

Cross-training to address manpower shortages



Challenges & Strategic Needs



- Local firefighters have limited wildfire suppression assets
- Hazardous terrain and safety risks are different
- Growing need for contract firefighting resources
- Complex coordination between structural and forestry operations

Prevention: Protecting Communities Before the Next Disaster | Prevention is just as important as response.

Firewise & Community Risk Reduction programs

Tools and training for local departments

Public education to reduce wildfire risk

Post-disaster hazard mitigation (debris, utilities, temporary housing)

Preparedness costs less than recovery.



NC Emergency Training Center: Building Readiness Before Disaster

Prepares firefighters for:

- Structural disaster response
- Swiftwater & High-water rescue
- Air fuel and craft emergencies
- Technical rescue
- Haz-mat
- Aircraft operations for wildfire and rescue

Provides Statewide certification standards and allows for cross-training among departments







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