

**Testimony of Christy Lieuallen before the  
Ways and Means Subcommittee on Oregon Emergency  
Management “Why Oregon Emergency Management is vital  
during all phases of a disaster.”  
April 1, 2023**

My name is Christy Lieuallen, and I’ve had the privilege to work with Oregon Emergency Management (OEM) from 2021 through 2023. OEM plays a pivotal role in disaster response and recovery. My purpose in testifying today is to support Oregon Emergency Management as a standalone state agency, supporting local communities during disasters and reducing the impact of future disasters.

Since March of 2020, I have served as co-chair of the Blue Mountain Region Long-Term Recovery Group and the Executive Director of United Way of the Blue Mountains for the past ten years.

In February 2020 the Blue Mountain region suffered its worst flooding in decades. More than 600 families in Washington and Oregon were affected by swollen creeks and rivers. Just as community organizations began to mobilize in response, we were hit by the COVID-19 pandemic. Normally, disaster response involves federal, state, and county representatives physically surveying damage and contacting survivors so they can apply for assistance. While some initial assessments were made, the normal process for assistance was stymied by our inability to meet survivors.

The Blue Mountain Region Long-Term Recovery Group (BMRLTRG) was organized in the wake of this flooding which models nationwide best-practices for recovering from disasters. Our coverage area includes Walla Walla and Columbia in Washington in addition to Umatilla and Wallowa counties in Oregon, as well as the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation.

Subsequently, the City of Wallowa and the surrounding area sustained widespread damage to residential and commercial property from a severe weather event that consisted of tennis ball size hail and extreme straight-line winds on August 11, 2022. Five hundred homes were impacted by the storm.

The City of Wallowa and Wallowa County each declared a state of emergency in response to the local impacts which have touched nearly every structure and vehicle in the community, and which exceeded local response and recovery capabilities. Thanks to the leadership of OEM, there has been close coordination between the city, county, state, and local non-profits allowing organizations and government agencies to support the development of a recovery plan.

In contrast, during the flood of February 2020, we did not have the support needed from the State of Oregon. Although we had an abundance of well-intentioned volunteers and willing service agencies, we needed leadership to develop a cohesive effort. We lacked the guidance and order that only OEM can provide.

Oregon Emergency Management has become a strong partner and leader for everyone recovering from disasters in Oregon. OEM links Long-Term Recovery Groups (LTRGs) together to

learn from each other. This connection has allowed many LTRGs to become strong organizations supporting individuals and families to become safe, sanitary, secure, and functional after a disaster.

OEM is now a nexus linking local, regional, state, federal, and private components, to respond to and recover from disasters. Their comprehensive systems approach has created a network of response, relief, and recovery workers. No single agency responding to a disaster can be expected to handle the challenges. OEM is now playing an essential coordinating role for the overall state response. OEM was the link between the City of Wallowa and the BMRLTRG. Without the warm handoff, the BMRLTRG would not have responded to the disaster and 500 households would not have the support they needed to recover. OEM has helped emergency managers and county commissioners understand the importance of LTRGs and the sub committees. This bridge between the state, county and LTRG has created an efficient recovery process in rural areas undergoing their first disaster in decades.

OEM provides meetings for leadership of the LTRG's and committees to learn from one another. They connect other state agencies with the LTRGs. One such instance was during the hailstorm in Wallowa. OEM connected the BMRLTRG with the Division of Financial Regulation. This connection has been invaluable. We have been able to support survivors with their insurance challenges. Without this connection many survivors would not have been able to navigate their insurance claims.

I have been impressed with the steady dedication of OEM. Working disaster recovery in both Oregon and Washington states, OEM is a gold standard and should be a model for other states. I am grateful to the State of Oregon and OEM for their partnership helping survivors recover from disaster.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. If you have any questions, please feel free to give me a call at 541.276.2661 or by email, [christy@uwbluemt.org](mailto:christy@uwbluemt.org).

Sincerely,



Christy Lieuallen  
Co-Chair- Blue Mountain Region Long-Term Recovery Group  
Executive Director- United Way of the Blue Mountains