



*Lake County, Ohio*

# Board of Commissioners

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## NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### Lake County, Ohio Successfully Completes 1<sup>st</sup> Ever Virtual Emergency Preparedness Exercise

PAINESVILLE, OH, October 8th, 2020 – On September 15<sup>th</sup> 2020, the Lake County Emergency Management Agency, along with partners at Ashtabula County, Geauga County, the State of Ohio and the Perry Nuclear Power Plant (PNPP), participated in the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) evaluated Radiological Emergency Preparedness Exercise (REPEX) to ensure off-site response organization readiness in the event of an emergency at the PNPP. This type of exercise is conducted and evaluated on a biennial basis and would normally involve a minimum of 200-300 players from public safety, volunteer organizations, county departments, PNPP staff and others. Due to COVID-19, the 2020 exercise had to be completed with fundamental changes in how the exercises are conducted and evaluated in order to adhere to public health and safety guidelines.

Beginning in June 2020, Lake County EMA began discussion with FEMA Region V about receiving real-life incident response credit for actions taken during the COVID-19 pandemic response. Working with the Lake County General Health District and other county agencies, Lake County EMA began the collection of data to apply for the exercise credit. After compiling more than 100 pages of documentation, FEMA Region V granted Lake County the “largest ever credit in FEMA history” towards seven evaluation criteria, which left eight criteria to be evaluated. “It is no surprise to me and my colleagues, that Lake County and our emergency planning personnel, are once again leading the way in conducting critical public safety services for our County’s residents. Continuing education, professional training, and long-standing community partnerships provide a solid foundation for handling complex situations similar to this exercise,” noted Lake County Commission President John R. Hamercheck.



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More than 3 months of collaboration and planning between Lake, Ashtabula and Geauga Counties, the State of Ohio, and FEMA Region V resulted in the first-ever Virtual REPEX in the United States. The REPEX had members of FEMA evaluating the EMA staffs remotely using video conferencing and teleconferencing programs. Sean O'Leary, Radiological Assistance Committee Chair for FEMA Region V, highlighted during the Post-Exercise briefing how this new and innovative way to complete a Virtual REPEX gave the FEMA staff a safe and effective "eyes and ears" view into EOC operations to demonstrate specific criterion and how this virtual REPEX would "improve response efforts nationwide." Todd Gemske, FEMA Team Lead, stated, "Lake County selected to have eight criteria evaluated and all were met with no findings and no plan issues identified." Many strengths of the Lake County EMA staff were identified, most notably their ability to handle a REPEX in the midst of a world-wide health crisis. The PNPP Virtual REPEX will set the standard for nuclear power plant exercises across the United States, during and following the COVID-19 pandemic.

Joe Busher, Director of the Lake County EMA, stated, "This is a great example of decades of planning, preparation with all federal, state and local stakeholders in management of real and potential emergencies, and thinking outside the box to do what's right for the protection of our communities."

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