



MT SERC Successes

Practical ideas for building active LEPCs, better state-local coordination, and a model other states can use.

2026 NASTTPO Conference · Justin Webster, MT DES – SERC Administrator



MacGyver



Paramount Global





What Success Actually Looks Like

Not compliance — capability. A system that actually works when it matters.

Operational Readiness



Seamless coordination that activates instantly during an actual emergency.

Practical Governance



Bylaws and structure that prevent drift and make the program resilient to turnover.

Useful Meetings



Focused agendas that make volunteer time worthwhile and produce real decisions.

Easy-to-Use Tools



Templates and guides that make it simple to say yes to doing the work.

Montana's Starting Point

Lightweight enough to survive the real world — structured enough to produce progress.



Large Geography

56 counties + 7 tribal jurisdictions.
Support must be scalable and remote-capable.



Variable Local Capacity

Ranges from full-time professional staff to entirely volunteer operations.



Volunteer Environment

Small-staff settings reward simplicity and repeatability above all else.



Relationships First

Relationships matter more than org charts in rural Montana.



Part One

From Compliance to Capability

How Montana reframed EPCRA work as an all-hazards platform
— and why that shift made everything easier.

From Compliance to Capability

The reframe that made everything else possible.

Then

LEPC work felt narrow, paperwork-heavy, and disconnected from daily preparedness.

Now

LEPC is a platform for all-hazards planning, hazard awareness, outreach, and coordination.

Result

The program became easier to explain, support, and far more relevant to local partners.

The LEPC as a Platform



LEPCs work best when they become the table where citizens, industry, and government collaborate to solve real planning problems — not just meet EPCRA requirements.

Who the LEPC Actually Serves

EPCRA created the intersection — good programs use it.



Citizens

Right-to-know, public awareness, and protective action guidance.



Industry

Chemical reporting, facility coordination, and emergency planning input.



Government

EM, fire, health, law enforcement, transportation, & community partners.

The Forum IS the Capability

The LEPC works when it becomes the table where all three groups solve practical planning problems together. Engagement — before an incident — is the product.



Part Two

The Montana Playbook

Four moves that produced real results. Steal all of them.

Four Moves That Actually Worked

Borrow what fits. These ideas work even if your context is different.

Clarify

- 1 Define roles, bylaws, expectations, and meeting purpose. Remove ambiguity so volunteers know exactly what they're doing and why.

Connect

- 2 Build relationships with facilities, local responders, and state partners before an incident requires it.

Simplify

- 3 Use templates, one-pagers, and repeatable tools. Make it easy for local partners to say yes to doing the work.

Sustain

- 4 Keep meetings useful, training active, and communication steady. Momentum is the product.

Start with Structure

Good structure reduces drift when staff turns over.

Chairperson + Info Coordinator

Defined officer roles create accountability and continuity even when membership turns over.

Bylaws Adopted — Nov 2025

New bylaws after a 20-year gap. Made public notice, meetings, and information handling predictable.

Annual Roster Maintenance

Keeps the network current across 56 counties + 7 tribal jurisdictions.

Governance Elements

Element	Why It Matters
Bylaws	Consistent operating rules
Officer roles	Clarify who does what
Open meetings	Builds legitimacy and trust
Roster updates	Keep the network active

Useful Meetings Drive Useful Committees

Meetings are where culture is built. Build the table you actually need.

Meeting Discipline

Quarterly Rhythm

Maintains momentum and prevents organizational drift.

Focused Agendas

Advance distribution and clear time discipline make volunteer time worth spending.

Action Follow-Up

Minutes + assignments + next steps turns meetings into progress rather than just talk.

Who Belongs at the Table



Core Responders — EM, fire, EMS, law enforcement, public health, hospitals



Infrastructure — Transportation, utilities, public works, schools



Facilities — Owners/operators with hazardous materials



Community — Media, nonprofits, AFN partners, tribal governments

Make Every Meeting Worth Showing Up For

People stay engaged when the work is practical, visible, and relevant.

Coordinated Speakers List

CST, HazMat Teams, EPA, BNSF, DEQ — a ready-to-use menu of subject-matter speakers. BNSF trained 400+ Montana first responders in 2025.

Facility + Community Tours

Site visits build real hazard awareness faster than any document. Let facilities show responders what they're actually dealing with.

After-Action Review

Use real incidents and exercises to improve the plan. Ash Grove (2025): a reporting gap turned into a targeted outreach campaign.

LEPC DYK in DES Newsletter

MT DES Monthly newsletter includes a dedicated LEPC section — low-cost, high-reach communication between meetings.



Part Three

Tools & Reporting

Turning compliance data into operational intelligence
— and building the products that make it shareable.

Turn Compliance Data into Operational Value

Tie each EPCRA section to its operational value — that's when the data becomes worth submitting.

Facilities identify hazards

Tier II data becomes a chemical hazard map when LEPCs know how to use it for response planning.

Notification gaps are a real problem

Ash Grove (spring 2025): state wasn't notified of a Section 304 release until weeks later via paper mail.

Local-first notification flow

Facilities call local EM first, push up through channels. Requiring 15 simultaneous calls isn't practical.

EPCRA Section → Operational Use

Section	Operational Use
302–303	Planning notification & coordinator linkage
304	Release reporting and follow-up
311–312	SDS and annual inventory (Tier II)
324	Public right-to-know access

Exploring: E-Plans pop-up reminders at Tier II filing to auto-prompt proper notification channels.

Tools That Make the Work Easy

Guides and templates LEPCs can use immediately — no reinvention needed.

Montana LEPC Handbook



Covers EPCRA requirements, meeting facilitation, planning elements, LERA designation, reporting, and annex guidance. Designed to stand alone in any county.

Monthly Topical 1-Pagers



Bite-sized references on HazMat, commodity flow, reporting, and planning elements. Released monthly — each can anchor an LEPC meeting agenda item.

MT DES SERC Webpage



Central hub for meeting materials, E-Plans access, handbook, LEPC resources, and Duty Officer information.

Fillable LEPC Report Form



Covers LERA designation, plan elements, HazMat plan review, and sector representation. Results feed directly into SERC support priorities.



MT SERC Website & Resources

The State HazMat Plan

The planning document behind the program — owned by the SERC, used by everyone.

What It Is



The statewide hazardous materials emergency response plan required under EPCRA and state statute. Sets the framework that local HazMat plans and LEPCs operate within.

SERC Ownership



The SERC reviews and approves the plan. Regular review cycles keep it current with changing facility inventories, team capabilities, and response protocols.

LEPC Connection



Local HazMat plans and LEPC Emergency Operations Plan annexes are designed to nest within the State Plan. Alignment between state and local is the goal.

In Practice



Currently Promulgated and operating with annual reviews by SERC. Continued refinement to make practical – May Meeting

Montana's Regional HazMat Program

Six certified teams statewide, governed by updated MOUs, recertified annually by the SERC.

Six Certified Teams

Billings, Bozeman, Great Falls, Helena, Kalispell, Missoula. Recertified Dec 1–Nov 30 annually. Personnel, training, and equipment verified each year.

New Deployment Flowchart

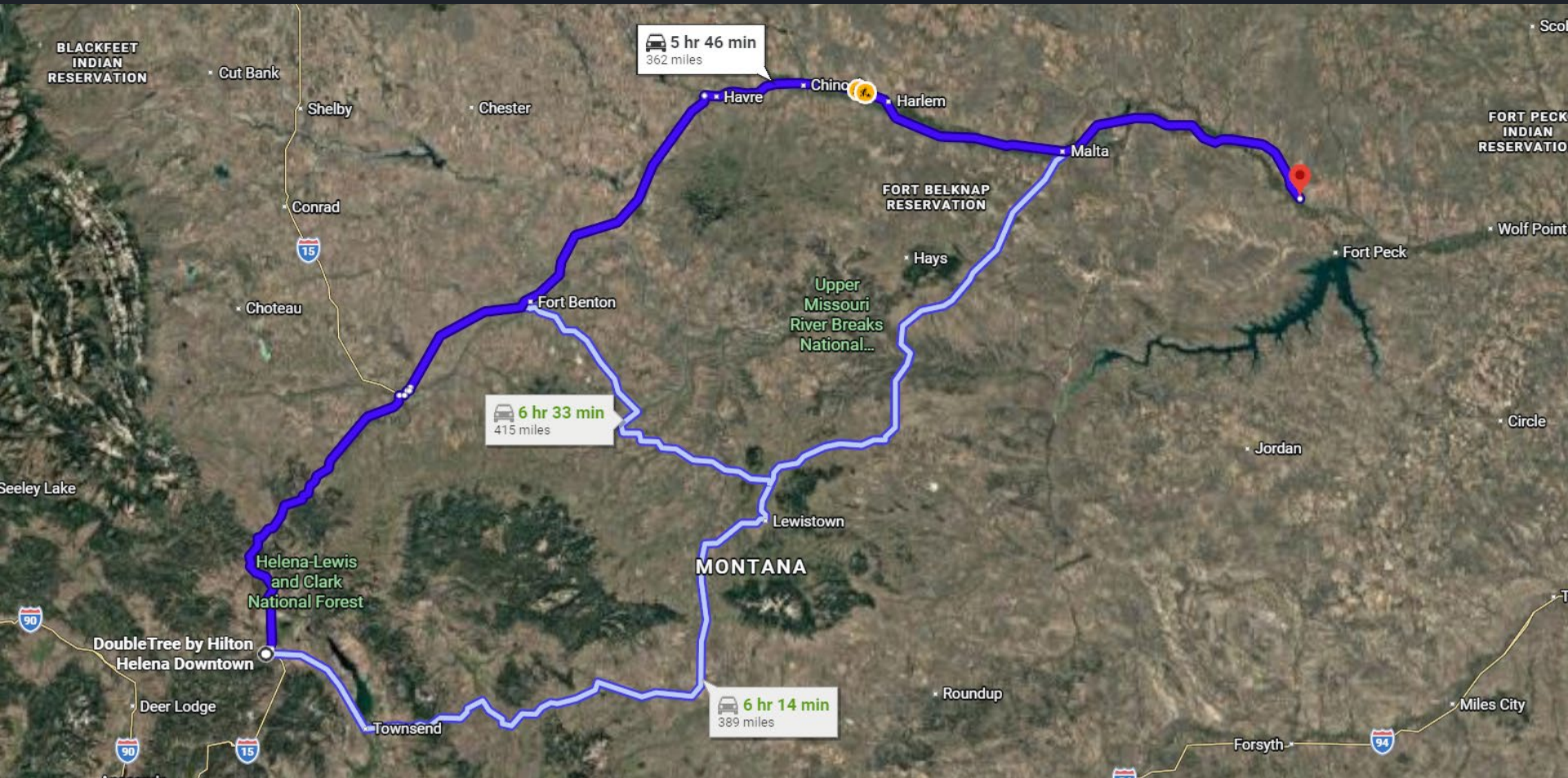
A real incident exposed gray areas. New policy clarifies the approval chain — distributed to all teams for review.

Reimbursement Waiver Process

New waiver letter process (modeled after the National Guard) allows local agencies to request cost forgiveness.

Rate Summary (FY 2025–2026)

Rate Type	Detail
Personnel	\$67.07/hour (flat rate maintained)
Equipment	Per MOU schedule
Backfill	Requesting agency NOT responsible
Waiver	Available via new waiver process



Part Four

What the Data Tells Us

LEPC report findings from 2025 — honest
insights driving targeted outreach.

Defining Local Authority: New Law, Real Challenges

Montana statute defines "Local Emergency Response Authority" (LERA) — implementation has hurdles.

What It Means

The entity with primary local authority for hazardous substance emergency response. Designation matters for legal clarity.

The Challenge

Statutory language has created implementation hurdles at the county attorney level. Some counties need legal guidance before they can formally designate.

The Workgroup Response

SERC formed a LERA workgroup in Nov 2024. Goal: Practical guidance to help counties navigate designation.

LERA Designation Status — 2025

40

Made at least some designation effort

18

Not yet designated

of 48 reporting jurisdictions (56 counties + 7 tribes in scope)

The LEPC Landscape in Montana — 2025

48 jurisdictions reported (56 counties + 7 tribal in scope). Data feeds directly into SERC support

Key Gaps — Where We Focus Outreach

LERA not designated	38%	Missing plan elements	60%
No annual plan review	46%	Media not engaged	72%

What This Drives

Targeted outreach on LERA

18 of 48 haven't designated a LERA. Workgroup formed to develop guidance and overcome county legal hurdles.

Media engagement

Media remains the least-engaged LEPC stakeholder. Virtual invitations to remote LEPCs being piloted.

Plan review prompts

22 of 48 don't conduct the required annual HazMat plan review. Even more don't have all planning elements. Direct outreach from state staff to assist LEPCs.

Part Five


Sustaining the Momentum

Momentum is not a result — it's a practice.
What Montana does to keep the system
moving.


What Keeping the System Moving Looks Like

These practices keep Montana's program from going dormant between crises.


Routine Newsletter Outreach

 MT DES newsletter delivers LEPC tidbits, CAMEO training notices, and resource updates statewide on a predictable schedule.


CAMEO + EPA Training

 CAMEO training distributed through weekly training updates. EPA Region 8 menu actively promoted — including exercises like the 2025 SLC earthquake drill.

Outreach + Speakers

 Coordinated speaker scheduling. Pre-vetted topics and contacts reduce the planning burden on volunteer committees.


Annual LEPC Reporting Cycle

 Forms out in October, due November 1. Results reviewed by SERC in November — a self-improving feedback loop into the next year's priorities.


What Montana Would Do Differently

The honest version matters more than the polished one.


Start with bylaws

 Going 20 years without formal SERC bylaws created ambiguity. Governance should be the first action — not the last.


Fix reporting early

 Section 304 notification gaps don't fix themselves. Proactive Tier 2 filer outreach and automated reminders matter — do it before an incident reveals the gap.

Media needs an invitation

 Media won't show up unless specifically and repeatedly invited. Virtual options remove the distance barrier for rural Montana.

LERAs need legal support

 When state law creates the obligation, counties need more than a memo — they need legal guidance, time, and a workgroup to navigate it

What Your State Can Take and Use Today

Montana's tools are designed to be shareable. Ask for any of these — they're yours.



Montana LEPC Handbook

Comprehensive how-to for any LEPC or SERC starting from scratch or rebuilding. Covers bylaws to chemical hazard analysis.



13 Topical One-Pagers

Monthly standalone reference sheets. Easy to co-brand for your state. One per LEPC meeting agenda item.



Deployment Flowchart

HazMat team deployment decision tool — eliminates gray areas in the approval chain.



LEPC Report Form

Fillable annual report that produces actionable data. Focus on what you'd actually change if you knew the answer.

Thank You

Questions about Montana's tools, or have solutions of your own to share? Find me after the session or reach out directly.



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Clarify · Connect · Simplify · Sustain