

HHS emPOWER Program

STORY FROM THE FIELD | BLIZZARDS IN GOSHEN COUNTY, WYOMING

The HHS emPOWER Program's (emPOWER) innovative tools support state and local efforts to anticipate, prepare for, and respond to the needs of electricity and health care dependent individuals across the emergency management cycle.

Why was the HHS emPOWER Program Needed?

During the Thanksgiving holiday of 2019, Goshen County, Wyoming, faced back-to-back severe blizzards with high winds of up to 60 miles per hour and projected prolonged freezing conditions. Roads and houses were snowed in, and the rural power cooperative projected power outages of up to 30 hours or more. Goshen County partnered with the Wyoming Department of Health (WDH) to officially request the restricted HHS emPOWER Emergency Response Outreach Individual Dataset (emPOWER Response Outreach Dataset) to support numerous multi-agency coordinated response outreach activities to at-risk individuals directly impacted by the severe storms and hazardous conditions.

How were the HHS emPOWER Program Tools Used?

Outreach Calls: Goshen County received the data and worked with the Goshen County Emergency Management Coordinator to rapidly compare it against other county information to develop a targeted plan and prioritization for conducting outreach activities to impacted at-risk individuals in their county. Leveraging local electric cooperative and company information, Goshen County compared the addresses in the emPOWER data against the areas that were projected to have prolonged power outages and required prioritized outreach activities. The Goshen County Emergency Management Coordinator partnered with the Sheriff's Office to identify areas where at-risk individuals resided in areas affected by the current power outage, then coordinated with the Sheriff's Office to conduct approximately 25 wellness checks by phone.

Wellness Checks: The Goshen County Sheriff's Office physically walked through blizzard conditions to conduct wellness checks of the snowed in at-risk residents without cell phones.

Partners



- Wyoming Department of Health
- Goshen County Sheriff's Office
- Goshen County Emergency Management
- Goshen County Road and Bridge Department
- Goshen County Electric Utilities & Rural Cooperatives
- Goshen County Durable Medical Equipment (DME) and Oxygen Suppliers
- American Red Cross

Quick Facts

Date: November – December 2019

Location: Goshen County, Wyoming



Tools used:

- ✓ emPOWER Emergency Response Outreach Individual Dataset

Stages of the Emergency Management Cycle:

- ✓ Preparedness
- ✓ Response
- ✓ Mitigation

"Goshen County was the first in Wyoming to use emPOWER to reach at-risk individuals during a disaster. This response underscored the need for this information to be available to protect the lives of at-risk individuals impacted by a disaster or emergency."

Shelly Kirchhefer, Goshen County Emergency Management Coordinator

What was the Impact?

WDH and Goshen County quickly partnered with multiple agencies and identified innovative ways to leverage their resources to reach at-risk individuals amidst power outages and severe blizzards affecting the county.

Best Practices:

- Leveraged the DME and oxygen supplier data in the emPOWER dataset to conduct wellness checks.
- Planned to continue collaboration with DME suppliers on emergency preparedness activities that can help address community needs and also encourage client personal preparedness for future events.
- Identified the need to access emPOWER data in advance of blizzards to prepare at-risk individuals by offering assistance to evacuate to a shelter and/or ensuring equipment has back-up power supplies to ensure individuals can safely shelter in place until power is restored.

What's Next?

Moving forward, WDH and Goshen County plan to formalize a new standard operating procedure for requesting and operationalizing emPOWER data, and WDH will train emergency managers and public health responders around the state on how to access and use emPOWER data. Goshen County also plans to continue their preparedness collaborations with local DME and oxygen suppliers to better anticipate, plan for, and respond to the needs of their at-risk population, and engage rural electricity cooperatives to inform power restoration prioritization for electricity-dependent individuals in future incidents, emergencies, or disasters.

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