#REMSontheAir Podcast Intro (Recorded): [00:00:00] Welcome to the *#REMSontheAir* Podcast, hosted by your partners at the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Safe and Supportive Schools and its Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools Technical Assistance Center. If you're an old friend, you know us as the REMS TA Center, your national school safety center.

Join us as we chat about key topics in school and campus safety, security, and emergency management with experts and partners from the field.

Janelle Hughes: We are so excited to be joined by Kevin Martin from the University of North Carolina in Charlotte. Welcome, Kevin. Do you mind telling us a little bit about yourself and your role within your institution?

Kevin Martin: Certainly. [00:01:00] Good morning. My name is Kevin Martin. I am Deputy Director of the Office of Emergency Management here at UNC Charlotte. I have been here for a little over 7 years. I'm also an alum of the institution, so I was also here a good many years ago. I've worked in emergency services, various rescue squads in the western North Carolina, to serving on urban search and rescue teams—all of that kind of stuff—for about 20 years now. And really the last 10 or so has been higher education emergency management–focused.

Within my role here, I lead up mainly the preparedness efforts. We have a planner. We have other people that help, but really, the—I'm kind of the architect of the emergency management apparatus, [00:02:00] as I like to call it, here on campus. So, good or bad, it's generally—it's a lot of my ideas.

Janelle Hughes: And we're sure that they're all good ideas. It's so great to hear that you are an alum as well, and I'm sure it's great for you to come back and, you know, to serve your college in a different way.

Kevin Martin: Yes, absolutely. My mother was actually the first graduating class from here in 1969.

Janelle Hughes: Oh, wow.

Kevin Martin: I could definitely say then it was five buildings. And now we're a hundred and something and second/third largest institution in the state, depending on what semester's enrollment looks like between us and UNC Chapel Hill. I never would have thought so many years ago that a degree in religious studies, concentrating in Eastern philosophy, would put me back here doing [00:03:00] this work. But I am certainly happy to be here. Thoroughly enjoy what I do in the campus in general. It's very lovely campus, though it has grown quite a bit since I was here earlier in my life. But it's quite good.

Janelle Hughes: Well, you know, as you said, we're also happy, you know, that you kind of made that full circle moment in coming back. And we know that considering the size, you know, of UNC and Charlotte, you know, and thinking about emergency management, we can only imagine some of the situations that you are managing from an emergency preparedness, but also a response, perspective. And I know that at your institution, you use Community Lifelines to support emergency management as well as emergency response. So, can you explain what Community Lifelines is and describe some of its components for us? [00:04:00]

Kevin Martin: Yes, absolutely. So, this is going to be the only time that I will quote FEMA, but I thought it'd be easier to get it from the proverbial horse's mouth instead of my interpretation of it, and then we can go into that further.

So, from FEMA, "a lifeline enables the continuous operation of critical government and business functions and is essential to human health and safety or economic security. Lifelines are the most fundamental services in the community that, when stabilized, enable all other aspects of society to function. FEMA has developed a construct for objectives-based response that prioritizes the rapid stabilization of Community Lifelines after a disaster."

Yeah, having said that and gotten it out of the way, what are we really talking about here? And the way that I look at it is we're talking about buckets of information. It's information about fundamental services of a [00:05:00] community, like FEMA said. This information leads to objective-based response that will prioritize the very aspects that allow society to function. Also, as FEMA said, it makes sense, right? We're kind of talking about a Maslow's hierarchy of community needs.

Right? So, that's really what we're talking about is what is the most fundamental things that need to be put in place for a community, for society as a whole, to get back going. We certainly see this right now, the folks in Maui—You know, that's what they're looking at is they're looking at what are the lifelines that need to be put into place so that the people can get back to a normal life.

Within Community Lifelines, FEMA just rolled out version 2.1. So, it's [00:06:00] the latest version. Really what has changed is FEMA's added an eighth lifeline: water systems. That was never previous. It was only seven before that. The seven previous lifelines are still there and functionally the same. There's safety and security; food, hydration, and shelter—that one actually changed a little bit because it used to say food, water, and shelter, but now it says hydration to separate it—health and medical; energy; communications; transportation; and hazardous materials.

Each of these lifelines have subcomponents. For example, the health and medical lifeline is broken down into medical care, public health, patient movement, medical supply chain, and

fatality management. All of those subcomponents then inform what the overall lifeline of how it's looking. They use colors like red, yellow, green [00:07:00] because everybody understands that. But really, it's: What are the stressors? What are the problems? What have we—what problems have we taken care of? What are we still working on to get the lifelines all back to a green status, right? Green is happy generally. So, it's getting back to that point.

Janelle Hughes: Thank you so much for that breakdown. And out of curiosity, how and why did you adopt Community Lifelines at UNC Charlotte?

Kevin Martin: Yeah, that's actually a great question because at the time I hadn't seen anyone else use these. I knew that FEMA had rolled them out after 2018/2019 when they were kind of testing them. But I hadn't seen anyone else do it by the time we were actually starting to implement this. But really, we needed a better way to [00:08:00] communicate and prioritize impacts from the—from an emergency with our administration, with campus stakeholders, that was limited in the FEMA-izing, right? Not too much jargon, not too much—it's something that everybody could understand.

So really, when this lifeline idea started rolling out, and we were watching it go and then, "OK, yep, it seems to be sticking. Let's start really looking at [it]." So really, I mean, we were just looking for buckets of inf—buckets to put information about response and recovery tasks and activities. You know, what's actually going on? What's the challenges? Really, that's—that was the whole reason, right? It's—we were trying to figure out how we could brief administration on: Here's what the bad things are. Here's the good things. So that way they could be making policy decisions, [00:09:00] decisions about, you know, canceling classes—all of this. But in a succinct way of doing it and in a framework that was consistent but that everybody understood really what the challenges were and are, and, you know, how can we go from there?

Now, we certainly did adapt the actual lifelines to better fit our needs, but largely they were expanded out of working groups that were utilized during the COVID response. I knew that I wanted to move us towards Community Lifelines, but I wasn't ready to introduce a new way of looking at campus emergency management. We had just rolled out a new EOP [emergency operations plan] in 2019. It was working towards this idea, but I didn't put it in there knowing that the next revision was where it was going to be. And since we already had the teams and task force working specific areas [00:10:00] during the pandemic response, it was easy enough to shift those to where we needed—where we needed them to be within the lifelines without having to do a formal rollout of a whole new lexicon and have to present that when we could just slow roll the implementation and really get to where we—where we wanted to be.

So briefly, some of the changes that we made: Energy lifeline, we turned to utilities. That's why we haven't added the eighth water systems because it's all facilities management anyway. There's no reason to break up that department further. I really don't want to get into trying to

use ESFs [emergency support functions] on a university campus, but you've got the same people doing multiple ESFs. It makes no sense within from what I have seen trying to do it. The other change that [00:11:00] we did was we left out HAZMAT. We don't have a response capability for that other than normal SOP [standard operating procedure] lab—minor lab spill kind of things. If it's actually, truly a HAZMAT event, Charlotte fire department's going to come in. They have a HAZMAT team. They have multiples. They're going to take control of that.

We wanted to keep our lifelines with things that we had control over. You know, we don't have control over firefighting. Fire is not a lifeline, really—I guess would be the lack thereof would be the lifeline. So why would, as we looked at it, why would we include HAZMAT? It just didn't make sense for us.

One that we did add was university services. So, we have seven, dropped HAZMAT, haven't added water because we've already got that taken care of in utilities, and then our seventh is [00:12:00] university services. This is where we can report on academics, research, athletics, everything else at the university that's very important and, you know, really some of it is the mission of why the university is here.

But it gives us a bucket to put all the other stuff that doesn't fit into our report and say, you know, "This is what—the football game is going to be impacted because of this tropical storm," or whatever the case may be. But, again, it gives us a bucket to put that that type of information in as well.

Janelle Hughes: Wow. That sounds like a very layered process. And you spoke for a moment about ESFs, which we here at the REMS TA Center, we know that that stands for emergency support functions, but can you talk a little bit through your thinking behind, you know, not integrating them into this framework? [00:13:00]

Kevin Martin: Oh, sure. Yeah, so we had tried, we had thought about, we contemplated, we'd rolled out ESFs, emergency support functions. And it really, you know, within our EOC [emergency operations center], you have your main players come in, right? Your facilities folks, your dining folks, your housing folks, and it really didn't make sense to rename our parking and transportation people to Transportation ESF 1 because—why—it's—why do we—it's not always a good thing.

I realize in ICS [Incident Command System], that one of the main things people like to do is give new titles to people. But within EOC operations, you know, that's not necessarily the best thing [00:14:00] and by keeping people departmental, because the parking folks and transportation folks are going to be doing parking and transportation anyway, why am I going to relabel them as an ESF 1? They're already doing the work. And then when you get to facilities, and they have a part of communications because of the—you know, whether it's hard lines for

telecommunications or fiber-optic or whatever—they have a part of that. But they also have parts of energy. They have parts of water sys—you're splitting up an ESF. It works great for a Federal response, state response. Definitely see why they do it. But for an institution, it doesn't make sense to try to break up a department to cover different ESFs when they're really just trying to do utilities.

So, it wasn't [00:15:00] helping us coordinate better in the EOC. It wasn't helping us better communicate across campus and with administration on what was going on. So, it didn't make sense to throw something else in that wasn't necessarily needed. If that makes sense.

Janelle Hughes: That does make sense. Thank you so much for explaining that for our audience.

Kevin Martin: Absolutely.

Janelle Hughes: And in thinking about your integration of Community Lifelines at UNC, what would you say is one of the most effective strategies that you used?

Kevin Martin: You know, I—effective strategies. I think it's really—it really comes down to just having a good way of communicating what is needed from incident command, EOC, to your policy group [00:16:00] and what the incident command is going to—is—it uses ICS, and they have the positions, and they have the things, but when you're talking about EOC and what you're trying to communicate to your administration, it's helpful to have a consistent way of doing that, a (for lack of a better word) simple way of doing that.

And I really—I really think that's where lifelines shine on this. Cause you're really putting what's the most important things that need—that we need to keep our community going. And where—you know, where are we with the status of those? Was it an ice storm? So, the tops of parking decks are all covered in ice, but the lower levels are fine? What—and—but we also have trees down [00:17:00] over sidewalks, or we've lost power because a tree fell on a transmission line.

It's really having a way to simply communicate, to be able to build a one-page brief that you can send out twice a day, and you can show the colors of, yes, this is what we're working on. You know, we're working on parking, or transportation is a problem because we've got ice-covered roads, or we've got trees down. And then be able to list out: Here's the impacts. This is what we're doing. And be able to succinctly do that in a page is really invaluable because it's—you know, you need to be able to get your ideas across as succinctly and as efficiently as possible to get to a decision that you need, so you can move forward on the next step.

And a lot of that may be, are we having classes or are we not having classes? One of the great [00:18:00]— I can't say great things, but one of the things after the pandemic is now there's—

it's very easy to go to remote classes versus actually, you know, having to attend. I think that over the next couple of years, the idea of a traditional snow day at a university won't exist anymore, right? We're not going to cancel classes because of snow because people can work from home. People can take classes from home. As long as you don't have widespread power outage over the whole region, you know, there's no reason not to have that class time because now we have systems in place to take care of it that were—had to be developed because of the pandemic.

But I think being able to communicate what the actual impacts are and what we need assistance with, what we need direction with, what we need, you know, money [00:19:00] for at times. But to be able to do that in a concise manner is very important for us because we, you know, we are emergency managers basically in a decent-size town, in a decent-size city, in a decently populated county of a state. So, we need to be able to communicate what we need and what help we need, where we're good, and what we think is going to be going forward.

Janelle Hughes: Thank you so much, Kevin, and you really make a great point just in thinking about, you know, the snow days and just the evolution, you know, of emergency response at education agencies, you know, as more technology is integrated. And I know that you all have done things in thinking about Community Lifelines, such as customizing the lifeline icons [00:20:00] and, you know, integrating some reporting strategies. But are there any specific tips that you have for other higher ed emergency managers on implementing Community Lifelines into their institutions?

Kevin Martin: Yeah, absolutely. Great question. I would say that if anybody out there is—has been looking for a way to, "How can I report information and how can I report the information the way that it will guide our response and recovery efforts?" You know, have a look at lifelines.

I think that they really are nice in how they summarize what the major challenges are, and you can use them for more than that. Realistically, I mean, if we look at FEMA usage of lifelines for response, it's about a unity of effort, right? You're trying to get these things [00:21:00] done first because without these things, the rest of the things don't really work.

So, you know, they can be—it can be more than just a reporting tool. It can be a guide for: these are the things that are most important that we need to do first, or this is where we need to put our maximum effort because this is what's holding us back from being back to (I'm using air quotes) "normal," right?

And because we're—EOCs aren't governed, they're not under the purview of an ICS police, right? Nobody's going to come out and tell you you're doing it wrong in your EOC. You can adapt these things. You can add these things. You can change the item. We changed the icons because I needed something that was more representative.

But, you know, it's—it gives me that tool to communicate that, [00:22:00] you know, this— these are our challenges. But because we're not under the purview of an ICS police, we can adapt these to fit the best that we need for our communities, for our stakeholders, right? I don't know what you have to lose for not—for not thinking about it, for not trying it.

I get—certainly understand that universities are very large ships, and it takes a lot to turn one, to use that metaphor. But, you know, it worked really well for us by just kind of sliding them in and getting people used to the idea of introducing—and there we are. Because these small improvements, you know, they add up after a while, and pretty soon people just understand: "Oh, yeah, we know what they're talking about when they say the lifelines," because we just slid it in during other things going on. Nobody really seemed to [00:23:00] notice of—and here we are.

Now, we've just completed another rewrite of our EOP. We have a lifeline annex. We have the whole thing full rolled out, and it makes sense. It's how when we do incident management team, that's what we call our group of stakeholders around campus, but when we do our monthly meetings, people already know that they're reporting out according to their lifeline. That that's how we do it. So, we've always got this in front of them, and they're always thinking about it, but it's such a simple idea that it's not a hard sell. It's not like some other things that have been tried that, you know, it takes a lot for people to understand because it's very, it's very jargon based. It's very, I always say FEMA-ized, right? It's always—it's a lot of acronyms and initialisms and all of [00:24:00] this kind of stuff, whereas this just makes sense. It's like, oh yeah, no, yeah, we definitely need power back on before we can do anything else. Great. Moving on.

So, I would just say if somebody's thinking about it, give it a try, run it by some people, see if you can start working in—see how you're already organized, and maybe this is just another step to that. Or maybe just start using it for reporting and not change your organization until you see whether it's working. But I think it's great. I mean, I've really been happy with the reception of it, with the understanding of it. It's not complex, and it really gets to the heart of what we're trying to do by making our universities more resilient, right? I mean, that's what we're all trying to do.

Janelle Hughes: Yes, that is our shared goal. You shared such a wealth of information with us today. [00:25:00] And just to close things off, I have one final question for you in terms of resources. Are there any that you would recommend, where people can go to find more information about Community Lifelines?

Kevin Martin: Absolutely. FEMA's really the best place to start. So, a simple Web search of FEMA Community Lifelines Toolkit will get you a link of where you need to be. I would say, remember, we're on 2.1, so if you veer off of that specific toolkit, you may find older

information. If you're gonna be starting this, you might as well start with the latest version, so it's 2.1. I would read out the URL, but I think that would be ridiculous at this point. You can just search for FEMA Community Lifelines Toolkit.

Janelle Hughes: Well, again, thank you so much, Kevin. We always appreciate having these conversations [00:26:00] with you, learning from you. And most importantly, we appreciate all that you do to keep your institution safe and ready for any emergencies that may come your way.

Kevin Martin: Well, I'd like to thank you very much for having me on to talk about this. I've really become a convert of the community lifelines idea over the last 3, 4 years. I really hope everyone else out there has some success with it, or if not, would love to know what great ideas you have. But again, thank you for having me on the podcast.

Janelle Hughes: Thank you so much, Kevin.