

PUBLIC SAFETY

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INTRODUCTION

County governments are often the first line of defense in protecting the public from harm. As such, ensuring public safety is a county's greatest responsibility. County government leaders should strive to understand the current state of public safety in their community and promote continuous improvement of public safety services to ensure citizens remain well-protected. Public safety agencies must have the necessary personnel, training, equipment, and resources at all times to respond effectively to emergencies and perform lifesaving actions.

This chapter provides an overview of the following county-level public safety services and providers:

- **Fire protection** – department types, standards and requirements, ratings, personnel, and mandatory medical insurance.
- **Emergency 9-1-1 services** – funding, state responsibilities, and training requirements.
- **PTSD insurance for first responders** – program, eligibility, and insurance coverage.
- **Emergency management** – functions, duties, agreements, and interaction with state and federal agencies.
- **Animal care and control** – obligations and non-mandatory animal welfare programs.
- **Code enforcement** – purposes and implementation.

Within counties, there is significant overlap between these public safety services and law enforcement. Please note that all law enforcement information and requirements can be found in the [Criminal Justice Chapter](#) of this handbook.

Throughout the chapter, the term “county governing authority” will be used to represent boards of commissioners, sole commissioners, and consolidated governments.

FIRE PROTECTION

The essential mission of a fire department is to save lives and protect property. A fire department's mission-critical activities include fire suppression, emergency medical services, disaster response, fire code inspections and enforcement, fire investigations, and public education for fire prevention.

Types of Fire Departments

There are career, volunteer, and combination fire departments. A career fire department has all-paid personnel, other than paid-on-call firefighters. A volunteer fire department is made up of only volunteers. Combination fire departments have both paid and volunteer personnel. Firefighting personnel include individuals who are firefighters, fire department officers, or fire department emergency medical service staff.

In general, fire departments with paid employees are found in urban or suburban areas. Departments served only by volunteers are more prevalent in rural counties where the population and demand for fire protection is lower.

The Georgia Firefighter Standards and Training Council (GFSTC) is authorized to adopt rules and regulations and establish and modify minimum requirements for all Georgia fire departments, whether employing full-time or part-time firefighters or using volunteer firefighters.¹

Requirements

To be legally organized within the State of Georgia, a fire department must meet or exceed minimum requirements related to its structure, capabilities, and operation.²

A fire department must be:

- Established to provide fire and other emergency and nonemergency services in accordance with standards specified by the local government, as well as by the GFSTC.
- Capable of providing fire protection 24 hours a day, 365 days per year within a defined area of operations that is approved and designated by the local governing authority and depicted on a map located at each fire station.
- Staffed with a sufficient number of full-time, part-time, or volunteer firefighters who have successfully completed basic firefighter training as specified by the GFSTC.³

The GFSTC sets forth additional minimum requirements for all fire departments in the state. Fire departments must be staffed with a minimum number of trained Volunteer Suppression Firefighters or State Certified Firefighters – at least four per fire station – who have the following requirements:

- Are at least 18 years old.
- Appointed by a legally organized and compliant fire department.
- Have successfully completed basic firefighter training.⁴

Insurance coverage must be maintained for all personnel.⁵ In addition, fire departments must possess documentation from the Safety Fire Division of the Georgia Office of Insurance and Safety Fire Commissioner indicating that the fire department remains in compliance with the reporting requirements for fires by state law.⁶

To receive a Certificate of Compliance and legally commence operations, a newly formed county fire department must submit a Compliance Package to GFSTC. The package includes:

- A completed compliance application.
- A map of the defined area of operation.
- A letter from the county governing authority approving the designated area of authority.
- An affidavit from the local governing authority affirming the department's ability to carry out its duties and functions within this area.
- A copy of the firefighter insurance certificate.⁷

Before the fire department may begin legal operations, GFSTC staff must conduct an on-site review to confirm the information contained in the Compliance Package.⁸

Equipment Requirements

In accordance with state law, each fire department must possess a minimum of the following types of equipment and protective clothing:

- One fully equipped, operable pumper with a capacity of at least 750 gallons per minute (GPM) at 150 pounds per square inch (PSI) and a tank capacity of a minimum of 250 gallons.⁹ However, previously approved fire apparatus that does not meet this minimum standard may be used in lieu of the required pumper until replaced by the local authority¹⁰ but only until January 1, 2025, per the GFSTC.¹¹
- Two GFSTC-approved Self-Contained Breathing Apparatus (SCBA) for each pumping apparatus.
- Issue of sufficient personal protective clothing to permit each firefighter to safely perform his or her job duties.¹²
- GFSTC-approved equipment, appliances, adapters, and accessories necessary to perform and carry out the duties and responsibilities of a fire department.

The GFSTC sets forth specific minimum requirements for equipment, appliances, adapters, and accessories for structural pumper apparatus.¹³

The GFSTC requires personal protective clothing for each firefighter who engages in fighting structure fires.¹⁴ The condition of all protective clothing and firefighting equipment is recommended to be checked after each use and on an annual basis.¹⁵ A sampling of the department's protective clothing must be made available to GFSTC staff during an on-site review.¹⁶

Georgia Fire Academy

The [Georgia Fire Academy](#) (GFA) is a division within the Georgia Public Safety Training Center. Established in 1975, the GFA oversees basic and advanced training for career and volunteer firefighters. The GFA provides numerous training programs and materials for firefighters, including the Basic Firefighter Program that is available to all firefighters to download free of charge.

State Fire Marshal

The Georgia State Fire Marshal is appointed by the Insurance and Safety Fire Commissioner.¹⁷ The State Fire Marshal investigates local fires and other fire safety-related laws at the request of the state commissioner, sheriff, chief of police, district attorney, or local fire official and is authorized to make arrests for criminal violations.¹⁸ The State Fire Marshal's Investigation Unit not only can be called upon to investigate fires, but also has accelerant detection K9 teams available to local authorities upon request.¹⁹ The Office of the State Fire Marshal is responsible for issuing licenses and permits to regulate hazardous materials and manufactured housing.²⁰

Water Supply

Water supply – critical to extinguishing fires – is the single greatest factor impacting a fire department's effectiveness rating (see ISO Rating).²¹ Water supplies must be automatic, dependable, and have enough volume and pressure to meet demand – which is often higher for industrial and commercial fires than for residential fires. Water systems, water main capacity, and fire hydrant distribution all may affect the supply of water available to a fire department.²²

Water supplies for fire protection include the following:

- Connection to a public water main at the street level, provided that a water flow test indicates volume exceeds peak demand.
- Water storage tanks, which are often used where an adequate supply of water is not available or reliable.
- Naturally occurring sources, such as rivers, streams, ponds, or lakes.
- Recycled or reclaimed water.²³

Counties may use one or more water sources and delivery systems and should ensure they are maintained in peak condition to be ready at all times for an emergency.

Fire Station Placement and Uses

Fire stations are placed strategically to reduce emergency response time and ensure all areas of a community are as well-protected as possible. Factors considered in selecting appropriate locations for fire stations may include geography, population density, historical call volume, and any special infrastructure needs, such as nearby tall buildings or large-capacity public venues.

The National Fire Protection Agency (NFPA) establishes response objectives for fire departments that can also help guide station placement and allocation of resources. For a career fire department, the response time objective for a first-due engine dispatched to a structure fire is four minutes, 90% of the time.²⁴ For a volunteer fire department in a rural area, the objective is 14 minutes, 80% of the time.²⁵

In addition to their regular functions, fire stations may be constructed to allow for use by the public as shelters in emergencies. Additional space must be designated for this purpose so that the work of the fire department is unimpeded.

Fire stations serve another important purpose. All fire departments are required by Georgia's Safe Haven Law to allow stations to serve as drop-off points to accept unwanted babies who are less than 30 days old. The law provides criminal immunity to a mother who chooses to leave her newborn baby in the physical custody of a staff member or volunteer at any fire station.²⁶

ISO Rating

The Insurance Services Office (ISO) is an organization licensed by the Georgia Insurance and Safety Fire Commissioner to perform independent audits of fire department coverage. By classifying the ability of fire departments to suppress fires according to an objective, nationwide standard, ISO helps guide fire departments in benchmarking and improving their facilities, equipment, and training.

ISO uses a Fire Suppression Rating Schedule that results in a Public Protection Classification (PPC) from one to ten. Class 1 represents superior property fire protection, while Class 10 indicates a failure to meet ISO's minimum criteria.²⁷ The Fire Suppression Rating Schedule considers the following elements to determine a fire department's PPC:

- **Emergency communications systems**, indicating how well the fire department receives and responds to fire alarms (a maximum of 10 points).

- **The fire department**, including equipment, staffing and training, and geographic distribution of fire stations (a maximum of 50 points).
- **The water supply system**, gauging whether the community has sufficient water supply and functioning, accessible hydrants for fire suppression (a maximum of 40 points).
- **Community efforts to reduce the risk of fire**, including fire prevention codes and enforcement, public fire safety education, and fire investigation programs (extra credit of up to 5.5 points).²⁸

Most insurers of home and business properties in the United States use PPC in calculating premiums. If all other factors are equal, the price of insurance in a community whose fire department maintains a good PPC is typically lower than in a community with a poor PPC.²⁹ Consequently, the PPC program incentivizes counties to continuously improve their firefighting services.³⁰

Employment and Training Standards

To ensure that firefighters are prepared to take on the dangerous tasks required by their jobs, the GFSTC has established qualifications for individuals employed by or volunteering for fire departments in Georgia and minimum standards for training.

General Qualifications

To be an employee, volunteer, or private contractor of a fire department operating in Georgia or to be certified as a firefighter in the state, a person must meet the following minimum qualifications:

- Be at least 18 years old.
- Be fingerprinted and pass a search of local, state, and national fingerprint files to disclose any criminal record.
- Within ten years prior to employment, not been convicted of or pleaded guilty to a felony or a crime that in Georgia would constitute a felony – with rare exception for individuals who meet a rigorous set of requirements.³¹
- Have a good moral character as determined by investigation under a GFSTC-approved procedure.
- Be in good physical condition as determined by a medical exam and successfully pass the minimum physical agility requirements established by the GFSTC.
- Within 12 months after employment, possess or achieve a high school diploma or a state-approved high school equivalency diploma.³²

Qualifications for Volunteer Firefighters

Any person serving as a volunteer firefighter must not have been convicted of or pleaded guilty to a felony or a crime that in Georgia would constitute a felony, within ten years prior to volunteering. A person who has been convicted of a felony more than five but less than ten years prior to volunteering may be registered as a volunteer firefighter after meeting the following requirements:

- Successful completion of a training program following the Georgia Fire Academy curriculum and sponsored by the Department of Corrections.
- Been recommended to a volunteer fire department by the proper authorities at the institution where the training took place.
- Complied with all other volunteer firefighter requirements.³³

Training

Firefighters must successfully complete a basic training course, either within 12 months of being employed as a full-time or part-time firefighter or within 18 months of being appointed as a volunteer firefighter. Upon completing basic training, a full-time or part-time firefighter receives certification from the GFSTC.³⁴ This certification may be transferred upon termination of employment from any fire department if the subsequently employing fire department chooses to accept it.³⁵ Fire departments may refuse to accept the transfer of previously acquired certification and may require any newly employed firefighter to complete a basic training course.³⁶

As a condition of continued certification, all firefighters train, drill, or study at schools, classes, or courses at the local, regional, or state level, as specified by the GFSTC.³⁷

Fire departments may set and establish requirements that exceed these mandatory minimum training standards.³⁸

Drug Testing Requirement

Firefighters who successfully complete training are subject to random testing for evidence of use of illegal drugs. Such testing must occur at least biannually for the first two years of licensure or certification. The cost of all drug testing must be borne by the employer.³⁹ Specific rules and regulations governing the purposes and procedures for firefighter drug testing are determined by the GFSTC.⁴⁰

Firefighter Insurance

Every legally organized fire department in Georgia is required to provide, maintain, and show proof of sufficient insurance coverage for each member of the fire department.

This coverage pays claims for injuries sustained enroute to, during, and returning from fire calls, other emergencies, and scheduled training sessions.⁴¹

In addition, each fire department must provide and maintain sufficient lump sum and long-term disability insurance coverage for each of its firefighters to pay claims for cancer diagnosed after a firefighter has served in the department for 12 consecutive months.⁴² The combined total of all lump sum benefits received by a firefighter in accordance with cancer-related insurance coverage requirements must not exceed \$50,000 over his or her lifetime.⁴³

To help communities comply with the state requirement to provide certain firefighter cancer insurance benefits, the ACCG-Interlocal Risk Management Agency (ACCG-IRMA) offers the Georgia Firefighter Cancer Benefit Program. Member counties contribute to the program through the Supplemental Medical, Accident, and Disability Fund to provide for firefighters' cancer benefit needs.⁴⁴

The Executive Director of the GFSTC must be notified immediately upon cancellation or reinstatement of any policy for the coverage of each member of the fire department.⁴⁵

EMERGENCY 9-1-1 SERVICES

Emergency 9-1-1 services connect citizens quickly and easily with law enforcement, fire, medical, rescue, and other emergency services. Replacing the use of different emergency phone numbers, the streamlined 9-1-1 system was implemented to reduce the response time to situations requiring public safety resources. The ability to simply dial 9-1-1 to notify public safety personnel of emergencies saves lives, reduces the destruction of property, and assists in apprehending criminals more quickly.⁴⁶ A 9-1-1 service may be provided by a single county or city or through multijurisdictional or regional 9-1-1 systems.⁴⁷

A primary 9-1-1 call center directly receives incoming 9-1-1 telephone calls. After receiving the incoming 9-1-1 call, the primary 9-1-1 center will either dispatch the appropriate public safety agencies to respond or transfer the call to the appropriate center for processing.⁴⁸ In some cases, the 9-1-1 call answering service and the dispatching service may be in separate centers, with dispatch centers receiving calls transferred from a primary 9-1-1 center, calls for service from a non-emergency 10-digit number, or directly receiving requests from first responders. For example, while a city often contracts with a county to receive its jurisdiction's 9-1-1 calls at a primary 9-1-1 center, these 9-1-1 calls could be transferred to the city for dispatch.

9-1-1 Advisory Board

A county governing authority may create, by resolution, a 9-1-1 advisory board to support its delivery of 9-1-1 services that meets community needs. With a maximum membership of 13 people, a 9-1-1 advisory board consists of the sheriff, representatives from other public safety agencies that respond to 9-1-1 emergency calls, and other individuals knowledgeable of emergency needs and 9-1-1 systems.⁴⁹ A 9-1-1 advisory board assists the county by:

- Reviewing and analyzing the progress by public safety agencies in developing 9-1-1 system requirements.
- Recommending steps of action to coordinate, regulate, and develop a 9-1-1 system.
- Identifying mutual aid agreements needed for the effective operation of the 9-1-1 system.

The board may also help implement necessary rules, regulations, operating procedures, and schedules related to 9-1-1 and provide other relevant services needed by the county.⁵⁰

The members of the advisory board shall not be compensated from moneys deposited into the Emergency Telephone System Fund.

Basic 9-1-1

As of 2024, Georgia no longer has Basic 9-1-1 systems. All counties provide Enhanced 9-1-1 service. Basic 9-1-1 technology was limited to delivering 9-1-1 calls to a 9-1-1 center within the caller's exchange. Unfortunately, Basic 9-1-1 service did not provide the caller's telephone number or location because it could only relay voice data, so the caller had to verbally provide their location and call back number to the 9-1-1 call taker. In addition, 9-1-1 calling areas in a basic system cannot be aligned to the boundaries of a county or city. Therefore, a 9-1-1 center may inadvertently receive calls from outside its jurisdiction or miss calls that were placed within the county or city limits.⁵¹

Enhanced 9-1-1

With Enhanced 9-1-1, known as E9-1-1, most 9-1-1 systems now automatically report the telephone number and location of 9-1-1 calls made from wireline phones. Selective routing is then used to route the 9-1-1 call to the jurisdiction that serves the location of the caller.

In compliance with Federal Communications Commission (FCC) rules, carriers and public safety entities have upgraded their 9-1-1 systems to E9-1-1 to more effectively route wireless 9-1-1 calls. E9-1-1 "improve the effectiveness and reliability of wireless 9-

1-1 services by providing 9-1-1 dispatchers with additional information on wireless 9-1-1 calls.”⁵² The National Emergency Number Association defines E9-1-1 Wireless Phase I & II as “the delivery of a wireless 9-1-1 call with callback number and identification of the cell-tower from which the call originated. Call routing is usually determined by cell-sector.”⁵³

The advantage of having E9-1-1, includes:

- Selective call transfer allowing staff to forward the call to the proper emergency agency.
- Display of the incoming call phone number, enabling staff to call back if disconnected.
- Display of the calling telephone’s address.
- Easier coordination of emergency aid when more than one emergency service is needed.
- Improved data collection enabling review and improvement in the delivery of emergency services.⁵⁴

Next Generation 9-1-1

Next Generation 9-1-1 (NG9-1-1) is an emerging 9-1-1 technology and its advantages are numerous.⁵⁵ NG9-1-1 improves interoperability between first responders, helping share life-saving information among police, medical responders, and fire departments – even among different counties and cities – quickly, seamlessly, and with better accuracy. With NG9-1-1, all 9-1-1 calls may be answered, even in conditions of call overload, power outage, or natural disaster. NG9-1-1 also enables the public to access emergency help in new ways, such as through text message or video.⁵⁶

While the technology to implement NG9-1-1 is available today, the transition is complex and gradual.⁵⁷ The first step in moving Georgia to NG9-1-1 is deploying a statewide ESInet and purchasing Next Generation Core Services (NGCS), which are the services needed to process a 9-1-1 call on an ESInet. Georgia also needs to continue creating a geospatial address database. Building a statewide NG9-1-1 system and connecting local 9-1-1 centers to the statewide system will require significant state leadership and funding.

Funding

Counties are authorized by state law to charge certain fees to help fund the operation and maintenance of their E9-1-1 system. Since E9-1-1 fees rarely cover the full cost of providing E9-1-1 services, counties often use other revenue sources, such as property taxes, to make up the shortfall. Local governments also receive 5% from moneys

collected from the excise tax on the sale of consumer fireworks for use in supporting E9-1-1 systems.⁵⁸

Monthly E9-1-1 and Wireless E9-1-1 Charges

A county governing authority that operates or contracts for an emergency E9-1-1 service can adopt a resolution to impose a E9-1-1 telephone charge.⁵⁹ A monthly fee of \$1.50 for every wireline, wireless (including prepaid wireless), and VoIP being provided E9-1-1 service may be imposed upon all telephone subscribers having an address in the county.⁶⁰

The telephone service supplier collects the revenues from E9-1-1 charges and wireless E9-1-1 charges. The telephone service provider collects the revenues from E9-1-1 and wireless E9-1-1 charges and must remit these revenues monthly to the Georgia Department of Revenue (DOR). At the end of each month, all service providers have 20 business days to remit the revenues to DOR, along with a report identifying the amount of the charges collected and remitted from telephone subscribers attributed to each county or city that operates or contracts for the operation of a 9-1-1 center. After this date, they accrue interest. DOR has 10 business days of the following month to process and distribute the collected revenues to appropriate local jurisdictions.⁶¹

Unless a city has imposed an E9-1-1 charge within its boundaries, a county's E9-1-1 telephone fee is applied countywide.⁶² If both a county and a city within the county have imposed an E9-1-1 charge, a wireless service supplier may certify to either local government that it cannot determine whether the billing addresses of its subscribers are in the local government's geographic service area.⁶³

Prepaid Wireless E9-1-1 Charge

Counties that operate or contract for the operation of a primary 9-1-1 center are also authorized to impose – by ordinance or resolution – a \$1.50 charge for every purchase of prepaid wireless service.⁶⁴ The prepaid wireless E9-1-1 charge is collected by the seller at the point of sale; the seller is permitted to retain 3% of collected charges as an administrative fee.⁶⁵ Sellers send prepaid wireless E9-1-1 charges to the state revenue commissioner.⁶⁶ The commissioner, in turn, remits the revenue monthly to counties that have levied the prepaid wireless E9-1-1 charge and filed with the commissioner a certified copy of the ordinance or resolution authorizing the charge.⁶⁷

Uses for E9-1-1 Fee Revenue

State law requires that the revenue from all E9-1-1 fees collected by local jurisdictions be used only for the following 9-1-1 service direct expenses:

- Lease, purchase, or maintenance of emergency telephone equipment, including necessary computer hardware, software, and database provisioning; addressing; and nonrecurring costs of establishing a 9-1-1 system.
- Rates associated with the service supplier's 9-1-1 service and other service supplier's recurring charges.
- Cost of salaries, employee benefits, and training incurred by the local government for directors and employees hired solely for operation and maintenance of the 9-1-1 system.
- Cost of leasing or purchasing a building used as a 9-1-1 center.
- Purchase or maintenance of computer hardware and software used at a 9-1-1 center, including computer-assisted dispatch systems and automatic vehicle location systems.
- 9-1-1 center office supplies and other supplies directly related to providing emergency 9-1-1 system services.
- Lease, purchase, or maintenance of logging recorders used at a 9-1-1 center to record telephone and radio traffic.⁶⁸

In very rare instances, counties providing E9-1-1 service might receive revenues from E9-1-1 fees that exceed the cost of providing the service. Such counties may then be authorized to use dollars from the Emergency Telephone System Fund to pay for other specific expenses. For more information, please see O.C.G.A. § 46-5-134(f)(2).

Reporting E9-1-1 Fee Collections and Expenditures

Any local government collecting or expending any E9-1-1 charges or wireless E9-1-1 charges must file an annual report of its collections and expenditures. The annual report requires certification by the recipient local government and its auditor in the annual county audit that funds were expended in compliance with the rules described above.⁶⁹

When counties operate and/or fund countywide 9-1-1 call centers, issues may arise in negotiations with cities about whether the county may charge cities for some or all the dispatch services provided by the county 9-1-1 center to city police, fire, and or emergency medical services. Unless an intergovernmental agreement provides otherwise, a county may not impose a fee on a city for receipt and initial dispatch of a 9-1-1 call.⁷⁰ Please see the [Intergovernmental Agreements and Service Delivery Strategies Chapter](#) for more information.

Joint Authorities

Neighboring local governments that each have imposed a monthly E9-1-1 charge, or a monthly wireless E9-1-1 charge, can form a joint 9-1-1 authority to operate an emergency 9-1-1 system spanning the jurisdictions involved.⁷¹ The authority – funded by the Emergency Telephone System Fund maintained by each local government – may be comprised of two or more counties or cities, or one or more cities and one or more counties.⁷²

State Responsibilities

All local governments imposing the monthly E9-1-1 charge are members of the Georgia Emergency Communications Authority (GECA).⁷³ GECA, an entity of the Georgia Emergency Management and Homeland Security Agency (GEMA/HS), is responsible for developing guidelines for implementing a statewide emergency 9-1-1 system and supporting the planning, development, and implementation of local 9-1-1 system plans.⁷⁴

GECA has the following other duties and responsibilities:

- Administer, collect, audit, and remit 9-1-1 revenues for local governments.
- Apply for, receive, and use federal grants, state grants, or both.
- Study, evaluate, and recommend technology standards for the regional and statewide provision of a public safety communications network and 9-1-1 system.
- Identify any changes necessary to provide more effective and efficient 9-1-1 service across Georgia, including consolidation and interoperability.
- Identify any changes necessary in the assessment and collection of 9-1-1 fees.
- Develop, offer, or make recommendations to the Georgia Public Safety Training Center, the Georgia Peace Officer Standards and Training Council (POST), and other state agencies as to training that should be provided to telecommunicators, trainers, supervisors, and directors of 9-1-1 centers.
- Recommend minimum standards for operation of 9-1-1 centers.
- Collect data and statistics regarding the performance of 9-1-1 centers.
- Identify any necessary changes or enhancements to develop and deploy NG9-1-1 statewide.
- Upon request, provide support to local jurisdictions to participate in Logan's List, a database that helps 9-1-1 operators and first responders assist people with special needs.⁷⁵

Training Requirements

Communications officers receive, process, or transmit public safety information and dispatch law enforcement officers, firefighters, medical personnel, or emergency management personnel.⁷⁶ They must complete a basic training course, approved by the Georgia Peace Officer Standards and Training Council, which includes training in the use of telecommunications devices for the deaf.⁷⁷

In addition to the basic training, communications officers are required to successfully complete training in the delivery of high-quality telephone cardiopulmonary resuscitation (T-CPR). The only exception to this additional requirement is communications officers who are already certified in emergency medical dispatch. Communication officers must accrue 10 hours of POST-certified continued education annually to maintain their certification.⁷⁸

Every dispatch center that receives, processes, or transmits public safety information and dispatches to appropriate public safety entities must always have on duty at least one communications officer certified in the use of telecommunications devices for the deaf. In addition, dispatch centers are not permitted to employ any additional or replacement communications officers who are not certified as having been trained in the use of telecommunications devices for the deaf.⁷⁹ No monthly E9-1-1 charge may be imposed for the support of any dispatch center that does not meet these requirements.⁸⁰

PTSD INSURANCE FOR FIRST RESPONDERS

Starting on January 1, 2025, state and local governments are required to provide insurance coverage to all first responders to help offset expenses when diagnosed with occupational post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).⁸¹ A “first responder” is defined as a peace officer, correctional officer, emergency medical professional, emergency medical technician, paid or volunteer firefighter, highway emergency response operator, jail officer, probation officer, juvenile correctional officer, and emergency services dispatcher.⁸²

The PTSD diagnosis must be made:

- By a licensed physician, psychiatrist, or psychologist who is certified in a medical specialty related to trauma-related mental health diagnoses.
- Within two years following the date of the traumatic event.⁸³

The insurance coverage provides a \$3,000 lifetime cash lump-sum payment after receiving a qualifying diagnosis. Furthermore, it also provides a lifetime three-year disability benefit that starts ninety days after the first responder is determined to be unable to continue work as a first responder due to the PTSD.⁸⁴

EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

Public safety is never more threatened than during emergencies. Emergency management is the practice of proactive planning, preparation, and coordination to mitigate the harm of large-scale emergencies in all their possible forms:

- Severe weather.
- Natural disasters.
- Outbreaks and pandemics.
- Terrorism.
- Radiation emergencies.
- Chemical spills.
- Mass casualty events.
- Other large-scale crises.

Together with cities, counties bear primary responsibility for providing emergency management services to their communities. In an emergency, local governments must spring into action to deliver a swift and effective response, as the GEMA/HS and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) may not be immediately available to provide assistance on the ground. A county having an up-to-date emergency management plan in advance of a disaster or catastrophe might mean saving countless lives – and millions of taxpayer dollars.⁸⁵

County Emergency Management Agencies

A county governing authority may establish an emergency management agency (EMA) to perform emergency management functions in accordance with Georgia's state-level emergency management plan and program. A county's EMA includes each city within the county by default unless any city has established its own EMA.⁸⁶

Powers and Authorities

County EMAs perform emergency management functions within the territorial limits of the county and outside of such territorial limits as may be required.⁸⁷ Each county has the following powers and authorities:

- To appropriate and expend funds, to execute contracts, and to obtain and distribute equipment, materials, and supplies for emergency management purposes.
- To provide for the health and safety of people and property, including providing emergency assistance to the victims of emergencies and disasters, and to direct

and coordinate the development of emergency management plans and programs in accordance with the policies and plans set by the federal and state EMAs.

- To appoint, employ, remove, or provide chiefs of services, warning personnel, rescue teams, auxiliary fire and police personnel, and other emergency management workers.
- To establish a primary and one or more secondary control centers to serve as command posts during an emergency or disaster.
- To assign and make available for duty the county's employees, property, or equipment related to firefighting, engineering, rescue, health, medical, and related services and to police, transportation, construction, and similar items or services for emergency management purposes, within or outside of county boundaries.
- To purchase, lease, or otherwise acquire sites required for installation of temporary housing units for disaster victims and to enter into whatever arrangements are needed to prepare or equip sites to use the housing units, including purchase of temporary housing units.⁸⁸

Counties are also authorized and empowered to make, amend, and rescind orders, rules, and regulations that may be necessary for emergency management purposes provided that they are consistent with orders, rules, and regulations promulgated by the governor and by any state agency exercising a power delegated to it by the governor.⁸⁹ In addition, they must be consistent with orders, rules, regulations, actions, recommendations, and requests of federal authorities, to the extent permitted by law.⁹⁰

Funding

State funding, administered by GEMA/HS, helps local government EMAs obtain equipment needed for disaster preparedness.⁹¹ County governing authorities are required to establish an EMA to be eligible to receive state funding for disaster relief assistance.⁹²

Emergency Management Agency Director

A county governing authority nominates a candidate to lead its EMA. The nominee is reviewed and appointed by the director of GEMA/HS. The appointed director has direct responsibility for the EMA's organization, administration, and operation. He or she serves at the pleasure of the county governing authority and is subject to its direction and control.⁹³

The emergency management director oversees EMA operations, develops plans to respond to and recover from natural and man-made disasters and emergencies, and

coordinates the emergency response of public and private agencies and organizations.⁹⁴ County governing authorities are required to furnish office space and necessary equipment and supplies for county EMAs.⁹⁵

County Collaboration with State and Federal Agencies During Emergencies

Local governments work with GEMA/HS and FEMA to prepare for and respond to emergencies.

GEMA/HS, which is part of the Office of the Governor, coordinates emergency management to prevent and respond to natural and man-made emergencies in Georgia. GEMA/HS provides the following services:

- **Preparedness**, including building and maintaining a comprehensive state emergency plan.
- **Mitigation**, including developing hazard mitigation plans and projects to protect people and property from exposure to natural hazards.
- **Response**, including serving as the main point of contact for local governments 24/7 when disaster strikes and coordinating with local, state, federal, volunteer, and private agencies to respond to disasters or emergencies.
- **Recovery**, including administering federal dollars for which communities are eligible in the wake of disasters and supporting local recovery efforts.
- **Training**, offering emergency management courses across the state.⁹⁶

At the national level, FEMA helps reduce disaster risk, coordinates federal response to stabilize communities after an emergency, and provides recovery support for individuals and communities.⁹⁷ Georgia is in FEMA Region 4.⁹⁸

FEMA support may be provided when a disaster is sufficiently significant and severe that federal assistance is needed to supplement the response of local governments and the state.⁹⁹ In such cases, the U.S. president makes a federal declaration of emergency, and counties included in the declaration are eligible to receive assistance from FEMA and other federal agencies.¹⁰⁰ When a county is included in a presidential declaration of emergency, it may be eligible to apply for federal grants through FEMA's Public Assistance (PA) Program. Counties can receive reimbursement for certain costs – such as labor, equipment, materials, contract work, and management costs – for work on public infrastructure and facilities needed as a direct result of the declared emergency.¹⁰¹

Before FEMA provides PA funding for any project, a county must have a FEMA-approved Administrative Plan that details how it will responsibly administer the funds, as well as procedures for requesting reimbursement or advanced funds.

Reimbursements are limited to expenses that FEMA considers reasonable and within its allowed scope.¹⁰² In addition, a mutual aid agreement is required for FEMA to reimburse a county governing authority for expenses paid to other jurisdictions for aid received during the declared emergency.¹⁰³

Emergency Operations Plan

GEMA/HS maintains the Georgia Emergency Operations Plan. Counties are encouraged to adopt their own Emergency Operations Plan (EOP) to ensure emergency preparedness at the local level.

A county EOP clarifies the roles and responsibilities of each county department in an emergency, setting forth how they will work with the county EMA and with state, federal, and private agencies to execute a coordinated, timely response. The EOP puts in place a framework for response, designed to be flexibly adapted and applied to any number of large-scale or complex emergency and disaster situations. Counties are advised to maintain a comprehensive EOP that is continually reviewed and evolved based on planning efforts, training and exercise activities, state and federal guidance, and lessons learned from actual disaster and emergency experiences. GEMA/HS provides a template EOP that counties may adapt to their needs.¹⁰⁴

Emergency Ordinances

Counties are advised to design their ordinances, regulations, policies, and procedures to allow the county governing authority, EMA, and other responding organizations and agencies to take expedient action in an emergency. To that end, it is beneficial to draft emergency ordinances well in advance of when they are needed.

Examples of emergency ordinances include the following:

- **Procurement.** In an emergency, it may not be possible to take the time to bid out emergency supplies or services according to a county's regular purchasing policy. Counties may establish an exception in their ordinances that suspends lengthy bidding requirements or cumbersome purchasing procedures for purchases that support the county's response to an active emergency.¹⁰⁵
- **Business registration.** A county governing authority may implement an ordinance activating a program of emergency registration of businesses operating in the county. Such an ordinance may only be implemented during a state of emergency declared by the governor and for a subsequent recovery period of up to three months. No business subject to the ordinance may do business in the county without first registering in accordance with the provisions of the ordinance.¹⁰⁶

- **Land use.** Counties may choose to temporarily suspend the enforcement of certain county codes, especially those related to land use and zoning. For example, if temporary dwellings such as trailers or tents are ordinarily prohibited, they may be allowed during the emergency and recovery period.¹⁰⁷
- **Fees.** Where it will help to promote rebuilding in an area impacted by a disaster, counties might suspend or reduce regular permit fees, application fees, or other rate schedules.¹⁰⁸

Maintaining and following emergency ordinances can help counties secure FEMA reimbursements. For example, if a county previously established a procurement-related exception for emergency purchases in its ordinances and follows it when buying supplies in a state of federal emergency, the county may be entitled to FEMA reimbursement, in contrast to a county that does not have an exception but detours from its regular procedures during the emergency.¹⁰⁹

To help counties prepare for emergencies, ACCG’s Model Emergency Management guide includes a model [Emergency Management Ordinance](#) that counties may adopt before an emergency. The draft ordinance sets forth the emergency management and response powers of the county, the county governing authority, and the emergency management director.¹¹⁰ The county attorney should review the ordinance prior to adoption to ensure compliance with current state law and local legislation, as well as alignment with relevant local needs.¹¹¹

Mutual Aid and Intergovernmental Agreements

To prepare proactively for emergencies or disasters too significant to be dealt with unassisted, a county EMA director may choose to form reciprocal emergency management aid and assistance arrangements with other public and private agencies in Georgia and – with the governor’s approval – agencies in other states. These mutual aid agreements must be consistent with the state emergency management plan and program. In a time of emergency, each local organization for emergency management is responsible for rendering assistance in accordance with such agreements.¹¹² The model [Emergency and Disaster Mutual Aid Agreement](#) included in ACCG’s Model Emergency Management guide can be used by counties to form agreements with counties, cities, authorities, and private agencies.¹¹³

County Governance During an Emergency

The business of county governance is naturally disrupted during an emergency. Counties should have an emergency management team – including the county attorney, law enforcement, communications function, EMA director, and more – in place and

ready to work with the county governing authority to prepare and implement proper emergency protocol when needed.

Declaration of Emergency

A state of emergency is a governmental declaration that serves to suspend normal governmental functions, notify the public about current conditions, and trigger implementation of emergency preparedness plans. When an emergency, disaster, or catastrophe occurs and appears likely to require more resources than those available at the county level, the governor enacts a state declaration of emergency that enables state and local governments to exercise emergency powers as outlined by statute.¹¹⁴

A county governing authority may also declare a local state of emergency with an executive order signed by the chair. A local declaration of emergency carries much less force than a state or federal declaration. However, a local declaration can be helpful as an immediate local response, alerting citizens and county staff even before a state emergency declaration and allowing the county governing authority greater flexibility while awaiting the governor's declaration. A county may plan for its local emergency declaration to activate certain provisions of its Emergency Management Ordinance – those not requiring a declaration from the governor – to help streamline operations and meet the immediate needs of the public.¹¹⁵ Counties may leverage the model [Declaration of Local Emergency](#) included in ACCG's Model Emergency Management guide as an example.¹¹⁶

Changing County Place of Business

A county governing authority may change its meeting place whenever an emergency or disaster causes it to be imprudent, inexpedient, or impossible to conduct government affairs at the regular location or locations. On the call of the chair or any two members of the county governing authority, the county governing authority may meet at any place within or outside its territorial limits. In this case, the authority must establish and designate places as the emergency temporary locations of government where all or any part of the public business may be transacted and conducted during the emergency or disaster situation. All acts are as valid and binding as if they were performed within the boundaries of the county. The county governing authority maintains its full powers and functions in such an emergency situation and may even temporarily eliminate time-consuming procedures and formalities.¹¹⁷ Additionally, state law authorizes local governments to hold meetings and hearing by teleconference during declared federal, state, or local emergencies.¹¹⁸

Imposition of Curfews

County governing authorities may impose curfews to help ensure public safety in the wake of an emergency or disaster. A county might choose to adopt a resolution specifying the details of the curfew policy – including the dates, hours, and territory within the county to which the curfew applies – and a list of groups exempt from the curfew, including first responders and others rendering emergency services.¹¹⁹

State Preemptions and Requirements Counties Must Follow

The state has enacted several preemptions and requirements that, in an emergency, counties must follow and that impact county policies and procedures:

- First informer broadcasts.
- Firearms and fireworks.
- State highway closure or restricted access.
- Water emergency response procedures.

First Informer Broadcasts

Media broadcasters in Georgia may apply to GEMA/HS for designation as a “first informer broadcaster.” Subject to rules and regulations promulgated by GEMA/HS, corporations or entities granted the designation of first informer broadcasters have the following abilities during a state-declared emergency to help keep the public informed:¹²⁰

- Access to areas affected by an emergency for restoring, repairing, or resupplying any facility or equipment critical to the ability of a broadcaster to acquire, produce, or transmit emergency-related programming.
- Access to the distribution of fuel, food, water, supplies, equipment, and any other materials necessary for maintaining or producing a broadcast or broadcasting signal.
- Retention of materials essential for maintaining or producing a broadcast or broadcasting signal, not having them seized or condemned.¹²¹

Firearms and Fireworks

In an emergency, state and local governments are prohibited from regulating firearms or ammunition to any extent not already required by law prior to the emergency – including seizing, requiring registration, or prohibiting possession or carrying of firearms.¹²² During a state of emergency, the governor may, however, suspend or limit the sale, dispensing, or transportation of explosives and combustibles, including

fireworks.¹²³ The governor also may restrict or prohibit use of fireworks in counties meeting certain drought conditions.¹²⁴

Counties typically cannot prohibit the sale, use, or ignition of legal fireworks unless expressly authorized by general law; however, general noise ordinances are enforceable as to fireworks.¹²⁵ Additionally, counties are authorized to require special permits for the use of fireworks at most times of the year other than specified holidays.¹²⁶

In 2024, the Georgia General Assembly revised licensing requirements for certain displays of fireworks. No person, organization, or entity may conduct a public fireworks exhibition without a valid license issued by the state Insurance and Safety Fire Commissioner and a permit from the local fire authority.¹²⁷ In addition to the original permit fees, local fire authorities may also charge reasonable fees for personnel needed for standby fire suppression and permit compliance.¹²⁸

State Highway Closure or Restricted Access

The Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) is authorized to close or limit access to any portion of a state highway in a state of emergency declared for inclement weather that results in dangerous driving conditions. GDOT may also require the use of tire chains, four-wheel drive with adequate tires for existing conditions, or snow tires with a manufacturer's all-weather rating to proceed on limited access state roads during a declared state of emergency.¹²⁹ These rules do not apply to emergency responders traveling the roadway to fulfill their duties.¹³⁰

Water Emergency Response Procedures

When the Environmental Protection Division (EPD) of the Georgia Department of Natural Resources determines that there is a threat to the health or property of downstream users of the state's waters, EPD notifies and consults within 24 hours with GEMA/HS, the local EMA(s) in the area affected, and the relevant county health department. Upon notification by EPD, the local emergency management agency or county health department must post a public notice about the threat through electronic media and print.¹³¹ While EPD is entrusted with coordinating emergency responses related to water issues, counties are nevertheless permitted to take any action within their authority to protect public health and safety related to water.¹³²

Optional County Action Regarding Property Tax Relief Due to Federal Disaster

Local governing authorities are authorized by state law to provide property tax relief to properties significantly damaged or destroyed in a federally declared disaster area.¹³³ A resolution may be adopted providing temporary tax relief to these properties for the

taxable year the disaster occurred. ACCG created a [model county resolution](#) for this purpose. For more information on this topic, see the County Revenues Chapter.

ANIMAL CONTROL AND PROTECTION

Animal control serves both to protect the public from dangerous animals and to protect animals from abuse and neglect. County animal control may provide additional animal welfare services, such as animal shelters, animal adoption outreach, and programs to educate the public about responsible pet ownership.

Requirements for Counties

At minimum, counties must perform animal control functions related to controlling the spread of rabies, protecting the public from dangerous and vicious dogs, providing sterilization and humane euthanasia, and impounding livestock at large.

Rabies Control

Each county board of health has primary responsibility for the control of rabies, a contagious and fatal viral disease. County boards of health are empowered and required to adopt and promulgate rules and regulations for the prevention and control of rabies within their jurisdictions.¹³⁴ To execute these duties, as well as to enforce other laws regulating the activity of dogs, boards of health must appoint a county rabies control officer.¹³⁵ The officer's salary can be funded in part by a fee that a county may choose to levy for each anti-rabies vaccine administered, as collected by the veterinarian administering the vaccine and remitted to the county treasurer.¹³⁶ Joint administration of the mandated anti-rabies program is permissible in one or more adjoining counties.¹³⁷

Responsible Dog Ownership Law

Counties are responsible for helping protect the public from dangerous and vicious dogs through enforcement of the Responsible Dog Ownership Law.¹³⁸ A *dangerous dog* means any dog that:

- Substantially punctures a person's skin with its teeth without causing serious injury.
- Aggressively attacks in a manner causing a person to believe the dog posed an imminent threat of serious injury although no injury occurred.
- Kills a pet while off its owner's property.¹³⁹

A *vicious dog* is one that inflicts serious injury on a person or causes serious injury to a person attempting to escape the dog's attack.¹⁴⁰

County responsibilities related to the Responsible Dog Ownership Law include the following:

- A law enforcement officer or dog control officer is required to immediately impound a dog if the officer believes the dog poses a threat to the safety of the public.¹⁴¹
- A law enforcement officer or dog control officer is required to immediately confiscate a dangerous dog or vicious dog if any aspect of the Responsible Dog Ownership Law is violated.¹⁴² The owner of the confiscated dog is required to pay all reasonable confiscation and housing costs prior to recovering the dog.¹⁴³
- A superior court judge can order euthanasia of a dog if the court finds – after notice and opportunity for hearing – that the dog has seriously injured a person or presents a danger to people and if the dog owner has either been convicted of a state crime related to the dog or if the county has filed a civil action requesting euthanasia of the dog.¹⁴⁴ A dog found by a superior court to cause a serious injury to a person more than once is required to be euthanized.¹⁴⁵

Counties and their employees are not liable for any damages to people injured by dogs as a result of failure to enforce the Responsible Dog Owner Law.¹⁴⁶

Mandatory Sterilization in Shelters

Any animal shelter, animal control agency, humane society, or animal refuge must ensure the sterilization of all dogs or cats acquired from that facility by providing sterilization by a licensed veterinarian before relinquishing custody of the animal.¹⁴⁷ Alternatively, the facility may enter into a written agreement with the person acquiring the dog or cat guaranteeing that sterilization will be performed by a licensed veterinarian within 30 days.¹⁴⁸ In this case, a signed statement from the licensed veterinarian performing the sterilization must be provided within seven days attesting that the sterilization has been performed.¹⁴⁹ The sterilization requirement does not apply if the owner of an animal in the facility's possession claims or presents evidence that the animal is his or her property.¹⁵⁰

Costs associated with sterilization are the responsibility of the person acquiring the animal and may be included in any fees charged for the animal if performed prior to acquisition.¹⁴⁷ Any animal shelter, animal control agency, humane society, or animal refuge must maintain and provide to anyone acquiring an animal a current list of licensed veterinarians who are willing to perform sterilizations, and the cost for such procedures.¹⁵¹

Euthanasia

When animal shelters and other facilities operated for the collection and care of stray, neglected, abandoned, or unwanted animals must euthanize dogs and cats, the only two methods permitted by state law are:

1. An injection of sodium pentobarbital or one of its derivatives.
2. An injection of any substance clinically proven to be as humane as sodium pentobarbital and officially recognized by the American Veterinary Medical Association.¹⁵²

Livestock

The sheriff and county law enforcement are required to impound livestock that are running at large or straying (also, an owner or operator of a farm may do so).¹⁵³ The owner of the livestock must then be served with written notice of the following:

- Where the livestock is being held.
- The amount due as a result of the impounding.
- That unless the livestock is recovered within three days from the date of notice, the livestock will be offered for sale.¹⁵⁴

County governing authorities are charged with providing truck transportation and establishing and maintaining suitable places for impounded livestock until the animals are collected by their owners or sold.¹⁵⁵

Equine Care

Local governments jointly share responsibilities with the Department of Agriculture for neglected or abused equine (horses, donkeys, asses, etc.). If abuse is suspected, the Commissioner of Agriculture may apply to the court for an inspection warrant or local law enforcement officers may apply for a search warrant. The Commissioner of Agriculture or law enforcement officer is authorized to impound any equine that does not have appropriate access to food and water, has been treated inhumanely, or has been subjected to cruelty, as determined by a licensed veterinarian.¹⁵⁶

The owner must be immediately notified by the impounding entity once the equine has been impounded. If the owner is unknown or cannot be found, the notice must be published once in a newspaper of general circulation.¹⁵⁷ The impounding entity (Department of Agriculture or local law enforcement) is responsible for making appropriate arrangements – such as shelter, food and water, veterinary services, and humane care – either by providing directly, contracting with a third party, or through a

no-cost volunteer group. Any person impounding an equine or providing care for one has a lien to recover for the reasonable costs of care.¹⁵⁸

The equine may be returned to its owner upon payment of costs of impound/care and entry of a consent agreement, or receipt of written assurances of compliance that the owner will comply with state law and not neglect or harm the equine.¹⁵⁹ If the owner is not found or does not comply, the equine may be sold or – if necessary – humanely euthanized. If sold, the proceeds should first cover the cost of care, then may be paid to county treasury if the county impounded the animal.¹⁶⁰

Nuisances

County governing authorities may choose to regulate animal nuisances. Examples of common animal nuisance ordinances include the following:

- **Leash laws** that require a dog owner to always maintain control of the dog with a leash or chain when in public or prohibit a dog owner from allowing the animal to run unattended in public rights-of-way or without permission on private property.¹⁶¹
- **Dangerous dog laws** that prohibit the owner of a dangerous dog to permit the dog to be off the owner's property without being restrained by a leash, contained in a crate or cage, or working or training as a hunting dog, herding dog, or predator control dog.¹⁶²
- **Vicious dog laws** that prohibit the owner of a vicious dog to permit the dog to be left unattended with minors, or to be outside an enclosure without being muzzled and restrained by a leash or contained in a locked cage.¹⁶³
- **Disturbance of the peace laws** that prohibit the owner of a dog or other animal from allowing it to annoy or disturb any person not on the property through loud barking or other animal noises that last for extended periods of time without reasonable cause.¹⁶⁴
- **Urban agriculture restrictions** that limit the number of chickens or other poultry or livestock animals allowed per parcel in areas not zoned for agriculture and specify the type, size, and placement of enclosure for such animals.¹⁶⁵

Animal Protection

Counties are authorized to protect animals via the Georgia Animal Protection Act.¹⁶⁶ Animal control officers and law enforcement officers are authorized to impound any animal that has not received humane care, has been subjected to cruelty, or is used or intended to be used in dogfighting.¹⁶⁷ Prior to an animal being impounded, a veterinarian must examine and determine the animal's condition or treatment.¹⁶⁸

A county must arrange to provide humane care and adequate and necessary veterinary services to any animal it impounds. This includes either providing shelter and care at a county facility or shelter or contracting with a private individual or entity to provide care.¹⁶⁹ A lien on the animal for the reasonable costs of care may be foreclosed in court.¹⁷⁰ The animal may be returned to its owner upon the owner's payment of all costs of impoundment and care and entry of a consent order providing that, when in the owner's hands, the animal will be given humane care, adequate and necessary veterinary services, and not be subjected to cruelty.¹⁷¹

An animal cannot be returned if:

- The owner is convicted of, pled guilty to, or pled nolo contendere to animal cruelty or dog fighting.
- The owner is found to have failed to provide humane care to an animal.
- The owner committed cruelty to animals or committed any other prohibited act.
- The animal was used to commit a crime.¹⁷²

As with animal nuisances, county governing authorities may enact ordinances for the protection of animal welfare. Such ordinances might include setting limitations on dog tethering or chaining, instituting mandatory lengths of time during which animal offenders cannot own or possess animals, or disallowing hoarding of animals.

Many counties pursue additional, non-mandatory programs and partnerships to help promote animal welfare within their jurisdictions. For example, counties may operate or partner with community nonprofits to run animal shelters, pet adoption and fostering programs, or programs to spay or neuter and release free-roaming cats.

CODE ENFORCEMENT

Properties and buildings maintained in violation of local ordinances, property maintenance codes, or construction codes may cause public safety, quality of life, and property values to suffer. Code enforcement officers are contracted or employed by a county to enforce health, safety, and welfare requirements, including issuing citations or filing formal complaints regarding violations.¹⁷³

Code enforcement officers may enforce the following county codes and ordinances:

- Zoning ordinances and resolutions.
- Ordinances and resolutions enacting county regulations.
- Environmental ordinances and resolutions.

- State minimum standard codes and associated ordinances and resolutions.
- Other ordinances and resolutions regulating the development of real property.
- Ordinances and regulations providing for control of litter and debris, control of junked or abandoned vehicles, and control of overgrown vegetation.¹⁷⁴

Code enforcement collaborates as needed with other county departments, such as fire and police, to address issues related to code violations.

Code Enforcement Boards

A county governing authority may pass an ordinance to create or abolish a county code enforcement board.¹⁷⁵ County code enforcement boards can have three, five, or seven members.¹⁷⁶ Members must be county residents, and preferably they should bring experience or expertise relevant to one or more county codes that are within the board's subject matter jurisdiction.¹⁷⁷ The county attorney is either counsel to the enforcement board or represents the county by presenting cases before the board.¹⁷⁸

County code enforcement boards have the following powers:

- To adopt rules of conduct for their hearings to ensure that each side has an equal opportunity to present evidence and argument in support of its case.
- To subpoena alleged violators and witnesses to their hearings, with the approval of the court having jurisdiction over a criminal violator of the county code or ordinance.
- To subpoena evidence to their hearings, with court approval.
- To take testimony under oath.
- To issue orders having the force of law to command whatever steps are necessary to bring a violation into compliance.¹⁷⁹

Initiating Code Enforcement Proceedings

Code enforcement officers, rather than members of code enforcement boards, are responsible for enforcing codes and ordinances.¹⁸⁰ When a violation of a code or ordinance is found, the officer notifies the violator and is required to give the person a reasonable time to correct the violation. If the violation continues beyond the time specified for correction, the officer proceeds with enforcement through the appropriate court or code enforcement board. If the officer proceeds through an enforcement board, the officer notifies the board and requests a hearing. The board then schedules a hearing, with written notice provided to the violator.¹⁸¹

If a violation is repeated, the code enforcement officer is not required to provide the violator with a reasonable time to correct the issue. The officer notifies the violator of the repeat violation and requests a hearing by the board, with written notice to the violator. The case may be presented even if the repeat violation has been corrected prior to the board hearing.¹⁸² The reasonable time requirement also does not apply if a violation presents a serious threat to public health, safety, and welfare, or if the violation is irreparable or irreversible in nature. In these circumstances, the officer must make a reasonable effort to notify the violator and immediately notify the board and request a hearing.¹⁸³

Fines

Upon notification that a violator has not complied with an order of the enforcement board by the set time, the board may order the violator to pay an administrative fine.¹⁸⁴ In determining the amount of the fine, the board considers the gravity of the violation, any corrective actions taken by the violator, and any previous violations he or she has committed.¹⁸⁵ Violations involving the health or safety of a third party may be fined as much as \$1,000 per day, while violations not involving the health or safety of a third party must not exceed \$1,000 in total.¹⁸⁶

Appeals

Decisions made by the code enforcement board can be appealed to the superior court. An appeal must be filed within 30 days of the execution of the order.¹⁸⁷

PUBLIC SAFETY ASSOCIATIONS

There are several statewide associations that promote and provide training, education, and professionalism for local public safety personnel. ACCG often partners with these groups on legislative matters, such as pending legislative or legislative study committees, due to their expertise in this area.

Georgia Animal Care and Control Association

The [Georgia Animal Control Association](#) (GACA) provides support to Animal Control, Animal Shelter, and Animal Welfare personnel. GACA board members participate in a yearly conference that includes interactive and hands-on training sessions. GACA aims to raise public awareness of responsible pet ownership, strengthen legislation pertaining to animal care, and improve shelter standards through joint projects and advocacy campaigns.

Georgia Association of Fire Chiefs

The [Georgia Association of Fire Chiefs](#) (GAFC) promotes fire prevention, emergency response, and public safety regulations. GAFC provides its members with certificate information, training courses, and networking opportunities. GAFC strives to improve

community resilience to fire emergencies, raise firefighter safety, and advance fire service standards through collaborations with governmental organizations, academic institutions, and other stakeholders.

Georgia State Firefighters Association

Firemen and emergency responders are represented by the [Georgia State Firefighters Association](#) (GSFA), which promotes their well-being, security, and career advancement. GSFA offers training courses, certifications, and other resources. GSFA additionally advocates for legislation and conducts public education campaigns to increase knowledge of fire safety, prevention, and readiness in all areas around the state.

Georgia Association of Public Safety Communications Officials

The [Georgia Association of Public Safety Communications Officials](#) (GAPCO) provides support to the professionals who act as the public's first line of communication with Georgia's emergency response organizations. GAPCO offers its members networking opportunities, certification programs, and training to help them improve their emergency call taking, dispatching, and communication technology skills. GAPCO seeks to influence government and industry decisions on public safety communications, promote professional development, and foster development and use of technology for benefit of the public.

Georgia Association of Code Enforcement

The [Georgia Association of Code Enforcement](#) (GACE) advocates for responsible code enforcement and promotes professionalism, fellowship, and communication among its local government members in the state. GACE, in partnership with the University of Georgia's Carl Vinson Institute of Government, offers education, training programs, and a Code Enforcement Officer Certificate Program to officials charged with the enforcement of county, city, and state codes in Georgia.

Emergency Management Association of Georgia

Established in 1986, the [Emergency Management Association of Georgia](#) (EMAG) is an association of state and local government emergency management professionals, as well as non-voting associate members. The Emergency Management Association of Georgia (EMAG) is an association of professionals serving its members by promoting professional development, providing networking opportunities, and serving as an advocate for the profession of Emergency Management.

The EMAG has three primary goals:

- To assist members in their efforts to save lives and protect property from the effects of disasters.

- To provide a forum for professionals to discuss current issues in the emergency management field.
- To serve as a policy advisory board to local emergency management agencies as well as to GEMA/HS.

Georgia Emergency Communications Authority

The [Georgia Emergency Communications Authority](#) (GECA), created in 2018, is governed by a 15 member board of directors appointed by the Governor that is comprised of state, local, and private sector leaders dedicated to improving 9-1-1 and emergency communications in Georgia. The Board meets quarterly. The dates and locations of the Board meetings will be posted on the GEMA/HS website.

The mission of the Georgia Emergency Communications Authority is to facilitate the effective and efficient operation of 9-1-1 and emergency communications across the state, with the vision to be the No. 1 state in the nation for innovation in training, technology, and standards for 9-1-1 and emergency communications.

¹ O.C.G.A. § 25-3-23(c)(1).

² O.C.G.A. § 25-3-22, et seq.

³ O.C.G.A. § 25-3-23(a)(1).

⁴ Ga. Comp. R. & Regs. R. 205-1-2-.02(3)(c).

⁵ Ga. Comp. R. & Regs. R. 205-1-2-.02(4).

⁶ Ga. Comp. R. & Regs. R. 205-1-2-.02(7).

⁷ Ga. Comp. R. & Regs. R. 205-1-2-.02(5).

⁸ Ga. Comp. R. & Regs. R. 205-1-2-.02(6).

⁹ A minimum of a 500-gallon tank capacity is recommended by GFSTC.

¹⁰ O.C.G.A. § 25-3-23(a)(2).

¹¹ Ga. Comp. R. & Regs. R. 205-1-2-.03(1). After January 1, 2025, an operable pumper apparatus with a tank capacity of less than 250 gallons may be retained for use as a mobile water supply, brush truck, or similar application, but not for structure fires involving interior fire attack or for search and rescue operations in structures typically occupied by human inhabitants.

¹² O.C.G.A. § 25-3-23(a)(2).

¹³ A list of minimum requirements for equipment, appliances, adapters, and accessories may be found at Ga. Comp. R. & Regs. R. 205-1-2-.03(2).

¹⁴ Personal protective clothing includes a helmet, coat, pants, boots, gloves and hood, Ga. Comp. R. & Regs. R. 205-1-2-.03(3)(a).

¹⁵ Ga. Comp. R. & Regs. R. 205-1-2-.03(3)(b).

¹⁶ Ga. Comp. R. & Regs. R. 205-1-2-.03(3)(c).

¹⁷ O.C.G.A. § 25-2-5.

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- ¹⁸ O.C.G.A. § 25-2-9(a), (b).
- ¹⁹ <https://oci.georgia.gov/safety-fire-reporting-education/arson-reporting>.
- ²⁰ <https://oci.georgia.gov/inspections-permits-plans/hazardous-materials>;
https://www6.citizenserve.com/Portal/PortalController?Action=showHomePage&ctzPagePrefix=Portal_&installati onID=360.
- ²¹ Items considered in the FSRS. *Verisk*. Retrieved June 3, 2024 from www.isomitigation.com/ppc/fsrs/items-considered-in-the-fsrs.
- ²² *Id.*
- ²³ O'Connor, B. (2021, June 7). Types of Water Supplies for fire protection systems. *National Fire Protection Association*. Retrieved June 3, 2024, from www.nfpa.org/News-and-Research/Publications-and-media/Blogs-Landing-Page/NFPA-Today/Blog-Posts/2021/06/07/Types-of-Water-Supplies.
- ²⁴ NFPA 1710, *Standard for the Organization and Deployment of Fire Suppression Operations, Emergency Medical Operations, and Special Operations to the Public by Career Fire Departments* (National Fire Protection Association 2020).
- ²⁵ NFPA 1720, *Standard for the Organization and Deployment of Fire Suppression Operations, Emergency Medical Operations, and Special Operations to the Public by Volunteer Fire Departments* (National Fire Protection Association 2020).
- ²⁶ O.C.G.A. § 19-10A-4 et seq.
- ²⁷ PPC Program. *Verisk*. Retrieved June 3, 2024, from www.isomitigation.com/ppc.
- ²⁸ The PPC Evaluation Process. *Verisk*. Retrieved June 3, 2024, from www.isomitigation.com/ppc/program-works/the-ppc-evaluation-process.
- ²⁹ How the PPC Program Works. *Verisk*. Retrieved June 3, 2024, from www.isomitigation.com/ppc/program-works.
- ³⁰ Benefits of the PPC Program for Communities. *Verisk*. Retrieved June 3, 2024, from www.isomitigation.com/ppc/program-works/benefits-of-the-ppc-program-for-communities.
- ³¹ A person who has been convicted of a felony more than five but less than ten years prior to employment may be certified and employed as a firefighter only when the person has successfully completed a required training program; been recommended to a fire department by the proper authorities at the institution at which the training took place; and met all the other job requirements. The GFSTC is the ultimate authority with respect to authorizing the employment, appointment, and certification of firefighters in these cases.
- ³² O.C.G.A. § 25-4-8(a).
- ³³ O.C.G.A. § 25-4-8.1(a).
- ³⁴ O.C.G.A. § 25-4-9(a)(1).
- ³⁵ O.C.G.A. § 25-4-9(b).
- ³⁶ O.C.G.A. § 25-4-9(c).
- ³⁷ O.C.G.A. § 25-4-10.
- ³⁸ O.C.G.A. § 25-4-11.
- ³⁹ O.C.G.A. § 25-4-11.1(a).
- ⁴⁰ O.C.G.A. § 25-4-11.1(b).
- ⁴¹ O.C.G.A. § 25-3-23(b)(1).
- ⁴² O.C.G.A. § 25-3-23(b)(2)(B).
- ⁴³ O.C.G.A. § 25-3-23(b)(2)(C).
- ⁴⁴ Firefighters' Cancer Benefit Program. *ACCG Insurance Programs*. Retrieved June 3, 2024, from www.accg.org/insurance/firefightercancer.php.
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- ⁴⁸ O.C.G.A. § 46-5-122(15).
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- ⁵⁰ O.C.G.A. § 46-5-136(b).
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- ⁵² Federal Communication Commission. Enhanced 911. <https://www.fcc.gov/general/enhanced-9-1-1-wireless-services>
- ⁵³ National Emergency Number Association. Wireless Phase I and II. https://kb.nena.org/wiki/Wireless_Phase_I_%26_II
- ⁵⁴ Georgia Emergency Management Agency 911 Emergency Telephone Number Plan. gema.georgia.gov/document/publication/emergency-telephone-number-plan.
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- ⁵⁷ Next Generation 911. *911.gov*. Retrieved June 3, 2024, from www.911.gov/issues/ng911.
- ⁵⁸ O.C.G.A. § 48-13-131 (b)(3).
- ⁵⁹ O.C.G.A. §§ 46-5-133(a) and 46-5-133(b)(1).
- ⁶⁰ O.C.G.A. §§ 46-5-133(a) and 46-5-134(a)(1)(A).
- ⁶¹ O.C.G.A. § 38-3-185(b)(1).
- ⁶² O.C.G.A. § 46-5-133(d).
- ⁶³ O.C.G.A. §§ 46-5-134.1(a) and 46-5-134.1(b).
- ⁶⁴ O.C.G.A. §§ 46-5-134.2(a)(7) and 46-5-134.2(b).
- ⁶⁵ O.C.G.A. §§ 46-5-134.2(c) and 46-5-134.2(i).
- ⁶⁶ O.C.G.A. § 46-5-134.2(h).
- ⁶⁷ O.C.G.A. § 46-5-134.2(j)(1).
- ⁶⁸ O.C.G.A. § 46-5-134(f)(1).
- ⁶⁹ O.C.G.A. § 46-5-134(m)(2).
- ⁷⁰ O.C.G.A. § 46-5-133(d).
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- ⁷² O.C.G.A. § 46-5-138(b).
- ⁷³ O.C.G.A. § 38-3-182(a)(2).
- ⁷⁴ O.C.G.A. §§ 46-5-124(a) and 46-5-124(b).
- ⁷⁵ O.C.G.A. §§ 38-3-182(b) and 38-3-182(c).
- ⁷⁶ O.C.G.A. § 35-8-23(a).
- ⁷⁷ O.C.G.A. §§ 35-8-23(b) and 35-8-23(d).
- ⁷⁸ O.C.G.A. § 35-8-23(f).
- ⁷⁹ O.C.G.A. § 36-60-19(a).
- ⁸⁰ O.C.G.A. § 36-60-19(b).
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- ¹⁰⁸ *Id.*
- ¹⁰⁹ ACCG (2016). *Model Emergency Management: Ordinances and Agreements* (4th Edition), p.6.
- ¹¹⁰ ACCG (2016). *Model Emergency Management: Ordinances and Agreements* (4th Edition), p.14-17. The Emergency Management Ordinance provided in this guide has been developed jointly by the Association County Commissioners of Georgia (ACCG), the Georgia Municipal Association (GMA), the Georgia Attorney General’s Office, and the Georgia Emergency Management and Homeland Security Agency (GEMA/HS) specifically for use by local governments.
- ¹¹¹ ACCG (2016). *Model Emergency Management: Ordinances and Agreements* (4th Edition).
- ¹¹² O.C.G.A. § 38-3-29.
- ¹¹³ ACCG (2016). *Model Emergency Management: Ordinances and Agreements* (4th Edition), p.31. The [Emergency and Disaster Mutual Aid Agreement](#) provided in this guide has been developed jointly by the Association County Commissioners of Georgia (ACCG), the Georgia Municipal Association (GMA), the Georgia Attorney General’s Office, and the Georgia Emergency Management and Homeland Security Agency (GEMA/HS) specifically for use by local governments.
- ¹¹⁴ O.C.G.A. §§ 38-3-1 through 38-3-64.
- ¹¹⁵ ACCG (2016). *Model Emergency Management: Ordinances and Agreements* (4th Edition).
- ¹¹⁶ ACCG (2016). *Model Emergency Management: Ordinances and Agreements* (4th Edition), p.22. The [Declaration of Local Emergencies](#) provided in this guide has been developed jointly by the Association County Commissioners of Georgia (ACCG), the Georgia Municipal Association (GMA), the Georgia Attorney General’s Office, and the

Georgia Emergency Management and Homeland Security Agency (GEMA/HS) specifically for use by local governments.

¹¹⁷ O.C.G.A. § 38-3-54 et seq.

¹¹⁸ O.C.G.A. § 50-14-1(g).

¹¹⁹ ACCG (2016). *Model Emergency Management: Ordinances and Agreements* (4th Edition), p.8.

¹²⁰ O.C.G.A. § 38-3-57(f)(1)(C).

¹²¹ O.C.G.A. § 38-3-57(f)(2).

¹²² O.C.G.A. § 38-3-37.

¹²³ O.C.G.A. § 38-3-51(d)(8).

¹²⁴ O.C.G.A. § 25-10-2(b)(3)(E).

¹²⁵ O.C.G.A. § 25-10-2(b)(3)(i).

¹²⁶ O.C.G.A. § 25-10-2(b)(3)(D).

¹²⁷ O.C.G.A. §§ 25-10-3.2 and 25-10-4.

¹²⁸ O.C.G.A. § 25-10-4(e).

¹²⁹ O.C.G.A. § 32-6-5(a).

¹³⁰ O.C.G.A. § 32-6-5(c).

¹³¹ O.C.G.A. § 12-5-30.4(c).

¹³² O.C.G.A. § 12-5-30.4(f).

¹³³ 'Disaster area' means that portion of any county which is wholly or partially located in a nationally declared disaster area under the federal Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act, 42 U.S.C. Sections 5121-5207.

¹³⁴ O.C.G.A. § 31-19-1, et seq.

¹³⁵ O.C.G.A. § 31-19-7(a).

¹³⁶ O.C.G.A. §§ 31-19-7(b) and 31-19-7(c).

¹³⁷ O.C.G.A. § 31-19-8.

¹³⁸ O.C.G.A. §§ 4-8-20 through 4-8-33.

¹³⁹ O.C.G.A. § 4-8-21(a)(2). A hunting, herding, or predator-control dog that kills a pet animal is exempt from the definition of a dangerous dog.

¹⁴⁰ O.C.G.A. § 4-8-21(a)(6).

¹⁴¹ O.C.G.A. § 4-8-24.

¹⁴² O.C.G.A. § 4-8-30(a).

¹⁴³ O.C.G.A. § 4-8-30(b).

¹⁴⁴ O.C.G.A. § 4-8-25.

¹⁴⁵ O.C.G.A. § 4-8-26.

¹⁴⁶ O.C.G.A. § 4-8-31.

¹⁴⁷ O.C.G.A. § 4-14-3(a)(1).

¹⁴⁸ O.C.G.A. § 4-14-3(a)(2).

¹⁴⁹ O.C.G.A. § 4-14-3(c).

¹⁵⁰ O.C.G.A. § 4-14-3(a)(2)

¹⁵¹ O.C.G.A. § 4-14-3(d).

¹⁵² O.C.G.A. § 4-11-5.1(a).

¹⁵³ O.C.G.A. § 4-3-4(a).

¹⁵⁴ O.C.G.A. § 4-3-5(a).

¹⁵⁵ O.C.G.A. § 4-3-11(a).

¹⁵⁶ O.C.G.A. § 4-13-4.

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- ¹⁵⁷ O.C.G.A. § 4-13-6.
- ¹⁵⁸ O.C.G.A. § 4-13-5.
- ¹⁵⁹ *Id.*
- ¹⁶⁰ O.C.G.A. § 4-13-7.
- ¹⁶¹ For example, Code of Ordinances of Whitfield County, Georgia, Sec. 4.23 - Restraint of dogs (Res. of 11-13-00) and Code of Ordinances of Tift County, Georgia, Sec. 14-14 - Leash law (Res. No. 2004-17, 10-12-04).
- ¹⁶² For example, Code of Union County, Georgia, Sec. 14-13(a) - Unlawful acts by owner of a dangerous or vicious dog; violations (Ord. of 9-18-2014(2)).
- ¹⁶³ For example, Code of Union County, Georgia, Sec. 14-13(b) - Unlawful acts by owner of a dangerous or vicious dog; violations (Ord. of 9-18-2014(2)).
- ¹⁶⁴ For example, Habersham County Animal Care & Control Department Code of Ordinances, Sec. 10-35 - Animals disturbing the peace (Ord. of 5-21-2018, § 1) and Code of the Henry County Board of Commissioners, Sec. 3-17-44(4) - Specific prohibitions - Animals (Ord. No. 00-08, § 1, 8-1-00).
- ¹⁶⁵ For example, Code of Laws of Fulton County, Sec. 34-210 - Nuisances (91-RC-441, § T, 8-21-91; 16-0469, Exh. 1, 6-1-16; 16-0728, Exh. A, 9-7-16) and Code of Athens-Clarke County, Georgia, Sec. 9-15-25 - Urban agriculture (Ord. of 5-5-2015(2), § 1).
- ¹⁶⁶ O.C.G.A. §§ 4-11-1 through 4-11-18.
- ¹⁶⁷ O.C.G.A. § 4-11-9.2(c).
- ¹⁶⁸ O.C.G.A. § 4-11-9.2(d).
- ¹⁶⁹ O.C.G.A. § 4-11-9.3(a).
- ¹⁷⁰ O.C.G.A. § 4-11-9.3(b).
- ¹⁷¹ O.C.G.A. §§ 4-11-9.3(c).
- ¹⁷² O.C.G.A. §§ 4-11-9.3(c) and 4-11-9.3(d)(1).
- ¹⁷³ O.C.G.A. § 36-74-21(1). See also O.C.G.A. § 36-1-20.
- ¹⁷⁴ O.C.G.A. § 36-74-21(2).
- ¹⁷⁵ O.C.G.A. § 36-74-3(a).
- ¹⁷⁶ O.C.G.A. § 36-74-22(a).
- ¹⁷⁷ O.C.G.A. § 36-74-22(b).
- ¹⁷⁸ O.C.G.A. § 36-74-22(e).
- ¹⁷⁹ O.C.G.A. § 36-74-25.
- ¹⁸⁰ O.C.G.A. § 36-74-23(a).
- ¹⁸¹ O.C.G.A. § 36-74-23(b).
- ¹⁸² O.C.G.A. § 36-74-23(c).
- ¹⁸³ O.C.G.A. § 36-74-23(d).
- ¹⁸⁴ O.C.G.A. § 36-74-26(a).
- ¹⁸⁵ O.C.G.A. § 36-74-26(b)(3).
- ¹⁸⁶ O.C.G.A. §§ 36-74-26(b)(1) and 36-74-26(b)(2).
- ¹⁸⁷ O.C.G.A. § 36-74-28.