

October 18, 2024 | StarNews (Wilmington, NC) Wilmington, North Carolina Page: 30 OpenURL Link

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Statesville Record & Landmark (NC): Page 3

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October 18, 2024 | Winston-Salem Journal (NC) Winston-Salem, North Carolina Page: 1 OpenURL Link

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Stipends Available for Artists Impacted by Helene

October 17, 2024 | Biltmore Beacon, The (Asheville, NC) Author: Staff Writer | Section: Arts | 310 Words OpenURL Link

Western North Carolina artists of all disciplines substantially impacted by Hurricane Helene are invited to apply for the ArtsAVL Emergency Relief Grant. The grant opened on Oct. 14 and awards \$500 stipends to arts professionals working in visual arts, performing arts, literary arts, music, film, choreography, interdisciplinary arts and more.

This regional grant is open to arts professionals in WNC counties impacted by Tropical Storm Helene, including Alexander, Alleghany, Ashe, Avery, Buncombe, Burke, Caldwell, Catawba, Clay, Cleveland, Gaston, Haywood, Henderson, Jackson, Lincoln, Macon, Madison, McDowell, Mitchell, Polk, Rutherford, Transylvania, Watauga, Wilkes, and Yancey.

ArtsAVL knows that at this moment artists and creative workers are facing the impact of property damage, loss of water and power, connectivity issues, job and project cancellations, and more.

"The need is real and immediate. For many artists, \$500 now is the difference between being able to buy groceries and pay bills, or not," said ArtsAVL executive director Katie Cornell. "Our hearts are breaking for our arts community and their losses are a powerful reminder of the many vital roles that artists and creative workers play in our communities."

Applications for the Emergency Relief Grant are reviewed on an ongoing basis and are subject to approval and available funds. Applications will be reviewed to ensure the applicant lives in an impacted area, that they have a professional artistic practice and that they have urgent need(s). Due to the high volume of artists in need, artists receiving a grant are not eligible to reapply, but awardees will be notified if and when they become eligible for a second round of funding.

ArtsAVL Emergency Relief Grants are a short-term, stop-gap measure to help minimize the disruption across the whole economy, which has catastrophically affected the entire region.

To join ArtsAVL in supporting WNC artists during this difficult time, visit artsavl.org/helene.

Apply for an ArtsAVL Emergency Support Grant and view other support resources at artsavl.org/aid.

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• Citation (aglc Style)

Staff Writer, 'Stipends Available for Artists Impacted by Helene', *Biltmore Beacon, The* (online), 17 Oct 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C45AED429D72E8



County OKs Modified Early Vote Plan

October 17, 2024 | Biltmore Beacon, The (Asheville, NC) Author: Staff Writer | Section: News | 186 Words OpenURL Link

In response to Tropical Storm Helene, the Buncombe County Board of Elections approved new times and locations for early voting under authority of an emergency resolution by the North Carolina State Board of Elections (NCSBE).

On Oct. 7, the NCSBE authorized Buncombe and a dozen other counties that were "severely disrupted" by Tropical Storm Helene to modify election procedures.

The local resolution established daily early voting hours of 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., from Oct. 17 through Nov. 1, including weekends. Voting will begin at 9 a.m. on Nov. 2, the last day of early voting, but per state law the polls will close at 3 p.m. that day.

"We've got a new early voting plan," said Buncombe Board of Elections Chairman Jake Quinn. "Please everybody, spread the word."

Buncombe County is in the initial stages assessing the status of its 80 election day polling places and contacting many poll workers.

Early voting requires fewer locations and poll workers, and the County Board of Elections' changes are intended to maximize voter access. Voters can choose any early voting location that is convenient to them.

For more information, visit www.buncombecounty.org/vote, or ncsbe.gov/Helene.

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• Citation (aglc Style)

Staff Writer, 'County OKs Modified Early Vote Plan', *Biltmore Beacon, The* (online), 17 Oct 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C45AED6DECF540



Biltmore Pledges \$2 Million for Storm Relief

October 17, 2024 | Biltmore Beacon, The (Asheville, NC) Author: Staff Writer | Section: Arts | 254 Words OpenURL Link

Biltmore Estate announced a \$2 million aid initiative through the newly established Biltmore Relief Fund for WNC to aid in relief efforts following Tropical Storm Helene.

Inspired by the legacy of George and Edith Vanderbilt, the focus of this fund is to provide critical and immediate financial relief for people in need, including supporting employees in crisis, providing support to area non-profits aiding the region and investing in recovery.

"Western North Carolina has been our family's home for more than 125 years and we are devastated to see Helene's impact on our region," said Bill Cecil, Jr., President and CEO of Biltmore. "We remain committed to supporting our employees and neighbors in the aftermath of this unprecedented storm and the long-term recovery efforts. Now more than ever, we must work together to stabilize and rebuild this community."

While the estate remains closed due to storm damage, as well as technology infrastructure, power, and water outages, the estate is working during this crisis to assist with immediate needs of emergency response teams, the estate's employees, and long-standing non-profit partners in the Asheville community.

Funds will be directed by Biltmore to non-profit organizations for distribution in the Western North Carolina community.

Like all of the region, conditions throughout the estate vary by location across the 8,000-acre property. Biltmore House and the conservatory, winery, gardens and hotels received minimal or no damage from the storm. In forested areas, crews are clearing debris from roads and inspecting wind damage. The entrance to Biltmore and other low-lying areas of the property experienced flooding.

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Staff Writer, 'Biltmore Pledges \$2 Million for Storm Relief', *Biltmore Beacon, The* (online), 17 Oct 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C45AED3A14E968



Out & About: Events to Take Note Of

October 17, 2024 | Biltmore Beacon, The (Asheville, NC) Author: Staff Writer | Section: Arts | 957 Words OpenURL Link

Farmer's Markets Reopen

at New Locations

The River Arts District Farmers Market has relocated to the Stein Mart parking lot at 848 Merrimon Ave. The event will return every Wednesday from 3-6 p.m.

The North Asheville Tailgate Market also has relocated to the Stein Mart parking lot. It will return every Saturday from 8 a.m. to noon.

Asheville City Market reopened on Oct. 12 at its permanent location, 52 N Market St., with the operating hours of 9 a.m. to noon

The Black Mountain Tailgate Market will remain closed until further notice.

The East Asheville Tailgate Market, 954 Tunnel Road, remains open on Fridays but with revised hours, 1-4 p.m., until further notice.

Both the West Asheville and Enka-Candler markets, 718 Haywood Road, are open at their usual locations and times, while the Weaverville Tailgate Market remains open in their temporary location of Honey & Hive, 23 Merrimon Ave., Weaverville.

For the most up-to-date information, follow along on each market's social media platforms.

All SNAP and card processing machines are working. Participating markets continue to offer double SNAP benefits up to \$20 in fruits and vegetable tokens. ASAP's Farm Fresh Produce Prescription continues.

Museum Collecting

Art Supplies

Though the doors of the Asheville Art Museum are closed due to the lack of water resources, the museum continues to serve as a source of strength and inspiration.

Currently the museum serves as a distribution hub for art supplies, helping local artists and educators who have lost materials and artwork due to the storm. Donation of art supplies is encouraged, and those seeking to help can drop them off at the Museum, Wednesday through Sunday, from 1 to 4 p.m.

Art Restoration

Workshop Planned

The Asheville Art Museum will host a conservation workshop to assist artists and collectors in assessing and restoring damaged family heirlooms or works of art on Oct. 17 at 2 p.m.

Staff is also planning to have individual conservation consultations available in the near future.

Look for upcoming art and wellness programming on the museum's plaza.

Free drop-in art-making, coloring activities, games and workshops will offer moments of respite and connection.

Activity schedules are planned to be posted on the website next week.

For those inspired to support the Asheville Art Museum during this time, visit ashevilleart.org/donate.

Shop, Support &

Sustain Creatives

While travel is not possible at this time due to the significant impacts of Tropical Storm Helene, Explore Asheville is launching the Love Asheville From Afar initiative in partnership with the Asheville Downtown Association, Go Local Asheville, ArtsAVL, the Asheville Area Chamber of Commerce, Asheville Independent Restaurant Association, MADE X MTNS, Mountain BizWorks, and JD Ellison & Company.

The goal is to create one easy place for people to shop, support and sustain Asheville-area and Buncombe County businesses from afar.

Buncombe County businesses, artists and makers that offer one or more of the following are eligible to participate: Have an online store/retail presence; Have the ability to ship local products and/or gift cards (physical or electronic); Are conducting fundraisers for operations, staff wages and/or reconstruction.

To request a business listing on the Love Asheville From Afar page, businesses will be asked to fill out a required form that requests a short description of the business, up to five images (product photos are preferred), as well as links to the online retail, direct funding opportunities and social media accounts. The Love Asheville From Afar page is available to view at ExploreAsheville.com. The site will be updated regularly.

For assistance in filling out the required form, or for any questions, reach out to the partnership team by email at partnersupport@exploreasheville.com.

Hendersonville Theatre

to Present 'Misery'

After weathering the storm of Hurricane Helene, Hendersonville Theatre is rising from the floodwaters to present one of the few Halloween shows in Western North Carolina—Misery, Oct. 24 to Nov. 3.

This gripping stage adaptation of Stephen King's best-selling novel offers a thrilling escape into suspense and terror during the fall season. Tickets are available online at HVLtheatre.org, or by contacting the box office at (828) 692-1082. Ticket are priced \$5 to \$38. Groups of 10 or more receive a 10 percent discount.

In the wake of the hurricane, Misery also serves as a fundraiser for survivors, with proceeds going to the Community Foundation of Henderson County, Interfaith Assistance Ministry, and Rural Organizing And Resilience WNC. Patrons are encouraged to bring donations to the theater. For a list of current donation needs, visit HVLtheatre.org/hurricane-helene-relief.

Rescued from a car crash that leaves him unable to walk, famous romance novelist Paul Sheldon finds himself in the secluded home of former nurse Annie Wilkes. As his self-proclaimed "number one fan," Annie's hospitality quickly becomes a nightmare, as Paul realizes she does not intend to let him leave. The stage adaptation captures the escalating psychological and physical torment as Paul battles to escape Annie's terrifying grip.

Church Postpones

Dementia Event

The Episcopal Church of St. John in Flat Rock will reschedule the workshop, "Learning to Dance with Dementia: When to Lead, When to Follow and When to Get Out of the Way, which was schedule for Oct. 17.

The church will provide a rescheduled date when it becomes available.

Until then, the The Episcopal Church of St. John will focus its efforts on the community during the recovery efforts of Helene.

Hemlock Volunteer

Event, Oct. 25

The Hemlock Restoration Initiative has cancelled all its events in October except its volunteer day with the Forest Restoration Alliance (FRA), on Oct 25.

"The FRA facilities at the Mountain Research Station in Waynesville have thankfully dodged the effects of the storm, and we hope that by continuing to provide this opportunity for some simple plant therapy and connection with each other, this nature restoration-centered event may offer some reprieve from the daily realities so many of us have been experiencing," according to a statement released by the organization.

Tasks scheduled during the volunteer day will include transplanting seedlings and preparing the greenhouses for winter.

If interested in attending, please email education@savehemlocksnc.org.

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Staff Writer, 'Out & About: Events to Take Note Of', *Biltmore Beacon, The* (online), 17 Oct 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C4ACBAD65FEBA8



Election Officials Vow: 'Buncombe County Will Vote'

October 17, 2024 | Biltmore Beacon, The (Asheville, NC) Author: TOM FIEDLER, Asheville Watchdog| Section: News| 675 Words OpenURL Link

Here are the most important words I can offer for anyone concerned about participating in the 2024 election:

"I am here to assure you that Buncombe County will vote," said Corinne Duncan, the county's director of elections.

In separate briefings last week, Duncan and state Board of Elections Executive Director Karen Brinson Bell assured voters that processes are in place to enable even those among us who have been severely impacted or displaced by Tropical Storm Helene to cast ballots in one of three ways:

Cast an absentee ballot from wherever you happen to be

Vote in-person during the early voting period, beginning Oct. 17

Vote at your designated polling place on Election Day, Nov. 5.

The only deviation from previously announced procedures could be the need to relocate early voting locations because of storm and flood damage to the buildings. Duncan said the county Elections Department is assessing the availability of those locations and, if relocating is necessary, will post addresses of alternative sites on the department's website, www.elections@buncombecounty.org.

For voters who may have been displaced by Helene or may have relocated outside the county temporarily, here's what you need to know:

Absentee Balloting

All registered voters in the state can request an absentee ballot through the North Carolina Absentee Ballot Portal. The online address is: https://votebymail.ncsbe.gov. A ballot will be mailed to you at your current address. It can be cast by mail, or you can drop it off at any early voting location, at the Buncombe County Elections Department, 59 Woodfin Place, Asheville, or on Election Day, Tuesday, Nov. 5, at any county polling location. The ballot must be received by 7:30 p.m. on that day, however it is cast.

Temporary Change of Address for Absentee Ballot: If you have already requested an absentee ballot to be sent to you at the address where you can no longer get mail or you can no longer occupy because of storm impact, you must contact the Buncombe Elections Department and request a new ballot be mailed to your current address, although it may be only temporary. Don't change your voter registration address unless you don't intend to return. Absentee ballots were already mailed prior to the storm and some may have been lost or damaged. Elections officials will mail a new ballot to your current address and will destroy your initial request.

If you have further questions, the answers are likely on the department website, www.buncombecounty.gov/vote. Or email elections@buncombecounty.org.

I'll give Elections supervisor Duncan the last word: "Buncombe County will have the opportunity to securely vote this election."

Find Your Sample Ballot and Voting Location

To look up your sample ballot, along with your precinct (Note: Election Day precinct locations for Buncombe County

have not been confirmed at this time). For voting location and other details, visit the State Board of Elections voter lookup tool or click the Voter Information button at buncombecounty.org/vote.

Absentee Voting

Due to current conditions, all voters are eligible to vote absentee. Registered voters can request their absentee ballot at ncdot.gov until Oct. 29. Note that the emergency resolution allows voters to request and receive an absentee ballot in person at their county board of elections office until Nov. 4

The emergency state resolution and modifying state legislation for Tropical Storm Helene allows votes or their near relatives or legal guardians to hand-deliver completed absentee ballots to any county board of elections office in North Carolina (the Buncombe County elections office is at 59 Woodfin Place in Asheville) or to the State Board of Elections office, as long as the ballot is received by 7:30 p.m. on Election Day. The county or State Board would then ensure those ballots are delivered to each voter's county board of elections by Nov. 14 — the day before county canvass — to be counted. A log and chain of custody will be maintained to secure these ballots.

For questions, call (828) 250-4200 or visit buncombecounty.org/vote.

Absentee ballots may be returned to an Early Voting site during the Early Voting period. Voters will be directed to the Early Voting Help Desk to return an absentee ballot.

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TOM FIEDLER, Asheville Watchdog, 'Election Officials Vow: 'Buncombe County Will Vote", *Biltmore Beacon, The* (online), 17 Oct 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C45AED53732040



News Briefs

October 17, 2024 | Biltmore Beacon, The (Asheville, NC) Author: Staff Writer | Section: News Briefs | 1436 Words OpenURL Link

Replacing Lost Documents in North Carolina

When applying for FEMA assistance after Tropical Storm Helene, North Carolinians may need to provide proof of identity, residence and other documentation. The following steps help replace important documents that may have been lost or damaged in the storm.

Insurance Policy Information

Call your insurance company or agent and ask for a copy of your policy, including the Declaration Page.

Birth, Death Certificates, Marriage, Divorce Documents

Order certificates online at NCDHHS: DPH: NC Vital Records: Order a Certificate.

Driver Licenses

If your driver license has been lost or damaged, you may apply for a replacement at any driver license office. Standard licenses also may be replaced online at https://www.ncdot.gov/dmv/license-id/renewal-replacement. If there is a change of address, North Carolina driver license or ID card holders have 30 days to update their address on the credential.

Social Security Card

You may be able to do this online at https://www.ssa.gov/number-card/replace-card, or you can fill out an application for a Social Security card and bring it to your local office along with unexpired identification. Documents must be original or have a signature, stamp, or raised seal from the issuing agency, no photocopies.

Medicare Card

To replace your card, call Medicare at 800-633-4227(TTY 877-486-2048), or visit your local Social Security office, request a new card through you online account with Social Security or visit MyMedicare.gov.

Green Card

Go to uscis.gov and complete the Form I-90 application to replace a permanent resident card, and file it online or by mail.

U.S. Passport

Visit travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/passports/have-passport/lost-stolen.

Federal Tax Returns

Request a copy of your forms at www.irs.gov/forms-pubs/about-form-4506

Military Records

Visit www.archives.gov/veterans/military-service-records

Volunteer Stipends for School Cleanups

Land of Sky Safe Routes to School Program is offering \$50 stipends to volunteers that help to clean up schools in the communities of Buncombe, Haywood, Henderson, Madison and Transylvania counties.

Volunteers may apply for stipends in coordination with local school contacts and the region's Safe Routes to School Coordinator, Ada McGovern, ada@landofsky.org.

"We know there's a lot of work to get our schools and communities ready again and we hope this can help show appreciation for all the work that is being done by so many in our communities," McGovern said.

Safety Critical During Recovery Efforts

As more volunteers participate in river clean-ups and other recovery activities, many will be coming into contact with mud, sludge, sediment and dust left behind by the storm. These materials may contain higher levels of pollutants and contaminants, so it's important to take the necessary precautions to protect yourself, said Bob Wagner, executive director of Mountaintrue, a nonprofit dedicated to protecting the forests and waterways of the Southern Blue Ridge Moutains.

To work safely, Wagner recommends using the following personal protective equipment (PPE):

Rubber boots that can be easily cleaned to prevent cross-contamination.

Rubber gloves to protect hands from direct contact with contaminated materials.

N95 masks (or better) to reduce inhalation of harmful dust and particles.

Long sleeves to protect arms from direct contact with potentially harmful substances.

Waterproof bandages to cover any cuts or abrasions, reducing the risk of infection.

Safety glasses or goggles to shield eyes from mud particles and dust.

After clean-up activities, be sure to shower as soon as possible to remove any remaining contaminants from skin and clothing. Given the lack of running water in many areas, workers/volunteers may want to arrange shower plans before signing up for a clean-up.

Following these safety guidelines will help ensure safety while helping the community recover.

Best Friends Opens AVL Clinics

In the wake of the devastation left by Hurricane Helene, Best Friends Animal Society has deployed Pet Resource Hub at Asheville Veterinary Associates in Buncombe County managed by Sister Kitten Rescue, 50 New Leicester Hwy. The hub is operating daily from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

The Pet Resource Hubs are funded by Best Friends fundraiser, which already raised \$360,000.

Best Friends Animal Society is a leading animal welfare organization working to end the killing of dogs and cats in America's shelters and make the country no-kill in 2025. Founded in 1984, Best Friends runs lifesaving programs across the country.

Free Mobile Vet Care Extends to NC Counties

Last week, Best Friends volunteers expanded the shelter's reach to other hard-hit Western North Carolina communities with a free mobile veterinary clinic in Rutherford and Yancy counties.

Volunteer vets from the Massachusetts SPCA picked up the mobile clinic at Providence Animal Center in Pennsylvania and made their way to North Carolina.

The clinic will offer first aid, vaccinations and wellness care, routine injury care and medications for dogs and cats in parts of the state where veterinary centers and shelters remain closed or working at limited capacity.

The Best Friends mobile vet clinic will operate on a first-come, first-served basis through Nov. 15. During that time, the clinic will take turns popping up at least two days a week at Heart of the Foothills Animal Rescue in Rutherford County, 380 US-221, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.; and two days a week at Yancey County Humane Society, 211 Kink Hearts Way, Burnsville, 10:30 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Times are scheduled to change. Check each shelter's Facebook pages for information.

Apply Now for Double Propane Credits

Propane Education & Research Council (PERC) program doubles the doubles the incentives available to qualifying producers for up to \$10,000 off the purchase of propane-powered equipment.

Double Propane Farm Incentive Program assists farmers recovering from the devastating impact of the 2024 hurricane season. The initiate is available through the end of the year.

The program covers a wide range of equipment designed to boost farm resilience and productivity, including irrigation engines, building and water heating systems, power generators, and flame weeding systems. With the Double Propane Farm Incentive Program, applicants can receive twice the standard incentive amounts for \$600 per liter of fuel displacement for propane-powered irrigation engines, up to \$60/kW for generators, \$3,000 for flame weeding systems, and \$4,000 for agricultural heaters.

"We understand that rebuilding after an extreme event like a hurricane is a long and challenging process for our agricultural community," said Michael Newland, director of agriculture business development at PERC. "U.S. farms and ranches help feed the world, and now they need our help. We hope that this program is able to provide a little bit of support and relief for those farmers we know are working hard to get operations back up and running."

Applications will be verified by Zip Code and National Weather Service data. Apply at Propane.com/FarmIncentive.

1 Percent SBA Recovery Loans

The WNC Strong: Helene Business Recovery Fund is being established with an initial \$7.5 million in support from the Golden LEAF Foundation. Mountain BizWorks and program partners hope to secure additional funding capacity in the coming days and weeks.

Through the Fund, impacted small businesses will be able to apply for loans up to \$100,000 to help meet immediate needs and bridge to longer term relief resources from SBA disaster loans, FEMA assistance, insurance, and other sources. The loans will have a one-percent interest rate and interest-only payments for 12 months. If not repaid in the first year, the loans will automatically convert to a term loan.

"Small businesses in Western North Carolina are essential to their communities and this help from Golden LEAF can give them a start to building back," said Governor Roy Cooper..

"Even in this darkest hour, we believe the path forward lies in unity and our common good. Together, we can

rebuild our community. We're honored to contribute our resources to this initial wave of emergency funds, a crucial step towards a more resilient future for our region," said Mountain BizWorks Board Chair, Zane Adams.

For terms and application information, visit mountainbizworks.org/helene/fund, wncstrong@mountainbizworks.org, or call 828-701-1525.

AVL Schools to Resume Classes Oct. 28

Asheville City Schools

Asheville City Schools (ACS) has been busy drilling wells at campuses and was able to get ground water at Hall Fletcher Elementary School. It will take about two to three weeks before water can move from the well to use at schools. ACS plans to drill wells on all campuses to serve as backup water. ACS has submitted an order for portable toilet trailers. The targeted school opening date for ACS is Oct. 28, however the goal is to open as soon as safely possible so this date may change. ACS will provide a 72-hour notice to parents prior to re-opening.

Buncombe County Schools

The safest and most actionable plan for reopening school will be to bring in portable restrooms with handwashing stations. Buncombe County schools has put in a request to get these facilities on campus as soon as possible. Meals, which include free breakfast and lunch to all students, will pivot to grab-and-go meals. Buncombe County Schools has no exact reopening date as of press time, but parents will receive a minimum 72-hour notice. Work is also being done to remap county bus routes.

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God's Pit Crew Rolls Into WNC

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The God's Pit Crew Immediate Disaster Response Team rolled into Asheville last week, with plans to remain through Sunday, November 3.

The newly arrived team joined the efforts of a smaller group of ministry volunteers who have been on site in Asheville for several days.

God's Pit Crew semi-trucks equipped with dehumidifiers, generators, chainsaws, tarps and other equipment to assist with cleanup efforts will have been assisting those affected by the catastrophic flooding of Tropical Storm Helene. The resources are being used to remove mud, wet carpet and furniture, and wet drywall from homes, as well as assist homeowners with damaged tree and debris removal.

"The damage in the Western North Carolina region is absolutely devastating," said God's Pit Crew President Randy Johnson. "Our prayers are with all of those affected by this storm and our many disaster relief volunteers who provide hope, healing, and restoration. We are blessed with so many great volunteers and donors who allow us to do what we do. We pray to help as many people impacted by Helene as possible, and we rely on the donors and volunteers who act as the main heartbeats of the ministry to keep it going."

Response efforts by the ministry are made possible via volunteers who serve on missions, as well as partners and donors who fuel the efforts with their gracious contributions.

Over 25 tractor-trailer loads of critical relief items have been delivered to hurting areas throughout Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, Tennessee and Virginia.

Individuals in need of assistance are asked to fill out the North Carolina Assistance Form located within the red banner on the God's Pit Crew website (GodsPitCrew.org). Volunteers will be working to muck out homes, assist with drying efforts and mold remediation, cut and remove damaged trees, and pray with families.

For those looking to assist with God's Pit Crew's disaster response initiatives, volunteer and donation opportunities can be found by visiting the website or by calling and speaking with a representative at (434) 836-4472.

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Health Officials on Lookout for 'Second Wave' of Medical Issues

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After the floods come the waves.

Following the initial health crises in the aftermath of Tropical Storm Helene, Buncombe County and others inundated by the storm may be facing a secondary medical surge, one driven by infections and diseases and potentially exacerbated by a lack of running water, emergency response officials warned.

Helene's initial devastation in Western North Carolina sent hundreds to the hospital with needs for everything from oxygen to traumatic wound care. Now, three weeks after the storm, doctors, health professionals and officials in charge of disaster relief say there could be a second wave of medical concerns affecting hospitals and clinics, and it could be here soon.

"What I expect the next wave to be is primarily medical, where people are beginning to get sick from their circumstance, and they're going to need a different kind of help," said Dr. Raymond Barfield, a palliative care and hospice specialist at Mission Hospital. "The first one was trauma. The second one is going to be medical, with probably a lot of infection-related [cases]."

"The stressors, the physical and medical stressors on the community after a disaster, they come in waves," said Richard Hess, Ohio team commander with the federal Disaster Medical Assistance Team, which is helping ease the influx of patients at Mission, the largest hospital in storm-battered western North Carolina.

While the next surge of medical issues isn't guaranteed, studies show they do come in waves following flooding.

"The health consequences of flooding may be described in terms of time as immediate, medium-term, and long-term," a 2009 study on the health impacts of floods said. "Immediate is considered as the period when the flood is present, medium is the immediate recovery phase (days to weeks), and long-term is the reconstruction phase (months to years) after the flood."

Another 2018 study showed risks for respiratory and heart disease are higher following disasters similar to Helene.

"Increased exacerbations of cardiovascular disease, including worsening control of hypertension and myocardial infarctions, with an associated increased risk of death, were observed after hurricane events with associated flooding," said one study. "Patients with chronic respiratory diseases were noted to have an increase in acute exacerbations after natural disasters, owing to disruption in maintenance therapy, loss of power, particularly among oxygen- and nebulizer-dependent patients, and overcrowding."

Local officials say they're prepared

Mission Health representatives, Buncombe County officials and federal agencies said they're ready for the next wave when it hits.

"This won't be short term. This will be long term," Mike Wargo, HCA Vice President of Emergency Preparedness said. "We've got a team of colleagues, physician leaders, nursing leaders, infection preventionists, that are really focused on that."

"We've got to really look to the integrity of the public health system, the hygiene within the community, and offer them water services that are being deployed, hygiene services that are being deployed, and just continue to assess the needs and provide those resources," Wargo said.

Buncombe County spokesperson Lillian Govus echoed sentiments, saying the county is making preparations for the possibility of a medical crisis. "I don't have further information on that at this time, but the public health ramifications of this crisis and this disaster are not an afterthought in terms of what our planning includes."

Buncombe public health officials say hand sanitizer will be key because of the ongoing water outage. They are asking for donations of hand sanitizer.

First Wave: Infections

There are several risks associated with this second wave, according to Dr. David Weber, medical director at the Department of Infection Prevention at UNC Medical Center in Chapel Hill.

The first of these are infections. Staph infections and strep come from bacteria on the skin and can affect people who have skin injuries, regardless of whether people have contact with infected water.

Someone with skin injuries who comes in contact with infected water could become infected with aeromonas or tetanus.

"If you're not up to date on your tetanus shots, those would be most of the ones I would worry about," Weber said.

"Most of those would occur in two to four days, pretty quickly, with the exception of the mycobacteria infections, which might take several weeks," he added.

People could also be infected by just wading through the water, splashing it and ingesting or inhaling it, Weber explained.

Norovirus is the most common infection risk by non-injury contact with water, Weber said, followed by e. coli. These result in gastroenteritis, nausea, and vomiting.

Legionnaires' disease is a risk with inhalation of infected water, Weber said.

Second Wave: Respiratory illnesses

But there are other infectious, non-water-related risks.

"Most of the other respiratory diseases are not going to be related to water or unsafe drinking water," Weber said.

"Those would be if people are in shelters. If they've left their house and you pack, you know, 100 people into a high school auditorium for days to weeks, and you go in and it's cot, cot, cot, a foot apart, that's when you would see things like respiratory illnesses, COVID-19, influenza, RSV."

"All it takes is one person coughing and sneezing, and everyone's sort of packed in there," Weber said.

Such an environment could also bring with it the risk of lice, Weber said.

There are other risks that could impact people weeks after contact with disease, including tuberculosis and hepatitis A, a liver infection spread by infected food and water. La Crosse encephalitis, an infection of the brain, is less likely, but could happen because of standing water and resulting clusters of mosquitoes, which spread the virus.

Weber also addressed numerous other threats people face following a flooding disaster: fires from candles or grills inside the house; carbon monoxide poisoning; snake bites; injuries from more fallen trees, from either cleanup or roots severely loosened by the rain and toppled by moderate wind; stress resulting in heart attacks and strokes; and mold taking over homes, even those with only minor water damage, causing asthma and respiratory illnesses.

"If you look at what people actually die of after the hurricanes, most of these infections are treatable," Weber said.
"You're not going to see a big death rate from that, but things like cardiovascular diseases, potentially psychiatric illnesses and others would be more of an issue."

The Right Tools

At Mission Hospital, a maze of tents called a decompression facility is shielding the Asheville health care hub from a potential surge.

Hess said he expected the tents to start getting more patients within about 10 days.

"If you look at disaster publications, it is predictable that you have these phases," Hess said. "Now, you never know when those are exactly going to hit, but with some percentage of probability, you get through the acute phase, then you go into your secondary phase, [when] you're going to get the people that are also helping do disaster response. Then you're also going to have the increase in the metabolic type stuff, the diabetics. Like, okay, no electricity? Diabetics have had no refrigeration for their insulin. That's a problem. It's a huge problem."

But the decompression facility is ready for all those patients. Stocked with state-of-the-art equipment, staffed by federal disaster response employees and Mission employees, and equipped with a mini trauma hospital, the facility provides medical workers with almost everything they need to deal with the next wave, if it hits soon.

Doctors have praised HCA Healthcare, Mission's owner, for doing everything in its power to get necessary resources, especially after several days without water and on backup power.

But for now and for the immediate future, the risks are high, and people will be needing care for everything from cuts to mental stress to severe heart issues.

"There's something about a huge crisis that just brings another layer of urgency and distress into people's lives, Barfield, the palliative care doctor, said. "It's not just their body that feels surprisingly unstable, which always sneaks up on us, but it's the whole countryside."

"You walk through the River Arts District and you realize, you know, Wow, whatever power I thought I had, that was an illusion," Barfield said. "This river showed me that it can undo an entire lifetime of work with a bunch of rain."

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UNC Asheville Moves Early Voting Site

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UNC Asheville will still serve as a host site for early voting, beginning Oct. 17, in partnership with the Buncombe County Board of Elections despite challenges presented by the unprecedented impact of Helene.

The University had originally planned to host early voting in Highsmith Student Union, but since the campus remains under Condition 3 (closed) status until at least Oct. 21, a request was made to switch the site to an adjacent University facility separate from the main campus.

Voters can now cast early ballots at 118 W.T. Weaver Blvd. in the building that is home to the UNC Asheville Health and Counseling Center. The new site, midway between Merrimon Avenue and Broadway Street, provides easy access for voters, and also offers ample parking and convenience.

The early voting site will be open from Oct. 17 to Nov. 1, including weekends, from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., as well as Saturday, Nov. 2, from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

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