

Black Mountain Fire Department 2024 Annual Report

Presented by: Fire Chief John Coffey

Date: October 13th, 2025

Hurricane Helene - A Defining Moment

- Hurricane Helene brought unprecedented devastation to Black Mountain.
- Widespread flooding, landslides, and infrastructure damage tested local emergency response systems.
- Despite overwhelming conditions, the Fire Department and partnering agencies responded heroically to hundreds of incidents.

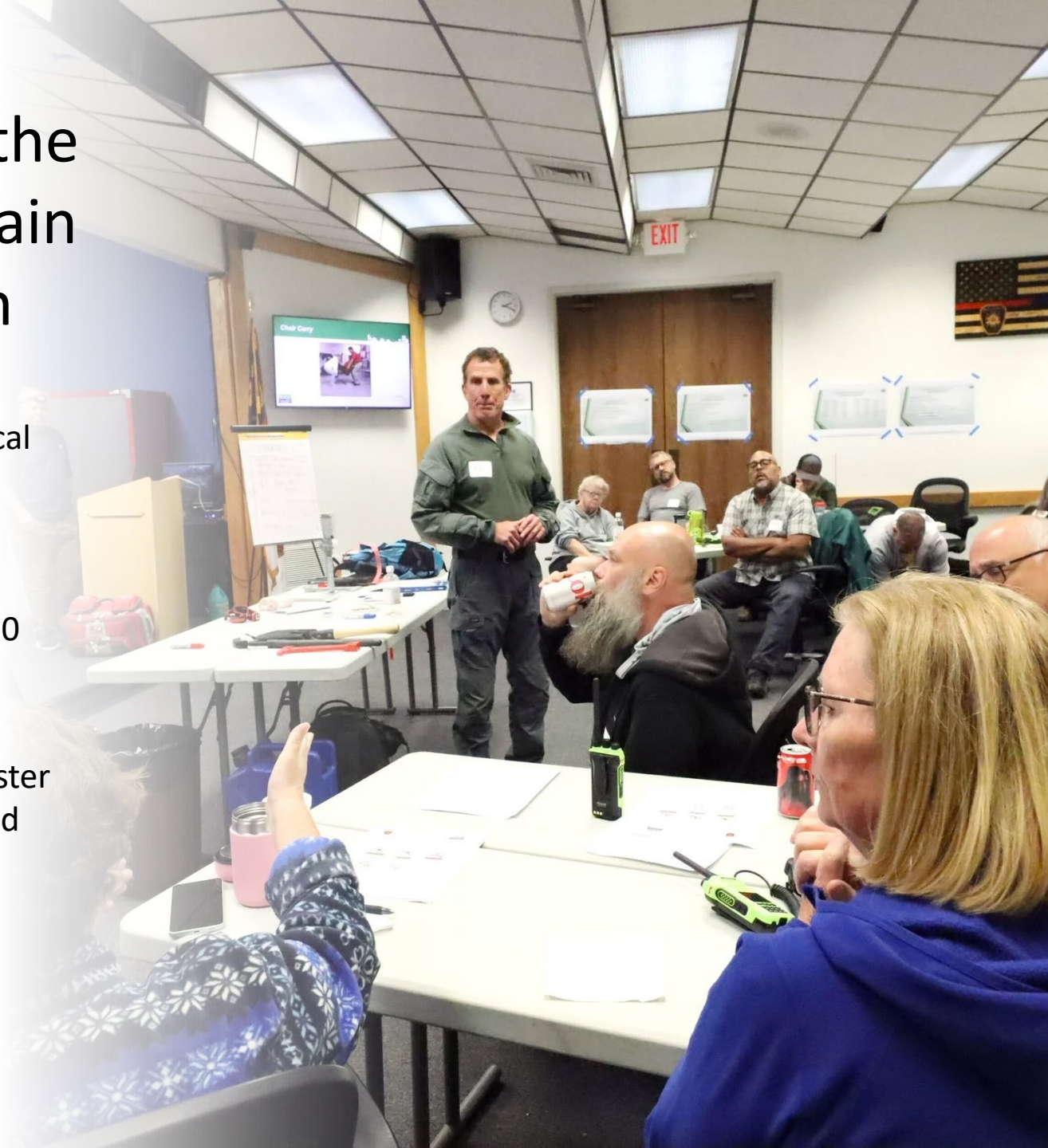


Establishing the Black Mountain CERT Team

CERT identified as a critical need during Helene.

First CERT team west of Hickory; approximately 30 members today.

Members trained in disaster response, light search and rescue, first aid, and communications.



What CERT Does

- Supports Fire, Police, and EMS during large-scale emergencies.
- Provides neighborhood-level disaster assistance.
- Assists with evacuation shelters, communications, and public information.
- Enhances community preparedness and resilience.





Training and Professional Development

Most town staff have completed NIMS and ICS training.

Ensures coordinated response and efficient multi-agency operations.

Continued emphasis on leadership and professional development.

Social Media and Public Outreach

- Social media presence continues to grow.
- Firefighter-created videos increased engagement.
- Safety messages reach thousands monthly.









Lessons from Helene

Helene revealed areas for improvement:

Equipment and apparatus limitations

Staffing shortages during prolonged events

Communication challenges

Even with statewide aid, local resources were overrun.

Improved Communications Systems

Major radio system improvements implemented.

Reintroduced UHF/VHF systems with modern tools:

- HAM radio integration
- Starlink internet

Thanks to volunteers and CERT team members David Billstrom and Mr. Borden for their radio expertise.



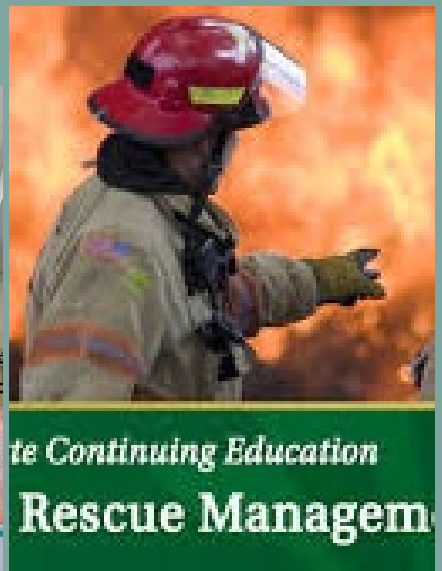
Staffing and Department Culture

- Full staffing achieved – no vacancies.
- Strong culture emphasizing professionalism, safety, and empowerment.
- Leadership approach encourages growth and excellence.















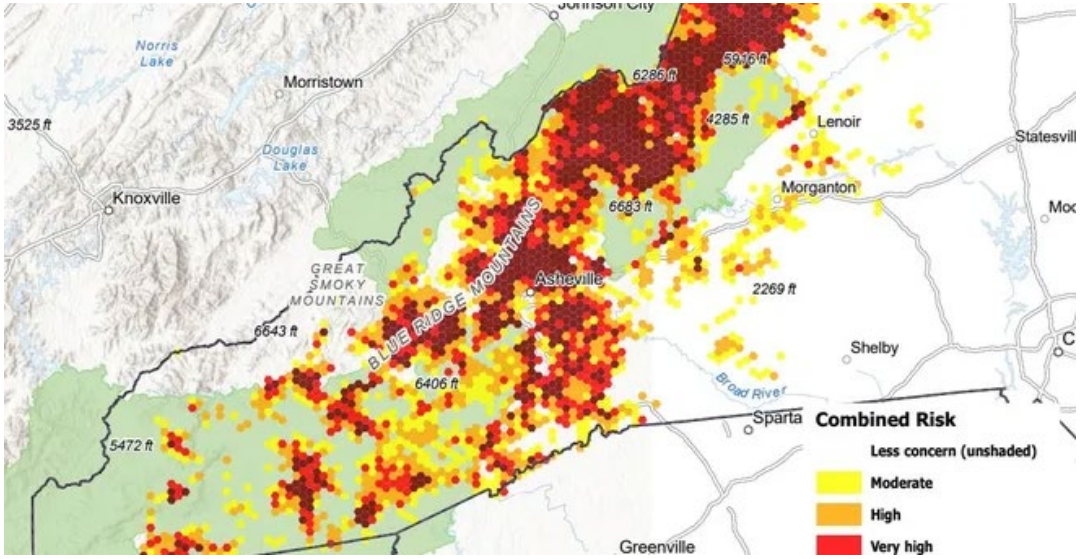
Apparatus and Equipment Updates

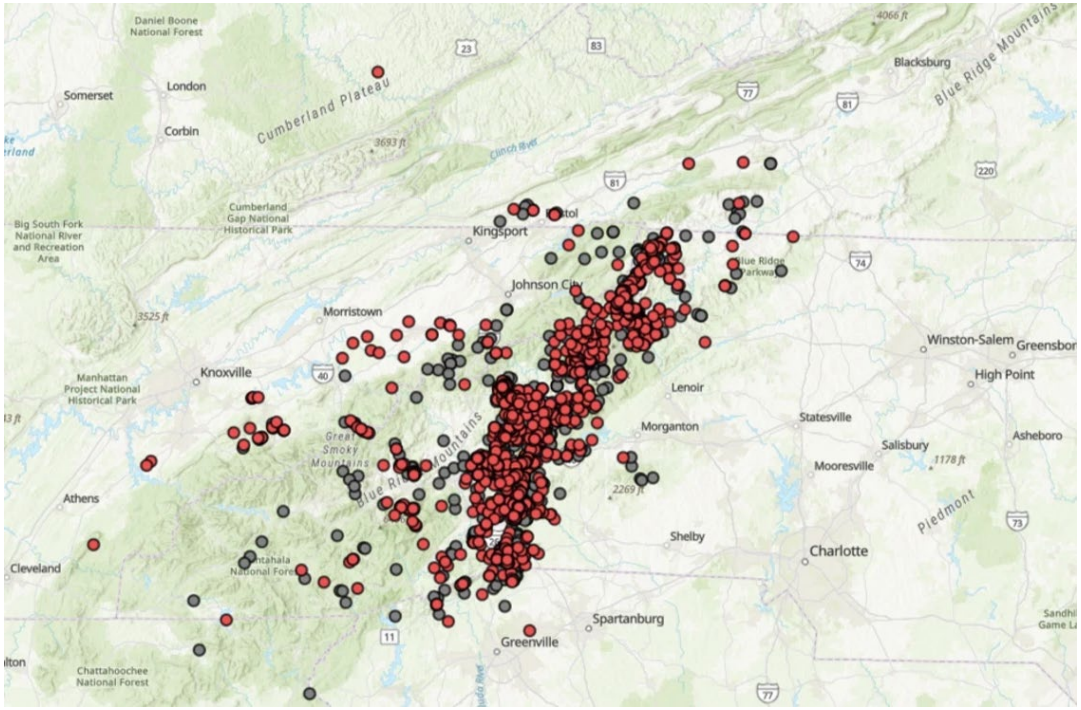
Mini-Pumper approved last year; still in production due to industry delays. Approximate arrival September 2026.

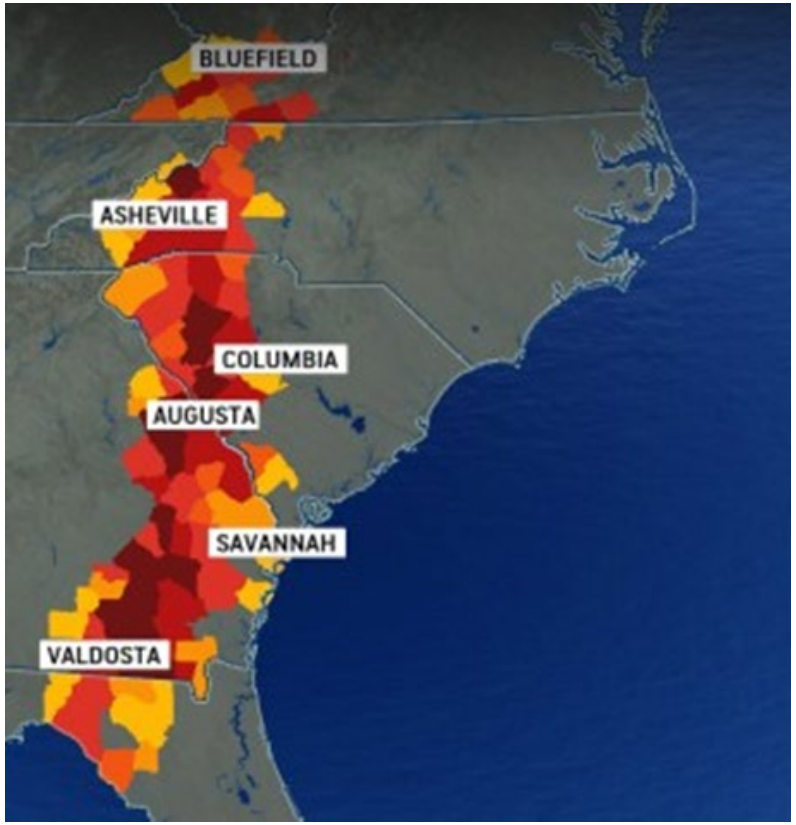
Rescue Equipment upgrades remain a top priority.

Post-Helene Debris and Fire Season Risks

- Improved understanding of landslide debris pathways.
- Entering fire season with 800,000 acres of debris across WNC.
- High wildfire potential per U.S. Forest Service.
- Low staffing and thinning resources are major concerns.

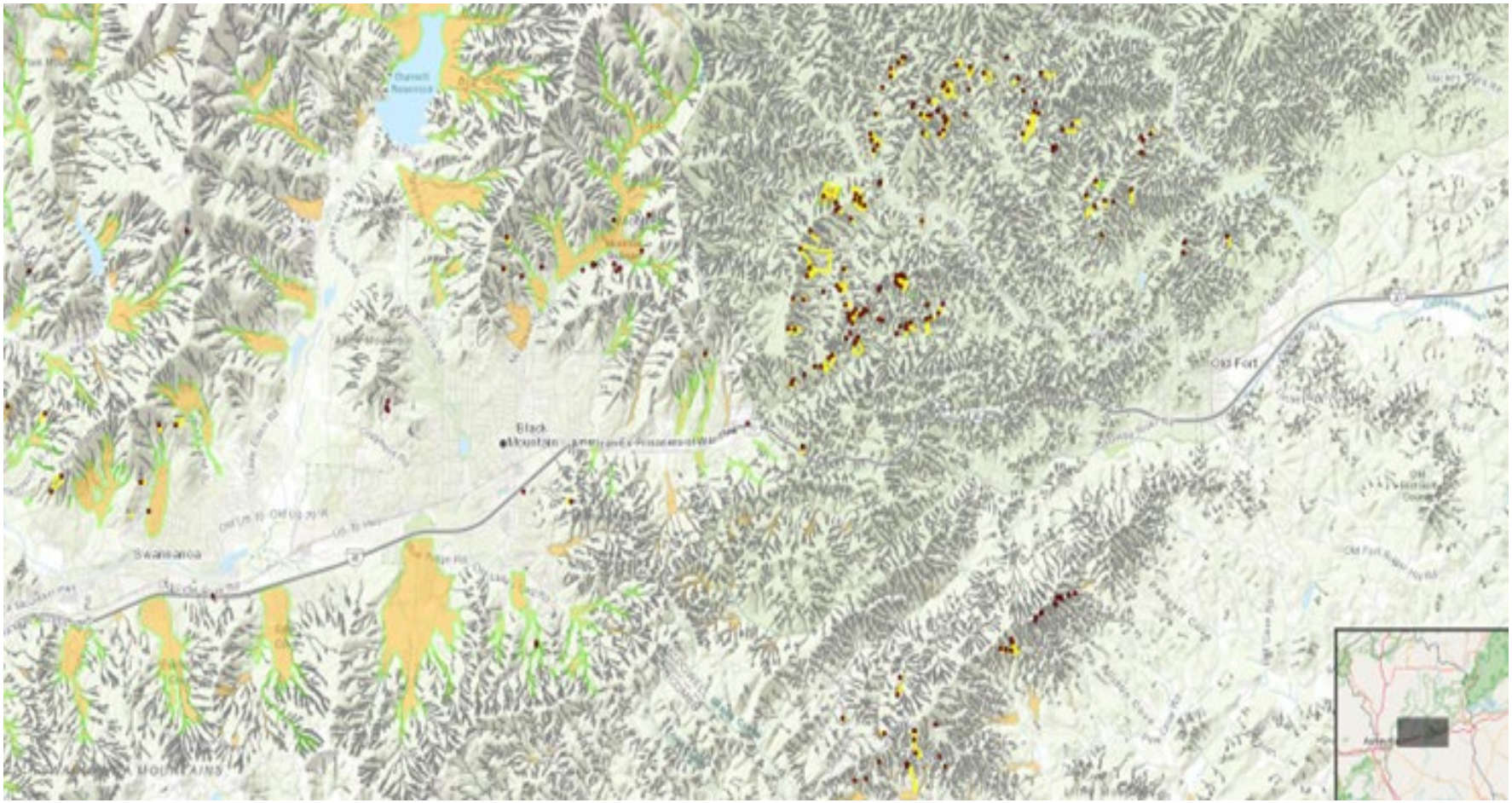






Hurricane Helenes Path

Landslide Data Black Mountain



Response and Call Statistics

- Total Calls for Service: 3001
- Fire Calls: 85 incidents involving a combustible material
- Rescue/EMS Calls: 1176
- MVC: 84
- Various Call Types (fire alarm, public assistance, etc.) : 1656
- Mutual Aid Provided/Received: 93/141
- Average Response Time: (Turnout 1:55) (Dispatch to Arrival 7:55)
  - Benchmark is 6 minutes

Training and Accomplishments

Total Staff Training Hours: 6375

Certifications Earned:

- Advanced Fire Certifications
  - CFI
  - Water Rescue
  - Technical rescue
  - Advanced EMT (former Intermediate)
  - Inspector
  - Public Education
  - Advanced Leadership schools
  - Instructor School
  - Company and Executive Fire Officer Designations

- Higher Education
  - Associates degree
  - Bachelor Degree
  - Masters Degree
  - (1) Currently working on a PhD

Succession planning is an investment in public safety. When we prepare future leaders today to ensure that the citizens we serve will always be protected by experienced, capable, and confident professionals; no matter who wears the badge tomorrow.

Fire and Life Safety Division
Fire Marshal's Office

- Increased inspections and education programs.
- Collaboration with schools, businesses, and community groups.
- Focused on proactive prevention and community risk reduction.
- Projected to become nationally credentialled by the end of 2025.
- Certified NFA N0777 - Comprehensive Fatal Fire Investigations.
- *North Carolina* Insurance Crime Information Exchange
  - President and Vice President of the Mountain Region Board
- Nominated for Western Director of the North Carolina Fire Marshal's Association



Black Mountain Community Connect

Together, Building a Safer Community Through Prevention Preparedness & Response

CREATE YOUR HOUSEHOLD LIFE SAFETY PROFILE TODAY

Community Connect





Looking Ahead

Expand CERT participation and training.

Strengthen interagency coordination and communication.

Prioritize apparatus replacement, technology upgrades, and staff development.

Commitment to excellence and resilience.

Why a Ladder Truck is Needed

The NC Office of State Fire Marshal (OSFM) and ISO rating systems assess departments based on community risk.

OSFM criteria: Districts with ≥5 buildings over 3 stories or 35 feet typically require an aerial apparatus.

Ladder trucks are essential for:

– Multi-story rescues and roof ventilation

– Fire suppression in elevated or hillside structures

– Access to confined or difficult terrain common in Black Mountain

Without a ladder truck, ISO ratings decline — raising insurance premiums for homes and businesses.

















Risk, Readiness, and Fiscal Impact

- Risk profile:
  - 17+ multi-story structures and expanding downtown development.
  - Tourism growth and new assisted-living facilities increase vertical hazards.
- Current mutual aid adds 15–20 minutes for aerial response from neighboring departments.
- Lack of local aerial capability limits ISO credit in Fire Flow, Equipment, and Water Supply categories.
- Insurance Impact: Townwide premiums estimated 3–8% higher without compliant aerial coverage.
- Recommendation: Begin capital planning for ladder truck acquisition to meet OSFM/ISO standards, enhance safety, and control insurance costs.

Closing

Thank You, Mayor and Council.

Your continued support enables us to protect and serve the citizens of Black Mountain with professionalism, compassion, and courage.