

GOVERNOR'S HURRICANE CONVENTION | WORKSHOP WS156

EXPECTATIONS vs. REALITY

What every Florida government leader needs to know — before, during, and after the storm

MODERATED BY JEFF GOLDBERG | Walton County Emergency Management

PANEL CO-PRESENTED BY



PBCCC 2F | May 15, 2026 | 10:30 AM – 12:00 PM

DEBRIS OPERATIONS HAVE BECOME A CONSTANT, NOT AN EVENT

WS156 | GRC 2026

DEBRIS OPS | THE NEW NORMAL

27

Billion-dollar disasters in 2023 (NOAA)

\$2T+

Cumulative U.S. disaster costs (1980 – 2024)

Rising

Frequency of catastrophic events

Compressed

Recovery windows between events

Higher

Public expectation of speed

Tighter

FEMA documentation standards

MORE FREQUENT, LESS SPACED, AND HARDER TO DOCUMENT — DEBRIS PROGRAMS HAVE BECOME A CORE FUNCTION OF EM.

YOUR PANEL

MODERATOR

Jeff Goldberg

Director, Walton County Emergency Management

Frames the discussion and drives audience engagement on debris operations.

ASHBRITT

Disaster Recovery Contractor

Matt Gierden

Senior Vice President

Contractor-side perspective on debris operations, FEMA coordination, and resident-facing realities.

DRC

Disaster Recovery Contractor

Evan Fancher

South Florida Regional Manager, DRC Emergency Services

10-year local government and debris management veteran; oversight of \$200M+ in Florida debris projects.

TETRA TECH

Debris Monitoring Firm

Wes Holden

Deputy Director, Response and Recovery, Tetra Tech

Independent monitoring perspective on documentation, FEMA reimbursement, and program scope (PPDR, waterways, hazardous trees).

PASCO COUNTY

Local Government

Andrew Fossa

Director, Pasco County Emergency Management

Local-government view on activating contractors, managing residents and electeds, and closing out under FEMA PA.

THE SIX PILLARS OF THIS SESSION

WORKSHOP OVERVIEW

1

Pre-Disaster Foundations

Contracts, maps, DMS site selection, and the prep work that decides outcomes

2

Day 1 Through Day 30 Realities

Where reality diverges from the timeline you promised your residents

3

Stakeholder Communication

Talking to residents, elected officials, and the press without losing the message

4

Rumors, Social Media & The Karen/Kevin Effect

How misinformation can derail an otherwise sound operation

5

Florida Case Study — Helene + Milton

Charlotte County: 344,243 CY across 107 zones — what worked, what didn't

6

Closing Out — Bulk Pickups & Final Passes

How missions end, what goes wrong, and how to protect your reimbursement

THE REALITY ON THE GROUND

This is what Day 1 actually looks like.

Mixed C&D, vegetative debris, residential possessions — all in one pile, all needing separation, monitoring, and documentation.





Riverine flooding. Inland communities. Same recovery playbook — different terrain.

THE EXPECTATIONS GAP

WHAT RESIDENTS EXPECT

- ▶ Trucks roll on Day 1; the curb is clear by Day 14
- ▶ One pass = the whole job
- ▶ The contractor handles everything end-to-end
- ▶ FEMA reimburses what we spend
- ▶ Social media will help us push out updates
- ▶ Close-out is a paperwork formality

WHAT ACTUALLY HAPPENS

- ▶ Mobilization is real. Day 1 is rarely Day 1
- ▶ Multiple passes are the norm — sometimes 4–6
- ▶ It takes the contractor, monitor, county, and FEMA
- ▶ FEMA reimburses what's documented — not the invoice
- ▶ Social media is as likely to derail as to help
- ▶ Close-out is where deobligations happen

STORM PATTERNS | THE EXPECTATIONS GAP IN PRACTICE

SINGLE-EVENT, HIGH-INTENSITY

Single high-intensity strike. Debris volume is enormous but the operational geometry is bounded. Mobilization can concentrate. Documentation streams are linear. The expectation gap is mostly about resident communications and pace.

COMPOUND, BACK-TO-BACK EVENTS

Sequence of events with overlapping operations. The playbook gets stress-tested in real time. Contract flexibility, multi-mission close-out, and crew re-mobilization become primary risks. The expectations gap widens — residents expect the playbook held; reality is the playbook is being rewritten mid-mission.

WHY BOTH PATTERNS MATTER

The single-event pattern proves the value of pre-positioned contracts, mapped collection zones, and permitted DMS sites. The compound-event pattern tests whether that infrastructure flexes under back-to-back activations. Every jurisdiction will see both patterns. The discipline for each is different.

WHERE'S YOUR GAP?

THE EXPECTATIONS QUESTION

When you think back to your most recent activation — or the one you're most worried about — where was the biggest gap between what you expected debris operations to look like, and what actually unfolded on the ground?

THE PLAN-CONFIDENCE QUESTION

What's the one assumption in your debris management plan that you're least confident would hold up in a real event today?

PRE-DISASTER FOUNDATIONS

CONTRACTS

Pre-Positioned & 2 CFR 200-Compliant

- ▶ Competitively procured under federal standards
- ▶ Active before the storm — not procured during
- ▶ Includes flex pricing for non-standard debris
- ▶ Independent monitoring contract, executed separately
- ▶ One primary contractor, best-value — not low-bid

MAPS & ZONES

Operational Geometry Defined

- ▶ Collection zones drawn pre-disaster, not improvised
- ▶ Priority routes (hospitals, EOC, evacuation) marked
- ▶ Parcel data + GIS layers loaded into ADMS systems
- ▶ Distinct ROW vs. private property boundaries

DMS SITES

Pre-Identified & Pre-Permitted

- ▶ Sites identified, leased, and permitted in blue sky
- ▶ EHP review completed where applicable
- ▶ Capacity sized for worst-credible event
- ▶ Reduction method (grinding, burn, haul) decided

Get these three right and every downstream conversation gets easier — with residents, FEMA, and electeds.

"ONE OF" CONTRACTING — EXPECTATION vs. REALITY

EXPECTATION

WHAT LEADERSHIP ASSUMES

CASE 1 — ACTIVATION

- ▶ I'll call every contractor, ask who has capacity, then pick.

CASE 2 — CAPACITY

- ▶ Activate two contractors and we'll get double the trucks.

CASE 3 — SPLIT MARKETS

- ▶ Splitting the county between primes shares the load fairly.

REALITY

WHAT POST-IRMA APPLICANTS SAW

CASE 1 — ACTIVATION

- ▶ Every contractor says "yes" — then sends best crews to whoever issued NTPs first. Lobbyists flood the EOC.

CASE 2 — CAPACITY

- ▶ Same trucks (often fewer) — plus double the management, lopsided cleanup, two back offices.

CASE 3 — SPLIT MARKETS

- ▶ Endless internal sales pitch to take over the other's area.

THE TAKEAWAY

Pick one primary. Pre-commit. Pay for readiness — not the option to call around when the cone shifts.

OLD STAFF, NEW STAFF — THE KNOWLEDGE GAP

OLD STAFF

Retirement-era institutional memory

- ▶ Lived through prior major events
- ▶ Built the contracts, the maps, the relationships
- ▶ Holds the 'blue sky' history of what worked
- ▶ Knows the FEMA POCs personally
- ▶ Is increasingly hard to find on Day 1 of the next storm

NEW STAFF

Shock and awe — fast-paced education

- ▶ Inheriting playbooks they didn't write
- ▶ Learning FEMA program rules in real time
- ▶ Overwhelmed by political and resident pressure
- ▶ Needs the contractor to fill institutional gaps
- ▶ Decisions made in Week 1 shape the entire mission

TRASH ROUTES vs. DEBRIS COLLECTION

WEEKLY TRASH ROUTES

WHAT RESIDENTS ARE USED TO

- ▶ Systematic — same day every week
- ▶ Schedule is published, predictable
- ▶ Throw-and-go: anything fits in the can
- ▶ Ease of access; trucks designed for the route
- ▶ If you miss it, it's not a crisis — try next week

POST-DISASTER DEBRIS COLLECTION

WHAT THEY ARE ABOUT TO EXPERIENCE

- ▶ Zone-by-zone, not calendar-driven
- ▶ Schedule depends on damage, access, and FEMA eligibility
- ▶ Specific allowables only — most household items excluded
- ▶ Trucks must navigate damage, downed lines, debris piles
- ▶ Multiple passes are normal — not 'one and done'



Before the storm, the cone shifts daily. Decisions you make now define recovery.

PANEL DISCUSSION



**What's the single decision you wish you had made
before the storm hit, rather than during the first 72 hours?**

Panelists who've run an activation go first. Audience joins in.

DAY 1 THROUGH DAY 30 — THE REAL TIMELINE

DAYS 0–3

MOBILIZATION

Contractor activation, monitor activation, DMS standup, ROW clearing on critical routes. Public expects trucks on every street — actual reach is limited to emergency arterials.

Reality: Market conditions have changed — best-value contracts get faster response than low-bid.

DAYS 4–10

FIRST PASS BUILDS

Full crew deployment, zone-by-zone first pass. Volume peaks. Residents start dragging debris to curbs. Misinformation begins — 'they skipped my street.'

Reality: Someone is always first, and someone has to be last.

DAYS 11–20

FIRST PASS COMPLETES

Most ROW debris collected on first pass. DMS sites under heavy load. Bulk haul-out begins. Elected officials start calling about specific properties.

Reality: 24/7 ops aren't a switch — night work doubles the workforce and the risk.

DAYS 21–30

SECOND PASS + SPECIALTY

Second pass for stragglers. Specialty crews on white goods, HHW, sand operations. PPDR ramp-up if eligible. Audit and documentation reconciliation in motion.

Reality: 90 days is not slow — complex programs (PPDR, waterways, vessels) take time.

If your messaging anchors on the first pass alone, you've set up a 30-day cycle of disappointment. Plan multi-pass communication from Day 1.

STAKEHOLDER COMMUNICATION FRAMEWORK

RESIDENTS

DAILY • PLAIN LANGUAGE

Zone-by-zone updates, expected pass dates, what to set out, what NOT to set out. Channel: website, social, door hangers, NextDoor outreach.

OWNER: Public Information Officer (lead)

HOA / ASSOCIATIONS

WEEKLY • COORDINATED

Bulk-pickup logistics, gated community access, monitor escort protocols. Channel: HOA presidents, board liaisons.

OWNER: PIO + Operations Lead

ELECTED OFFICIALS

DAILY SITREP + AD HOC

Operational dashboard, volume metrics, hotspot complaints, FEMA funding posture. Channel: SITREP + direct call line.

OWNER: County Administrator / EM Director

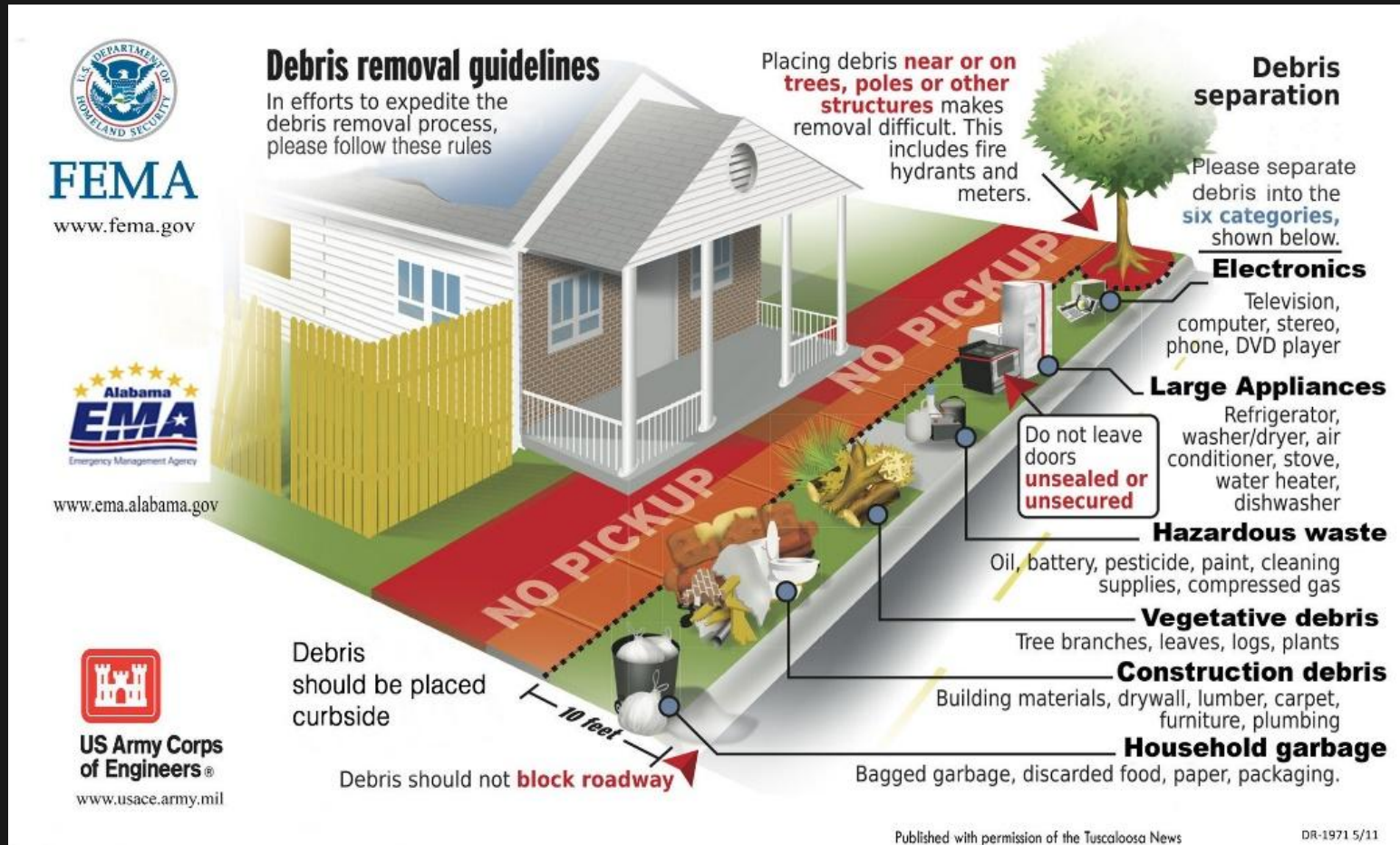
PRESS / MEDIA

SCHEDULED + REACTIVE

Designated spokesperson only. Daily numbers, weekly milestone, on-camera ride-alongs. Channel: scheduled press conferences.

OWNER: PIO + County Communications

WHAT RESIDENTS SHOULD SET OUT — AND WHAT THEY SHOULDN'T



THE SIX CATEGORIES

- ▶ Vegetative — trees, branches, leaves
- ▶ Construction & Demolition (C&D)
- ▶ Large Appliances (white goods)
- ▶ Electronics (E-waste)
- ▶ Hazardous Waste (HHW)
- ▶ Household Garbage — bagged

GOLDEN RULE

10 ft from utility, no overhanging power lines, no blocking the roadway, separated by category.

THE RUMOR MILL — SOCIAL MEDIA & MISINFORMATION

1

'They skipped my street.'

Reality: first pass is in progress; their zone is later in the rotation. Counter with public zone map + completion dashboard.

2

'The trucks aren't even county trucks.'

Reality: subcontractors with county-approved decals and monitor escorts. Counter with vehicle ID public page + monitor presence FAQ.

3

'They're charging the county per truck, so they go slow.'

Reality: pay-per-CY. Slow = unpaid. Counter with payment model explainer (per cubic yard, measured at DMS).

4

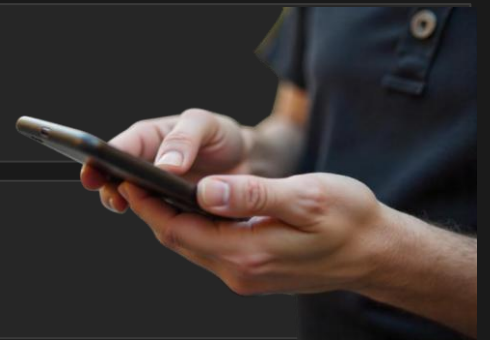
'They took my [appliance/car/grill] without permission.'

Reality: visible-from-ROW debris pickup is per policy. Counter with what-to-set-out / what-not graphic, parcel-line clarification.

5

'FEMA's going to reject all this and we'll get the bill.'

Reality: documented, monitored work is reimbursable. Counter with proactive FEMA coordination updates and CPARS history reference.



Pre-draft the responses BEFORE the storm. Reactive messaging during the event is too slow to catch the rumor cycle.

COORDINATING WITH ELECTED OFFICIALS

DAILY SITREP

Single-Page Operational Brief

Volume totals, zones complete, complaint hotspots, FEMA posture, equipment count. One page, same format every day. Distributed before 7 AM.

ESCALATION PATH

Constituent Issues Resolved Within 24 Hours

Documented protocol for elected-official requests: triage → operations response → resolution → constituent callback. No cherry-picking.

NO SURPRISES RULE

Bad News Before It Hits The Press

If a zone is delayed, a DMS is overloaded, or a FEMA finding is coming, electeds hear it from you first. Not from social media. Not from the local paper.

RIDE-ALONG OFFERS

Let Them See The Operation

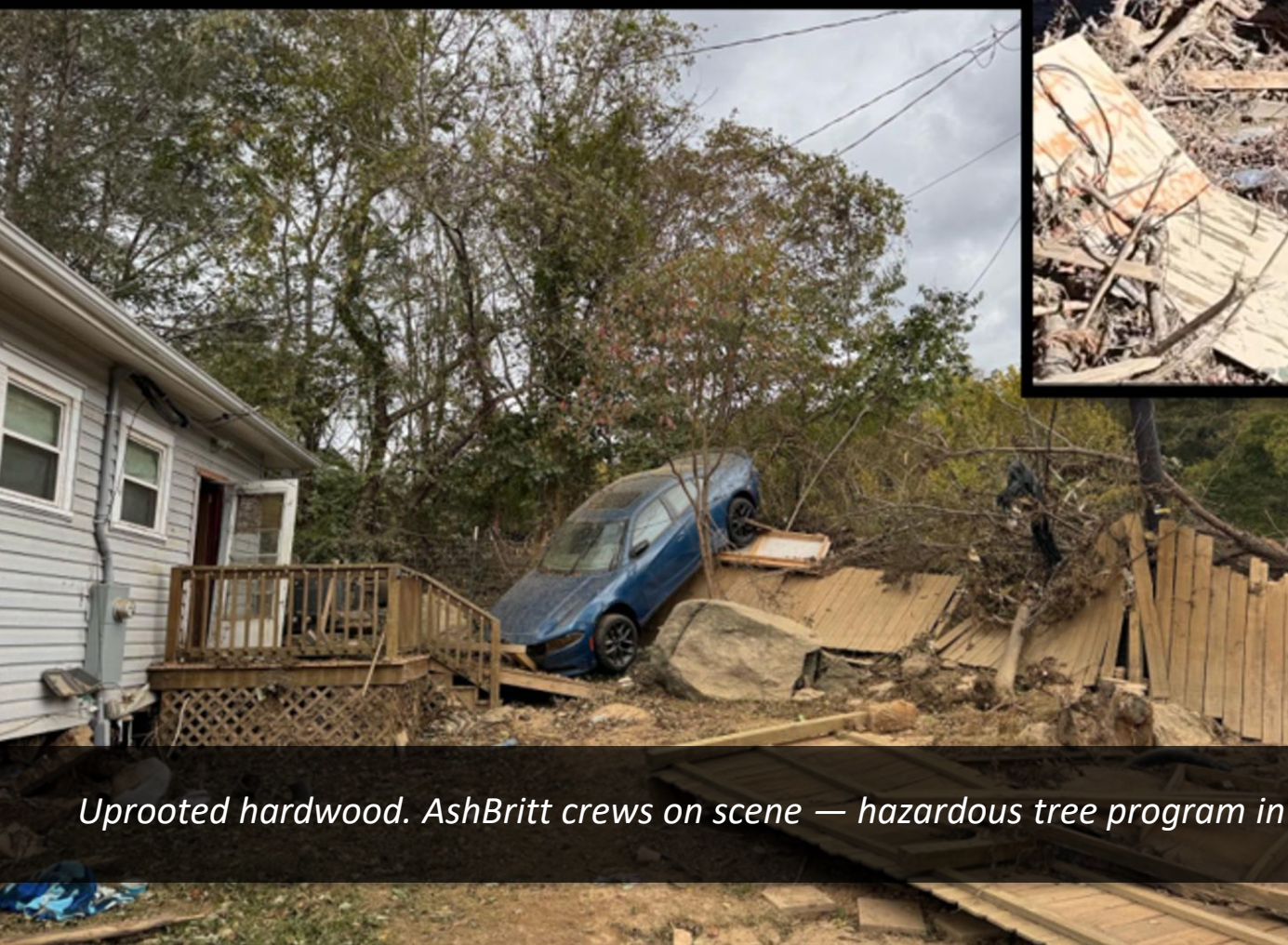
Structured ride-alongs with operations and monitoring. Visible elected presence = political cover when residents complain. Schedule them; don't wait for the ask.

PANEL DISCUSSION



**When electeds, residents, and contractors
are all pulling different directions — who owns the message?**

And how do you keep that voice consistent across days, news cycles, and shifts?



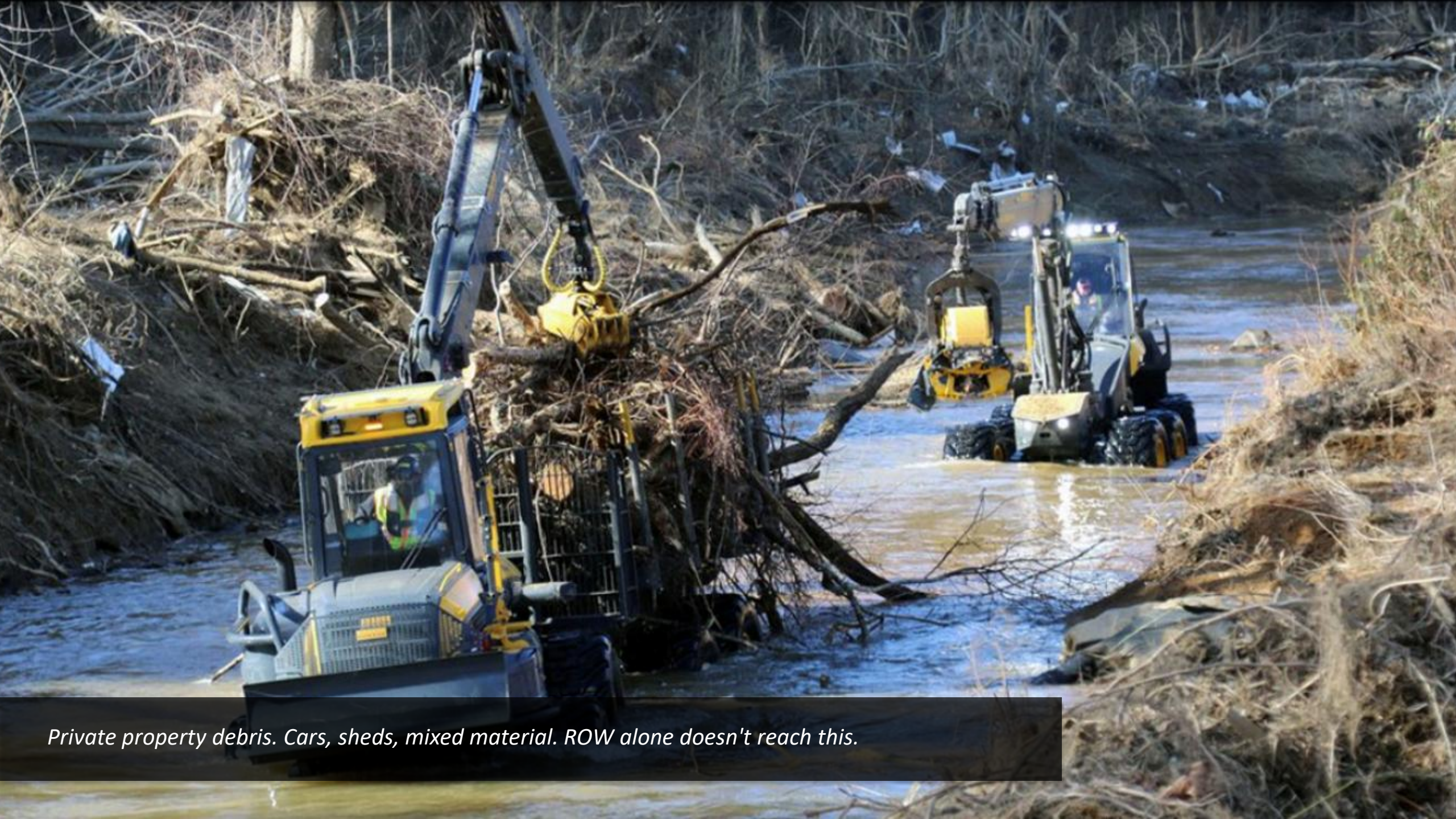
Uprooted hardwood. AshBritt crews on scene — hazardous tree program in action.



Hazardous tree on a private driveway. Sectioning, removal, monitoring — all separate.



Submerged vehicles. Waterways and vessel recovery — a program of its own.



Private property debris. Cars, sheds, mixed material. ROW alone doesn't reach this.

CONTRACTOR & MONITOR PERSPECTIVE

CONTRACTOR REALITIES

FROM THE DRC EMERGENCY SERVICES VIEW

- ▶ **Pick one primary, not several** — “One-of” splits give you double the management and the same trucks; the best crews flow to whoever issued NTP first.
- ▶ **Lobbyists arrive before the trucks do** — Expect calls and EOC visits the moment a storm forms — decisions should already be made.
- ▶ **Activate fast, decisively** — Capacity, staff, and financials matter more than the lowest unit price after landfall.
- ▶ **Two contractors, two back offices** — Splitting a county doubles invoicing reconciliation across millions of dollars.

PROGRAM SCOPE REALITIES

FROM THE TETRA TECH MONITORING VIEW

- ▶ **ROW debris is just the tip of the spear** — PPDR, CPDR, waterways, NRCS, vehicles & vessels each add their own scope and timeline.
- ▶ **Hazardous trees are complex** — Leaners and hangers need specialty crews and add weeks, not days, to the program.
- ▶ **Night ops are dangerous, not faster** — 24/7 operations require 2× the workforce and raise injury and damage risk.
- ▶ **Private property programs are not optional** — Commercial insurance does not cover what residents and HOAs expect — plan the eligibility conversation early.

QUICK QUIZ

Two weeks into the operation, a county commissioner publicly states on social media that his street has been 'skipped four times.' What is the correct response?

A Send a truck to his street tomorrow morning — politics wins

B Issue a press release explaining the zone schedule

C Pull the ADMS load tickets for his zone and reply with documented passes

D Quietly add his street to the priority list and don't acknowledge it publicly

QUICK QUIZ — ANSWER

Two weeks into the operation, a county commissioner publicly states on social media that his street has been 'skipped four times.' What is the correct response?

A Send a truck to his street tomorrow morning — politics wins

B Issue a press release explaining the zone schedule

C Pull the load-ticket data for his zone and reply with documented passes

D Quietly add his street to the priority list and don't acknowledge it publicly

ANSWER: C — Pull the data. Load tickets, GPS traces, and monitor logs document every pass. A respectful, fact-based reply with documented evidence ends the rumor cycle. Cherry-picking (A or D) sets a precedent. Generic press release (B) doesn't address the specific claim.

FEMA REIMBURSEMENT — EXPECTATION vs. REALITY

EXPECTATION

WHAT LEADERSHIP ASSUMES

- ▶ FEMA will reimburse on a predictable timeline
- ▶ Expedited Project Worksheets solve most problems
- ▶ The State will keep our data moving
- ▶ The PA program I know is the program I will close out under
- ▶ Disaster Relief Fund is always there

REALITY

WHAT THE 2026 ENVIRONMENT LOOKS LIKE

- ▶ Final review and payment can take up to 24 months
- ▶ Expedited PWs accelerate cash, not eligibility — overpayments come back
- ▶ DRF is constrained; legislative changes possible
- ▶ PA reform is likely in 2027 (Review Council, RAPID, parametric)
- ▶ Per-capita damage thresholds may increase — document everything

CLOSING OUT — BULK PICKUPS & FINAL PASSES

PHASE 1

BULK PICKUP PUSH

The 'last call' campaign — residents drag remaining debris to the curb. Volume can spike 15–25% in the final two weeks.

PHASE 2

FINAL PASS

One last documented sweep of every zone. Monitor verification at completion. Public messaging: 'after this pass, debris is your responsibility.'

PHASE 3

DMS DEMOBILIZATION

Site closure, final grinding/burn completion, haul-out totals reconciled. EHP closeout. Site restoration to pre-disaster condition.

PHASE 4







DOCUMENTATION RECONCILIATION

Every load ticket reconciled. Every parcel/zone matched to a monitor record. Closeout package prepared for FEMA submission.

WHAT GOES WRONG AT CLOSE-OUT

Premature demobilization (crews leave before the final pass), insufficient public notice on the bulk-pickup window (residents miss the deadline), and incomplete documentation reconciliation (load tickets that can't tie to a zone or monitor record). All three are recurring FEMA deobligation triggers.

CLOSE-OUT COMPLIANCE CHECKLIST

-  **LOAD TICKET RECONCILIATION**
Every load ticket tied to: zone, GPS, monitor signature, DMS receipt, and disposal facility.
-  **MONITOR LOGS**
Daily monitor reports reconciled against contractor invoices. Discrepancies investigated and resolved before submission.
-  **DMS CLOSURE DOCUMENTATION**
EHP closeout, site restoration records, final grinding/burn certifications, scale tickets, disposal facility receipts.
-  **PROCUREMENT FILES**
Original solicitation, evaluation, award documentation, and any modifications. 2 CFR 200 compliance demonstrable.
-  **PUBLIC NOTICES**
Bulk-pickup and final-pass notices archived with dates, channels, and reach metrics.
-  **FEMA PROJECT WORKSHEETS**
Each PW reconciled to actual costs. Updated PWs submitted for cost overruns. Supporting evidence packaged and indexed.

THE REALITY CHECK



Pre-positioned contracts. 90-day timelines.

ROW-only scope. Fast FEMA reimbursement.

Which of these expectations is most baked into your plan — and least true today?

THE FULL SPECTRUM

One storm. Four very different recovery missions.

Forecasting → Flooding → ROW devastation →
Waterways

*Each requires different contractors, different
equipment, and a different conversation with FEMA.*



CLOSING Q&A — AUDIENCE PROMPTS

THE RESIDENT QUESTION

How are you handling the gap between what residents expect — full property cleanup, fast turnaround — and what an eligible ROW mission actually delivers?

THE PPDR QUESTION

Where do PPDR questions show up in your jurisdiction — private roads, gated communities, HOA streets, mobile home parks, condemned structures — and how prepared are you to answer them on day one?

THE MISINFORMATION QUESTION

What's the most damaging piece of misinformation you've had to fight during a debris mission — and how did you get ahead of it?

THE CLOSE-OUT QUESTION

What's the most expensive close-out mistake you've watched a jurisdiction make?

THE ADVICE QUESTION

One piece of advice to a jurisdiction that has never been through a major debris activation — and the one thing you'd tell them not to do?

THANK YOU

Questions & Continued Discussion

PANEL CO-PRESENTED BY



Matt Gierden, SVP
matt@ashbritt.com



Evan Fancher
efancher@drcusa.com



Wes Holden
WES.HOLDEN@tetratech.com



Andrew Fossa
afossa@pascocountyfl.net