

Transcript for “Ashley Morris, Preparedness and Outreach Division Manager at Prince George's County Office of Emergency Management in Maryland, and Melissa Sizemore, Planning Captain and Meteorologist at Wilson County Emergency Management Agency in Tennessee”

Clear Skies Ahead: Conversations About Careers in Meteorology and Beyond

August 19, 2025

Kelly Savoie (00:00):

Hello, Clear Skies Ahead listeners. This is Kelly Savoy and I'm hoping you can take a moment of your time to rate and review our show wherever you listen to podcasts. We have produced over 60 episodes and you can help us reach even more individuals that will benefit from the diverse experiences shared by our guests. Thanks so much for listening, and I hope you enjoy this new episode.

Kelly Savoie: (00:32):

Welcome to the American Meteorological Society's podcast series, Clear Skies Ahead: Conversations About Careers in Meteorology and Beyond. I'm Kelly Savoie and I'm here with Emma Collins, and we'll be your host. We're excited to give you the opportunity to step into the shoes of an expert working in weather, water, and climate sciences.

Emma Collins (00:52):

We're happy to introduce today's guest, Ashley Morris, Preparedness and Outreach Division Manager at Prince George's County Office of Emergency Management in Maryland. And Melissa Sizemore, Planning Captain and meteorologist at Wilson County Emergency Management Agency in Tennessee. Welcome, Ashley and Melissa. Thanks so much for joining us today.

Ashley Morris (01:11):

Yeah, super excited to talk a little bit about emergency management and weather.

Ashley Morris (01:15):

Thanks for having us.

Kelly Savoie (01:16):

Ashley, could you tell us a little bit about what sparked your interest in science and how it influenced your educational path?

Ashley Morris (01:22):

Yeah, so just like a lot of meteorologists, all I remember is just being outside one day, getting caught in a thunderstorm and just being fascinated. Also a little scared but fascinated with storms ever since I can remember, six years old, seven years old, I would always watch storms, go outside, watch the lightning, draw the lightning count the seconds for the miles, and do all of that. Ever since I was a kid, and it's really interesting because I also had a little bit of an interest in earth sciences too, would go around looking for rock collections, walk in the hills, try to find crystals, all of that kind of thing. And then I absolutely love

some of our field trips in elementary school to some of the astronomy exhibits, so looking at the stars, looking at the skies. So really it's just kind of been in my DNA forever, just been doing it forever and was always really happy to choose meteorology and weather as my passion for my career my entire life.

Kelly Savoie (02:25):

And so how did you decide on colleges? Did you know that there was majors in the certain area that you were interested in?

Ashley Morris (02:35):

Yeah, so I decided that I really wanted to pursue meteorology in middle school. So ever since then I was always planning on being a meteorologist. And my mom actually helped me do some searching for universities that had atmospheric science programs, and that was kind of it for me. It was always kind of well drawn out that I was going to do meteorology and weather.

Kelly Savoie (02:57):

And how about you, Melissa? Did it start at a young age like Ashley?

Melissa Sizemore (03:00):

Yeah. I caught the bug very early on in life. I honestly can't remember a day where I wasn't obsessed with the weather. I grew up in California and we lived just at the base of the San Bernardino Mountains. We would always get the weather warnings from the local weather forecast office on the weather channel, and the little banner would scroll across the TV and the alarm would go off and I'd get so excited and I'd run out in the backyard and I'd look over the mountains and see all those thunderstorms building because of the, or graphic uplift on the mountains itself and just have always been super passionate about meteorology the weather. I always as a kid, envisioned myself on television and obviously that's not where I ended up. My path was vastly different than that, but it has always been a dream to be able to really work in the weather, water, climate community.

Kelly Savoie (03:57):

And did you also major in meteorology or did you major in a related science? Where did you end up going to school?

Melissa Sizemore (04:04):

So I went to Western Kentucky University and I initially majored in meteorology with a minor in broadcast science and then kind of pivoted to an earth, a land weather climate path later when I decided that emergency management was the final path so I could take some other courses to blend in on some of the items that I thought were necessary to be able to make myself marketable in the emergency management community.

Emma Collins (04:33):

So you've talked a little bit about it, Melissa, but what other courses or skills beyond the required math and science courses do you think would be the most helpful to individuals wanting a career in your profession outside of your basic weather courses?

Melissa Sizemore (04:45):

Math, science, public relations are huge courses that I think would be really, really informative for individuals to take at a higher education level one, so you can understand how to communicate with people, but also interact with people and market what you're trying to do in an emergency management agency to the individuals that you're serving. Additionally, basic public speaking courses, communication courses, because you're going to have to go out to these different communities and sectors of your community, vulnerable populations that understand and you need to understand how to communicate with these people and communicate with them on their level. You're not speaking above them, you're speaking to them and understand how to communicate with these individuals to get the message across and to make those vital connections to make them safe. Sociology are some other courses that I took that I really, really enjoyed to understand human behavior and human response in disaster. And then outside of higher education, utilizing the FEMA independent study website to be able to take some courses to really educate yourself on some different elements of emergency management, to be able to get some basic understanding of what you are doing within your job and to get a basic understanding of the basic systems that we use within the field to be able to get your foot in the door.

Emma Collins (06:16):

And how about you, Ashley? I saw you shaking, nodding your head—excuse me—in emphatic agreement there. Do you have anything else to add?

Ashley Morris (06:22):

Yeah, so I would just say especially for meteorology students who are looking to get into emergency management, taking any kind of classes in public administration or government is really helpful. I think I only had one class that I took in grad school kind of knowing I was going to go to government emergency management route. That really kind helped me get accustomed to that. And even to this day, I've been working in local level government for eight years now, and I still am trying to kind of learn how local government works, how can you pass different policies, laws, and from local, state, federal, how all of that connects. So I think just better understanding our government systems really helps all government employees. I also suggest GIS, so funny story about me, I got my bachelor's in abstract science and geophysics and my master's in Natural Hazards geography and GIS.

And I was trying to get into emergency management at one point, and the only way that I was actually able to get a job was that I had a GIS class. They wanted me to come in and do disaster mapping. They wanted me to do some risk assessment with GIS. And so I think GIS is a super handy tool to have in your tool belt, especially if you're going to come into doing hazard assessment and emergency management. And then finally, I did kind of want to just make a plug for risk management, but also just general emergency management classes. There are a lot of classes nowadays in universities that are focusing on emergency management degree programs, minor programs, all of that. Even if you're just interested in dabbling in emergency management, it's always good to just take a couple of those classes so you better understand the disaster system in the United States and how that kind of connects not only to meteorology, but just to all the disaster workings in our country.

Kelly Savoie (08:09):

Yeah, I did notice that there are some schools now that offer postgraduate certificates in emergency management, which is pretty cool if anybody wanted to get some more experience in that. Melissa, how do you incorporate science-based practices when it comes to meteorological hazards and risks?

Melissa Sizemore (08:29):

So there are multiple methods that I use to be able to really integrate science into what I do. It's very unique with somebody with a science background to be working in emergency management itself. I think we're more of the unicorn than the expectation, and it's really a culture change and a culture shift when you come into an office to try and implement science-based methods when you're trying to move an agency forward. A lot of the information I do is very data-driven, so I'm going and I'm pulling data from different databases with the NCDC, pulling stuff off of IEM and using that to build risk assessments. So looking at hazards over time, disasters over time looking at has our probability increased, decreased, and how we can adequately plan for that. So using that specific risk assessment and risk analysis to be able to drive how we exercise, how we train individuals within our agency.

Because what's unique about Wilson County EMA is we're not just the EMA, we're the county fire department, we're the county ambulance service as well. So we're a threefold agency with three different silos. And so what I'm doing here is using the information that I'm pulling, especially risk-based information to be able to drive how we're going to move forward to better train and better equip our individuals out in the field because I'm not necessarily the person that's going to be responding to a tornado, right? I'll be in the EOC doing a lot of strategic level movement, but they're going to be the tacticians on the ground actually responding, touching people, saving lives, so understanding what they may need to better understand how to do their job and how they can understand how the disaster system works. Same thing with mitigation. We use a lot of hazard based and probability based information to be able to drive mitigation efforts in our community as well, especially in mitigation projects. Usually if you can exercise the need for something. So really be able to explain why you need to get this project done if it costs a million dollars, \$2 million, and be able to use the data that we're actively gathering from different governmental entities, historical data, and then utilize that to be able to drive our decision makers to make a decision to be able to spend that money because then you can quantify the money that they're going to save by implementing and spending that money on the front end. So it's really twofold.

Kelly Savoie (11:13):

Yeah, I was wondering, does it ever happen where there's some natural disaster in an area and then say a couple of weeks later they get hit again? Has that ever happened or is it just, it's a one and done and then it doesn't happen for quite a lot of time afterwards?

Melissa Sizemore (11:36):

I've been working in Tennessee for about six months now. My previous position was in the Birmingham area in Alabama, and within two years we had seven tornadoes within our county. So it's Whoa. Yeah, I am a firm believer if it's not in your right now, it's going to be in your backyard eventually. And there have been areas in that specific location that have been hit multiple times by different types of hazards, whether it be flooding, whether it be tornadoes, and a lot of it within a short timeframe. So we had one year we had an EF three, and then six months later we had a 1000 year flood, so a 0.01% chance that the flood would actually occur, and we had nine 12 feet of water in areas that have never flooded before. So it's not out of the ordinary to be able to see hazards like that occur in certain areas of the country.

Emma Collins (12:33):

So, Ashley, why is community engagement so important when it comes to emergency management?

Ashley Morris (12:39):

So I think it is extremely important that we're out in the community so that we can better understand what our community design is. Melissa and I spent a lot of time trying to not only use weather data to make emergency plans, but actually create solutions that would work during the disaster. And we cannot do that without understanding who we're trying to serve, what their resources are, what they have access to, what they don't have access to, and what they're going to need in the future. So it's important that we're going out, we're inviting the community into our office to take part in workshops, in stakeholder meetings and things like that. We give them opportunities to give insight on mitigation programs and projects. We also want to let them know that we exist. Many people aren't aware that emergency management systems are embedded in local government or state government.

Many people are aware of FEMA because they get a lot of publicity, but our people can't find us and use our resources that we're working so hard to do if they don't know we exist. So we do a lot of outreach events. We do booths, we hand out flyers, we do whatever we can to make sure that they know that we're an actual working local government agency for them and that they can count on us before disasters, during disasters and after disasters. So you could have a wonderful program that is really well built out and it's not going to do much good if people don't know where to go after the disaster. So that's one reason I would say it's super important. Another also is just trust. You tend to trust people that you see. You trust the agencies in the community. We want to build that trust. And during today's times, it's really important that we're working and establishing that trust with our whole community so that again, they can count on us in some of their most vulnerable times.

Kelly Savoie (14:34):

And I was thinking too, it must be tricky because the community is made up of people in all different age groups and contacting or getting information out to certain age groups is different depending on who they are. So I'm sure you have social media campaigns as well versus people of different ages who probably might not go to a community event. So how do you navigate all that?

Ashley Morris (15:03):

Yeah, so we try to use as many different modes as possible. My agency here, we actually have an outreach division where we have some full-time folks who are dedicated to just outreach. They're going into schools doing presentations, they're doing the booth events and going to community events like we've been mentioning, but they're also trying to establish relationships with the bigger community groups, houses of worship, boy scouts, girl scouts, all the different groups in our county so that we can meet with them, provide them information, give them CPR first aid training or whatever, and then they can pass it on from there. We also really heavily rely on training programs like the community emergency response team or cert. We're constantly recruiting community members or adults over 18 to come in, learn some disaster response skills from us, and then roster up and help us during disasters as volunteers.

A huge part of that is also having them go back out into their own community and teach their neighborhoods and teach their community groups why disaster preparedness is important, how emergency management works, how to be weather ready, and then bring them to our training so that we can continue to spin that out. So long story short, we use a lot of different modes and really we heavily rely on community networks. We want people to then turn around and tell those people to then turn around and tell those people so that it kind of spiderwebs out across our really large county.

Kelly Savoie (16:35):

I can see it's a lot of work there, but it's good that you do it and you get the word out. I hope more people now are aware of the services that you offer. So we all have challenges in our careers. So I wanted to ask you both, what are some of the challenges you have faced during your careers? And Melissa, why don't you start?

Melissa Sizemore (16:58):

This is a great question. Some of the biggest challenges that I faced, especially early on in my career, especially in an area where you don't need a college education to move into this type of field, the biggest challenge for me was really proving myself in proving that I belong in the emergency management field. And I'm sure Ashley can partially agree with that. And a lot of it is also because I'm a very strong female in a very male dominated field, a very well-educated female in a well dominated field. So I had to do a lot of different things to be able to make myself belong and not necessarily anything in a bad way, but I had to go through some search and rescue training so I could show that I'm not afraid to get dirty, I'm not afraid to get out in the field and work when it was necessary.

And then a lot of it was just relationship building. So not trying to outsmart or disrespect anybody in the field that may not be, that have a lot of tactical experience, a lot of real world experience that I could learn from then in the same way they could learn from me. So it almost like a knowledge sharing type of relationship and really building those strong bonds with individuals to have people in my circle to also vouch me saying, this girl's legit. She knows what she's doing, and she can come and she can prove a lot of value. The second piece was 2020. I mean, absolutely killed a lot of us. It took a lot out of us in the emergency management community, yes, a lot of people got to do telework and do a lot of different things, but I worked in the first three months of COVID. I didn't have a day off of work, and I did not telework at all. We didn't telework, so it was a lot. We were working 60 to 80 hour weeks putting in a lot of time. And on top of that, we had three disasters within that timeframe too. We were planning for a C one event, which is the next step above an NSSE. So that's like a DNC, an RNC Super Bowl type event that was going to be occurring in '22, 2022. So we had a lot of spokes in the wheel that were just extremely difficult and extremely challenging, but we got through it and I grew so much as an individual through that challenge to become a better emergency manager and a better steward of the community.

Kelly Savoie (19:47):

What were some of your challenges, Ashley?

Ashley Morris (19:49):

Yeah, that is a really great question. Definitely resonated with a lot of the same challenges that Melissa had for me. I will say my number one goal has always been saving lives. Even when I wanted to be a NWS meteorologist, I was all about issuing the warning so we can save more lives. It's always been about protecting people from weather and coming from the STEM background, Melissa and I have an ability to understand some of the science parts, the natural hazards data, the modeling, all of that cool stuff. And being able to bring that into the field has always been a big passion of mine. However, it's still very new in emergency management, trying to do data-driven decisions or using academic research or even looking at peer reviewed processes. It's not really well applied yet. We're definitely improving with that. But one of my biggest frustrations is I came in really enthusiastic with that and it was very easy for me to miss the mark with a lot of the folks in my emergency management profession. We're just not operating that way yet.

So, I got a little discouraged because I kind of got a lot of pushback with trying to use some of the science stuff. I got a lot of "it's always been done this way", which still drives me nuts because we have to keep

evolving in disaster management. And then I did always have a little bit of a challenge with belonging. Just like Melissa, I don't come from first response. I come from science and data and all that cool stuff. So I figured out different ways to find acceptance in the community, but also do just like she did, learn more about fire, do ride outs on engines, be able to talk the talk and walk the walk so that you can earn a little bit of that respect, but still be proud of what I bring to the table and try to fill the gap that we have in the field with that.

One last challenge, I'll just say that still kind of weighs on me a little bit, is just the fact that at the local level, we are severely understaffed and underfunded. Like I mentioned before, FI gets a lot of recognition for emergency management, but your local county and city emergency management is working nonstop to do all of the plans, all the exercises, and when the disasters happen, we're kind of in charge of them at the local level. Disasters aren't local. We get support from the state, we get support from the feds. That being said, we don't always see a lot of staffing. Some offices can have one emergency manager up to maybe 12, and we also just don't see a lot of the funding. So I think for me, going through COVID, like Melissa, going through some pretty significant disasters over the past 10 years of my career, I would like to see a lot more growth in our field, a lot more importance, a lot more advocacy of budget, even community support. And it's been a little frustrating, I will say, not having that, and a lot of us do burnout, I would say COVID for sure. But even now, I mean with some of the challenges with the different natural hazards we're responding to now, it's tough. So, definitely have learned how to evolve and roll with the punches with that. And I do extremely love emergency management despite all the challenges with it.

Kelly Savoie (23:09):

Melissa, you mentioned COVID. So my question is what falls under emergency management? It's not just, is it just natural disasters, or does it do things like COVID and maybe West Nile virus and sicknesses from bugs or mosquitoes and things like that. Does that fall under it as well?

Melissa Sizemore (23:32):

Yes. Anything that is going to involve a coordinated response is going to need the hand of an emergency manager to help manage that response itself. So it's not only your natural hazards, it's technological, like your fixed facilities where you have a lot of manufacturing that have methyl, methyl bad stuff, bad chemicals that have issues, transportation issues. So hazmat instances on interstates, airports, railroads, you have the different types of hazards such as power outages.

Kelly Savoie (24:10):

I was just going to say that. What power outages, is that part of it?

Melissa Sizemore (24:14):

Power outages in general. Just transportation issues. So let's say you have, take New York for example, what happens if the subway goes down in the city? Chaos, I'm assuming people can't get places, right? That's a disaster. At a local level, that is a disaster, and you're going to need an emergency manager to help manage that incident.

We deal with communicable diseases, COVID, for example, during COVID, our agency manned our vaccination call center. So we established it and manned it. So our employees were physically answering calls for individuals that were wanting to get vaccinations because volunteerism didn't exist during

COVID because of COVID, we managed and did all of the logistics. So all of the masks, the gowns, the gloves, the hand sanitizer, the cleaner, everything that physically came into our county, we took receipt of, we inventoried, and then we deposited out to our several hospitals, our fire departments, our government agencies, our schools. I think at one time we had pushed out 2 million masks. I mean, the numbers were just out of this world on how much we brought in and then how much we had distributed. And then we actually co-lead the actual response hand in hand with the health department locally.

So, it was a unified command. So Jefferson County, EMA was one piece. The Jefferson County Department of Health was the other piece. And we were responding to that disaster in a unified manner to be able to ensure that our community stayed safe and they got the things that they needed special. Another piece that a lot of people don't realize that emergency management is actively involved in. So the Super Bowl and emergency manager is helping manage that NFL football games, MLB, baseball games, NASCAR races, indie car races, all of these things that you see on the television that you're enjoying as a spectator or maybe you're actually there in person to attend something like a Bonnaroo, maybe a music festival or something like that. There is somebody, whether it be a private sector, EM or in hand in hand with the local county, EM helping manage the actual event itself and then also being prepared in case something goes wrong to be able to respond to it. So it's not just when the disasters are happening, it's when the sky is blue. And we've got a lot of people coming into our community spending money and have the expectation of actually coming to a safe event during a blue sky day. We're involved in that too.

Kelly Savoie (27:02):

That's crazy. Now I see why you should definitely get more funding and more people. So Ashley, is there only one emergency management office per county usually?

Ashley Morris (27:17):

Yeah. So usually at the county level you'll have that county office of emergency management. They could oversee everything in the county or they could oversee the unincorporated areas. You also could have city level. So for city government, they can empower their government to hire a city emergency manager who'd be in charge of that city. And then past that, you have the state level agency. So we all kind of work together. You start at the lowest rung, city emergency management, they act, then county can support that city and then state supports that county. And then FEMA or the federal government helps support from there. And like I said, some offices have one emergency manager to that county or that city, but some are lucky enough to have a couple. My office is one of the larger offices. We have roughly 12, but we also serve a million people on the border of DC. So it's like 12 is a lot in the words of EM. But we just talked about everything we have to do.

Emma Collins (28:21):

Man, I got to say I am learning a lot on this episode that I had no idea about. I'm also really excited that we're hosting you guys for this awareness. So August, 2025 is the National Emergency Management Awareness Month in the US. Could you provide our listeners with more details about the goals of this new campaign? And we'll start with Ashley.

Ashley Morris (28:41):

Absolutely. So the International Association of Emergency Managers has basically made this August, the very first August for National Emergency Management Awareness Fund. Our goal is to do kind of what

we're doing today, just inform more in the public about what emergency management is, how the disaster system works in the United States, and to really just get people to know that we exist. I have a lot of stories of going and getting my hair cut or getting my nails done and telling people I'm an EM. And people are like, what is that? Are you a dispatcher? Do you write an engine? People just aren't aware that we have emergency managers as a field, as a profession, but also as a resource to help people during disasters. So our goal is to again, just highlight what we do, discuss a little more about our duties, whether it's in the government, the private sector, the healthcare sector, but also tell people a little more of how they can get involved. If you want to serve as an emergency manager, here's the professional route to do that. If you need an emergency manager, here's the resources we have. And then also too, if you want to advocate, are you passionate about climate impacts or disaster impacts? Can you advocate for more mitigation in your county? Can you talk to elected officials about funding disaster management? And just also really telling people that they have the opportunity to do that as well. So that's pretty much it.

Emma Collins (30:15):

And how about you, Melissa, in your office? How are things going for August this month?

Melissa Sizemore (30:20):

Actually really, really good. I'm actually very excited about emergency management awareness month. I'm excited that this initiative has started because of the lack of awareness of what we do and who we are and where we're at. I'm in a very unique spot here in my current agency because we do more than just emergency management. We are the county fire department, we're the county ambulance service. But I know in past roles and past locations with variants of staffing, my first office, I worked in a three person office in Jefferson County. We had eight people. So a very large difference. And really here in my current position, I'm the only one here. So I am the planner, that person doing all of the things all of the time. And I think it's really important that we have this type of visibility. So not only our constituents, but also what you would consider adjacent fields are aware of what we do and that it's not just the federal government coming in and sweeping when a disaster happens because 80% of the time, if a disaster happens within your county, FEMA's not coming because we have thresholds that we have to meet at the county level.

So an X dollar amount dependant upon population that we have to meet, not on residential damages, but on physical public infrastructure and public response to be able to meet the need for some type of disaster declaration. And there's a lot of lack of awareness on how the disaster system actually works. And a lot of that stems from various publicity of FEMA coming in and not being aware that you have a local potentially city level depending on where you're at across the country. It's much more prominent in the Northeast than it is really anywhere else across the United States. But you have a local level, you have an a state level EM office that does a lot of this, and they're out boots on the ground working their tails off for you guys, because we want to save lives, we want to save property. And I think it's just super important that people are aware and know that they have individuals like us within their communities that will fight tooth and nail to try and get them the things that they need and really truly help them on their worst day when disasters actually strike.

Ashley Morris (32:58):

Yeah, and if I could just interject real quick, I was totally loving that end that she was talking about with locals. If you think about what we talked about, I mean, we're the ones doing the community engagement. We know our neighborhoods, we know our people, we know our threats, and then we also

control things like the mitigation projects, codes, those things. And so really the biggest impacts and changes to disaster management response and recovery, and also prevention is at that local level. So it's so important that people do understand that we're here working really hard on those things and that we need people to not only engage with us every day, play a role in our outreach, our preparedness, our projects, advocate for funds and be a part of that, but we have to work on that at that local level. Absolutely agree with everything Melissa just said.

Kelly Savoie (33:50):

Well, this is a good segue. What advice, Ashley, do you have for individuals interested in pursuing careers in emergency management and do you see the field growing?

Ashley Morris (34:01):

Yeah, so I am so excited about emergency management. I didn't think I would end up here, but I'm really glad that I did. And so I love telling students how they can get into emergency management, especially if you're coming from STEM meteorology, earth sciences, just like Melissa and I, the advice I would have first is to definitely reach out to some emergency managers who work in the field. They can be like Melissa and I who have the same background, but I also encourage you to reach out to people who don't. I made the mistake of not doing enough research before I got into EM to fully understand some of the operational lapses that I had, not having fire service experience or not understanding some of the public safety stuff. If I would've reached out and made those connections, I would've been able to volunteer in a local firehouse or done some training like some of the search and rescue training that Melissa was talking about.

So it's important to make those connections while you're still in school so that you can better understand what the job entails and what you really need to do in the job. Classrooms and educations are very important, but we don't always use what we learn in the classroom in the real world. So, definitely think people need to do that. I personally think being well-rounded when you're coming into emergency management's really important. So it's awesome to have a really solid weather background. It's awesome to have an earth science background, but like Melissa mentioned, we do all hazards. So we have terrorism, we also have pandemics, public health, we also have cybersecurity now and a variety of different things that we're trying to work on with threats to our jurisdiction. So if you can be well-rounded, learn a little bit about all of that stuff, it really empowers you to come into the field and apply all the critical thinking and all the data-driven work that you do in school to our career.

And then finally, I'll just say be flexible when you're coming in. When I was making my entrance, I knew I wanted to do EM, but I wasn't really sure even what it was. And so I had to be a little flexible with the location I picked where I was applying, how I was going to start. It's just important to be open-minded when you're learning because you never really know where your path is going to take you. And I'll say that even my plan of what I wanted to do five years ago with my EM career has vastly changed with T. And I've pretty much told myself to be as open-minded as possible and just to make as many experiences and learning opportunities as possible. So get to exploring and have some conversations.

Kelly Savoie (36:50):

Melissa, do you have anything to add in? Where do people actually go to find open postings for these positions? Do they just go to the county site? How does that work?

Melissa Sizemore (37:02):

So one thing I do want to add is that this field is, I believe this field is in its changing stage. We're seeing this vast change in how emergency management is operating, the individuals coming into the field. Because really when you really think about it, emergency management as a career is truly in its infancy. Really. Modern emergency management didn't start until September 11th, 2001. So when you really think about it, our actual field is only about 25 years old. Civil defense has been around for a very long time, but the way in which we currently operate and how things work is really only about 25 years old. And we're seeing this huge shift in how the career field is looking, how it operates, who is coming in, who is becoming an emergency manager. And I think that is a very amazing thing, especially for students that even have a remote interest in the field itself.

And you don't need to have an EM background to be a marketable individual in an emergency management office because everybody needs to be a subject matter in something. So an expert in one, but also really have knowledge and a little bit of everything else. So if you can market yourself in a way that you as an individual, whether it be you've got a broadcast background or communications background, how you can apply that back to emergency management is just as valuable as coming in with an emergency management degree. Now, when you're looking for jobs, there are various ways that you can look. I was just recently in the job market because we had just moved from Alabama to Tennessee because my husband who works for the weather service had a duty station transfer. So we moved to Tennessee because his job brought him up here. So the way I found my job posting was on LinkedIn.

LinkedIn is a great resource, especially if you're wanting to look at a wide variety of emergency management jobs, not necessarily government, but if you're interested in consulting, if you're interested in private sector, if you're interested in the healthcare path of emergency management, LinkedIn is a fantastic resource to be able to look at postings. IEM has a job board that they utilize for postings using things like the other job posting websites, Google I used whatever resource I could find to say, emergency management jobs in Tennessee enter and just looked. Depending on the size of your program, you may have a place where you have a connection with someone that may be working in the field that can point you towards some resources and some direction on where to look at jobs and how to prepare to apply for a job and how to prepare for an interview. That's also super important if you're really looking at applying for an EM job, is understanding how to really structure that resume, really how you should walk in and perform in an interview and kind of have a general idea of what kind of questions you're going to be asked. I know if we have students that are interested and would want to talk through something like that, I'd be happy to talk with them. And I know Ashley's talked with people through mentoring programs. Well, with stuff like that too.

Emma Collins (40:29):

Well, we're so grateful for everything you've told us about your careers. However, before you guys go, we always ask our guests one last fun question at the end of the show, and I understand that there's been agreement on what is your favorite hobby. So Ashley, let's start with you.

Ashley Morris (40:43):

Yeah, so I will say I grew up in the desert in New Mexico, and so I never saw a beach until I was probably, I don't know, 22. And now I actually go and my goal is to travel to every beach in the United States and try to visit as many beaches as possible.

Emma Collins (41:00):

I love that.

Ashley Morris (41:01):

I know when I have time off, if I could spend time laying on the beach, checking out new beach places. That's kind of what I like to do. My most exciting one was Australia did that for school in May. Very cool.

Kelly Savoie (41:17):

Nice, nice. Which coast?

Ashley Morris (41:19):

Just the Sydney area. We went to the Sydney beaches and a couple of the others up Northern Australia.

Kelly Savoie (41:27):

Yeah, I love the beach in the morning and later in the evening when there aren't a lot of people there, it's just so beautiful. I am a big beach person too.

Ashley Morris (41:37):

Yeah, it's definitely my peaceful place to just find myself.

Kelly Savoie (41:43):

Absolutely.

Emma Collins (41:44):

I hope you're getting some exposure to Northeastern beaches, which can vary wildly from rock to very soft sand. It also depends on if you're on the Atlantic side or you're in an inlet, which is fun. How about you, Melissa?

Melissa Sizemore (41:58):

I'm a little bit different though. I love to travel like Ashley does. My hobby is actually, I coach color guard for high school teams, so I'm very active in the fall marching band scene as well as the winter guard international scene in the winter and springtime. So I work with high schools. I work with them on improving their technique. I write their choreography. I help them write and stage their shows so they have these shows that they can go and compete with and win medals and trophies. I really enjoy working with high school age kids. I feel like it's super fulfilling and it's something not related to work. It's still work, but it's not related to my full-time job that it's a different sense of fulfillment for me than my normal, what I would consider. It's not an eight to five, but because we're 24/7, 365 all the time. But I truly enjoy that. That's probably one of my favorite things that I do outside of work.

Kelly Savoie (43:05):

That sounds really fun. And right here, honor guard, color guard. I didn't know that. I also did small flags in the marching band. Oh my gosh, I loved it so much. It was so fun.

Emma Collins (43:18):

That's awesome. Is there a difference between winter and spring guard?

Melissa Sizemore (43:22):

So winter is indoors, so it's indoors on usually a digitally printed tarp, and it's to some type of music soundtrack, whether it's custom made or utilizing something that may be popular mainstream to put together a show utilizing flags, saber rifles, and dance. Fall guard is with the marching band, and that is musical pieces put together that the marching band plays on a football field with drill sheets that you have to make shapes and these intricate movements. And it's so God awful hot outside and having to deal with all of that. So it's more of the winter and the spring is just the guard itself. The fall is the guard and the band put together.

Kelly Savoie (44:13):

Yeah, and there's competitions with other schools. It's really, really fun.

Melissa Sizemore (44:19):

It's a lot of fun.

Kelly Savoie (44:21):

Well, thanks so much for joining us, Ashley and Melissa, and sharing your work experiences with us.

Melissa Sizemore (44:26):

Thank you for having us. I enjoyed it.

Ashley Morris (44:26):

Same. Thank you.

Emma Collins (44:28):

Well, that's our show for today. Please join us next time, rain or shine.

Kelly Savoie (44:34):

Clear Skies Ahead: Conversations About Careers in Meteorology and Beyond is a podcast by the American Meteorological Society. Our show is edited by Johnny Lay, technical direction is provided by Peter Klay. Our theme music is composed and performed by Steve Savoie, and the show is hosted by Emma Collins and Kelly Savoie. You can learn more about the show online at www.ametsoc.org/clearskies. And you can contact us at skypodcast@ametsoc.org, if you have any feedback, or would like to become a future guest.