

May 16, 2026

The Rusk County Emergency Services District #1 met on this date at 9:01 a.m. with Board President David Burks presiding. Board Members present were Jiffy Dukes, Gloria Dooley and Wayne Griffith. Board Members absent were Curt Collings. The meeting was opened with a prayer from Dennis Roach followed by the pledge to the American flag.

Participants present were: Jeremy Bozeman-Eastside VFD, Dennis Roach-Overton VFD, Rayford Gibson-Tatum VFD, Patrick Dooley-Rusk Co. Rescue, Paul Patterson-Reklaw VFD, Robert Crawford-New London VFD, Marvin Vinson-Crims Chapel VFD, Deniese Case-Mt. Enterprise VFD, Craig Christian-Rusk Co. Rescue, Jerry Kidd-Carlisle VFD, Randy Case-Mt. Enterprise VFD, Michael Searcy-Rusk Co. Rescue, Tina Dukes-Laneville VFD, and Shawn with Christus EMS.

The meeting was opened with remarks from Board Member Jiffy Dukes reminding everyone that this was a workshop and no decisions could be made. This particular workshop was to hold a round table discussion with all members present on various items of interest or concern from the departments. It was hoped that the ESD could host this type of workshop on a quarterly basis for input and guidance from the departments on future items.

The following is a summary of the different topics discussed during the workshop. This summary is not intended to be a word-for-word transcript of the discussions held.

1. Public Transparency and Financial Information

The group discussed how much financial information should be included in ESD meeting packets and/or posted publicly. There was discussion about whether full department bank statements and detailed financials should be included with the public meeting packet or whether a summary financial report would be more appropriate.

The general concern was that full financial packets could become hundreds of pages and may confuse the public if they are not familiar with reading government-style financial reports. At the same time, several people acknowledged that the information involves public money and is subject to public records laws.

A suggested approach was to post a summary departments financial report on the ESD website as a starting point, while keeping the detailed department financials available if requested or sent separately to the board and departments. The summary report currently shows beginning and ending account balances and general account information but does not drill down into department-level expenditure details.

Several participants noted that withholding information could create the appearance that something is being hidden, even if the ESD is already complying with the law. Others cautioned that releasing too much information could create unnecessary public confusion or “armchair quarterbacking.”

There was also discussion that public pressure for more transparency is growing statewide and may eventually result in stricter legislative requirements for ESDs, counties, school districts, and other taxing entities.

General direction discussed:

The ESD will likely consider posting a financial summary or meeting packet information online, but no final decision was made. The issue will need to be placed on a future agenda.

2. Department Budget Management

The group discussed the upcoming budget process for the volunteer fire departments. Departments were reminded that their projected revenue should equal or exceed projected expenses. It was noted that several departments had previously submitted budgets where expenses exceeded revenue, which is not a balanced budget.

Departments were encouraged to include proper line items for vehicle repairs, contingencies, and other foreseeable expenses. A specific reminder was given that

departments should include at least \$3,000 for vehicle repairs where appropriate and should consider adding a contingency line item.

There was significant discussion about grants. Departments were told that any grant application should be reflected in their budget, even if the grant may not be awarded until a future year. If a department applies for a grant for equipment, vehicles, bunker gear, rescue tools, or other major purchases, the grant amount, anticipated cost share, and any expected ESD funding request should be shown on both the revenue and expenditure sides of the budget.

The reason for this is so the ESD can plan for potential matching funds or related expenses instead of being surprised after a grant is awarded.

Key point:

Departments should clearly label grant-related expenses and matching revenue so the ESD can cross-reference the budget items.

3. Junior Firefighter Programs

The group discussed junior firefighter programs and the need for clear written policies. Departments were asked whether they currently have junior firefighter programs and whether they have detailed written policies.

This discussion was prompted by an incident in which a junior firefighter reportedly drove a fire engine a considerable distance to a fire. There was strong concern that allowing a 16- or 17-year-old junior firefighter to drive fire apparatus creates major safety, liability, and legal risks.

The group discussed the need for minimum standards, including restrictions on minors driving fire department or rescue vehicles, participating in interior fire attack, or entering IDLH environments. There was also discussion about whether junior firefighters under 16 should be allowed to respond to emergency calls at all.

Several people suggested that the ESD or the Rusk County Firefighters Association could help develop a countywide minimum standard for junior firefighter programs. Departments could still adopt stricter policies, but there would be a baseline standard for all departments.

There was also discussion about social media, photo permissions, parental waivers, psychological maturity, and the risk of exposing minors to traumatic emergency scenes.

General direction discussed:

Departments with junior firefighter programs should provide copies of their current policies. The issue may be sent to a committee or the Firefighters Association to develop recommended minimum standards.

4. Possible Changes to Standard Guidelines

The group discussed upcoming changes to the ESD's standard operating or funding guidelines. Most changes were described as minor updates, but one major concern was departments making large purchases or repairs without prior ESD board approval and then bringing the bill to the ESD afterward.

Examples included large repair bills or major purchases that had not been discussed in advance. The point was made that if a truck has been down for months or a major repair is expected, the department should notify the ESD before the expense is incurred.

The ESD sets aside money for emergencies and contingencies, but departments were reminded that major repairs should not simply be treated as automatic ESD obligations after the fact.

Updated guidelines will likely be sent to the departments before formal consideration so chiefs and department representatives can review them and ask questions.

5. Inventory Needed for Alpine Implementation

The group discussed collecting inventory information from all volunteer fire departments for entry into Alpine. Items mentioned included bunker gear, helmets, SCBAs, AEDs, Lucas/Lifeline CPR devices, rescue tools, chainsaws, battery-powered tools, and other significant assets.

The purpose is to create better tracking of ESD-funded assets and department equipment, including serial numbers, assigned apparatus, replacement timelines, and maintenance records.

There was discussion about whether only ESD-owned assets should be entered or whether all department assets should be inventoried. The general view was that there is value in entering everything, with ownership or assignment noted.

Patrick was asked to obtain or create an Excel inventory template, preferably using the Alpine format, so departments can complete the needed information consistently. There

was discussion about using drop-down fields where possible to maintain uniform reporting.

Action discussed:

An Alpine-compatible inventory spreadsheet/template should be sent to departments so they can begin compiling asset information.

6. Attendance at TEEX and Other Training Classes

A major discussion was held about poor attendance at scheduled TEEX training classes. It was noted that one recent class had 24 people signed up but only 10 showed up. This creates problems because TEEX tracks attendance and may be reluctant to continue providing classes if Rusk County repeatedly has low turnout after requesting training.

There was discussion about whether the training committee is trying to offer too much training too quickly, possibly causing burnout among the same active members who usually attend. At the same time, it was pointed out that many people ask for local training but still do not attend when classes are offered locally.

The group discussed the difficulty of scheduling training during summer months due to vacations, baseball, fire school, and other conflicts. July was specifically noted as difficult because of A&M fire schools.

Current and upcoming training topics discussed included:

- Strategy and tactics for initial company operations
- Incident safety officer
- New fire chief/challenging issues
- CPR/BLS classes
- TEEX classes
- NFA direct-delivery classes
- Fire Academy hybrid training
- Quarterly first responder training
- Northeast Texas training meetings

The group appeared to lean toward reducing or pausing classes during June, July, and August, then resuming in September. Chiefs were encouraged to push their members to attend training and to communicate clearly when members cannot attend after signing up.

There was also discussion about keeping a consistent training calendar and posting training dates on the ESD website calendar so departments can plan ahead.

7. Open Comments from Departments and Members

Jiffy Dukes asked to go around the room so each person could provide input, ask questions, or raise concerns. This was done to make sure everyone had an opportunity to speak during the roundtable.

Several members expressed appreciation for the ESD's work and said they had no complaints. Others raised specific issues.

8. Radio Emergency Button / Kilgore Dispatch Issue

The group discussed an issue involving emergency button activations on radios. Kilgore recently upgraded its dispatch consoles and added Rusk County ESD talk groups. When an emergency button is pressed, Kilgore's console receives a panic alert and their policy requires them to verify the safety of the radio user.

There was discussion that this creates confusion because Kilgore dispatch has procedures for the alerts, while local dispatch may not yet be fully trained or configured to handle them in the same way.

The communications committee will likely need to meet to review emergency button procedures, dispatch console setup, and training.

9. Christus EMS / FRO Identification and Badging

A Christus EMS representative discussed the need for better identification of First Responder Organization personnel on emergency scenes. The concern is that EMS crews may not know who someone is, what department they belong to, or what level of medical credentialing they have.

An example was given from outside Rusk County where a person attempted to start an IV even though the agency they were with was not an advanced-level FRO. This raised concerns about scope of practice, credential verification, and scene accountability.

Christus EMS is considering a badging system that could include:

- Department logo
- Christus EMS logo
- Individual photo
- Name and title
- Color coding for BLS or ALS credentialing

- Possibly QR code verification
- Credential expiration tracking

There was discussion about whether FROs should remain department-based or whether there should be a countywide Rusk County ESD #1 FRO identity. Jiffy Dukes raised liability concerns about shifting too much responsibility directly to the ESD. Others noted that liability could still reach the ESD through contracts and mutual aid, regardless of structure.

The group discussed whether an MOU among departments might be the best way to handle countywide FRO recognition without unnecessarily shifting liability.

General direction discussed:

The badging concept was generally supported, but the structure, liability, credential verification, and funding need more discussion. This will likely need to be placed on a future agenda.

10. Photo Backdrop and Badge Process

Related to the badge discussion, the group talked about how to take consistent ID photos. It was suggested that the ESD purchase a proper photo backdrop so all badge photos are uniform.

A blue background was favored over white because white can cause lighting and washout issues. The group also discussed whether photos should be taken at the ESD building rather than submitted by email, since emailed photos can vary in size, quality, and format.

11. Tire Policy

A question was raised about whether the ESD has a tire policy for smaller trucks, such as brush trucks with 19.5-inch or 16-inch tires. The existing policy appears to focus mainly on larger apparatus tires, such as 22.5-inch tires.

The explanation given was that larger truck tires are a major expense, which is why the ESD took on more of that burden. Brush truck tires were viewed more as a general maintenance item, though the issue may need further review.

Vendors such as Southern Tire Mart and Hometown Tire were discussed. Departments were encouraged to shop carefully, compare prices, check tire ratings, and verify tire dates.

Key reminder:

Departments should treat ESD funds as carefully as they would their own money.

12. Closing Comments

Jiffy Dukes thanked everyone for attending and participating. He emphasized that the purpose of the roundtable was to allow open discussion and honest input from the departments.

The group discussed possibly continuing quarterly roundtable workshops so departments and the ESD can continue communicating outside of formal board meetings.

A motion to adjourn was made by Board Member Wayne Griffith and seconded by Board Member Jiffy Dukes. The meeting adjourned at 10:45 a.m. with a unanimous vote of the Board.

Secretary

President