

NFFE News



NFFE Local 639 Playing Vital Role in Aftermath of Baltimore Key Bridge Collapse

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National Federation of Federal Employees (NFFE) Local 639 represents employees working for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) Baltimore District, where NFFE-IAM members are actively involved in the response to the collapse of the Francis Scott Key Bridge in Baltimore, Maryland. The USACE is a vital team member of the Key Bridge Response Unified Command, which also includes the U.S. Coast Guard, the Maryland Department of the Environment, the Maryland Transportation Authority, the Maryland State Police, and Witt O'Brien's.

To aid in the restoration of shipping operations at the Port of Baltimore, the USACE Baltimore District is contributing its unique technical expertise and abilities to the Unified Command team. This includes certified underwater assessments, structural engineering, bridge inspections, contract support and waterway wreckage management – all facilitated by advanced hydrographic and topographic sonar tools on its fleet of highly-specialized survey vessels.

The Unified Command has three main objectives to restore normal operations. The first is to clear the federal channel, which involves removing wreckage using floating cranes and consolidating debris. The second is to refloat and remove the Dali, the cargo ship which struck the Key Bridge in the early morning hours of March 26. Once those two objectives are complete, the bridge will be disassembled and all remaining debris will be cleared, allowing for resumption of pre-collapse marine traffic patterns into and out of the Port of Baltimore. With these operations underway, the Unified Command's top priority is recovering the missing construction workers who were victims of this tragedy.

As the USACE Baltimore District assists the Unified Command in cleaning up the Fort McHenry Channel, Local 639 has also played a critical role in supporting their colleagues in the aftermath of a traumatic disaster. Local leaders are trained in Critical Incident Stress Management and have been aiding their coworkers through this difficult experience.

“During this Key Bridge event, we have found that employees will acknowledge tragedy in similar and dissimilar ways, which leads to behaviors and attitudes that could affect their work and home lives,” said Local 639 President Willie Pack. “Our local recognizes the human element related to life altering events, because we are as they are – emotionally caring, hopeful, and giving people. Helping and supporting is what NFFE Local 639 does, and this is how we are intentionally present in the background to assist those on the ‘Front Line.’”

“Our brothers and sisters of the USACE Baltimore District are doing incredible work,” said NFFE National President Randy Erwin. “The mission that these folks are so critically involved in is immensely tedious, dangerous, and complex. Responding to this disaster and clearing the wreckage has implications not only locally, but across the country and around the world. I am really proud of Local 639 for their work in the aftermath of this unfortunate event, and also their commitment to supporting their colleagues during this challenging time.”

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