

Emergency Support Function 15 Public Affairs

ESF Coordinator:

Public Information Officer

Primary Agencies for:

Elected Officials
Emergency Management

Support Agencies:

Local Jurisdictions
Board of County Commissioners
Volunteer Organizations
Grant County Public Utility District

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Purpose

Emergency Support Function 15 (ESF 15) ensures that local resources are deployed during potential or actual emergencies or disasters to provide accurate and timely information before, during and after an emergency or disaster to the general public. The general public may include private citizens, large and small businesses, governments, emergency responders and the media. ESF 15 also provides resource support to implement the Joint Information Center (JIC) for briefing the news media.

B. Scope

ESF 15 coordinates actions to provide public affairs support to local incident management operations and elements. It identifies the support positions necessary for coordinating communications to the general public. This ESF applies to all local agencies within Grant County to include Grant County which may require public affairs support during emergencies or disasters. The provisions of this ESF apply to any event designated by the Director of Emergency Management or Elected Officials where significant interagency coordination is necessary.

II. POLICIES

A. Life-safety information and instructions to the public has first priority for release.

B. Mission assignments to departments or jurisdictions for public affairs should be agreed upon by those entities prior to an actual emergency or disaster.

- C. Emergency public information actions before, during, and following any emergency will be determined by the severity of the situation as declared by involved entities, or as perceived by the public.
- D. Local jurisdictions and other response organizations will be notified when an emergency or disaster has occurred that requires an emergency public information response.
- E. The Emergency Alert System (EAS) is activated as the principal means to disseminate emergency warnings and priority emergency instructions to the public.
- F. The function of JIS system is to coordinate information before its release to the public and the news media.

III. SITUATION

A. Emergency or Disaster Conditions and Hazards

A natural or human-caused emergency or disaster may occur at anytime.

B. Planning Assumptions

1. An incident has occurred and public perception is such that people believe they have been placed in danger by a natural or human-caused emergency or disaster.
2. The event requires responding agencies to provide instructions and information to the public about the incident and actions people should take to save and protect life, property, economy, and the environment.
3. Responding agencies will provide information to reduce public concerns about the incident and response activities.

IV. CONCEPT OF OPERATIONS

A. General

1. Public affairs resources are coordinated by the Public Information Officer at the Emergency Operations Center (EOC).
2. The staff at the EOC coordinates messages with public information officer(s) from all involved departments and agencies.
3. The Joint Information System (JIS) also supports the third principle under the NIMS public information system. Organizations participating in incident management retain their autonomy. The departments, local governments,

organizations, or jurisdictions that contribute to the JIS do not lose their identities or responsibility for their own programs or policies.

4. A rumor control section is established by the PIO to
 - a. Answer inquiries from the public.
 - b. Act as a media monitoring group to monitor media broadcasts to ensure accuracy of released information.

B. Organization

1. Emergency Management

Emergency Management or designee has the responsibility to appoint a staff member to the position of Public Information Officer (PIO). Emergency Management or designee will utilize local agencies to distribute emergency information to the public and special populations.

2. Local Jurisdictions

Local jurisdictions are responsible for providing its citizens with information on the event and what immediate protective actions they should take, such as taking shelter or evacuating. Local government is responsible for providing the public with information and intermediate protective actions designed to further save lives, protect property, economy and the environment, and long term recovery actions to restore the affected community, as nearly as possible, to its pre-incident condition.

C. Procedures

1. Local jurisdictions should establish a PIO to provide public information before an emergency or disaster. Emergency Management has established a Public Information Officer position and is available to support any jurisdiction upon request. Local jurisdictions which have a designated PIO will coordinate information through Emergency Management. Grant County assumes lead responsibility unless the event occurs in the incorporated community and the jurisdiction chooses to accept the lead role as PIO. Should the local jurisdiction choose to utilize their local PIO through a JIS a Joint Information Center is activated.
2. The PIO representative at the EOC, with assistance from emergency management staff, will coordinate public information actions with the state PIO. Messages will be coordinated through the establishment of a JIS, where agency representatives share information throughout the event. This enables local agencies to share information at the state and federal levels if necessary.

3. The Emergency Management PIO will coordinate the emergency public information response through all phases of natural or human-caused incidents, regardless of the size or extent of the incident. This will be conducted through all phases of the incident. This will be accomplished in collaboration with the Chief Elected Officials, the Director of Emergency Management, Incident Commander, and the state PIO.
4. Emergency public information will be coordinated through the EOC. If a Joint Information Center (JIC) is established, state emergency public information will be provided to the media and the public through the state EOC. The JIC may coordinate information to the Washington State Emergency Information Center (WEIC) through the State EOC as information only referring coordination to the WIC. The state PIO will coordinate the management of this information through all phases of the incident. This is accomplished in collaboration with the Governor's Communications Director.
5. If the event is an Incident of National Significance, public affairs may be coordinated through a Joint Field Office (JFO), which is a coordinating center for Federal officials, officers, and resource coordinators.
6. Local jurisdictions and other response organizations can be notified by the Multi-Agency Communications Center (MACC) or Emergency Management Department when an incident has occurred that may require an emergency public information response to support activities at the county EOC.
7. Upon request Elected Officials, PIOs and the Emergency Management Director arrange incident site visits for state and federal governments and local media, as well as responses to government inquiries about the event.

D. Mitigation Activities

Emergency Management conducts public education as part of regular business. The department attends fairs, community events, and meetings. Public information is often disseminated through books, pamphlets, discussion panels, videos, and other publications. Much of this information is based on all-hazards planning and specific information is made available which offers insight and suggestions for reducing risks associated with those hazards.

The department, in conjunction with incorporated municipalities and special purpose districts, has conducted vulnerability assessments and logged critical facilities through the Grant County All-Hazards Mitigation Plan, published separately. This plan is available to the public for review. The plan identifies significant hazard occurrences of the past as well as offering strategy to mitigate potential losses to life and property.

E. Preparedness Activities

1. Elected Officials and Public Information Officers should participate in exercises to practice public affairs responsibilities. Press releases from exercises are often reviewed to ensure that appropriate protective actions have been recommended for the public. All pertinent agencies are encouraged to train appropriate staff to implement public information responsibilities and to prepare resource materials to be used for an emergency or disaster.
2. Develop effective working relationships with the news media to aid information being broadcast in a timely manner to the public.
3. Emergency Management has the capability to distribute public messages through the Emergency Alert System (EAS) for local emergencies. For more information about EAS, refer to ESF #2, Communication, Information Systems, and Warning.

F. Response Activities

1. Disseminate emergency instructions and critical information to the public.
2. Provide the public (through the media) with accurate information regarding the event.
3. Establish a Joint Information Center (JIC) for briefing the news media.
4. Establish a rumor control function to respond to public and media inquires.
5. Provide spontaneous volunteer phone bank and reception center information to the public.

V. Responsibilities

Public Information Officer

The primary role of the PIO is to gather, verify, coordinate, and disseminate emergency instructions and critical information through the media to the public. A secondary function is to provide the public accurate and complete information regarding incident cause, size, status, resources committed and potential short or long-term impacts, if known, and to address important inaccuracies before they are reported incorrectly a second time. Large incidents involving numerous response agencies, PIOs from all responding agencies should combine to coordinate public information under the direction of the designated PIO in the EOC. The on shift PIO is provided public affairs resources from EOC representatives and Emergency Management staff to include items such as situation reports, notes, and protective actions recommendations, and contact information for pertinent community organizations and individuals.

Primary Agencies

These agencies are responsible to identify collaboration needs with many departments, agencies, volunteer organizations and businesses for public affairs in an emergency or disaster in an effort to protect life, property, economy and the environment.

Agency	Responsibilities
Emergency Management	Establishes an information center to provide instructions and information to the public about emergencies or disasters and designates a PIO for the incident. Coordinates public information response through all phases of an incident. Develops messages in conjunction with other primary agencies to be distributed through the Emergency Alert System (EAS).
Designated Public Information Officer	Prepares messages at the EOC for public distribution. The PIO must get approval on all messages prior to their delivery from a Chief Elected Official.
Elected Officials	Reviews and approves emergency public information messages and press releases prior to public delivery through broadcast media.

Support Agencies

These agencies are responsible to lead the planning efforts in areas of agency expertise and provide assistance in coordination with other departments and agencies when appropriate.

Agency	Responsibilities
All Pertinent Agencies	<p>The following local support agencies are likely to provide general public information officer support as requested to Emergency Management, EOC, JIC, or the lead state agency during response and recovery activities, should an emergency, disaster, or hazard specific incident occur:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Board of County Commissioners Grant County Auditor Office Grant County Treasurers Office Law Enforcement Fire Departments/Districts Grant County Health District Emergency Medical Services Public Works Grant County Coroner Grant County Public Utility District

American Red Cross	Provides public information on the location of shelters and assistance centers for people affected by the emergency or disaster.
Washington State Emergency Management Division	Coordinates state-level information to the public following a natural or human-caused emergency or disaster. Coordinates with county, municipal, and other public information officers.
Federal Emergency Management Agency	Coordinates federal-level information to the public following a natural or human-caused emergency or disaster.
Department of Homeland Security	Coordinates federal-level information to the public following an Incident of National Significance.

VI. RESOURCE REQUIREMENTS

The resources necessary to accomplish public affairs activities will be determined by the situation.

VII. REFERENCES

see Appendix 2 of the Basic CEMP

VIII. TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

see Appendix 1 of the Basic CEMP