

EMERGENCY SUPPORT FUNCTION #15
“Public/Media Affairs”

PRIMARY AGENCY:

Guernsey County Public Information Officer

SUPPORT AGENCIES:

All organizations involved in emergency response and recovery and having requirements to release information to the media.

I. Introduction

During a disaster the means of dispersing public information to victims may be severely affected by overwhelming demand and/or damage to local media caused by the disaster. County assistance may be required to supply critical information to victims, responders, recovery personnel and members of the media. In addition, following a disaster, information may often be vague, erroneous or contradictory. County and local agencies public information personnel will work in cooperation and coordination with one another to ensure that precise, correct, and verified emergency public information (EPI) is released to the public and representatives of media.

A. Purpose

This Support Annex addresses the organization necessary for the development, distribution and coordination of prompt, accurate, consistent, authoritative and understandable emergency information to the public in the event of an emergency and/or disaster.

B. Scope

1. Emergency Public Information (EPI) efforts will focus on specific, event-related information.
2. This information generally will be of an instructional nature focusing on such things as warning, evacuation and shelter. It also is important to keep the public informed of the general progress of events. A special effort will be made to report the facts as accurately as possible and provide advice concerning necessary protective actions. Rumor control will be a major aspect of the information program and will operate from the EOC.

C. Policies

1. The Guernsey County Public Information Officer (GCPIO) will lead an Emergency Public Information team during declared county emergencies that operates at the direction of the Executive Group in the Guernsey County EOC.
2. The PIO will establish an emergency information center at or near the EOC as a point of contact for the media during an emergency and provide necessary staff and equipment to support its operation.
3. All county-level emergency information will be coordinated through the Executive Group for approval before release by the PIO.
4. To the maximum extent possible, local organizations involved in emergency response and recovery operations, will coordinate Emergency Public Information and related information with the Guernsey County PIO or designee before release.
5. Ongoing public education programs will be conducted to increase public awareness of potential hazards and necessary responses.

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II. Situation and Assumptions

A. Situation

1. Guernsey County is vulnerable to a variety of hazards. Media outlets exist which, if effectively employed, can be used to inform the population of the events that are occurring and how they may best take action to them.
2. During periods of emergency, the public needs and generally desires detailed information regarding protective action to be taken for minimizing loss of life and property. There are times, however, when disaster strikes without warning and the public information system cannot react rapidly enough to properly inform the public about the hazard. For this reason, it is important that prior to the occurrence of an emergency, the public is made aware of potential hazards and the protective measures that can be employed.
3. During a county wide or large disaster, a Joint Information Center maybe established to coordinate the dissemination of information about all county, state and federal disaster response and recovery programs.
4. The public may accept as valid rumors, hearsay and half-truth information which may cause unnecessary fear and confusion.
5. The following news media outlets can assist in disseminating of public information in the county.

a. Newspapers

The Daily Jeffersonian	Cambridge
The Times Recorder	Zanesville
Village Reporter	Byesville

b. Radio Stations

WCMJ (96 FM)
WBIK (92.1 FM)
WILE (1270 AM / 97.7 FM)
WWKC (105 FM)
WBNV (93 FM)

c. TV Stations/Cable Networks

WHIZ-TV	Zanesville
WTRF-TV	Wheeling
WTOV-TV	Steubenville
WBNS-TV	Columbus
WOUB-TV	Athens

Cebridge Communications	Channel 2 (Local Access)
Aldelphia Communications	Channel 1
AVC Communications	Channel 2 (Local Origination)

A contact list for the above media outlets is maintained in the county resource manual.

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B. Assumptions

1. An effective program combining both education and emergency information may significantly reduce disaster-related casualties and property damage. However, despite educational programs, people are generally unconcerned about hazards until affected. Thus, special emphasis must be placed on the effectiveness of the emergency information program.
2. Local print and broadcast media will cooperate in broadcasting and publishing detailed disaster-related instructions to the public.
3. Depending on the severity of the emergency, telephone communication may be disrupted. Local and regional radio/television stations without emergency power may also be off the air. If this occurs, public address systems and door-to-door sweeps may be initiated.
4. State-level news releases will be coordinated with the Guernsey County PIO and will not conflict with county-level releases.
5. Rumor control procedures directed by the Guernsey County PIO will prevent incorrect information from affecting emergency response activities.
6. The Guernsey County PIO maintains listings of media contacts and Emergency Alert System (EAS) networks and relies on those contacts and networks for the dissemination of Emergency Public Information.
7. The Guernsey County PIO has identified resource and personnel requirements for emergencies and is prepared to operate in the Guernsey County EOC or at a Joint Information Center (JIC) near the site of the disaster as needed.
8. The Guernsey County PIO develops and maintains the Emergency Public Information Team Standard Operating Procedures that detail specific team actions, required resources and responsibilities during emergencies.
9. State level news releases will be coordinated with the Guernsey County PIO and will not conflict with county level releases.

III. CONCEPT OF OPERATIONS

A. General

1. The Guernsey County PIO will act as the lead agent for this ESF. Other local agencies and departments may also be requested to provide support during county-level emergency operations.
2. The PIO will serve as the single point of contact for the media during an emergency to ensure coordination of local public information activities with all local, state, and federal agencies, in conjunction with the Emergency Management Agency.
3. The Guernsey County PIO is responsible for ensuring that coordinated public information services are provided throughout a county-level emergency from assessment through response and recovery and that these services are provided in a cooperative manner with local Public Information Officers as applicable.
4. The Guernsey County Commissioners or their appointed representatives operating out of the Executive Group in the EOC during county-level emergencies have ultimate control over the release of County Public Information.

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5. After media releases have been approved, copies will be given to ESF #5 for distribution to personnel in the EOC and at the site as needed.
 6. All available means to disseminate continuous Emergency Public Information to the general public will be used including:
 - a. Broadcast Media (Cable, Radio, and Television)
 - b. Door to Door Notification
 - c. Email Lists
 - d. Facsimile (FAX)
 - e. Official Internet Websites (County and municipal)
 - f. Mobile Public Address Systems
 - g. Print Media (Local Newspapers, Brochures, and Handouts)
 - h. Telephone
 - i. Weather Radios via NWS/NOAA Newport, NC
 7. Emergency information efforts should focus on specific event-related information. This information will focus on such things as warning, evacuation, and shelter, as well as keeping the public informed of the general progress of events.
 8. A special effort should be made to report positive information regarding emergency response to reassure the community that the situation is under control. Rumor control must be a major part of the informational program. Public feedback should be used as a measure of the program's effectiveness.
 9. Education efforts will be directed toward increasing public awareness about potential hazards and how people should deal with them. All information and education efforts will rely heavily on the cooperation of commercial media organizations.
- B. Joint Information Center (JIC)
1. The county PIO if necessary will establish a Joint Information Center (JIC). This JIC shall be a physical location where Public Information Officers on the local, state, and federal levels of government and other Public Information Officers having an interest in the emergency can meet to ensure coordination of information to be released to the media and the public. Press briefings may also be held at the JIC.
 2. The JPIC provides for an organized arrangement of functions encompassing emergency personnel, facilities, equipment, and procedures involved in providing accurate, coordinated, and timely instructions and information to the public during an emergency.
 3. The JIC generally will be located at the Guernsey County Administration building, but may be located closer to the incident in order to facilitate coordination with response and recovery operations at the site and to provide a coordinated center for information to media personnel at the site.
 4. The Guernsey County PIO and the EPI Team working out of the JIC will maintain Executive Group approval for releases of EPI. This will be accomplished through email, fax/modem, hand delivery, telephone, and/or radio communications.
- C. Federal, State, and Local Network for EPI and Media Relations
- The most important PIO activity is to disseminate clear, correct and factual information to the public in a timely manner. All levels of government must provide readily available emergency public information that will support emergency response and recovery. During

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county emergencies requiring state assistance, the County and Local PIO(s) will work cooperatively with state PIO(s) and in coordination with one another to ensure that timely, accurate, and consistent information is released.

D. Rumor Control Procedures

A special effort should be made to report positive information regarding emergency response to reassure the community that the situation is under control. Rumor control must be a major part of the informational program. Public feedback should be used as a measure of the program's effectiveness.

1. Accurate EPI, provided to the general public in a timely manner, will minimize fear, curtail rumors, and provide a constructive means for dealing with the situation.
2. Procedures for rumor control will be implemented, and the facts will be reported as accurately and quickly as possible.

IV. ORGANIZATION

A. The Guernsey County PIO manages the activities at the JPIC in coordination with the County Commissioners, Mayors, and Township Trustees and representatives in the EOC and at the Incident Command Center at the site of the emergency.

1. The Emergency Public Information Team is made up of the following personnel:
 - a. Guernsey County PIO (Team Leader)
 - b. Public Information Assistant
 - c. All organizations involved in emergency response and recovery and having requirements to release information to the media.
 - d. Administrative Support
2. The Guernsey County PIO serves as the primary point of contact for the Guernsey County EMA.
3. The Guernsey County PIO is responsible for ensuring local media are kept informed about emergency public information, particularly evacuation or shelter information.
4. As the local media representative, the Guernsey County PIO should be prepared to disseminate information about all phases of the emergency.
5. News media often prefer to talk to local representatives and the Guernsey County PIO should be prepared for such requests.
6. The establishment of any necessary media center on scene and media access to the scene will be coordinated with the incident commander by the PIO.
7. Refer to the Emergency Public Information SOP for detailed information on team notification/activation procedures, responsibilities, interfacing with the Executive Group, federal, state and local personnel, logistical procedures and related team information.

B. Pre-Incident Actions

1. Conduct hazard awareness programs.
2. Coordinate with media.
3. Conduct public education programs.
4. Prepare emergency information for release during emergencies.

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C. Incident Period Actions

1. Develop public information for release.
2. Coordinate rumor control.
3. Schedule news conferences including photo opportunities interviews and tours.
4. Maintain a callback system with media
5. Post Incident Actions
6. Provide public information.
7. Compile record of events.
8. Assess effectiveness of information and education program.

D. Educational Programs

There are many activities involved in the educational programs. The media should be provided with information on new developments affecting emergency management activities. Thus, much information reaches the public via television, radio, and newspapers. Lectures and other presentations are often requested by various organizations, presenting another opportunity for public education. Educational brochures and films are also distributed to the general public and organizations.

E. Emergency Public Information Programs

1. Many of these activities are continuations of the educational programs. Media materials are kept at the EOC and distributed to the media as necessary. In addition, television and radio stations maintain a selection of public service announcements related to emergency preparedness.

V. Roles and Responsibilities

A. Responsibilities of Guernsey County PIO

1. Staff and manage PIO activities during county assessment, response and recovery operations.
2. Provide coordinated briefings for media representatives.
3. Release Emergency Public Information as directed by the Executive Group and in coordination with other state, federal, and local Public Information Officers.
4. Ensure approval of county news releases and related information by Executive Group before issuing to media representatives.
5. Ensure coordination of all news releases through EPI Team operating out of the JIC.
6. Provide required reports of activities to ESF #5 for inclusion in Situation Reports.
7. Provide hazard specific EPI for preparedness, response, and recovery initiatives as needed.
8. Be prepared to accompany personnel going to the site of the disaster if needed.
9. Coordinate information requests about injured persons with the American Red Cross. Supply lists of missing or injured persons only after written confirmation by local authorities and approval of Executive Group.
10. Provide After-Action Reports as requested.

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B. Responsibilities of EOC members to PIO:

1. All designated EOC representatives will cooperate in public education programs.
2. All representatives in the activated EOC will verify reports received from the field.
3. The Communications Coordinator will assist the County PIO by providing telephone/fax equipment for the media at the JPIC if it does not interfere with appropriate response/recovery operations.
4. All representatives in the EOC will clear press releases relating to their response efforts with the County Commissioners, Mayors, or Township Trustees.
5. The Medical Coordinator will provide the PIO with timely information concerning casualties, numbers, and types of injuries. This information will be given to the Local Law enforcement for next-of-kin notifications before it is released to the public.

VI. Administration and Logistics

- A. The County Commissioners, Mayors, or Township Trustees will review all press releases before they are released. Timely dissemination is essential.
- B. Copies of all press releases will be maintained on file at Guernsey County EMA.
- C. When the EOC is activated, the County PIO on duty will keep a log listing all media contacts made, press releases issued, and any other major PIO functions accomplished during that 12-hour shift. This report will be given to the County Commissioners, Mayors, or Township Trustees and a copy to the new County PIO coming on-duty at the end of this shift. The new County PIO should be briefed on activities and needs for the next 12-hour shift.
- D. The County PIO will log all incoming and outgoing messages.
- E. Representatives from State, Federal, and private sector organizations will coordinate with the PIO for the provision of technical information for release to the public. Such information includes but is not limited to health risks related to the hazard, type and availability of assistance, geographic, geological, meteorological, and demographic information related to population protection.

VII. Supporting Plans and Procedures

Dealing With The News Media

1. When contacted by a reporter take the name, organization and telephone number. Tell the reporter a Public Information Officer will call them right back. Then call the PIO. The PIO will talk with the reporter or arrange an interview with the person best able to respond to specific questions.
2. If you are asked by the Public Information Officer to talk to a reporter, respond only to inquiries regarding your own area of participation or expertise. Refer requests regarding other program area to the Joint Information Center.
3. Report all contacts with the media to the JIO.
4. Report any problems—rumors, inadequate, incorrect, or negative coverage—to the Public Information Officer.
5. Other tips for responding to questions from reporters:
 - ☐ Listen to the entire question before responding.
 - ☐ Avoid answering questions that call for speculation on your part; e.g., “Is this the worst disaster you have ever seen?”; “How much is the recovery effort going to cost?”; or “How many applicants do you expect at the center?”
 - ☐ Beware of false assumptions and erroneous conclusions.
 - ☐ Avoid answering hypothetical questions.
 - ☐ Be alert to multiple questions.
6. If there are any problems, call the Public Information Officer immediately.
7. **Be sure to tell members of the media** where they may find accurate, up-to-date, official information about the disaster response, recovery and mitigation programs.

Handling Television Coverage Of The Disaster Recovery

1. Be polite, courteous and responsive.
2. Remember that television reporters serve an important role in the recovery process by disseminating accurate information to the public. Your job is to help them get accurate information and a positive impression of the process. Primarily, you will be asked to provide background information about what is happening:
 - ☐ What is the process for disaster victims to follow?
 - ☐ How is it going?
 - ☐ Have you had any procedural problems?
 - ☐ What is the general impression of the day's activities?
 - ☐ What is the mood of the victims?
3. Remain in control of the situation at all times. Think about and decide in advance what your communications objectives are.
4. Television crews should not be allowed to interfere with operations.
5. Television reporters should be advised that general filming of procedures is acceptable, but that they must be permission from individual disaster victims before shooting any close-up footage of them.
6. Do not serve as a liaison between a television reporter and the disaster victim.
7. Only a small portion of what you say to a television reporter may be used on the air; so choose your words carefully and stay away from unfamiliar subject matter. Do not be afraid to say, “I don't know,” or to refer the reporter to someone with the appropriate expertise.

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