

Emergency Support Function #15 External Affairs - Public Information

PRIMARY AGENCIES:

All Participating Signatories:

Cities (all their respective departments)

Tribes

Hospitals & Medical Providers

King County Government

Nonprofit Organizations

Private Industry

Special Purpose Districts (fire, sewer & water, schools, port)

SUPPORT AGENCIES:

Washington State Emergency Management Division

Department of Homeland Security (DHS)

DHS Federal Emergency Management Agency

Other Federal Agencies

Introduction

Purpose

The purpose of this Emergency Support Function (ESF) is to establish a regional “Joint Information System” (JIS) that will support emergency response through an effective development, coordination, and dissemination of emergency public information in the event of natural or technological (human-caused) emergencies or disasters. This ESF is an element of the Regional Disaster Plan for Public & Private Organizations in King County and is intended to facilitate:

- coordinating communications between affected agencies and organizations with the media and public,
 - establishing a central point for information distribution on behalf of partners needing public information assistance as well as facilitating regional information coordination, and
 - expanding the Regional Public Information Network (RPIN) to include online multi-organizational systems to internally enhance information sharing amongst public, private and nonprofit public information personnel.
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Scope

During a major terrorist incident or large-scale disaster, evacuation, movement, sheltering, and personal protective measures to affected populations will likely be influenced by effective public information and emergency instructions. The Emergency Alert System (EAS) and voice-driven systems such as Public Announcement (PA) systems on emergency response vehicles simply can't reach the large populations that will be affected. A cooperative and technically effective use of the Internet and the dissemination of public information via the media provide the best chance of conveying life-safety and public awareness information to large numbers of at-risk people.

In some types of disasters, public warning might well be the only operational response possible.

In the response phase, coordinated, accurate, consistent, timely, and easily understood information can directly affect the safety of affected populations, and can contribute to the overall safety and well-being of the community. Individual and regional public information functions and actions before, during and following any emergency will be determined not only by the severity of the emergency and the involved agencies and organizations, but also by the perceptions of the public.

During recovery, emergency public information can be critical for helping people put their lives back in order.

A significant emergency public information response will require the coordination of many public and private organizations, Washington State, and federal agencies. This ESF describes those organizations and their responsibilities and relationships.

Policies

Public agencies under RCW 38.52 are responsible for the emergency management functions in their jurisdiction. Private and nonprofit organizations also have internal policies and plans that guide their respective emergency management functions. Each organization is responsible for establishing an emergency public information function within its internal organizational structure. Activation of the Joint Information System (JIS) and Joint Information Center (JIC) does not preclude participating organizations from releasing their own information about their policies, procedures or programs.

During multi-jurisdictional, multi-agency and region-wide disasters, the coordinated flow of public information and facts concerning the event and respective responses are needed to protect the safety and well being of the public. Before its release, participating agencies' disaster information will be coordinated to the maximum extent possible to ensure consistency and accuracy.

During an activation of the Regional Disaster Plan, public information/public affairs/media relations officers representing responding organizations will work collaboratively to coordinate their respective agencies' actions with other responding organizations through a defined "Joint Information System" (JIS). Larger regional events may necessitate establishment of a "Joint Information Center" (JIC) within the system that can serve as a central point for face-to-face coordination for the public information function in support of a multi-organizational response. The JIC provides a location for organizations participating in the management of an incident to work together to ensure that timely, accurate, easy-to-understand, and consistent information is disseminated to the public.

Public agencies, as well as voluntary and private responding organizations, are encouraged to participate in and share the resources of the JIS. Responding agencies that are unable to send a representative are encouraged to conduct their information activities in cooperation within the JIS.

Any public or private organization that has a role to play in the region's emergency response efforts may become a member of the Regional Public Information Network (RPIN). Additionally, public or regulated agencies and non-profit organizations having the need to widely disseminate emergency-related information to the public are encouraged to participate in the RPIN web site at <http://www.rpin.org/rpinweb/>. The Regional Public Information Network (RPIN) Steering Committee will continue working collaboratively to refine and recommend JIS procedures and this ESF so they can be used for disasters that encompass more than one jurisdiction or agency.

Regional Public Information Network (RPIN) Definition

RPIN was formed in early 2000 to enhance regional inter-governmental and inter-agency cooperation during emergencies and to explore strategies for providing more effective, coordinated public information when significant disruptions occur. The RPIN Steering Committee meets on a regular basis to refine plans, recommend strategies, and provide training opportunities to PIOs in the region. RPIN partners include representatives from numerous government jurisdictions, agencies and organizations that provide services to the public in the greater King, Pierce and Snohomish County area.

The RPIN.org web site is a unique tool which can provide vital public information and notifications on a regional basis. This web site benefits the public and partners by:

- Providing a central source for news through direct links to information being released by a variety of agencies and organizations in central Puget Sound.
- Providing RPIN partners a central place to make their information more easily accessible to the public and media via the Internet when incidents occur. This

includes both headlines linking to RPIN partner web sites or to news releases posted directly on RPIN.

- Providing partner agencies with a redundant web site in the event their own site becomes inoperable.
- Allowing information to be sent directly to subscribers via e-mail and pager notification.

Situation

Emergency/Disaster Conditions and Hazards

The King County region will periodically experience emergency situations that require the coordinated dissemination of critical information to the public via the news media and other informational outlets. Potential emergency situations include natural, technological and human-caused events. Public information is critical to alerting our citizens to an impending emergency, directing and informing them during the emergency, and assisting them during the recovery.

Planning Assumptions

The Emergency Alert System (EAS) is the best means to provide an initial warning to the public. It will be used in time-sensitive situations when the public must be warned immediately of an impending emergency or disaster. Warning and immediate life safety communications are addressed in “ESF 2 - Communication.”

As the initial warning communications are released, the public information role quickly begins keeping the media and public informed. Responding agencies may provide instructions and information to the public about the incident and actions they should take to save and protect lives, property, economy, and the environment. Additionally, those agencies provide information to reduce public concerns about the incident and what actions their respective organizations are taking.

After a major disaster, normal means of communications in the affected area may be destroyed or severely disrupted; therefore, only limited and incomplete information may be expected from the area until communications can be restored. In those situations, non-traditional means of communicating between participating organizations and with the media and public must be established and utilized.

The public information function for many organizations is performed by a limited number of individuals within the organization, or may be a part-time duty for persons with other responsibilities. Personnel resources available to respond to larger events that attract significant attention or last longer than 8-12 hours may be severely limited.

Rumors or misinformation can cause unnecessary distress among the public, provoke counter-productive public actions, and impede response and recovery efforts. Public information personnel must focus on addressing these rumors by providing accurate and timely information, which is coordinated with other affected response agencies.

Concept of Operations

General

Jurisdictions, agencies and organizations are responsible for providing their respective communities with information on the incident and what immediate protective actions they should take, such as sheltering or evacuating.

The public information function of individual organizations may be phased in accordance with the size and scope of the emergency situation. Initially a Public Information Officer (PIO) from an agency or business may provide adequate PIO support to an Incident Commander. As the incident grows or there are multiple incident sites, the public information function may be conducted or supported by an Emergency Operations Center (EOC) / Emergency Coordination Center (ECC).

Multi-jurisdictional, multi-agency and region-wide events will quickly warrant the need for coordinated communications among those jurisdictions, agencies and organizations involved.

Public organizations may use the RPIN web site to assist in the dissemination of public information in addition to their own web site.

Organization

Participating organizations should establish a public information function to provide information and instructions to their respective communities before, during, and after an emergency or disaster. That function should include the coordination of information with other affected organizations as needed.

Participating agency internal public information functions may be categorized or defined as:

- 1. Self-sufficient Information Centers*

Jurisdictions, tribes, agencies and organizations possessing sufficient resources to respond to media and public information needs surrounding the incident. They might require public information assistance at some point during the response effort. This level of capability does not preclude the

activation of a JIC. If a JIC is activated, coordination and information sharing between individual information centers and the regional JIC is highly recommended.

2. *Reliant Information Centers*

Smaller jurisdictions, tribes, agencies and organizations severely impacted by an event, that are unable to manage the public information response and rely on the JIC as a primary point of release for their information.

The Joint Information System (JIS), defined in this ESF, will provide the framework for organizations to coordinate emergency public information. This system can provide the necessary staffing, facilities and resources to develop and distribute verified information to the public on behalf of multiple agencies for as long as conditions warrant.

Within that system, a Joint Information Center (JIC) can be established and serve as a central location to disseminate information in an environment that provides broad organizational coordination and the ability to function over an extended period of time, if necessary. When an event is of significant magnitude and causes large-scale disruption, the JIC may be activated at the direction of incident managers overseeing the emergency management operations response.

JIS / JIC Involvement

Within the Joint Information System (JIS), there are two identifiable event triggers for how an agency or organization will be involved in the system:

Local-High Impact Event

The jurisdiction or agency having primary responsibility for an incident requests public information mutual aid support. Public information resources through the Regional Disaster Plan will be available to assist.

Region-wide Event

A Regional JIC is activated to release public information, assist the media and create a centralized location for the coordination of information. Information is released in cooperation with the affected jurisdictions, agencies and organizations. *Note: Affected jurisdictions maintain the ability and autonomy to disseminate their own public information.*

Procedures

If a single entity is in need of additional resources to provide accurate and timely information, public information personnel from other organizations may be called upon to assist the impacted agency and work under the direction of the supervising

public information officer (PIO) representing the organization being assisted. The Joint Information System (JIS) will operate at three different levels:

Level One – Local information centers are activated in response to an incident. The activated agencies distribute their own public information messages. All agencies involved in the incident are encouraged to share and coordinate their messages before release.

Level Two – Within the JIS, if a single entity is impacted by an event and is in need of additional resources to aid the organization in providing accurate and timely information, public information personnel from other organizations may assist the impacted agency and work under the direction of the supervising public information officer (PIO) representing the organization being assisted.

Level Three –A JIC may be created to support responding federal, state and local agencies. Public information liaisons should be established between other operating information centers. Public outreach and hotlines are initiated.

If there is an event with impacts to either multiple agencies or organizations simultaneously, the formation of a JIC co-located with emergency operations or coordination center is a preferred solution. This may be a single location where PIOs assemble to collect, coordinate and disseminate information on the incident.

The RPIN web site may be utilized as a key tool for making news releases and other emergency information available to the media and public in one central location.

JIC Operations

1. The JIC will provide a centralized location for public information briefings to allow for participation by a variety of spokespeople and subject matter experts representing partner agencies and groups. The JIC will provide “one-stop shopping” for the news media and others seeking coordinated information.
2. Each individual responding agency and organization retains full ability to provide its own emergency information to the public as necessary, and is encouraged to provide representation and share information with the JIC if co-location cannot be achieved.

Lead Agency

Typically there is one jurisdiction, agency or organization that is impacted more significantly than others. That particular entity could be the lead for a regional JIC. The operation of the JIC should mirror the command organizational structure, if such a structure is established.

Facility

Locations for a JIC for regional events may vary and be dictated by the individual situation. It is highly preferable for the JIC to be established and co-located with an emergency operations or coordination center. Primary and alternate locations should be identified in the event of a large-scale, region-wide event.

Staffing

Additional personnel staffing for a regional JIC will follow the procedures established by the Incident Commander or lead responding agency and in accordance with guidelines contained in this ESF.

This ESF assumes a baseline of training has been established for the region's PIOs. Having a public information plan that is executed by a well-trained staff will mitigate the confusion that normally occurs in disaster situations. Participation in regularly scheduled disaster exercises will provide the cadre of personnel needed for larger scale events.

Mitigation/Preparedness/Response/Recovery Actions

All signatory partners should ensure to the best of their ability that their personnel and equipment are protected from the effects of disasters, and that appropriate emergency procedures and operating plans address and comply with local, state and federal response and recovery guidelines.

Responsibilities

Primary Agencies are responsible for ensuring that public information functions and operations are appropriately coordinated during and after a disaster. Primary Agencies will attempt to:

- Organize and coordinate the emergency public information function for their individual organization.
- Conduct training for personnel whose normal duties do not include PIO functions.
- Establish and coordinate procedures and the use of designated facilities during emergencies and disasters.
- Provide trained PIO staff or other appropriate individuals to staff the Regional JIC in support of other affected organizations and regional events.

- Make appropriate staff available to coordinate and share information through various communication means if public information resources cannot be sent to the Regional JIC.
 - Participate in RPIN as resources allow.
 - Utilize the JIS when situations warrant.
 - Maintain updated public information contact names and numbers as part of the “PIO Resource Directory” on the RPIN.org web site.
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Support Agencies should conduct their public information function in a way that is consistent with local agencies public information functions and operations during and after a disaster. Support Agencies attempt to:

- Coordinate respective public information within the Joint Information System (JIS).
 - Provide trained PIO representatives or other appropriate individuals to the JIC as the situation dictates.
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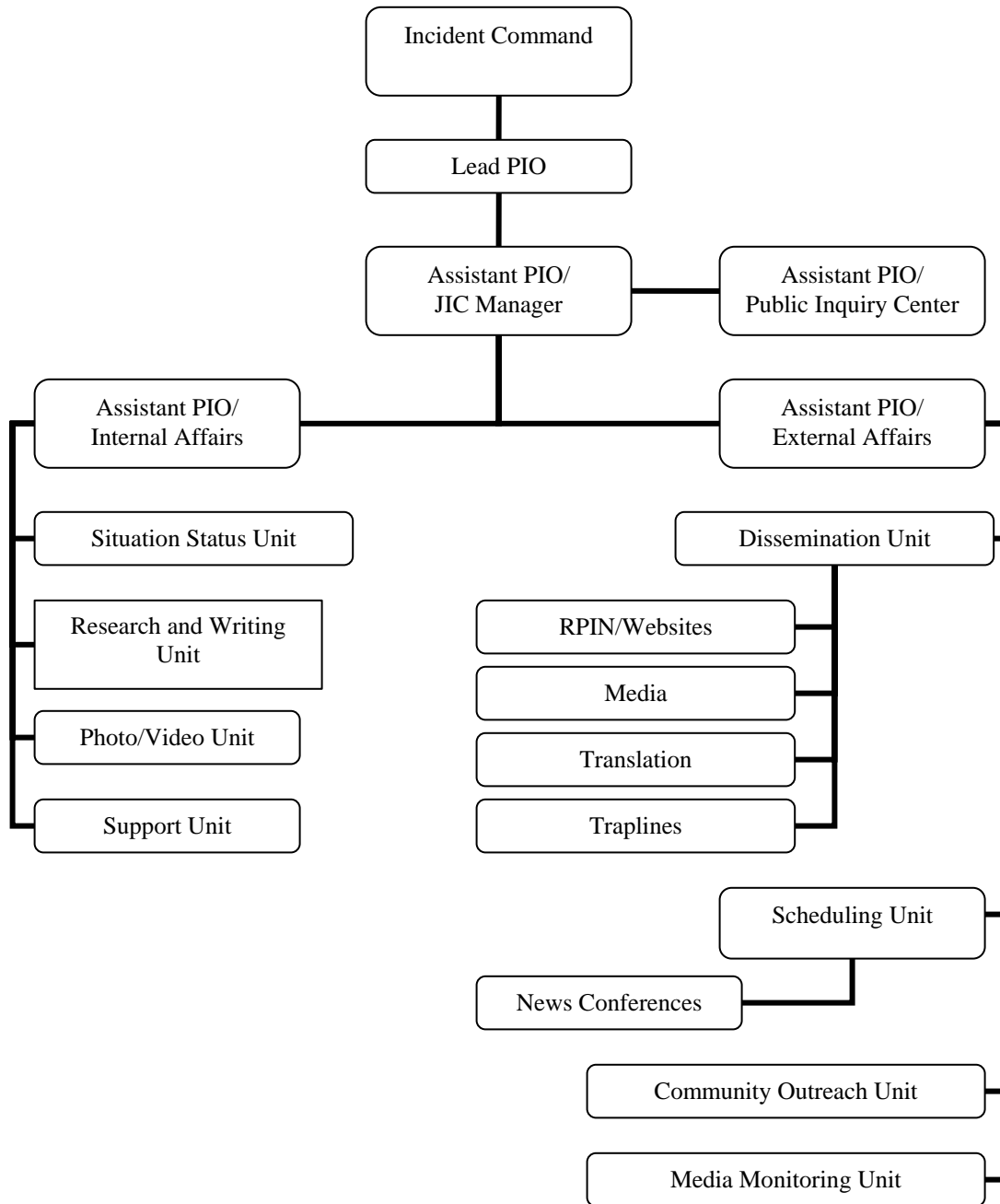
Resource Requirements

Pre-designated facilities and equipment must be identified to support the PIO function during disasters.

References

PIO Resource Directory
Regional Public Information Network (RPIN)
King County Public Information Officers (PIO) Procedures Guide
Regional Joint Information Center (JIC) Manual

Regional Joint Information Center Organizational Chart



Detailed job descriptions and roles can be found in the Regional Joint Information Center (JIC) manual.