

PUBLIC INFORMATION

PURPOSE: In an emergency or disaster, multifaceted coordination is needed to insure that the county is responsive to the informational needs of its residents and accurate and timely information is disseminated. This annex outlines the authorities, procedures, and roles and responsibilities specific to the public information annex.

RESPONSIBILITY: The County Manager is responsible for designating a County Public Information Officer (PIO) who will be responsible for the overall coordination of public information activities at the county level. The County PIO is the official spokesperson for the Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) and supports both the Policy Group and the EOC Director. Departmental PIOs are responsible for public information activities in their department and for coordinating these activities with the County PIO. All public information activities will be coordinated through the county's Emergency Operations Center (EOC) or the Joint Information Center (JIC) when established.

PREPAREDNESS:

- **Planning:** The coordination of public information planning for the county is the responsibility of the County PIO, while the responsibility for departmental planning lies with departmental PIOs. These planning efforts include developing and maintaining the plans, procedures, checklists, contact lists, and other materials needed to implement the public information function.
- **Pre-scripted Information:** PIOs will collect and maintain a file of fact sheets, instructions and procedures, and other readily available pre-scripted information on a wide range of topics to support the rapid dissemination of public information. This pre-scripted information will usually be generic in nature and non-specific to the event, but may still prove valuable to both the media and the public in the early stages of an emergency or disaster. Pre-scripted information will be verified on a regular basis to ensure that it is current and accurate.
- **Training:** All PIOs should have basic PIO training and receive training on the county plans and procedures specific to the public information function. Additionally, the County PIO should maintain a cadre of specially trained PIOs to support the County PIO in an emergency or disaster.
- **Media:** PIOs should establish and maintain a solid working relationship with the media. Additionally, the media should be involved with public information planning, training, and exercises when appropriate. County PIOs will maintain a current media directory with points of contact and programming information for radio, television, newspaper, and other media outlets.

RESPONSE AND RECOVERY:

- **Information Dissemination:** In an emergency or disaster, each department is responsible for the dissemination of information to the public according to departmental standard operating procedures. This dissemination is coordinated with the County PIO, the EOC when activated, and with any of the following (as appropriate): surrounding counties, local jurisdictions, nongovernmental organizations, and state and federal agencies. Through this coordinated effort, the following information will be disseminated to the public:
 - Lifesaving or health preservation instructions
 - Emergency status information
 - Disaster assistance and recovery information
 - Information in response to public or media inquiry
 - Information to resolve any conflicting information or to dispel rumors
 - Other useful information

- **Coordination:** In smaller incidents, emergency public information can usually be handled by a single departmental PIO. However, in larger incidents, more coordination is needed and a JIC may be established by the County PIO to coordinate the county's public information efforts.
 - Joint Information Center (JIC): When deemed appropriate, the County PIO will establish a JIC to facilitate the collection, coordination, and dissemination of public information for the county. The JIC provides an expanded capability to work closely with public information representatives of various county departments and agencies, local jurisdictions, nongovernmental organizations, and both the state and federal government. It may be augmented by liaisons from one or more of these agencies, or may send a liaison of its own to another designated information center.

The county's JIC will be located in the Johnson County Administration Building, Rooms 1050, 1051, 1052, 1054-1055, and the O.A.S.I.S room. An alternate location will be in the Northeast Offices, at 6000 Lamar, Mission, KS.

The following tasks will be accomplished through the JIC:

- Develop a capability to rapidly release emergency instructions and information to the public through all available means.

- Coordinate periodic news briefings throughout an emergency or disaster as appropriate. A media briefing center may be established at the JIC or other locations as determined by the incident. These locations must be available on short notice and be logistically suitable for conducting media briefings.

- Receive all calls from the media and the public concerning an emergency situation and respond with official information or relay calls to other PIO's, the County PIO, or EOC staff.
 - Obtain reports or situation summaries from EOC representatives of all emergency organization elements to maintain current estimates of the situation.
 - Prepare news releases.
 - Develop and maintain an emergency on-line web presence for the County to provide emergency information to the media and public.
 - Establish a field information center, if appropriate, at a location near the command post. Be prepared to work with the EOC and JIC if activated.
 - Provide an on-scene Information Officer(s), as appropriate to county affected facilities.
 - Conduct situation briefings for visitors, media, other government agencies, representatives, or interested or affected parties.
 - Conduct tours of the area affected by the disaster, if and as appropriate.
 - Arrange interviews with key personnel, when requested by the media, or County PIO.
 - Develop an after action report on public information activities. This report should include an assessment of the public information operations and their effectiveness, a record of events, and any printed material, news releases, tapes and clippings.
- **Dissemination Process:** Many methods are used to disseminate information to the public during an emergency or disaster. Warning systems, in general, are described in Annex B: Communications. Considerations for special populations are outlined below.
 - General Public: Radio, television, print media, NOAA all-hazard radios, fliers, posters, brochures, information kiosks, and the Johnson County website are all established methods for providing information to the public. Use of a particular medium(s) will be situation dependent, based upon the urgency of the information and the intended audience.
 - Special Populations:
 - **Hearing impaired:** The county provides severe weather notification to the hearing impaired in the county by activating a paging system during severe weather. Although the county activates the paging system, an external paging vendor is responsible for maintaining the

system. Trailers on TV screens provide similar information through the Emergency Alerting System (EAS).

- Visually impaired: The EAS provides audio alerting via radio and television stations. Some emergency planning and disaster information brochures are available in Braille.
- Non-English speaking: Many televisions have the capability to provide closed-captioning in Spanish.
- Schools: Most schools in Johnson County use NOAA all-hazard radios for notification of severe weather events and other emergencies. Some schools have tone-alert radio receivers tied into the emergency management institutional warning network.
- Hospitals & Nursing Homes: Most have NOAA all-hazard radios for notification of severe weather events and other emergencies.
- Correctional Facilities: The Adult Detention Center receives severe weather and other emergency information through Sheriff's Dispatch.
- Other: Special needs populations as determined.

- **Specialized Information Protocols:**

- Restricted Areas & Reentry: Information on restricted areas, as well as the process for reentry into an area after it has been declared safe, will be obtained from the Incident Commander's staff and disseminated immediately to the media and the public.
- Emergency Assistance: Information on any federal, state or local disaster assistance that might be available will be obtained from the agency offering the assistance. In some cases this information may given directly to the media and the public. In others cases, a telephone number will be provided for obtaining additional information.
- Casualties: Information on the number of fatalities, injured and missing will be obtained from the Incident Commander's staff and disseminated immediately to the media and the public. The identity of victims will be released only after confirmation of proper next-of-kin notification.