
ESF #15-Public Information and External Communications

Planning Team

ESF Coordinator:
Office of Public Affairs

Primary Agency:

- Governor's Office
- Office of Public Affairs

Support Agency:
All state agencies

Non-governmental Organizations:
WIBW Radio/KS Ag Network

Federal Agencies:

Private Sector:

Purpose

The purpose of ESF #15 is to disseminate information about disasters/emergencies to the public through the news media, state websites and social media sites and other appropriate communication means (hotlines, response to inquiries, etc.).

ESF #15 provides for accurate, prompt, coordinated information on emergencies in which local governments have requested state assistance to prepare and disseminate relevant disaster-related information. This ESF is intended to improve the ability of all participating agencies and organizations to:

1. Provide timely, consistent information on the status of emergency operations;
2. Coordinate the release of public information from all responding agencies;
3. Assure the public that government is responding effectively to the emergency;
4. Make credible and consistent information available to answer citizen inquiries; and
5. Provide ongoing and useful information regarding recovery activities

Scope

ESF #15 coordinates state actions to provide the required external affairs support to federal, state, local, and tribal incident management elements. ESF #15 applies to all state departments and agencies that may require public affairs support or whose public affairs assets may be employed during a disaster/emergency.

The provisions of this annex apply to all organizations and agencies having a role in disaster/emergency response or other events designated by the TAG, as KDEM's CAO, where significant interagency coordination is required.

Policies

Emergency public information activities are coordinated through a JIC designated to disseminate a variety of information and instructions to the general public, government officials, and the news media through direct contact, news conferences, news releases and advisories, and response to public and news media queries.

The OTAG public information officer (PIO), as state PIO, serves as the official spokesperson and primary news media point of contact for inquiries relating to emergency response and recovery operations. The state PIO may enlist other state agency PIOs to serve as spokespersons on behalf of the state or on behalf of their agency, and refer media inquiries to those individuals. These activities are coordinated with the SEOC, the governor's press secretary, state agencies, and with local and federal information counterparts.

Following a governor's declaration, all agencies and organizations having a role in the KRP will be integrated into the JIS.

Concept of Operations

General

Following a state declaration, or at the request of the SEOC Policy Group, the JIC will be activated and partner agencies may be required to report to the SEOC.

The goal of emergency public information is to keep the public informed of the general progress of events and provide educational information, particularly in the realm of health and safety.

A comprehensive emergency public information program combines educational and emergency information to reduce casualties and property damage and provides long-term public education related to hazard awareness. In either case, the participation of several state agencies is often required for successful implementation.

The ESF #15 planning team has identified areas requiring additional discussion specific to ESF #15. These areas include the JIS and JIC.

JIS

Emergency Public Information activities are structured under a JIS concept which ensures coordination of messages, whether the PIOs are located at one site (JIC) or multiple sites (virtual JIC). The JIS is designed to disseminate a variety of information and instruction to the general public, government officials, and the news media through direct contact, news conferences, news releases and advisories, web sites and social media sites, and timely response to public and news media queries.

The primary JIC, established in support of the KRP, may release general medical and public health response information to the public after consultation with the KDHE. When possible, a recognized spokesperson from the public health and medical community (state or local) delivers relevant community messages.

JIC

JIC is a physical location where PIOs from organizations with primary disaster involvement come together to coordinate and disseminate information.

The purpose of JIC is to:

- a. Gather and coordinate information and serve as the “hub” for the release of timely, accurate, consistent and useful disaster related information;
- b. Allow all involved organizations to speak from “one sheet of paper” providing consistent messages to the public;
- c. Enable the EOC Team to concentrate on emergency decision-making and refer all media and public inquiries to the JIC;
- d. Ensure the ability exists to answer direct inquiries from the public;
- e. Monitor media coverage to verify the accuracy of information being disseminated;
- f. Be proactive in responding to the disaster related information needs of all audiences; and
- g. Develop and implement a comprehensive public information strategy to gain and maintain public trust and confidence

In most cases, the JIC will be located in close proximity to the SEOC. However, it may be located anywhere to support emergency activities. Wherever it is located, it is imperative that the JIC maintain contact with decision makers and/or the SEOC via telephone, radio, the Internet, facsimile and/or face-to-face communications.

Once a JIC is activated, all emergency public information activities, including media inquiries, should be coordinated through the JIC. The JIC will become the central coordination point for all emergency public information and external communications activities. To the extent possible, the JIC will be staffed with PIOs from all agencies and organizations involved in the event.

The JIC is designed to be flexible to accommodate the unique requirements of any emergency or disaster situation and its structure and staffing will be customized for each response. For example, a major event would require JIC activation and full staffing, while a smaller event might only require one or two people performing all of the necessary tasks.

Regardless of the incident, the function of the JIC remains essentially the same, while the number of departments and agencies involved as well as the location and the quantity of information to be disseminated will vary greatly. At a minimum, the following functions must be performed regardless of these variables:

- a. Establish and maintain contact with local radio, television and print media;
- b. Develop and disseminate written information such as news releases, fact sheets and other reports as needed;
- c. Schedule news conferences or interviews with agency heads and other officials; brief them if appropriate;
- d. Provide interview opportunities that meet the unique needs of each medium (television, radio, print);

- e. Establish and maintain a communications link or a JIS with field PIOs and all remote sites performing public information activities;
- f. Monitor the information being released by the media to ensure appropriate information is being released and take steps to correct any inaccurate information;
- g. Exchange information with elected officials, voluntary organizations, industry representatives, state and federal PIOs and all other involved agencies as the situation dictates; and
- h. Provide ongoing information to and coordination with county, city, state and federal elected officials

PIOs working in the JIC retain the autonomy to represent the public information needs of their respective agencies, while working closely with the SEOC Team and/or JIC to ensure consistent information is being disseminated in a timely manner by all departments.

The PIOs working in JIC will have two primary functions:

- a. Carry out the public information activities of their respective departments and agencies; and
- b. Provide support to and assist with the overall JIC mission.

Designated departmental PIOs may be asked to staff various JIC functions regardless of the level of involvement of their respective departments. This will ensure an adequate number of PIOs are available to support emergency public information activities.

Organization

ESF #15 will be staffed by the Governor's Office PIO, OTAG PIO and PIOs from partner agencies, or their designees. Participants of the JIC report to the JIC lead which is the governor's PIO or OTAG PIO or if both are unavailable, a JIC lead will be designated.

ESF #15 oversees the release of information to the public, primarily through the media. Staff will perform the JIC functions listed above. Other state agency PIOs may be asked to assist with the above duties or other communication-related duties including serving as a spokesperson as needed.

During an emergency or disaster, the JIC reports to the state policy group and the SEOC manager for review of material prior to release.

Notification

- a. KDEM staff will notify the Governor's Office and the state PIO of incidents, which have potential state public information implications;
- b. Conversely, the Governor's Office and the state PIO and PIOs of other tasked agencies will notify KDEM when having knowledge of such threat; and
- c. The state PIO will notify designated PIOs and identify those who will report to the SEOC.

Direction and Control

- a. The TAG and his/her KDEM designee are responsible for all information programs and will direct all emergency information activities;
- b. ESF #15 staff work is at the direction of the governor's press secretary;

- c. The OTAG PIO, as state PIO, serves as the official spokesperson primary news media contact point, but may designate other state PIOs to assist or to continue speaking on issues specific to their own agency;
- d. Unified information will be provided by ESF #15;
- e. Information will be obtained from situation reports, county information and one-on-one contact with all ESFs; and
- f. Information will be disseminated to the media/public upon review and approval by director of KDEM, deputy director of KDEM or their designee.

Actions

Examples of actions performed under ESF #15 during the various phases of an emergency include, but are not limited to:

Mitigation

- 1) Publicize state's accomplishments toward mitigation; and
- 2) Publicize lessons learned, if appropriate (i.e. would not result in a security compromise, etc.).

Preparedness

- 1) Implement a comprehensive public information program. Such a program should include news conferences, news releases, fact sheets for media and local organizations, updates for state agency websites and social media sites, public service announcements that are prepared in English and other languages and are closed-captioned, and hotlines for public inquiries; and
- 2) Regularly provide preparedness messages to the public/media throughout the year through PSAs, web sites, news releases and events including September Preparedness Day.

Response

- 1) Publicize response activities that directly benefit affected communities, including location of shelters and feeding stations; location of comfort stations; location and hours of operation for health clinics to receive medical attention or specific medications, boil water orders; food safety measures, road closure information; school and office closing information; environmental hazards; and
- 2) Serve the SEOC Team in various areas of field operations (i.e., the Forward State Emergency Response Team, Impact Assessment Teams: Rapid Response Team, KAT, Disaster Field Office operations, Recovery Center operations, intrastate and/or interstate mutual aid assistance, etc.).

Recovery

- 1) Respond to reporter inquiries for damage assessment statistics and estimates;
- 2) Coordinate with FEMA regarding the status of disaster declarations, types of assistance available to disaster victims, and recovery center locations; and
- 3) Provide ongoing news updates to media/public regarding assistance and the recovery process.

Responsibilities

Coordinating Agency

The OTAG/Public Affairs' Office is designated as the coordinator for ESF #15. As ESF coordinator, the OTAG/Office of Public Affairs coordinates meetings, plans, exercises, training, and other activities with the private sector, and the ESF #15 support agencies.

Primary Agencies

Governor's Office

- 1) Primary responsibility for public information;
- 2) Coordinates with the OTAG/Public Affairs Office on information releases.

OTAG/Public Affairs Office

- 1) Oversees coordination and dissemination of the state's information related to an emergency/disaster on behalf of governor's press secretary;
- 2) Coordinates with governor's press secretary on public information/news releases;
- 3) Serves as state PIO and JIC lead;
- 4) Keeps appropriate leadership and PIOs informed of public information/media issues during an event;
- 5) Serves as the official spokesperson and primary news media contact point, and designates other state PIOs to assist or to speak on their specific agency issues;
- 6) Activates the JIC and implements JIS;
- 7) Coordinates dissemination of information with local, state, federal and tribal officials;
- 8) Coordinate with utility companies to prepare and release public information regarding the emergency;
- 9) Establishes an information center/media area that includes a news conference venue for media representatives;
- 10) Schedules news conferences/updates during the emergency;
- 11) Coordinates and maintains response to rumors;
- 12) Maintains a record of events;
- 13) Responds to media inquiries;
- 14) Monitors news media and web sites for messages/misinformation about the emergency;
- 15) Establishes hotline for public inquiry; and
- 16) Makes available emergency public information for at risk/special needs populations.

Support Agencies

- a. Develop applicable SOPs, guidelines and/or checklists detailing the accomplishment of their assigned functions;
- b. When requested, deploy a representative to the SEOC to assist with public information activities;
- c. When requested, serve as a backup spokesperson for the state PIO, or speak on behalf of own agency, as designated by state PIO;
- d. Provide ongoing status reports;
- e. Maintain updated resource inventories of supplies, equipment, and personnel resources, including possible sources of augmentation or replacement;

- f. Document all costs and expenses associated with response and recovery activities taking care to clearly separate disaster related work from daily work in the event that state and federal reimbursement becomes available; and
- g. Maintain up-to-date rosters for notifying personnel and 24-hour staffing capabilities, and provide this information to the state PIO.

Incident Specific Annexes
