

OKANOGAN COUNTY
Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan

EMERGENCY SUPPORT FUNCTION 15

PUBLIC AFFAIRS

RESPONSIBILITY SUMMARY:

Primary Response

Okanogan County Department of Emergency Management
Okanogan County Public Information Officer

Supporting

Public Broadcasting
 KOMW (North Cascades Broadcasting)
 NOAA National Weather Service
North Cascades Chapter of the American Red Cross
Response Agencies
Public Information Officer Cities/Towns/Response Agencies

Plan Preparation & Maintenance

Okanogan County Department of Emergency Management

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Purpose

The purpose of this Emergency Support Function (ESF) is to provide guidelines for an efficient and coordinated continuous flow of timely information and instruction to the public using all available communications media prior to, during, and immediately following an emergency or disaster.

B. Scope

Emergency public information actions before, during and following any emergency will be determined by the severity of the emergency or potential emergency. A significant emergency public information response could involve personnel from all jurisdictions, organizations, and agencies within the county.

II. POLICIES

A. Authorities – See Basic Plan

B. Assignment of Responsibilities

1. A county Public Information Officer (PIO) and alternate will be the Sheriff and County Emergency Manager.
2. Each response agency should appoint and train a spokesperson who will act as the Incident Commander's (IC) PIO at the scene.
3. Each of the cities/towns within Okanogan County are requested to have persons designated and trained as primary and alternate PIOs who could work in the county EOC or Joint Information Center (JIC) during the time of a declared emergency. (Refer to Appendix A – Joint Information Operations)

III. SITUATION

A. Emergency/Disaster Conditions and Hazards

A natural or technological emergency or disaster could occur at anytime within the county.

B. Assumptions

1. An event has occurred, or has been forecast as imminent, which places people and property in danger.
2. Technological caused events and some natural events, such as fires, may not provide any advance warning.
3. Other natural disasters, such as winter storms and flooding, can generally be predicted, allowing some time for preparedness actions.
4. The event requires response and/or actions by the public in order to eliminate or reduce their exposure to the danger of the event.

IV. CONCEPT OF OPERATIONS

A. General

1. The county and cities/towns are responsible for providing their citizens with information on impending or existing emergencies, to include immediate protective action they should take, such as sheltering or evacuation.
2. A JIC may be activated, if the situation warrants. The JIC will likely be at an off-site location, such as the Okanogan County Public Health or the USDA Forest Service – Okanogan Valley Office. Agencies involved will staff telephones and coordinate media activities under the supervision of the County PIO.
3. If a JIC is not activated, the PIO releases will coordinate through the Emergency Operations Center.
4. All county agencies and jurisdictions are responsible for providing the county PIO with appropriate information about the incident, and actions needed to save lives and protect property.

B. Information Support Structure

1. The PIO will keep county EOC informed of the situation and of any public affairs assistance that might be needed. County EOC will coordinate all requirements with WAEMD/EOC.
2. The WAEMD will coordinate with federal agencies to keep them informed of the situation, and of any assistance that might be needed.
3. IC may appoint a PIO and spokesperson at the incident scene. If no PIO is appointed, the IC will act as spokesperson. Close coordination between the PIO at the scene and the county PIO and EOC is necessary to ensure correct accurate and timely information is given to the public.
4. If an outside agency/organization, such as FEMA, the U.S. Forest Service, etc., sets up a PIO/JIC in Okanogan County because of an event, the county PIO will coordinate with that agency in order to avoid conflicts in information being released. Preferably, the county PIO, or representative, will become a member of the other agency public information JIC.

C. Notification

Appropriate county agencies will be notified when an emergency or disaster has occurred

that requires a PIO response, and be asked to keep the EOC or JIC informed of the situation in their area of responsibility.

D. Emergency Management Activities

1. All agencies in all jurisdictions are responsible to:
 - a. Identify and train personnel to implement the public information responsibilities outlined in this ESF.
 - b. Prepare and coordinate public information resource material that might be needed by their agency during an emergency.
 - c. Participate in programs to educate the public about hazards caused by emergencies or disasters, and actions people may be asked to take to protect themselves, their property, and the environment.
 - d. Advise agencies and jurisdictions of emergency management PIO training that is available.

- E. When the county EOC and/or the JIC are activated, the county PIO, or their designee, coordinates the preparation and release of news regarding the emergency situation. All news releases and status reports will be coordinated with/through the county PIO to reduce release of conflicting information.

V. RESPONSIBILITIES

A. DEM/EOC

1. Recommend activation of the JIC, when deemed necessary.
2. Assist in providing the PIO with technical advice and assistance, and recommends training for that person.
3. Assist the PIO in selecting alternates to serve in the EOC.
4. Assist the PIO in creating checklists that may be used for all phases of the emergencies (Mitigation and Preparedness, Response, and Recovery) for which the county is vulnerable.
5. Maintain a media contact list, which includes addresses, phones, e-mail, and FAX numbers.

B. The Public Information Officer (PIO)

1. The PIO is responsible for the preparation and release of news regarding the emergency situation. Pre-scripted information should be prepared for all types of hazards, which may occur in the county.
2. Distribute news releases to the local media using the pre-established contact list. This may be done by using faxes, phone, e-mail, scheduling and conducting briefings, or using messengers.
3. Plan, schedule, and coordinate briefings or news conferences for the media.
4. Provide EOC with copies of news releases issued for inclusion in the after action report.
5. If a Federal Disaster Recovery Assistance Center (DRAC) is established in the county, the PIO will continue to coordinate the release of news throughout the recovery phase.
6. Provide information concerning individual and public assistance when available.
7. If the activation of the Emergency Alert System (EAS) is deemed necessary, it will be accomplished in accordance with the Inland Northwest EAS Region Plan.

- C. The North Cascades Chapter of the American Red Cross will normally be the agency responsible for sheltering, clothing, feeding and registering displaced persons. These agencies may also coordinate volunteers who wish to assist in the response and/or the recovery efforts. The PIO will maintain contact with these agencies and coordinate information to the public about the services they are providing or coordinating.
- D. All county and city/town agencies and departments will notify the PIO of any requests for information from any of the media, and of any material or reports they provide to the media.
- E. If an evacuation of part, or all, of the county becomes necessary due to an emergency, the PIO has the primary role in disseminating instructions to the public. Special situations dealing with evacuation are found in ESF 13 – Public Safety, Law Enforcement, and Security.

APPENDICES

- A. Joint Information Center Operations

Appendix A

JOINT INFORMATION CENTER OPERATIONS

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Purpose

The Joint Information Center (JIC) is a temporary organization established during emergency events that provides response agencies with a means to pool communication resources and ensure that consistent and accurate information is released as quickly as possible to the general public and news media. The agencies involved work cooperatively to accomplish these goals and the establishment of a JIC ensures that viewpoints from all response agencies are taken into account.

A Joint Information Center (JIC) may need to be activated to support a large-scale emergency that requires multi-agency and multi-jurisdictional response. Onsite as well as offsite staffing, and 24-hour operation, may be needed.

The benefits of a JIC are:

- Consistent messaging
- Central working facility
- Single, recognized source for official information
- Enhanced information sharing
- Pooled resource (staff and & equipment)
- Coordinated delivery of the message

B. Intent

To provide procedures for the activation of the county JIC during emergency responses and other situations in which multiple organizations need to collaborate to gather updated information, verify accuracy of data, coordinate all public statements and disseminate consistent messages (provide timely, accurate and useful) information to the public and other stakeholders.

II. SITUATION AND ASSUMPTIONS

A. Situation

1. Upon receipt of information of an impending local emergency or intensifying national crisis, a decision may be made to enhance activation of the EOC and/or establishing a JIC.
2. Centralized county/state coordination and dissemination of factual, official information helps assure a well-informed public, avoid or minimize the release of incorrect information, and deflate rumors.
3. Should the JIC be activated, it may operate out of the county EOC, unless the event requires additional manpower, in which case the JIC would move to a predetermined location.
4. In major emergency or disaster situations, there may be a large number of media representatives seeking information about the situation and about

response actions. It is the intent of the DEM to cooperate fully with the media in all phases of emergency management.

5. A major emergency or disaster will attract regional and national media representatives thus necessitating the establishment of a JIC staffed by emergency public information personnel.

B. Assumptions

1. When activated, the JIC becomes the primary tool for facilitating the release of information to the media, as well as the citizens of the affected area. All responding agencies will direct questions, concerns, and media inquiries to the JIC.
2. During emergency situations and disasters, the general public and media will require information about the emergency situation and instruction on proper response actions.
3. The JIC may be declared operational once the necessary equipment and personnel are in place. The IC, county DEM/EOC, and County Communications Center should be notified of activation and provided with appropriate phone number(s).
4. The local media and radio will perform an essential role in providing emergency instructions and up-to-date information to the public.
5. Depending on the severity of the emergency, or the media's perception of the severity of the emergency, regional and national media will also cover the story and require information and comment from local officials.
6. Our capability to provide information will be overwhelmed if sufficient staff is not provided and if sufficient planning is not completed to accommodate media and public needs.
7. Upon activation, the JIC will organize to accommodate the work space needs of each responding agency. However, the facility may not be reasonably equipped to handle multiple agencies. Agency PIOs should be prepared to provide their own equipment, such as laptop computers and printers, as needed.
8. In order to provide an organizational framework in the JIC, a team approach to management, coordination and dissemination has been developed.
9. The JIC will be equipped with enough communications resources to ensure the timely and accurate gathering and dissemination of information.
10. All media will use the center to receive official news, information, instructions and procedures should a local incident or severe international crisis occur.

CONCEPT OF OPERATIONS

A. Public Information Response Activities

1. The overriding concept of the JIC is that each individual represent his/her own agency, and at the same time participate in a coordinated public information approach.
2. A JIC is a collocated group of representatives from organizations and agencies involved in an event that are designated to handle public

information needs. The JIC structure is designed to work equally well for large or small situations and can expand or contract to meet the needs of the incident.

3. When public or private agencies and organizations come together to respond to an emergency event, efficient information flow is critical to effectively carrying out the PIO responsibilities and meeting expectations of the public. A JIC is a centralized location that serves to achieve that information flow.
4. Generally, a collocated group of PIOs representing the agencies involved, will follow establishment of a multi-agency coordinating (MAC) group.
5. Throughout the emergency, the JIC Manager will provide internal briefings, reconcile conflicts and provide a forum to discuss issues relating to the JIC process.
6. The JIC will operate 24-hours a day, seven days a week, if needed and as able, with scheduled hours of operation being determined by the JIC Manager in consultation with agency PIOs and JIC staff.
7. All response agencies unable to locate within the JIC will be encouraged to coordinate and disseminate copies of their news releases to and through the JIC. Other agency PIOs may fill support positions within the JIC.
8. Statements that include reporting on actions by other jurisdictions will normally be coordinated within the JIC with the appropriate organization(s) prior to release.
9. The JIC will make available to the media all information received from other organizations, as appropriate.
10. JIC staff will assist agencies in responding to inquiries. They will answer all news media inquiries for which there is releasable information available, and refer news media inquiries to the appropriate agency's PIO.
11. The JIC Manager will facilitate overall policy guidance and operations for the JIC, and will coordinate, as needed, with the lead agency in the JIC, if one is designated.
12. The emergency public information staff may be called upon to warn the public about evacuations and other significant emergency requirements. In this case, they will fully mobilize and disseminate emergency instructions and information to the public in the following order of priority:
 - a. Lifesaving/health preservation instructions
 - b. Emergency status information
 - c. Other useful information, originated by the government or in response to media inquiries

B. Organization

The JIC organizational structure is based on functions that generally must be performed whether a person is handling a routine emergency or managing communications for a major response to a disaster. For proper coordination in a major emergency or disaster it

is essential that emergency public information be released from a single point to assure consistency and authenticity.

1. At emergency incidents, on-scene PIO will release information from a single location. It is desirable that the public information representatives from other involved agencies join the PIO in releasing information through a single coordination point on-scene. All information releases will be coordinated by the PIO with final approval given by the IC, MAC group or agency administrator, whichever is appropriate.
2. The PIO will coordinate information releases for the emergency from the county EOC or JIC and maintain contact with on-scene and other PIOs for details about the incident.
3. Goals of the JIC
 - a. Provide confirmed, accurate and consistent public information
 - b. Provide the public with one contact base for all departments, governments, medical facilities, and public utilities
 - c. Answer media calls and requests
 - d. Set up news conferences, prepare executives, and notify the media
 - e. Write news releases, advisories, statements, and speeches, as requested
 - f. Provide rumor and damage control