

ESF 15: Public Affairs

PRIMARY AGENCIES:

Mayors
Walla Walla County Commissioners
Walla Walla County Emergency Management
Walla Walla County Emergency Public Information Officer

SUPPORT AGENCIES:

American Red Cross serving Central and Southeastern Washington
Public Broadcasting
 KONA Radio (Emergency Alert System hub)
 NOAA National Weather Service
The Salvation Army

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. An Emergency Public Information Officer (EPIO) and alternate are appointed by the Emergency Management Executive Board (EMEB).
2. Each response agency should appoint and train a spokesperson who will act as the Incident Commander's PIO at the scene.
3. Each of the cities within Walla Walla County should have persons designated and trained as primary and alternate EPIOs who could work in the EOC or Joint Information Center (JIC) during the time of a declared emergency. (Refer to Appendix A – Joint Information Center Plan)

III. SITUATION

A. Emergency/Disaster Conditions and Hazards

1. A natural or technological emergency or disaster could occur at any time 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 earthquakes, 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 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 Walla Walla County Public Health and Legislative Building. Agencies involved will staff telephones and coordinate media activities under the supervision of the EPIO.
3. If a JIC is not activated, the EPIO will carry out their assigned duties from the Walla Walla County Emergency Management (WWEM) Emergency Operations Center (EOC).
4. All county agencies and jurisdictions are responsible for providing the EPIO with appropriate information about the incident, and actions needed to save lives and protect property. Generally, if a JIC is stood up, a representative from each of the involved county agencies will be assigned to the JIC.

B. Information Support Structure

1. During a declared emergency, the EPIO will work out of the WWEM EOC unless a JIC is activated. Media briefings usually will not be conducted at the EOC, due to space and congestion considerations.
2. The EPIO will keep the Washington State Department of the Military, Emergency Management Division (WAEMD) Washington State Emergency Operations Center (SEOC) informed of the local situation and of any public affairs assistance that might be needed.
3. WAEMD SEOC will coordinate with federal agencies to keep them informed of the situation, and of any assistance that might be needed.
4. Incident commanders 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 EPIO is necessary.
5. If an outside agency/organization, such as FEMA, the U.S. Forest Service, an airline, etc., sets up a public information office/JIC in Walla Walla County because of an event, the Walla Walla County EPIO will coordinate with that agency in order to avoid conflicts in information being released. Preferably, the Walla Walla County EPIO, or their representative, will sit

on the other agency public information office/JIC, if one is established.

C. Notification

Appropriate county agencies will be notified when an emergency or disaster has occurred that requires an EPIO response, and be asked to keep the EPIO at 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 county agencies and jurisdictions of emergency management PIO training when it is available.

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

V. RESPONSIBILITIES

A. Emergency Management Executive Board (EMEB)

1. The Walla Walla County Commissioners are responsible for the designation of an EPIO, and ensuring that the person is trained and qualified. If the EPIO or designee is not available during an EOC/JIC activation, they are responsible for designating an alternate EPIO.
2. The Chair of the Walla Walla County Commissioners, or the member of the EMEB that is in charge at the time, should review all news releases and any emergency alerts sent by the Emergency Alert System (EAS).
3. The Walla Walla County Commissioners will remind all county departments to clear any releases to the media or public through the EPIO in order to prevent release of conflicting information and to assist with rumor control.
4. Mayors will remind all city departments to clear any releases to the media or public through the EPIO in order to prevent release of conflicting information and to assist with rumor control.

B. Walla Walla County Emergency Management Department Director

1. Recommend activation of the JIC, when deemed necessary.
2. Assist in providing the EPIO with technical advice and assistance, and recommends training for that person.
3. Assist the EPIO in selecting alternates to serve in the EOC.
4. Assist the EPIO 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. Maintain this list in the EOC Standard Operating Procedures.
- C. The Emergency Public Information Officer (EPIO)
1. The EPIO is responsible for the preparation and distribution of news releases regarding the emergency situation. Pre-scripted information should be prepared for all types of hazards, which may occur in the county.
 2. Obtain approval from the Walla Walla County Commissioners Chairman, or the EMEB member in charge in the WWEM EOC, prior to issuance of a news release.
 3. 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.
 4. Plan, schedule, and coordinate briefings or news conferences for the media.
 5. Coordinate with the WAEMD SEOC EPIO, and provide WAEMD SEOC with copies of news releases issued.
 6. If a Federal Disaster Recovery Assistance Center (DRAC) is established in the county, the EPIO will continue to coordinate the release of news throughout the recovery phase.
 7. Provide information concerning individual and public assistance when available.
 8. If the activation of the Emergency Alert System (EAS) is deemed necessary, it will be accomplished in accordance with the current Columbia Basin EAS Operational Plan.
 9. Prepare recorded messages for the emergency information hotline, as necessary.
- D. The American Red Cross serving Central and Southeastern Washington and/or Salvation Army will normally be the agencies 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 EPIO will maintain contact with these agencies and coordinate information to the public about the services they are providing or coordinating.
- E. All county and city agencies and departments will notify the EPIO of any requests for information from any of the media, and of any material or reports they provide to the media.
- F. If an evacuation of part, or all, of the county becomes necessary due to an emergency, the EPIO 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.

VI. APPENDICES

A. Joint Information Center Operations

APPENDIX A: Joint Information Center Operations

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Purpose

1. Protection of the public health and safety in the event of a major emergency or disaster requires many local, state, federal, and private industry organizations to provide accurate and timely information to the public. Effectively and rapidly communicating what happened, what is being done in response and what the public needs to do to protect itself is the primary task of the Public Information Officer (PIO) of the agencies responding to the emergency.
2. Public welfare calls for a coherent, overall response to an emergency and at the same time, clarity in what may be differing messages from responding jurisdictions. A community's information system must be able to provide the public with the information they need in order to cope with the emergency situation. The coordination of this information and its timely dissemination is extremely important.
3. Gathering and disseminating emergency information in a multi-jurisdictional response requires a well-organized coordination process. When jurisdiction PIOs coordinate with each other from their respective Emergency Operations Centers, with the community, or by providing the media with a single information source, they are using a Joint Information System.

B. Intent

1. To provide implementing procedures for the activation of the Walla Walla County Joint Information Center (JIC) during emergency responses and other situations in which multiple organizations need to collaborate to 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 Walla Walla County Emergency Management (WWEM) Emergency Operations Center (EOC).
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 WWEM 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 WWEM 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.
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. When the JIC is activated, it is in the process of starting up and preparing to “open” or “get ready for business”. When the JIC is operational, it is responding to requests for information and officially “open” or “ready for business.” The JIC may be declared operational once the necessary equipment and personnel are in place.
4. The local media, particularly television 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 are 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 and office needs of each responding agency. However, the facility for the Walla Walla County JIC 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, although some may be available at the JIC.
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. The public relies on the JIC concept. All media use the center to receive official news, information, instructions and procedures should a local incident or severe international crisis occur.

III. CONCEPT OF OPERATIONS

A. Public Information Response Activities

1. The overriding concept of the Walla Walla County JIC is that each individual represent his or 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 EPIO 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 EPIO 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 EPIO 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, the emergency public information organizations representatives 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 inquires
13. The emergency public information organization will supplement and coordinate with on-scene Incident Information Officers (IIO), may establish a media briefing center at the WWEM EOC, and a JIC depending on the nature of the hazard and the size and characteristics of the emergency or disaster.

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. The establishment of a JIC will avoid multiple releasing points.

1. At emergency incidents on-scene IIO will release information from a single location. It is desirable that the public information representatives from other involved agencies join the IIO 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 Incident Commander, MAC group or agency administrator, whichever is appropriate.
2. The Emergency Public Information Officer (EPIO) will coordinate information releases for the emergency from the EOC/JIC and maintain contact with on-scene and other PIO's 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