Public Information Annex

During emergency situations, the public and the media will demand information and will need instructions on what to do.

Telephones may be out of service and radio and television stations may be off the air. The demand for information may be overwhelming. It is important to have enough trained staff available to handle this demand.

The local media, particularly radio, will perform an essential role in providing emergency instructions and information to the public. During a major disaster, regional and national media will also demand information and may play a role in reassuring (or alarming) distant relatives of disaster victims.

The Public Information function, led by the Public Information Officer (PIO) addresses these concerns. The priorities of the Public Information function are:

- First priority: Information that could save lives or protect health.
- Second priority: Emergency status information (the emergency situation and response efforts; how to contact relatives, etc.)
- Third priority: Other useful information (stories, background, how to get monetary assistance, etc.)

I. OBJECTIVES

- The rapid dissemination of accurate instructions and information to the public during periods of emergency.
- Response to media inquiries and calls from the public. Names of casualties will not be released.
- Establishment of a Media Center near the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) for use by reporters.
- Establishment of an On-Scene Public Information Team at the site of the incident.

II. PHASES OF THE EMERGENCY

A. Before

During this phase, prepare and update the plans, response checklists, contact lists, sample news releases, radio/TV messages, emergency instructions, periodic status reports, forms, etc. that will guide the public information response to an emergency. Plans and procedures should provide for coordination and communication with other emergency organizations. Prepare maps for television use.

Assign and train staff. Consider training extra staff in case the primary emergency public information staff, particularly the Public Information Officer, are injured or are unable to report for duty.

Coordinate with Public Information Officers for the local Cities and invite them to supplement emergency public information staff during emergencies, if possible. Coordinate with public information officers from responding law enforcement and fire agencies. Develop a rapid communication system between public information officers of different jurisdictions.

B. During

1. Warning Phase

This phase could begin upon receipt of a warning, such as the forecast of a flood, fire, winds or Tsunami. During the warning

phase, mobilize staff and use the public information response checklist to guide your actions.

During emergency operations (including the warning phase), the Public Information Officer will serve as the dissemination point for all media releases from the district. Other agencies or departments in this jurisdiction wishing to release information to the public must coordinate through the Public Information Officer.

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2. Impact Phase

During this phase, mobilize the public information organization and provide information according to the above priorities. Use the public information response checklist to guide your actions.

Make sure that all information is clear, concise, confirmed and approved by the appropriate authority before release to the media or public. Do not release unconfirmed information or speculate on the extent of the emergency, even if repeatedly urged to do so. "I don't know." and "I don't have that information." are acceptable responses.

C. After (Recovery)

During this phase, continue to release information on the restoration of essential services, travel restrictions, and assistance programs. Later, when time allows, review your actions and update this Emergency Plan as needed.

III. ORGANIZATION AND RESPONSIBILITIES

A. County

Within the district, the emergency public information organization will be supervised by the Public Information Officer. The PIO will maintain working relationships with Public Information Officers in the cities, at other government levels, and with cooperating agencies.

The SVFR PIO has the responsibility to release emergency instructions and information to the public through all appropriate and available means. Maintenance of the situation boards and maps in the Media Center is part of this responsibility.

The SVFR PIO additionally has the responsibility to coordinate control of all visitors to the Emergency Operations Center. This includes issuing security badges, providing briefings, tours, spokespersons, escorts, and as appropriate, accommodations and transportation.

The SVFR PIO has the further responsibility to provide on-scene public information as the situation warrants. Initially this is supplied by the first responding agency, but PIO staff may be mobilized to relieve the first responder. If appropriate, a media control point will be established in the vicinity of, but physically separated from, the incident site or field command post. The intention is to satisfy the needs of the media in a safe and orderly manner without interfering with response operations. In the event that PIO staff are on-scene, periodic communications to update the EOC staff are required. This can be through amateur radio (ACS/RACES) or other means.

B. Statewide Levels

The State PIO gathers information from the counties through the Mutual Aid Regions in order to summarize the disaster situation for the media and to report on state agency response activities.

The State PIO will also establish statewide Emergency Alert System programming, in addition to local efforts; keep the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Public Information Officer informed of developments; and provide public information staff support to local counties on request.

The FEMA Public Information Officer will provide information on federal response efforts and federal assistance programs and may provide public information staff support to the state on request. The federal government determines nationwide EAS programming.

When possible, the State PIO will coordinate news releases regarding the district with the County Public Information Officer *prior* to release to the media. When this is not possible, the County PIO will be informed as soon as possible.

C. Public Information Coordination

Government Public Information Officers and cooperating response agency Public Information Officers (American Red Cross, Salvation Army, utility companies, etc.) should coordinate efforts so that mutual needs may be fulfilled during emergencies. Community Public Information Officers may be asked to supplement government public information staff if necessary.

IV. POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

A. Release of Information

Only the designated PIO, with approval from the Director of Emergency Services (DES), has the authority to release any information regarding disaster operations, damage assessment and casualties when the Emergency Plan is activated. All requests shall be directed to the PIO and the identity of the calling party confirmed prior to releasing sensitive information. Day-to-day operations are the exception and are handled by the Sheriff's department.

B. Media Relations

Maintain working relationships with local reporters and share with them the details of this plan and their responsibilities under this plan. As appropriate, brief the media periodically throughout the year on hazardous material incident response procedures and related emergency public information procedures. Maintain media contact lists.

C. Media Center

During emergency situations, the Communications Shop will be designated as a media center. Access to the main building must be controlled, by using the gates and locking doors.

The media center should be equipped with at least one large table and several chairs. During a prolonged emergency, phones should be installed for media use.

Status boards can help in the release of information to the media. Maps of the disaster area and maps of local radio/TV broadcast coverage areas should also be on hand.

D. Visitors to the Emergency Operations Center

Visitors may enter the EOC after they have received approval from the Operations Section Chief.

The Public Information Officer will talk with reporters and hold press conferences in the media center. Arrangements may be made with the Operations Chief to allow media into the EOC.