



## **EF 15 – Public Information**

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Tasked Agencies	
<b>Primary County Agency(s)</b>	California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE), Health and Social Services Agency
<b>Supporting County Agency(s)</b>	County Commissioners, Sheriff's Office
<b>Primary City Agency(s)</b>	Fire Department
<b>Supporting City Agency(s)</b>	City Council, Police Department
<b>Community Partner(s)</b>	Media partners
<b>State Agency(s)</b>	California Governor's Office of Emergency Services, Office of Crisis Communications and Media Relations
<b>Federal Agency(s)</b>	Department of Homeland Security/Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)

## 1 Introduction

### 1.1 Purpose

Emergency Function (EF) 15 describes how the County and City will disseminate information to the public and other partners during times of emergency (e.g., evacuation/shelter-in-place orders, water boil notices, emergency sheltering information, situational awareness notifications, etc.).

The primary operational priority for EF 15 is to:

- Provide timely, accurate, clear, and accessible public messaging to support actions to protect public health and safety.

Preparedness, response, recovery, and mitigation activities that may be conducted to complete this priority are listed in Appendix B.

### 1.2 Scope

The following activities are within the scope of EF 15:

- Support departments in the timely and accurate dissemination of information to the public, media, and other partners.
- Support the development of consistent and accurate messaging.

### 1.3 Policies and Authorities

None at this time.

#### 1.3.1 Policies

The following policies are currently in place:

- California Government Code, Title 2, Division 1, Chapter 7 (California Emergency Services Act).

- Title 2, Division 1, Chapter 7.5 (California Natural Disaster Assistance Act).
- California Code of Regulations, Title 19, Division 2 (Standardized Emergency Management System Regulations).

### 1.3.2 Agreements

The following agreements are currently in place:

- None at this time.

## 2 Situation and Assumptions

### 2.1 Situation

The following considerations should be taken into account when planning for and implementing EF 15 activities:

- The ability to disseminate information to the public during a disaster can be hampered by a variety of things, including power outages and damage to telecommunication infrastructure.
- Providing information to the public during a disaster or emergency event can be crucial in reducing loss of life and property damage and avoiding panic situations. It can also reduce the effect of secondary threats or cascading impacts so that the public is able to take preventative measures.
- The National and California Emergency Alert System (EAS) are the principal methods for the dissemination of emergency warnings and providing instruction to the public. This system relies on telecommunication infrastructure that can be damaged or destroyed during a large scale emergency.
- All available communication methods will be used to provide timely and consistent information to officials and employees, individuals with access and functional needs, residents, and neighboring jurisdictions.
- Print and/or electronic media may be used to get emergency information to its target audience. Electronic media enable rapid public notification of impending threats and recommended protective actions. Print media provide more detailed information for slowly developing threats and extended emergency response and recovery activities.

### 2.2 Assumptions

EF 15 is based on the following planning assumptions:

- Emergencies and disasters may occur without warning at any time of day or night and may cause mass casualties.
- An effective public education and information program will help save lives and property during emergencies and disasters.
- In an emergency situation, the public will demand information about the emergency and the protective actions being taken.
- Local print and broadcast media will cooperate in broadcasting, publishing, and posting on the web detailed disaster-related instructions for the public.

- Normal means of communications in the affected areas may be either destroyed or largely incapacitated; therefore, only limited and incomplete information is anticipated from the disaster area until communications can be restored.
- Responding agencies will provide information to reduce public concerns about the incident and the response activities.
- Sufficient numbers of trained support personnel will be available to help coordinate public information and interface with the media and appropriate agencies.
- Demands for information from media outside the jurisdiction will be significantly increased in a disaster.
- Rumors often abound and information is usually sketchy at best. It may be hours before officials know the facts. Rumor control procedures will be directed by the designated Public Information Officers (PIOs) and will help prevent incorrect information from affecting emergency response activities.
- The PIOs maintain a listing of media contacts to disseminate emergency public information.
- In a major emergency or disaster, a Joint Information Center (JIC) may be set up to help facilitate the information flow between agencies and the general public.
- Information is one of the first casualties of a disaster. The lack of information, or contradictory information, may cause confusion. The public may accept as valid rumors, hearsay, and inaccurate information that may cause unnecessary fear and confusion.

### 3 Roles and Responsibilities

*See Appendix B for a checklist of responsibilities by phase of emergency management.*

## 4 Concept of Operations

### 4.1 General

Until the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) is opened, the PIO on scene provides information to the media, with the approval of the Incident Commander. Once the EOC is activated, PIO functions are directed from the EOC. The on-scene PIO will continue to provide information regarding response activities.

The PIO in the EOC will be the Lead PIO. Under the command and management structure of the Incident Command System (ICS), the Lead PIO is part of the Command Staff supporting the Incident Command structure. The PIO works directly for the Incident Command.

PIOs working the incident handle all media and public inquiries, emergency public information and warnings, rumor monitoring and response, media monitoring, and other functions required to coordinate, clear with appropriate authorities, and disseminate accurate and timely information related to the incident.

### 4.2 Joint Information System

Depending on the extent of an emergency or disaster, information may be disseminated to the public through a Joint Information System (JIS) that begins when an emergency occurs and ends when the response is complete. In a major incident involving multiple agencies or jurisdictions, the Incident Commander or PIO may establish a JIC. When established, the JIC becomes the

primary location for facilitating the JIS and providing the news media with a single, reliable source of information.

Depending on the size and nature of an incident, the JIC may be co-located with an existing EOC/command post or could be designated as an independent facility. A lead PIO, representing the lead agency for the response, will be assigned to the incident and will maintain the following responsibilities:

- Coordinate information-sharing among the larger PIO network.
- Develop and distribute materials to the general public and media partners.
- Implement information clearance processes set by EOC Command.
- Schedule media briefings in a designated location away from the EOC and other emergency operations.

## **4.3 Working with the Media**

### **4.3.1 Media Briefing Facilities**

During a major emergency or disaster, media briefing areas may be established in a facility that is capable of handling them. The media briefing area should always be coordinated with the EOC Incident Command, placed some distance away from the incident location, and separated from the EOC to keep critical activities free from media interference.

### **4.3.2 Media Access to the Scene**

- The PIO will allow escorted media access to the EOC only under limited, controlled circumstances and only with the prior approval of the Incident Commander. Before being admitted to the EOC, media representatives shall display appropriate identification and shall be escorted by a member of the Public Information staff at all times.
- In cooperation with the EOC and the Safety Officer, the on-scene Incident Commander may allow media representatives restricted access to the scene, accompanied by a member of the Public Information staff. This should be done with consideration for the safety of media personnel, the impact on response, and the wishes and concerns of the victims.
- If it is not safe or practical to admit all media representatives to the scene, a media “pool” may be created, in which media representatives select one camera crew to take video footage for all. If even such controlled access is impractical, a “staged” photo opportunity to tape response vehicles or support activities may satisfy the media’s need for video footage.
- Response personnel must be protected from unwanted media intrusion. Off-shift personnel should be provided uninterrupted rest. It may be necessary to provide security to facilities where response personnel are housed and disconnect the telephones to ensure privacy. The media may be allowed access to response personnel, at the discretion of the on-scene Incident Commander, only if such an interview does not interfere with response efforts.
- Victims and families should be provided access to public officials without having to face media, as appropriate.
- When an incident takes place on private property, access will be coordinated with the owners of the site, if possible.



- If the situation should get out of control, law enforcement officials have the authority to arrest and remove members of the press (and any other unauthorized persons) who are interfering with the safe management of the incident or whose actions represent a threat to the safety of themselves, responders, or the public.
- Response personnel will not comment on the incident without the consent of the Incident Commander. Inquiries should be directed to the designated PIO, with approval of the EOC Command.

#### 4.4 Dissemination of Ongoing Emergency Public Information

The PIO is responsible for:

- Collecting, coordinating, and disseminating emergency information.
- Advising on-scene and EOC Command on information and media issues.
- Advising officials.
- Responding to media and public inquiries.
- Using an established JIS structure and procedures to coordinate incident information.
- Staffing the JIC based on incident-specific needs.

A single telephone number for the public to call for emergency information may be activated to assist in preventing or correcting public misinformation about an incident. This line is staffed by call-takers trained to handle public calls and knowledgeable about current incident status.

Clear, accurate, and consistent information must be disseminated to the public during an emergency for the public to take appropriate protective actions. The information must be distributed in a variety of methods to ensure accessibility and comprehensive penetration of the message. Methods of public information dissemination include the following:

- **Press releases** – A press release is a prepared written news release that uses current data and information.
- **Media briefing or conference** – A briefing is an exchange of information on a single topic and typically includes a question-and-answer period, whereas a conference is a gathering of media where reporters expect to be able to ask questions on a variety of topics.
- **Print media** – Print media, including newspapers and magazines, allow PIOs to disseminate public information such as detailed information, background, and input from subject matter experts.
- **Radio** – In addition to warnings issued by the EAS, radio allows PIOs to release audio clips and sound bites to the public. The local station KSUN 101.1 FM is an active partner in emergency operations and may support public messaging.
- **Television** – PIOs may utilize television to disseminate visuals, sound bites, and graphics to the public.

- **Internet** – The internet is a dynamic communication conduit that includes webpages, rich site summary (RSS) feeds, and email and can be used as a strategic path for sharing information during an emergency.
- **Newsletters/Mailers** – Information sent directly to the public can provide details on events and activities as well as background information on the County’s emergency management programs.
- **Social Media** – Web-based platforms may be used for alerting the public in sudden onset and rapidly developing disasters, direct communication with large groups of constituents, building situational awareness, fostering transparency and accountability, obtaining feedback, and responding quickly to rumors and misinformation. Common types of social media are:
  - Blogs
  - Social networking (e.g., Facebook, LinkedIn)
  - Media sharing (e.g., YouTube, Flickr, Pinterest, Instagram)
  - Wiki
- **Call Center** – May be used as a way to divert unnecessary calls away from the 9-1-1 system, gather information to increase situational awareness of the incident, and disseminate emergency public information.
- **Message Boards** – The County utilizes message boards on roadways to indicate hazardous conditions, and the Colorado Department of Transportation routinely activates similar boards on Interstate 70.

Each distribution method has strengths and weaknesses. The PIO must determine the best methods of media distribution to reach all populations within the County and must ensure that the weakness of each system is covered by the strength of another. Additionally, the PIO must ensure that all communications are accurate, consistent, and coordinated to avoid public confusion. Pre-planning, message maps, easily adapted messages to be recorded, and the creation of partnerships can assist the PIO in determining what message formats and dissemination methods will be the most accessible to the population of the County.

## 4.5 Training Recommendations for PIOs

During an emergency or disaster, PIOs must be able to assemble information quickly, organize it, and use it to develop effective messages for release to the public. They must understand the ICS and how they work together to coordinate information for the public through a JIS and JIC. To ensure that PIOs possess the needed skills and background to perform these critical duties, it is recommended that all PIOs complete the following training in order to qualify for JIC duty:

- FEMA Introduction to Incident Command System training IS-100
- FEMA National Incident Management System (NIMS) and Introduction training IS-700
- FEMA National Incident Management System (NIMS) Public Information Systems training IS-702

## 4.6 Access and Functional Needs Populations

The PIO coordinates information outreach activities to Access and Functional Needs Populations with agencies/organizations that have an ongoing relationship with these groups and service their functional needs on a day-to-day basis. These organizations assist in disseminating alert and warning and ongoing emergency information to the elderly, hearing or vision impaired, non-English-speaking, homeless, and citizens who have physical or mental challenges, are homebound, or have other access or functional needs. Dispatch has teletype/telecommunications device for the deaf (TTY/TDD) capability, text to 9-1-1, and access to language line services for communicating with non-English-speaking individuals on a one at a time basis (not a wholesale notification method).

## 4.7 Coordination with Other EFs

The following EFs support EF 15–related activities:

- **All EFs.** All functions will provide situation status updates and subject matter expertise to inform development of public messaging as well as disseminate approved messaging.

## 5 EF Annex Development and Maintenance

CAL FIRE will be responsible for coordinating regular review and maintenance of this annex. Each primary and supporting agency will be responsible for developing plans and procedures that address assigned tasks.

## 6 Appendices

- Appendix A – EF 15 Resources
- Appendix B – Roles and Responsibilities

## **Appendix A      EF 15 Resources**

The following resources provide additional information regarding EF 15 public information–related issues at the local, state, and federal level:

### **City**

- None at this time

### **County**

- Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication Plan

### **State**

- California Emergency Plan: EF 2 – Communications and EF 15 – Public Information

### **Federal**

- National Response Framework
- Federal Integrated Public Alert and Warning System

## Appendix B Roles and Responsibilities

The following checklist identifies key roles and responsibilities for EF 15 – Public Information. It is broken out by phase of emergency management to inform tasked agencies of what activities they might be expected to perform before, during, and after an emergency to support the volunteers and donations function. All tasked agencies should maintain agency-specific plans and procedures that allow them to effectively accomplish these tasks.

### Preparedness

Preparedness activities take place before an emergency occurs and include plans or preparations to save lives and help response and recovery operations. Preparedness roles and responsibilities for EF 15 include the following:

- ☐ Develop operational plans for EF 15 activities.
  - For coordinating, managing, and disseminating public information and alerts and warnings effectively under all hazards and conditions.
  - To process the inflow of public related information from all sources in a timely fashion.
  - To rapidly control rumors by correcting misinformation.
- ☐ Participate in EF 15–related trainings and exercises as appropriate.
- ☐ Develop community-based mechanisms to support the provision of prompt, accurate information to the public in the dominant languages of the community (English, Spanish, Iu-Mien, etc.) and in languages and formats appropriate for those with limited language competence, disabilities, cultural or geographic isolation, or vulnerabilities due to age.
- ☐ Develop emergency plans that are community-based and include outreach and education to the public, through community and faith-based organizations and other institutions, to promote individual preparedness based on the risks in their communities.
- ☐ Establish neighborhood pre- and post-disaster information centers at schools, the workplace, libraries, shopping centers, places of worship, and other community institutions to provide information on evacuations and the location of disaster assistance sites.
- ☐ Develop and implement public information, alert/warning, and notification training and exercise programs.
- ☐ Conduct planning with support agencies.
- ☐ Ensure that lead agency personnel are trained in their responsibilities and duties.
- ☐ Develop pre-scripted messages in multiple formats and languages.
- ☐ Identify possible locations for a JIC and press conferences.
- ☐ Develop staffing procedures and checklists for the JIC.
- ☐ Develop and maintain a list of equipment needed to activate the JIC.
- ☐ Ensure that all departments have trained staff to support the JIC.
- ☐ Ensure that all local media outlets are pre-identified and contacts established. Brief them regularly on emergency public information procedures.
- ☐ Ensure that emergency responders are familiar with public information procedures and know how and when to refer the media to the appropriate field or JIC personnel for information.
- ☐ Encourage media involvement in the exercise design process and planning.

## Response

Response activities take place during an emergency and include actions taken to save lives and prevent further property damage in an emergency situation. Response roles and responsibilities for EF 15 include the following:

- ☐ Provide situational updates to the EOC, as required, to allow for the development of timely and accurate public messaging.
- ☐ Provide a representative to the EOC, when requested, to support EF 15 activities.
- ☐ Activate emergency plans and mobilize emergency personnel.
- ☐ Conduct rapid assessments for immediate response objectives.
- ☐ Coordinate with the EOC and primary and supporting agencies to develop a flow of information, including situation reports, health advisories, and other public information releases concerning the response efforts.
- ☐ Inform the public of health and/or safety concerns and ways to reduce or eliminate the associated dangers.
- ☐ Provide evacuation instructions and shelter locations.
- ☐ Provide situation reports, health advisories, evacuation instructions, shelter locations, and other public information releases in multiple languages and formats appropriate for those with limited language competence, disabilities, cultural or geographic isolation, or vulnerabilities due to age.
- ☐ In coordination with the EOC, release emergency information as dictated by the situation.
- ☐ Implement a proactive public information strategy to ensure that the media's needs are being met.
- ☐ Conduct media briefings on a regular basis.
- ☐ If the situation dictates, activate and staff the JIC.
- ☐ After coordination with the County PIO, release information regarding the emergency or disaster to other County departments and agencies, the media, and the public.
- ☐ Resolve any conflicting information and dispel rumors.

## Recovery

Recovery activities take place **after** an emergency occurs and include actions to return to a normal or an even safer situation following an emergency. Recovery roles and responsibilities for EF 15 include the following:

- ☐ Demobilize response activities.
- ☐ Maintain incident documentation to support public and individual assistance processes.
- ☐ Participate in all after-action activities and implement corrective actions as appropriate.
- ☐ Provide public information on recovery efforts.
- ☐ Continue to utilize multiple means of communicating public information and education and provide information in multiple languages.
- ☐ Provide news releases with major emphasis on:
  - Types and locations of emergency assistance available, including contacts, phone numbers, location (e.g., food and water points), information concerning disaster recovery centers, and trash debris disposal instructions
  - Public health notices

- Restricted areas
  - Movement or travel restrictions
  - Contacts and phone numbers for missing persons information
  - Contacts and phone numbers for local non-emergency assistance
  - Public safety notices.
- ☐ Continue EOC operations until it is determined that EOC coordination is no longer necessary.
- ☐ Coordinate with the appropriate agencies to deactivate the JIC.
- ☐ Inform the public of any follow-up recovery programs that may be available.
- ☐ Return staff, clients, and equipment to regularly assigned locations. Provide critical payroll and other financial information for cost recovery through appropriate channels.
- ☐ Participate in after-action critiques and reports.
- ☐ Update plans and procedures based on critiques and lessons learned during an actual event.
- ☐ Initiate financial reimbursement process for support services.

## Mitigation

Mitigation activities take place **before and after** an emergency occurs and include activities that prevent an emergency, reduce the chance of an emergency happening, or reduce the damaging effects of unavoidable emergencies. Mitigation roles and responsibilities for EF 15 include the following:

- ☐ Participate in the hazard mitigation planning process.
- ☐ Provide agency and incident data to inform development of mitigation projects to reduce hazard vulnerability

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