



HORRY COUNTY EMD PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICER PROCEDURES GUIDE

January 2025



APPROVAL & IMPLEMENTATION

Annex I

PUBLIC INFORMATION

Signature

Date

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ANNEX I
PUBLIC INFORMATION

I. PURPOSE

The purpose of this annex is to outline the means, organization, and process by which we will provide appropriate information and instructions to the public during emergency situations. This annex also provides for public education to be conducted in advance of emergency situations to reduce the likelihood that citizens will place themselves in hazardous situations that may require an emergency response.

II. EXPLANATION OF TERMS

A. Acronyms

EMD	Emergency Management Department
EOC	Emergency Operations Center
IC	Incident Command/Commander
ICP	Incident Command Post
JFO	Joint Field Office
JIC	Joint Information Center
JIS	Joint Information System
LWP	Local Warning Point
PIO	Public Information Officer
TV	Television

B. Definitions

Public Information: Information provided to citizens before, during, and after emergency situations/incidents specifically including instructions on how to protect personal health, safety, and property or how to obtain assistance.

III. SITUATION & ASSUMPTIONS

A. Situation

1. The County faces a number of hazards, which may cause emergency situations; see Comprehensive Emergency Plan for a summary of those hazards and their possible impact.

2. During emergencies, the public needs timely, accurate information on the emergency situation and appropriate instructions regarding protective actions that should be taken to minimize injuries, loss of life and damage to property.
3. For some slowly developing emergency situations (such as river flooding), there may be several days for local government and the media to provide detailed information about the hazard and what citizens should do.
4. For other emergency situations, there may be no warning, leaving the public information system unable to react rapidly enough to properly inform the public about the hazard and what to do about it. For this reason, it is important that the public be advised of likely hazards and what protective measures should be taken to lessen the effect of an emergency and/or disaster.

B. Assumptions

1. An effective program combining both education and emergency information can significantly reduce loss of life and property. However, many people are unconcerned about hazards until they may be affected and will not participate in or retain pre-emergency education; therefore, special emphasis must be placed on the delivery of emergency information during emergencies and disasters.
2. Local media will cooperate in disseminating warning and emergency public information during emergency situations and may participate in pre-disaster awareness programs and other disaster education activities.
3. Some emergency situations may generate substantial media interest and draw both local media and media from outside the local area, overwhelming the available emergency public information staff.

IV. CONCEPT OF OPERATIONS

A. General

1. Pursuant to the National Incident Management System (NIMS) operating principles and protocols, public information efforts should generally focus on specific event-related information. This information will generally be of an instructional nature focusing on such things as warning, evacuation, and shelter. Appendix 2 describes some basic emergency information needs.
2. A special effort should be made to keep the public informed of the general progress of events. Reporting positive information regarding emergency response will help to reassure the community that the situation is under control. Rumor control must be a major aspect of the informational program. Public feedback should be used as a measure of the program's effectiveness.
3. Education efforts are to be directed toward increasing public awareness about potential hazards and how people should prepare for them. All information and education efforts will rely heavily on the cooperation of every type of media

organization.

B. Information Dissemination

1. In the initial stages of an emergency situation, the Public Information Officer (PIO) may have to act on time-sensitive hazards. Within the limits of the authority delegated to it, the Public Information Officer and/or the Public Information team, along with Emergency Management, will determine if a warning needs to be issued, formulate a warning if necessary, and disseminate it. Pre-scripted emergency messages have been prepared for likely hazards.. A list of these messages is in the possession of the Horry County Public Information Office. These pre-scripted messages may be used as written or tailored as needed for specific circumstances.
2. When the Incident Command System is activated for an emergency situation, the Incident Commander will normally warn the public in and around the incident site. A designated PIO at the Incident Command Post (ICP), assisted by the County PIO staff if necessary, will normally provide information on the emergency situation to the media if the EOC has not been activated. The IC, regardless of the command structure – single or unified, will approve all information relayed to the media by the PIO.
3. Once the EOC has been activated for an emergency situation, the EM Director/EOC Manager will normally determine the need for additional warning and instructions. The PIO staff will formulate additional warning messages and public instructions, where appropriate. The PIO staff will disseminate Special News Advisories and other emergency public information materials to the media directly.
4. In the case of large-scale emergencies or disasters where there are substantial external responders from other jurisdictions and/or state or federal agencies and the response and recovery effort may continue for an extended period, a Joint Information Center (JIC) may be established. The JIC, an element of the Joint Information System (JIS) developed to provide information to the public during an emergency, is a working facility where the emergency public information efforts of all participating jurisdictions, agencies, volunteer organizations, and other responders can be coordinated to ensure consistency and accuracy. In federally declared incidents, a JIC will typically be set up as part of the Joint Field Office (JFO).
5. The following means will be used to provide emergency information and instructions to the public:
 - a. Special news broadcasts by radio, television, and cable companies.
 - b. Local newspapers.
 - c. Special Email Distribution Lists
 - d. Government Access Channels
 - e. The local government Internet site.
 - f. Public Safety social media accounts
 - g. IPAWS alerts via partners
 - h. CodeRED alert system

C. Providing Emergency Information to Special Populations

Special populations will be provided information on emergency situations and appropriate instructions by the following methods:

1. Visually impaired: EAS messages and news advisories on radio, and NOAA Weather Radio.
2. Hearing-impaired: Captioned EAS messages and news advisories on television, print media, and special Email distribution list.

D. Resources

The PIO staff shall maintain a Media Roster that contains the names, telephone and facsimile numbers, and email addresses of each of the media resources. See Appendix 1 for an example.

E. Phases of Management

1. Mitigation

- a. Conduct hazard awareness programs.
- b. Develop systems to enhance information dissemination during emergency situations.

2. Preparedness

- a. Develop and distribute educational materials; conduct public education programs.
- b. In coordination with the EMD, prepare pre-scripted warning and public instruction messages for known hazards. See Appendix 5 to this annex for a list of those messages included in Annex A, Warning.
- c. Brief local media on local warning systems and coordinate procedures for transmitting emergency information to media.
- d. Conduct public education on warning systems and the actions that should be taken for various types of warnings.
- e. Train public information staff.
- f. Brief local officials and emergency responders on working with the media. See Appendix 3.
- g. Maintain this annex.

3. Response

- a. Develop, obtain authorization, and release public information on the emergency situation.

- b. Conduct media monitoring to determine the need to clarify issues and distribute updated public instructions.
 - c. Manage rumor control.
 - d. Conduct news conferences and arrange interviews as needed.
4. Recovery
- a. Provide public information relating to recovery process and programs.
 - b. Compile record of events.
 - c. Assess effectiveness of public information and education program.

V. ORGANIZATION & ASSIGNMENT OF RESPONSIBILITIES

A. General

1. The overall responsibility for providing emergency information and instructions to the public rests with Emergency Management.
2. The Emergency Management Director shall provide general guidance for Public Information (PI) programs.
3. The Horry County Director of Public Information will manage and coordinate all emergency public information related activities and direct such staff as may be assigned or recruited to assist in those activities.
4. The PIO assigned to EMD will coordinate messaging and media needs for an activation.
5. Public Information Office will staff PIO positions at the Incident Command Post, the EOC, and the JIC if opened.

B. Task Assignments

1. Emergency Management will:
 - a. Ensure that the jurisdiction has implemented and institutionalized processes and procedures to coordinate and integrate public information functions including the development of a public education program for emergency situations.
 - b. Authorize release of all EOC approved incident information to the media.
 - c. Notify the Director of Public Information that a Joint Information Center (JIC) is warranted by the incident.

- d. Notify the Public Information Officer that the Public Information Phone Bank is warranted by the incident.

2. The Director of Public Information will:

- a. Represent and advise the EOC on all public information matters relating to the management of the incident.
- b. Ensure the EM Director/IC approves the release of all incident-related information.
- c. Coordinate and integrate public information functions across jurisdictions and functional agencies as required.
- d. Develop accurate and complete information on the incident for both internal and external consumption.
- e. Coordinate the overall emergency public information efforts of local government.

3. The Public Information Officer (PIO):

- a. Serve as the official County representative in the JIC.
- b. Conduct public education programs as an ongoing activity.
- c. Develop and disseminate public information materials and maintain a stock of materials for emergency use based on hazards likely to confront the jurisdiction. Such materials should include:
 - a. General materials dealing with the nature of hazards and basic protective actions to take in the event of an emergency, including shelter-in-place and evacuation.
 - b. Hazard specific instructions on “where to go and what to do” in an emergency.
- d. In coordination with Emergency Management pre-scripted warning messages for known hazards for use by the local warning point and the EOC.
- e. Develop methods (i.e., newspaper supplements, prepared TV/radio scripts for broadcast stations) for distribution of EPI materials to the public.
- f. In cooperation with the EMD, coordinate with broadcasters (radio and television stations and cable television companies) to develop procedures for local government to disseminate warning messages and emergency information through the broadcast media.

- g. Authenticate sources of information, verify for accuracy, and obtain authorization before issuing news releases.
 - h. Provide authorized news releases to the media while keeping the Emergency Management Director/Director of Public Information informed of message content.
 - i. Monitor media coverage of emergency operations for accuracy of reports and issue corrections where necessary.
 - j. Act to control rumors.
 - k. Brief potential Incident Commanders, department heads and key staff, and the EOC staff on basic public information needs, working with the media, and media access during emergency operations. See Appendices 2, 3 and 4 for further information on these subjects.
 - l. Maintain a media briefing area at the EOC or the vicinity of the EOC.
 - m. Periodically brief the media on local warning procedures.
 - n. Maintain a Media Contact Roster. See Appendix 1 for a sample.
 - o. Compile printed and photographic documentation of the emergency/disaster.
 - p. Develop public information emergency checklists for known hazards.
See Appendix 6.
 - q. Anticipate and be prepared to handle unscheduled inquiries from the media and the public.
 - r. Upon notification from the EM Director/EOC Manager, activate and manage the Public Information Phone Bank.
 - s. Post event, all Freedom of Information (FOIA) requests will go through the Public Information department and its designated FOIA manager.
3. All local government departments and agencies will:
- a. Refer media inquiries during emergency situations to the PIO.
 - b. Assist the PIO in responding to requests for information from the public or the media.

VI. DIRECTION & CONTROL

A. General

1. The Emergency Management Director and the Director of Public Information will work in conjunction to provide general guidance for emergency-related public education and information activities and approve all information released to the news media.
2. The Public Information Officer shall direct all emergency public information activities, coordinating as necessary with other individuals, departments, and agencies performing other emergency functions.
3. To the extent possible, the PIO shall release, upon approval, all information to the public and the media during emergency operations. During emergency operations, departments and agencies shall refer media inquiries to the PIO.
4. The PIO shall provide updates to the Emergency Phone Bank operators with information approved by the Emergency Management Director for public release.
5. The PIO will coordinate with dignitary visitors' press/public relations person when applicable.

VII. OPERATING CONDITION LEVELS

A. OPCON Level 3 - Normal Operations

B. OPCON Level 2 - Preparation

1. Monitor the situation.
2. Update warning messages as necessary.
3. Update public information materials based on current threat and disseminate.
4. Provide information to the media on local readiness activities.
5. Place selected off-duty personnel on standby to increase staffing if necessary.
6. Staff public information positions in the EOC or at the ICP when activated.

C. OPCON Level 1 – Disaster Operations

1. Monitor the situation.
2. Update warning messages as necessary.
3. Update public information materials based on current threat and disseminate.

4. Provide media with what information is available
5. Prepare for post-disaster and work with IC for the most current information.

VIII. ADMINISTRATION & SUPPORT

A. Media Contact Roster

The PIO shall maintain a contact roster for the media organizations that are involved in local emergency management programs. A sample is provided in Appendix 1.

B. Records

1. The PIO shall maintain a file of all news advisories and press releases issued during emergency operations.
2. The PIO shall also compile and maintain copies of news clippings and other media materials distributed for use in post-incident analysis and future training activities.

C. Educational Programs

1. The PIO and the EMD shall conduct disaster educational programs to increase citizen preparedness. Educational programs may include presentations in schools and for community organizations, displays at local public gatherings, community meetings, distribution of educational materials, and other activities. The local media may be willing to assist with such activities and local businesses may be willing to sponsor such events and assist with costs. Educational brochures may also be distributed with regularly scheduled government, utility, or business mailings.
2. The PIO is expected to obtain and maintain materials for disaster-related public education. A wide variety of educational materials dealing with emergency management and disaster preparedness are available. Materials may include websites, pamphlets, posters, videos, etc. Many publications are available in ready-to-distribute form or as fact sheets whose content can be incorporated into locally developed materials. Materials available include emergency preparedness information of general interest.
3. The principal providers of disaster-related educational materials are the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), the American Red Cross (ARC), and the South Carolina Emergency Management Division (SCEMD); many agencies and volunteer organizations also published specialized disaster-related educational materials. FEMA publishes a catalog of their publications and both FEMA and the ARC include educational materials on their web sites; see Section XI, References, for their addresses. The SCEMD also distributes hazard-specific awareness materials periodically throughout the year to local EMCs as part of state awareness campaigns.

D. Training

Members of the public information staff for whom public information is not their primary daily work should attend public information training, preferably training focusing on emergency public information activities. SCEMD and FEMA offer Public Information Officer training.

IX. ANNEX DEVELOPMENT & MAINTENANCE

- A. Development.** The Public Information department is responsible for developing and maintaining this annex.
- B. Maintenance.** This annex will be reviewed annually and updated.
- C. Operating Procedures.** The Public Information Officer is responsible for developing and maintaining SOPs covering recurring public information tasks.

XI. REFERENCES

- A.** FEMA, *FEMA Publications Catalog*
- B.** FEMA, *Guide to All-Hazard Emergency Operations Planning*
- C.** FEMA web site: www.fema.gov
- D.** American Red Cross web site: www.redcross.org
- E.** Department of Homeland Security, *National Incident Management System*

MEDIA CONTACT ROSTER

Located on Constant Contact

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PUBLIC INFORMATION NEEDS

1. Background

During emergency situations, it is important to provide the general public with adequate information on the situation as rapidly as possible to alleviate concerns and reduce the likelihood of panic or inappropriate actions. The news media are the primary means of disseminating such information by providing up-to-date information quickly to a wide audience. The information they provide reduces the time and manpower that local government would have to divert from response and recovery tasks to deal with (which could be an overwhelming number of inquiries from the public). Every effort should be made to cooperate with the news media in providing information and in recognition of the rights of the news media to perform their proper function.

2. Information Needs

The following types of information shall be provided to the public as soon as possible in as much detail as possible.

A. What Happened

- 1) Nature of incident or emergency
- 2) Location
- 3) Time of occurrence
- 4) Situation resolved or response on-going
- 5) Cause (Until an investigation has determined the cause with reasonable certainty, it is not advisable to speculate.)

B. Current Response Actions

What actions have been or are being taken to protect public health and safety and public and private property?

C. Known Damages

- 1) Homes
- 2) Businesses
- 3) Government buildings
- 4) Infrastructure – roads, bridges, parks, etc.

D. Casualties

- 1) Number dead and apparent cause
- 2) Number injured and nature/severity of injuries and where being treated
- 3) Number missing and circumstances
- 4) General identification of casualties – age, sex, situation (employee, homeowner, responder, etc.
- 5) Names of casualties – only released after next of kin have been notified

E. Evacuations

- 1) Areas and facilities evacuated
- 2) Approximate number of evacuees

F. Shelter & Mass Care

- 1) Shelters open – name and location
- 2) Approximate number of persons being housed in shelters
- 3) Mass feeding site or other mass care facilities in operation – name, location, and number of persons being served.

G. Status of Utilities

- 1) Electric service
- 2) Telephone system
- 3) Water system
- 4) Sewer system
- 5) Natural gas distribution

H. Road and Facility Closures

I. Organizations Responding

- 1) Local government
- 2) State agencies
- 3) Federal agencies
- 4) Volunteer groups

J. Means of contacting evacuees

K. Areas to which access is restricted and the reason(s) for such restriction

L. For ongoing emergency situations, planned response activities

M. In the recovery phase:

- 1) Disaster assistance programs available
- 2) How to apply for disaster assistance

3. Collection and Dissemination of Information

Information shall be collected and disseminated as soon as possible by the appropriate personnel. All incident-related information must be approved by the IC prior to dissemination.

- A. Where an Incident Command Post has been established and a qualified public information staff member is at the scene, that individual may provide information directly to the media if the EOC is not activated. If no qualified public information staff member is present at the scene, the Incident Commander or a member of his staff should pass situation information to the Public Information Officer for release to the media.

- B. Where an Incident Command Post has been established and the EOC has been activated, information from the incident scene will normally be passed to the Public Information Officer at the EOC. The Public Information Officer will utilize reports from the scene and other available pertinent information to brief the media and prepare news advisories for release to the media.
- C. The Shelter and Mass Care Officer is responsible for collecting information on shelter and mass care activities and providing that information to the PIO.
- D. The Energy and Utilities representative in the EOC is responsible for obtaining information on the status of utilities and providing it to the PIO.
- E. Law Enforcement and Public Works/Engineering are responsible for obtaining information on road closures and facility closures and providing it to the PIO.
- F. The PIO is responsible for collection of information from the Incident Commander, the EOC staff, and other sources and agencies. The PIO staff is responsible for preparation of news releases, for the dissemination of information directly to the news media, and, where appropriate, for making arrangements for announcements directly to the public via radio and/or television hookups.
- G. Hospitals are responsible for dissemination of information concerning casualties and deaths. They generally have policies restricting the release of detailed information without permission of patients or their families. This information that they choose to release will normally be disseminated directly to the news media. The PIO should request that the EOC be provided copies of any information released to the media.

