

# **Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan**



## **Section 1-Public Information & Outreach Plan**

*January 2025*

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# Section 1 – 3 Public Information & Outreach Plan

## I. PURPOSE

- A. The Horry County Emergency Management Department Public Information and Outreach Plan establishes guidelines for how the Horry County Public Information Office will convey public information and conduct engagement with the community.

Through the Public Information and Outreach Plan, the Horry County Public Information Office will endeavor to take a positive and proactive position with respect to communicating prevention, mitigation and preparedness messages to the public through traditional and new media and will seek out opportunities to present clear, concise and consistent messages targeted to specific audiences and tailored to community needs.

- B. Horry County Emergency Management understands the importance of public information and outreach. This plan outlines the activities and strategies to be utilized by the Horry County Public Information Office for the implementation of the Emergency Management Outreach program. The program encompasses activities to inform the public and provides opportunities for the public to engage in preparedness-related events and activities.

- C. The goals of the plan are:

1. Educate Horry County residents to better prepare themselves, their families, their businesses and their neighborhoods for an emergency.
2. Encourage the public to take actions; such as evacuation, shelter in place, or follow specific public safety instruction.
3. Educate local communities, business partners and organizations to better prepare for natural and man-made hazards.
4. Strengthen relationships between and among Horry County businesses and regional partners to improve public messaging before, during and after an emergency.
5. Increase Horry County EMD media presence as a trusted source on issues of emergency preparedness, response and recovery.

## II. SITUATION AND ASSUMPTIONS

### A. Situation

Horry County EMD and Horry County Public Information understands that community outreach efforts have to recognize that people have widely varying motivations and commitments to emergency

management and activities that reduce their vulnerabilities to hazards. Among the general public, we would expect to find varying degrees of emergency preparedness based upon hazard, vulnerability and the cost and complexity of specific preparedness measures.

1. To be effective, information must come from multiple sources, be communicated over multiple modes of communication, focus on actions to take, explain how those actions reduce future losses and be consistent across the diverse messages received.
2. The impact of seeing/observing others prepare and mitigate is generally stronger than passively receiving information. The more people hear, read and see, the more they will do to get prepared.
3. People will organize themselves around networks of friends and interests and the emergency management community needs to engage the public through these established networks.

#### B. Assumptions

Messages on preparedness and mitigation have low market penetration. Although most organizations that provide information on preparedness work collaboratively, most groups disseminate information independently. Coordinated public messaging that provides a clear, common and consistent message will increase its effectiveness.

### III. CONCEPT OF OPERATIONS

#### A. Principles

Horry County Public Information staff are guided by the following principles when providing public information and conducting outreach to the community.

1. Public involvement is an essential part of the concept, design and implementation of Horry County EMD programs, policies and plans.
2. Horry County residents benefit from a wide range of opportunities for community participation.
3. Feedback received from the public will be actively used to improve Horry County EMD operations.
4. Outreach efforts will identify and align key messages to audiences and will attempt to reach Horry County's diverse communities.
5. Partnerships with the media, community organizations and other groups encourage and facilitate public involvement.
6. Public agencies, including agencies throughout the County, should be part of the public involvement partnership.
7. The extent, timing, manner and outcomes of activities will vary depending on the circumstances of a project or decision, but will always strive to facilitate maximum participation from the community.
8. Outreach will not be used to promote individuals (department or otherwise) nor any political platforms or affiliations.

#### B. Key Messages

Horry County EMD and Horry County Public Information believe that preparedness is not a thing you can buy or own. Rather, preparing yourself and your family involves small, simple steps taken consistently over time. There are three national-level key messages that collectively make up a series of simple preparedness steps. As such, the following key messages will generally be included in all public information and outreach, regardless of the specific project or event. In order to push the key messages, Horry County or regionally-specific branding will be developed (i.e. “Anytime, Anywhere: Prepare”) and promoted in partnership with other regional partners.

1. Make a plan – encourage individuals, families, businesses, specific communities and other groups to develop a plan for an emergency. The plan should apply to a wide range of hazards and situations.
2. Assemble a kit – persuade residents and visitors to assemble emergency kits (with a minimum three days of supplies) at home, at work, in their vehicles and anywhere else they spend time. Emphasize that having a kit allows individuals to be more self-sufficient in an emergency and reduces the demands on first responders.
3. Stay informed – communicate ways to stay informed about natural and man-made hazards, changing conditions and events in the surrounding community. Share a range of options to obtain information (i.e. PublicAlerts.org, National Weather Service, local media, etc.).

#### C. Outreach to Target Audiences

Horry County EMD and Horry County Public Information recognizes that members of the community are at varying levels of emergency preparedness. Horry County residents can be divided into four general groups:

1. Those who have and routinely practice emergency plans. This group needs ongoing encouragement and access to training but already understands the importance of preparedness.
2. Those who may or may not have a plan but are aware of the importance of emergency preparedness. This group needs access to information and tools on how to elevate their level of preparedness.
3. Those who do not have a plan or practice emergency preparedness. This group – the largest – first needs to be persuaded that preparedness is worth their time, and then provided with information and ongoing encouragement.
4. Those who travel to Horry County year-round. It is estimated that more than 19 million visitors frequent the Grand Strand annually.

#### D. Target Messages

The key messages will be supplemented by targeted messages to the various populations listed below. Depending on the circumstances of the situation, Horry County Public Information Office will coordinate outreach and share information by leveraging existing relationships with public and private partners, through direct communication and, in some cases, by building new relationships. For example, working closely with and supporting the efforts of agencies directly involved with vulnerable populations on a daily basis.

An emphasis will be placed on the following:

1. Populations living & working in hazard susceptible areas (i.e. flooding, wildfire, hurricane etc.).
2. Community groups (i.e. neighborhood associations, non-governmental organizations, etc.).

3. Businesses (i.e. specific businesses, business associations, etc.).
4. English Second Language Populations (i.e. Spanish, Russian, etc.).
  - a. During the event of an emergency, Horry County EMD has established an agreement with a multilingual service to assist in communicating emergency information with non-English speakers. The translation services are contracted on an as needed basis.
5. Vulnerable populations (deaf/hard of hearing, blind, special medical needs etc.)

#### E. Communication Strategies and Activities

Public information and outreach activities will promote the overall core messages (i.e. make a plan, assemble a kit, and stay informed), communicate information specific to a monthly topic (i.e. winter weather preparedness) and motivate the community around emergency preparedness. Specific activities utilized by Horry County Public Information will include the following:

1. Conducting media events
2. Working with partner agencies within the county and around the region on events, conferences and information sharing
3. Frequently posting new content on the Horry County EMD website
4. Actively using established social media accounts
5. Developing videos for presentations and posting to the EMD website
6. Creating/updating pamphlets and other literature
7. Conducting targeted outreach to share information and build relationships with stakeholders
8. Participating in or supporting press conferences conducted by partner agencies within the county or region
9. Organizing community meetings to provide information
10. Establishing the Emergency Phone Bank upon EOC activations

#### F. Implementation

The implementation of the Outreach Plan is guided by specific project plan programs.

1. Public Outreach Program – a public outreach plan for the calendar year that outlines emergency preparedness topics (i.e. hurricane season), targeted audiences, PIO staff responsibilities and partner agencies.
2. Projects – each major activity (such as a media event, speaker, etc.) will be reviewed using the following criteria to ensure the project success:

- a. Specific targeted messages
- b. Target audiences – Residents, businesses, visitors, senior centers, civic organizations etc.
- c. Outreach strategy – Analyze the best way to reach Horry County target audiences
- d. Media/social media strategy, including media events (press conferences, tours, video) and web content.
- e. Timeline and assigned duties – Schedule public speaking engagements to raise emergency preparedness awareness
- f. Budget – Annual budget to fund outreach materials for program

#### **IV. ORGANIZATION AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

##### **A. Public Information**

The Horry County Public Information Office is responsible for working with EMD staff, the media, partners and stakeholders to implement and execute this plan.

##### **B. Media, Partners and Stakeholders**

In the effort to reach the entire community, Horry County Public Information Office will work in partnership with other government, non-profit, private, community organizations and media groups within Horry County and around the region. Groups include, but are not limited, to the following:

1. Media – television, radio, newspapers (regional and community-based), blogs, etc.
2. Other government partners – local, state, federal and special district agencies around the County.
3. Neighborhood groups – such as neighborhood coalitions, associations and neighborhood business districts.
4. Private sector partners – such as businesses and industry associations.
5. Non-profit organizations - Red Cross, United Way, Salvation Army, etc. Community groups and volunteer organizations
6. Schools – public and private K-12 education institutions, higher education institutions throughout the county, technical and vocational training institutions, etc.

##### **C. Emergency Phone Bank**

Upon activations of the Emergency Operations Center, and in coordination with Human Resources and Emergency Management, the Horry County Public Information Office will establish and coordinate the efforts of the Emergency Phone Bank as a channel for disseminated critical information before, during and after disaster events.

1. County x5000 line becomes the dedicated Emergency Phone Bank line for callers seeking information on Horry County activity and resources.
2. The Horry County Public Information Office is responsible for recruiting and training employees for staffing the Emergency Phone Bank

## **V. ANNEX MAINTENANCE**

Horry County Emergency Management has the responsibility to develop the Public Information and Outreach Plan and will coordinate with the Horry County Public Information Office on their implementation of the program. The Public Information and Outreach Plan will be updated in conjunction with the CEMP as stated in Section VII, Plan Development and Maintenance.