

EMERGENCY SUPPORT FUNCTION #15—EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

LEAD AGENCY

Pierce County Communications Department

SUPPORT AGENCIES

Pierce County Department of Emergency Management
Pierce County TV
Public Safety Agency Public Information Officers/PIOs
Public Information Officers/PIOs from Other Entities

STATE AND FEDERAL LEADS

Washington Military Department-Emergency Management Division
Federal Emergency Management Agency

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Purpose

1. To ensure that sufficient assets are mobilized during emergencies or major disasters to provide accurate, accessible, coordinated and timely information to impacted communities and populace, first responders, governments, news media, tribes, and private sectors, including those with alternate communication needs (such as limited English proficiency, low literacy, and those with disabilities including deaf or hard of hearing, low vision/blindness, or cognitive impairments).
2. To provide resource support and mechanisms to implement the Pierce County Joint Information Center (JIC) Plan (attached) and supplementing first responder public information officers' operations with JIC resources.

B. Scope

1. This Emergency Support Function (ESF) details the establishment of support positions to coordinate communications to various audiences. This ESF applies to all county departments and agencies. Cities and towns, special districts, public safety agencies, and nonprofit organizations may require public affairs/information support or whose public affairs/information assets may be employed during an emergency or major disaster.
2. The context of this ESF is emergency or major disaster situations that exhausts or nearly exhausts the capacity of county first responder public affairs/information operations or when support is requested. These incidents are typically complex in nature or extend beyond one operational period.
3. This ESF supports the Pierce County JIC Plan.

C. Core Capabilities and Actions

The following table lists the core capabilities that ESF #15 most directly supports along with the related ESF #15 actions. In addition to the core capabilities listed in the table,

PIERCE COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT PLAN

all ESFs support the following core capabilities: Planning, and Operational Coordination.

Mission Area	Core Capability	Description and Actions
Prevention	Public Information and Warning	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Share prompt and actionable messages—including threat or hazard alerts (such as National Weather Service, National Terrorism Advisory System, etc.)—with the public and other stakeholders, as appropriate. 2. Provide public awareness information to inform the general public on how to identify and provide terrorism-related information to the appropriate law enforcement authorities, thereby enabling the public to act as a force multiplier in the prevention of imminent or follow-on acts of terrorism.
Protection		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Use effective and accessible indication and warning systems to communicate significant hazards to involved operators, security officials, and the public (including alerts, detection capabilities, and other necessary and appropriate assets).
Mitigation		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Communicate appropriate information, in an accessible manner, on the risks faced within a community after the conduct of a risk assessment.
Response		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Inform all affected segments of society by all means necessary, including accessible tools, of critical lifesaving and life-sustaining information to expedite the delivery of emergency services and aid the public to take protective actions. 2. Deliver credible and actionable messages to inform ongoing emergency services and the public about protective measures and other life-sustaining actions and facilitate the transition to recovery.
Recovery		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Reach all populations within the community with effective actionable recovery-related public information messaging and communications that are accessible to people with disabilities and people with limited English proficiency, protect the health and safety of the affected population, help manage expectations, and ensure stakeholders have a clear understanding of available assistance and their roles and responsibilities. 2. Support affected populations and stakeholders with a system that provides appropriate, current information about any continued assistance, steady state resources for long-term impacts, and monitoring programs in an effective and accessible manner.

II. POLICIES

Pierce County government recognizes the importance of providing vital health and safety information to affected populations. The Pierce County Joint Information Center (JIC) and/or Communications Department will do everything possible to ensure that the information is consistent, accurate, complete, and promptly delivered using communication methods that will disseminate the information as widely as possible to affected populations and the general public, including those with alternate communication needs. Therefore:

- A. Pierce County Communications Department is the lead agency for ESF #15, and as such, is responsible for developing and maintaining plans and procedures related to ESF #15.
- B. Pierce County Communications Department will be the lead agency for public information unless the situation warrants otherwise (such as health epidemics, hazardous material spills, wildfires, or other public safety events); in such instances, the Communications Department and DEM will support the entities having jurisdiction with disseminating their public information.
- C. Public safety agencies will provide specific emergency related messaging content or suggestions on life safety items such as evacuation and health outbreaks.
- D. All separately elected agencies in government will retain and manage their own independent public information officials and spokespersons.
- E. Agencies and organizations will maintain responsibility for developing content for public information and resource materials specific to the agency, its programs, and subject matter expertise.
- F. ESF #15 is committed to communicating with the whole community during response and recovery operations during emergencies and major disasters. The whole community includes populations with limited English proficiency (LEP), individuals with disabilities, and others with access and functional needs.
 - The LEP Plan is an attachment to this ESF and outlines how ESF #15 will communicate with LEP populations before, during, and after an emergency or major disaster. The LEP Plan meets the requirements of Senate Bill 5046 and federal policy guidance document titled *Guidance to Federal Financial Assistance Recipients Regarding Title VI Prohibition Against National Origin Discrimination Affecting Limited English Proficient Persons*, 76 Fed. Reg. 21755-21768.

III. SITUATION

- A. Emergency/Major Disaster Conditions and Hazards
 - Any emergency or major disaster has the potential to adversely impact the county's ability to provide health and safety information to residents and communicate with

responding agencies, impacted communities, the news media, tribes, volunteer organizations, and the private sector.

- Reference the Pierce County Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment (HIRA) for detailed information on the hazards that have the potential to impact Pierce County.
- Joint Information Center is the location from which incident-related information is gathered, processed, and disseminated. Potential means for dissemination includes the news media (such as radio, television, cable, print), websites, social media, and—if necessary—by hand/word of mouth.

B. Planning Assumptions

- Disruption and damage to the telecommunications infrastructure may occur during an emergency or major disaster. The type and degree of damage will determine the effectiveness and efficiency of the response and recovery efforts.
- Any undamaged communications infrastructure will be overwhelmed and cease to function.
- Rumors or misinformation can cause unnecessary distress. Rumors may provoke inappropriate responses by the public or impede response and recovery efforts.
- Physical co-location of communications may be rendered difficult or impossible, necessitating virtual (remote) JICs.
- Agencies may not have multiple or available communication professionals to support the incident which will impact JIC/JIS coordination.
- Local agencies will coordinate their public messaging including messages regarding support for access and functional needs populations.
- Following an emergency or major disaster, responding agencies will disseminate health and safety information as soon as possible, and by whatever means available.
- Requested telecommunications resources may not be available or may be delayed.
- All Public Information Officers will endeavor to keep all stakeholders informed with clear, accurate, and complete reports of changing situations, including those with alternate communication needs, as soon as possible.
- Public messaging before, during and after the incident will be in a variety of formats and languages and are made accessible to those with alternate communications needs.
- Public messaging will include specific information as to what people with access and functional needs should do in an evacuation and/or sheltering situation that is different from the actions recommended to the general population.

- Public messaging for people with access and functional needs, including those with alternate communication needs, will also focus on community gathering points such as schools, ethnic grocery stores, ethnic media outlets, churches, community centers, advocacy groups and support agencies.

IV. CONCEPT OF OPERATIONS

A. General

1. The Tacoma-Pierce County Emergency Operations Center (EOC)—hereafter called the “EOC”—is responsible for establishing and maintaining the Pierce County Joint Information Center (JIC).
2. The Pierce County JIC is co-located with the EOC, while the EOC is operational. As response to the emergency or major disaster transitions to long-term recovery, the functions of the Pierce County JIC may transfer to a state or federally established JIC.
3. The Pierce County JIC will coordinate activities and information between the EOC, PIOs in the field, other jurisdictional JICs/JIS, affected jurisdictions, and the Pierce County Communications Department.
4. Field PIOs will communicate with the Pierce County JIC directly or through dispatch.
5. The DEM Mobile Operations Command Center (MOCC) vehicle may be dispatched to support field communications and/or field operations.
6. Public safety agencies and other private and public organizations may provide communications resources to the EOC/Pierce County JIC, when requested and if available.
7. South Sound 9-1-1 has primary responsibility for sending Emergency Alert System (EAS) and/or Wireless Emergency Alert System (WEAS) messages as requested by the EOC Manager.
8. The EOC or the Washington State Emergency Operations Center (SEOC) will send EAS and/or WEAS messages when South Sound 9-1-1 is unable to do so.
9. The State will send Amber Alerts on behalf of law enforcement agencies which may utilize the Pierce County JIC during CART activations.
10. The Pierce County Emergency Management blog is operational during times of emergencies or major disasters that necessitate a level 1 or 2 activation of the EOC, or in situations when dissemination of information is critical. When operational, the blog can be accessed directly from Pierce County’s website notification banner(s). The blog is a direct source of information regarding the scope of the emergency or major disaster, the impacts to the county, emergency action steps, evacuation information, collection sites, water and food distribution, recovery information, etc.
11. The Pierce County JIC and/or the Pierce County Communications Department will ensure that county government employees are informed of their operational and work status based on their continuity personnel assignment status—along with

other pertinent information—through PC WARN, phone lines, and the county website.

12. The Pierce County JIC will provide public messaging in alternative formats and languages (as able) to inform people with access and functional needs of support resources and situation updates.
13. The Pierce County JIC will coordinate with regional emergency management PIOs and activated JICs when coordinating multijurisdictional messaging for regional incidents.

B. Preparedness Activities

Lead Agency

1. Establish process for developing, disseminating, monitoring, and evaluating emergency public information through during response and recovery operations for emergencies or major disasters.
2. Identify and prepare public information materials for use during response and recovery operations for emergencies or major disasters.
3. Make Pierce County residents aware of the PC ALERT notification system and emphasize the importance of personal preparedness.
4. Develop public messaging prior to an event to inform people with access and functional needs of response activities and any actions that would differ from the general public.
5. Participate in developing regional preparedness campaigns for multi-jurisdictional messaging for regional events.
6. Develop public messaging in multiple formats and languages to make it accessible to as many individuals as possible, including those with access and functional needs (such as pre-scripted, pre-translated information and materials for quick dissemination to individuals with limited English proficiency, people with disabilities and others with access and functional needs).
7. Develop relationships with community-based organizations serving limited English proficient populations, including ethnic media, to act as “force multipliers” for message dissemination during emergencies or major disasters, including:
 - a. vetting pre-scripted and pre-translated messages with trusted community leaders in various cultural community and disability groups; and
 - b. identifying advocacy groups, ethnic organizations, community centers and other resources to disperse public messages to access and functional needs populations.
8. County departments coordinate to identify communication personnel, with responsibilities for providing public information during emergencies or major disasters, to assist in implementing the JIC Plan.

9. Develop and maintain a list of trained, professional emergency communicators from various agencies and organizations in the county, who could be called upon to assist in communication responsibilities.
10. Develop a training and exercise program for agency Public Information Officers/communications specialists on ESF #15, JIC/JIS, and the JIC plan.
11. Develop a public education program that focuses on the personal resiliency of access and functional needs populations.
12. In accordance with Presidential Executive Order 13347, provide technical assistance to support the needs of individuals with disabilities served by State, local, and tribal governments, private organizations, and individuals in emergency preparedness planning. As well as, facilitate the implementation of emergency preparedness plans as they relate to individuals with disabilities, with government agencies, private organizations, and individual partners.

Support Agencies

13. Prepare and coordinate public information resource materials specific to the department, its programs and subject matter expertise for use during response and recovery operations for emergencies or major disasters. Resource materials may include pre-scripted instructions and information translated into most frequently spoken non-English languages.
14. Develop pre-scripted messages on area responsibilities for quick dissemination.
15. Assist with the emergency public information / communications component of their agency's continuity of operations planning.
16. Identify appropriate communications staff to become part of a team responsible for implementing the external affairs responsibilities outlined in this ESF. Communicate changes to Pierce County Emergency Management.
17. Attend training and participate in exercise programs established by Pierce County Emergency Management state response agencies to become familiar with plans, operating procedures and systems during response and recovery operations for emergencies or major disasters.

C. Prevention and Mitigation Mission

1. Identify people with access, functional, transportation, communication, and health needs in order to plan for evacuation and mass care needs, thereby:
 - a. reducing the number who do not evacuate and later require search and rescue assistance;
 - b. mitigating or reducing the lack of support for this community due to resource shortages; and

- c. encouraging, supporting, and empowering “higher risk” individuals to better support themselves during an evacuation in order to reduce the need for the response community to provide resources.

D. Response Mission

Lead Agency

1. Manage public expectations on incident response activities.
2. Maintain the Pierce County Emergency Blog as the primary source for vetted, official incident-related public information and messaging.
3. Establish and implement a process for approving messaging in coordination with affected agencies, the EOC, JIC Manager, and Lead PIO (incident specific).
4. Establish communication with PIOs of responding agencies, impacted local jurisdictions and tribes, the State EMD, and the regional office of the Federal Emergency Management Agency.
5. Collaborate with responding agencies on external affairs activities related to the emergency or major disaster.
6. Provide timely and accurate information to the public through established channels such as traditional and social media, public alert systems (PC ALERT), low tech communication tools (trap lines, community points of information, etc.) and the Pierce County Emergency Blog. This includes communicating with access and functional needs populations through vetted community voices and the use of alternate formats.
7. Monitor news coverage and social media platforms for situational awareness, and to the degree possible or necessary. Prepare communications to address or correct rumors and misinformation.
8. Provide the whole community with coordinated, prompt, reliable, and actionable information through the use of clear, consistent, accessible, and culturally and linguistically appropriate methods to effectively relay information regarding any threat or hazard, as well as the actions being taken and the assistance being made available, as appropriate.

Support Agencies

9. Force multiplier: magnify JIC messaging by sharing messages (public information content) to established internal distribution lists using all available methods.
10. Monitor news coverage and social media platforms for situational awareness, and to the degree possible or necessary prepare communications to address or correct rumors and misinformation.
11. Provide timely and accurate information to the public through established channels such as traditional and social media, public alert systems (PC ALERT), low tech

communication tools (trap lines, community points of information, etc.) and the Pierce County Emergency Blog. This includes communicating with access and functional needs populations through vetted community voices and the use of alternate formats.

E. Recovery Mission

1. Manage public expectations on recovery operations and disaster assistance.
2. Update the whole community on current status of programs and available resources.
3. Facilitate ongoing communication coordination through the JIC/JIS.

V. RESPONSIBILITIES

Lead Agency	ESF Responsibilities
Pierce County Communications Department	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Lead agency for day-to-day public information/news services for Pierce County government. 2. Maintain the Pierce County Emergency Management blog and other related social media sites. 3. Post information on the county's intranet site specifically for county employees 4. Relocate the necessary staff and operations to the Pierce County Joint Information Center (JIC) following an emergency or major disaster declaration. 5. Inform people with access and functional needs of response activities they should engage in and will encounter during and following an emergency or major disaster. 6. Coordinate with ESF #2 to provide accessible alerts using existing communications systems. 7. Develop public messaging in multiple formats and languages, as possible. Use pre-scripted, pre-translated messages when possible. Follow pre-scripted messages with detailed translated messages as able, depending on availability of service providers. 8. Promote use of interpreter and translation service provider contracts to assist with providing accurate and timely messages to access and functional need populations. 9. Coordinate responsibilities with supporting agencies such as non-governmental partners (such as businesses, faith-based organizations, etc.). 10. Communicate, update, inform Executive leadership. 11. Facilitate communications between County Council, Executive's Office, and other elected officials on EOC/JIC operations and incident-related information.

PIERCE COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT PLAN

Support Agencies	ESF Responsibilities
<p>Pierce County Department of Emergency Management</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Activate the EOC/JIC as necessary to support emergency operations. Follow Pierce County JIC operational guidelines provided in the Pierce County JIC Plan (attached). 2. Notify all affected jurisdictions and stakeholders of operational and situational conditions and provide frequent and regular status updates. 3. Maintain operational readiness of the Mobile Operations Command Center (MOCC) and deploy, when requested. 4. Provide adequate and appropriate emergency information and resources to Pierce County TV and the Communications Department. 5. Authorize EAS, WEAS, and Pierce County ALERT messages, when necessary. 6. Send EAS messages if South Sound 9-1-1 is unable to do so.
<p>Pierce County TV</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Interrupt regular cable programming to report emergency information, when requested or provided by the JIC. 2. Support EOC/JIC operations with video broadcasts from the Media Room at EOC.
<p>Public Safety Agency Public Information Officers/PIOs</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Affected agency PIOs will coordinate public affairs/information messages and operations with the Pierce County JIC. 2. Provide communication (PIO) support to other affected jurisdictions, as requested and able. 3. Take lead on public information coordination for public safety events. 4. Provide PIO support to JIC operations, upon request.
<p>Public Information Officers/PIOs from Other Entities</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. During an emergency or major disaster, PIOs from all responding entities and affected jurisdictions will coordinate public information through the JIC to ensure consistent messaging throughout incident response and recovery operations. 2. Maintain lead public information responsibilities for discipline-specific information (such as road conditions) within their jurisdiction. 3. Use pre-scripted messages for areas of responsibility for quick dissemination. 4. Deploy PIOs to the Pierce County JIC, as requested and able. 5. Coordinate public information specific to the organization, its programs and subject matter expertise. 6. Disseminate agency specific messaging to other entities, including components of their agency's Continuity of Operations (COOP) program/plan, such as: suspending non-essential functions, relocating personnel, delegations of authority, etc. 7. Request support from the JIC, when needed.

PIERCE COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT PLAN

State and Federal Leads	ESF Responsibilities
<p align="center">Washington Military Department- Emergency Management Division</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Deploy Public Information Officer(s) to the Pierce County JIC, upon request and/or when providing state assistance. 2. Send EAS messages when requested by South Sound 9-1-1. 3. Provide telecommunications resources as requested by the EOC. 4. Coordinate requested telecommunications resources outside of the state's capabilities with the federal government. 5. In the event that a local or tribal government requests assistance to provide emergency public information to its community, WMD-EMD may do the following: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Collaborate with the requesting organization to provide vital health and safety information to affected communities from the SEOC/JIC. b. Find and deploy public information staff to help the affected jurisdiction with its on-site emergency public information activities. c. Activate/execute statewide contracts for translation and interpretation services.
<p align="center">Federal Emergency Management Agency</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Deploy Public Information Officer(s) to the State or Pierce County JIC following an emergency or major disaster declaration. 2. Establish a JIC within the Joint Field Office following a major disaster.

VI. AREAS OF COORDINATION CROSSWALK

The following table describes the typical functions concurrently active during incidents involving ESF #15. Other ESF annexes are listed as a reference to guide coordination.

Function	Agency	ESF Annex
Alert and Warning	DEM	ESF #2
Situational Awareness	DEM	ESF #5
Public Health Alerts	TPCHD	ESF #8
Public Safety Information	Pierce County Sheriff's Department	ESF #13
Disaster Assistance	DEM	ESF #14

VII. AUTHORITIES AND REFERENCES

- Evergreen JIS Operations Guide.

- Executive Order 13166, *Improving Access to Services for Persons with Limited English Proficiency*, August 11, 2000.
- Executive Order 13347, *Individuals with Disabilities in Emergency Preparedness*, July 26, 2004.
- Pierce County Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment, March 2015.
- Pierce County Emergency Operations Center Plan.
- Pierce County Joint Information Center/Joint Information System Plan.
- Substitute Senate Bill 5046.PL—Limited English Proficiency.

VIII. TERMS AND DEFINITONS

- (See Appendices I and II)

IX. ATTACHMENTS

- [Pierce County Inclusive Emergency Communication Plan, January 2020.](#)