

## **Emergency Support Function (ESF) 15 External and Public Affairs**

<b>ESF Coordinator</b>	<i>Snohomish County Executive Office (PIO)</i>
<b>Primary Agencies</b>	<i>Snohomish County Executive Office Snohomish County Department PIOs</i>
<b>Supporting Agencies</b>	<i>Snohomish County Department of Emergency Management (DEM) Snohomish County Departments, as required Snohomish County Emergency Management Organizations Area PIOs</i>

Federal and State primary and supporting agency responsibilities for this ESF are outlined in the National Planning Frameworks (Federal) and Washington State Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan.

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

#### **Purpose**

To establish a mechanism that will provide accurate, coordinated and timely information and warnings to impacted communities, the general public, first responders, governments, media, tribes and private-sector stakeholders in the event of an emergency or disaster situation.

#### **Scope**

A significant emergency or disaster situation will require media relations capabilities and will involve Public Information Officers (PIOs) from many local governments, businesses and community organizations. ESF 15 coordinates the release of information to provide the appropriate public support to federal, state, local and tribal governments during an emergency or disaster situation.

### **II. POLICIES**

The County Executive Office has the primary responsibility for the coordination of public information activities in Snohomish County.

Life-safety information and instructions to the public have first priority for release.

The Emergency Alert System (EAS) and/or MyState USA are activated as the principal means to disseminate emergency warnings and priority emergency instructions to the public.

The lead jurisdiction will provide immediate and vital information to the general public and state, local, private and tribal organizations regarding response and recovery activities.

The State may initiate emergency public information to augment or enhance local jurisdiction capability or when requested by a county/local emergency management agency.

### III. SITUATION

#### Emergency/Disaster Conditions and Hazards

Any emergency or disaster has the potential to adversely impact the county's ability to provide health and safety information to the citizens, and to adversely impact communication with necessary first responders, governments, media, tribes, volunteer organizations and private sector.

Refer to the Snohomish County Natural Hazard Mitigation Plan (published separately) for the natural and manmade events that may affect Snohomish County.

#### Planning Assumptions

Disruption and damage to the telecommunications infrastructure will likely occur in the event of an emergency or 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 or cease to function.

Health and safety information and emergency protective measures will be disseminated as soon as possible by whatever means available.

Requested telecommunications resources may not be available or may be delayed.

All public affairs/information officers will coordinate messaging and endeavor to keep all stakeholders adequately informed with clear, accurate and complete reports of changing situations as soon as possible.

### IV. CONCEPT OF OPERATIONS

#### General

Upon notification, the Snohomish County Public Information Officer (PIO) will report to the Snohomish County Emergency Operations Center (EOC) to coordinate and disseminate accurate and timely disaster-related information.

The PIO, or another designated PIO, will work with emergency management staff, whether or not the EOC is activated, to issue appropriate press releases, monitor and update county social media, coordinate information among municipal and agency PIOs, and conduct media interviews.

The PIO will coordinate with ESF 5 – Emergency Management to ensure there is appropriate PIO staffing, and set up a Joint Information System / Center as appropriate.

The PIO will initiate rumor-control procedures by monitoring media sources and social media sources, as appropriate.

## Organization

The **Snohomish County Executive Office** houses the Director of Communications, who the County Executive has appointed the County Public Information Officer (PIO). The PIO organizes and manages the public information operations of Snohomish County. Additionally, the PIO coordinates the efforts of Departmental PIOs during emergent conditions. The Executive Office has the responsibility to name backup PIOs in the event the primary PIO is unavailable.

The **Snohomish County Department of Emergency Management** will utilize local municipalities and agencies to distribute emergency information to the public and special populations.

**Local Jurisdictions**, in coordination with the PIO, are responsible for providing citizens with information on the event and what immediate protective actions should be taken, such as taking shelter or evacuating. Local government is responsible for providing the public with information and intermediate protective actions designed to further save lives, protect property, economy and the environment, and long-term recovery actions to restore the affected community to a state of normalcy.

## Procedures

Snohomish County assumes lead responsibility as PIO unless the event is isolated to the incorporated community and the jurisdiction chooses to accept the lead role as PIO. Local jurisdictions that have a designated PIO will coordinate information and through a Joint Information System / Center. Specific procedures for JIS/JIC activation are contained in the JIS/JIC plan, which is in the process of being written.

The PIO, or designee at the EOC, with assistance from ESF 5 – Emergency Management, will coordinate public information actions with the state PIO if state agencies are involved. Messages will be coordinated through establishment of a Joint Information System (JIS), where agency representatives share and coordinate information throughout the event. This enables local agencies to efficiently and accurately share information at the state and federal levels if necessary.

The PIO will coordinate the emergency public information response through all phases of natural or human-caused incidents, regardless of the size or extent of the incident. This will be accomplished in collaboration with the Chief Elected Officials, the Director of Emergency Management, Incident Commander(s) and the state PIO.

Emergency public information will be coordinated through ESF 15 in the EOC. If necessary, a Joint Information System / Center will be established. The JIS may coordinate information with the Washington State Emergency Information Center (WEIC) through the State EOC.

If the event is an Incident of National Significance, public affairs may be coordinated through a Joint Field Office (JFO), which is a coordinating center for Federal officials, officers and resource coordinators. The Snohomish County PIO still has a responsibility to disseminate the county message.

Upon request, Elected Officials, PIOs and the Emergency Management agencies will arrange site visits for state and federal governments, and local media, as well as coordinate response to inquiries about the event. Safety must first be determined and verified by the on-duty safety officer before such visits are made.

### Mitigation Activities

- Snohomish County DEM conducts public education and outreach as a part of regular business. The department disseminates preparedness and other public information on its Web site and at fairs, community events, trainings, presentations and meetings. Much of this information is based on all-hazards planning and specific information is made available which offers insight and suggestions for reducing risks associated with those hazards.
- The department, in conjunction with incorporated municipalities and special purpose districts, has conducted vulnerability assessments and logged critical facilities through the Snohomish County All-Hazards Mitigation Plan, published separately. This plan is available to the public for review. The plan identifies significant hazard occurrences of the past as well as offering strategies to mitigate potential loss of life and property.

### Preparedness Activities

- Complete the JIS/JIC plan for Snohomish County.
- Identify and acquire emergency support function-specific training requirements.
- Identify areas where public education programs (i.e., personal preparedness) are needed.
- Identify locations for media briefings.
- Encourage county, local, private and tribal organizations to attend Washington state and FEMA-approved public information courses.
- Develop and maintain a roster of ESF 15 personnel, including complete contact information for both home and office.
- Develop equipment lists, including methods for disseminating information (EAs, MyState, etc.) and monitoring traditional and social media.
- Ensure that support agencies can communicate with their respective agencies from the County EOC. This must be coordinated with ESF 2 - Communications.
- Develop and maintain an accurate media contact list.
- Develop effective working relationships with the news media to aid information being broadcast in a timely manner to the public.
- Develop procedures for rumor control inquiries.
- Prepare and maintain pre-recorded and written messages for various incidents and situations for distribution through various media.
- Test, train and exercise the ESF 15 plan and the JIS/JIC plan (when complete) to identify gaps and familiarize disparate agencies and personnel with procedures for emergency communications and messaging. Be involved in all phases of exercise development, which includes planning, facilitation and evaluation.

### Response Activities

- Activate ESF 15 in support of PIO coordination based on incident assessment.
- Coordinate with affected partners, both within and without of county government, to develop a flow of information concerning emergency protective measures, response and recovery efforts.

- Establish and operate a Joint Information System / Center when appropriate.
- Inform the Washington State Emergency Management PIO of response activities.
- Assess the scope, magnitude, extent and potential duration of the incident.
- Obtain a status report on all local and county activities, as needed.
- Collect information concerning ESF field operations and activities.
- Attend briefings and gather information for periodic media updates.
- Document and maintain a record of incoming and outgoing communications.
- Establish contact with the pertinent elected officials representing the affected area and coordinate information on the incident.
- Conduct media briefings on a regular basis.
- Monitor media, including social media, and implement a rumor control process when appropriate.
- ESF 15 will coordinate with the EOC Manager before deactivating ESF 15.

### Recovery Activities

- Coordinate with appropriate agencies to deactivate the JIS/JIC, if activated.
- Disseminate information on recovery programs or available disaster assistance programs.
- Keep elected officials informed of recovery activities.
- ESF 15 will coordinate with the EOC Manager before deactivating ESF 15.

## V. RESPONSIBILITIES

### General

The PIOs' primary role is to gather, verify, coordinate and disseminate emergency instructions and critical information to the public through traditional and social media. A secondary function is to provide the public accurate and up-to-date information regarding incident cause, size, status, resources committed and potential short- or long-term impacts, if known; and to correct important inaccuracies. During large incidents involving numerous response agencies, PIOs from all affected agencies should coordinate public information under the direction of ESF 15 in the county's EOC. The on-shift PIO is provided public affairs resources from EOC representatives and Snohomish County DEM staff and include such things as situation reports, response status, protective action recommendations, and contact information for pertinent community organizations and individuals.

All primary and supporting ESF agencies must have established disaster related policies, systems, and procedures for:

- Personnel accountability, safety, lines of authority and succession
- Providing logistical support to their personnel and equipment
- Facility / infrastructure damage assessment and reporting
- Continuity of operations to maintain essential services
- Facility / infrastructure repair and restoration

### Primary

### Lead Public Information Agency (Snohomish County Executive Office)

- Assess the public-affairs implications and needs of the incident.
- Support the chief elected official in disseminating emergency public information.
- If the Snohomish County PIO is unavailable, utilize the backup PIOs designated by the Executive Office to coordinate all county public information.
- Manage EOC public information and JIS/JIC operations.
- Coordinate public-information activities with other participating and affected agencies.
- Assist local officials with disseminating information (e.g., protective action recommendations).
- Collect and coordinate information from all sources (e.g., the State EOC, partner agencies and municipalities, rumor control) to monitor overall response.
- Obtain approval for release of information from the EOC Manager or designee.
- Conduct and/or coordinate regular news conferences at the EOC and/or the JIC.
- Enlist agency staff to respond to media questions on technical or agency issues if necessary and when appropriate.
- As available and deemed appropriate, provide maps, charts, status boards, schematics or other displays that clarify the disaster situation in support of news conferences and/or briefings.
- Monitor media broadcasts, social media and articles for accurate information.
- Monitor and log incoming calls for information and rumors.
- Coordinate public information with the chief elected official and the State PIO as necessary.

### Supporting

- If necessary, provide PIO(s) to assist at the scene, JIC or the EOC.
- Assist ESF 15 by providing pertinent public information for dissemination to media sources, social media and for distribution to the public.
- Participate in news conferences and briefings upon request.
- Coordinate information and messaging with other PIO(s).
- Monitor and log incoming calls for information and rumors.
- Monitor media broadcasts, social media and articles for accurate information.

## VI. REFERENCES

- A. Snohomish County Hazard Identification and Vulnerability Analysis (HIVA)
- B. Snohomish County Natural Hazards Mitigation Plan
- C. Snohomish County Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan
- D. Snohomish County JIS/JIC Plan (under development)

## VII. TABS