EMERGENCY SUPPORT FUNCTION #15
EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

ANNEX COORDINATOR:
Thurston County Emergency Management (TCEM)

JOINT PRIMARY AGENCY:
Thurston County Emergency Management (TCEM)
Board of County Commissioners (BOCC)/PIO

SUPPORT:
Thurston County Departments (PIOs)
Thurston County Communications 911 (TCOMM)
Local Public Safety Agencies
Local Media (TCTV, radio stations, blogs, newspapers)
Washington State Emergency Management
Thurston Area PIOs Emergency Network (TAPEN)

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Purpose

To ensure that sufficient assets are mobilized during emergencies or disasters to provide accurate, coordinated, and timely information to impacted communities and populace, first responders, local government, media, tribes, and private sector. This includes those with alternate communication needs (e.g. limited English proficiency and deaf and hard of hearing).

To provide resource support and mechanisms to implement the Thurston County Joint Information Center (JIC) Plan and supplementing first responder public information officers' operations with JIC resources.

B. Scope

ESF-15 details the establishment of support positions to coordinate communications to various audiences. It applies to all county departments and agencies that may require public affairs/information support or whose public affairs/information assets may be employed during an emergency or disaster.

The context of ESF-15 is emergency or disaster situations that exhaust 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. ESF-15 supports the Thurston County JIC Plan.

II. POLICIES

Thurston County government recognizes the importance of providing vital health and safety information to affected populations. TCEM and BOCC will work to ensure that information is consistent, accurate, complete, and promptly delivered using communication methods, within County guidelines, to disseminate information to affected populations and the general public, including those with alternate communication needs.

This Annex does not relieve local city, town and tribal emergency management organizations or other agencies of their responsibility to communicate and provide information on the emergency or disaster to their residents including limited English proficient (LEP) populations during times of emergency or disaster.

III. SITUATION

A. Emergency/Disaster Conditions and Hazards

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

   2. Reference the Hazard Mitigation Plan for the Thurston Region, Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan (CEMP) and Hazard Identification and Vulnerability Analysis (HIVA) for detailed information on the hazards with a potential to impact Thurston County.

   3. People with access and functional needs may not be able to access (e.g. hearing or visual impairment) or understand (e.g. cognitive impairment or limited English speaking) conventional warning systems (e.g. sirens, emergency alert systems) advising them of the need to evacuate during a short-notice event such as a flash flood, wildfire, or hazardous materials spill.

B. Planning Assumptions

   1. Disruption and damage to 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.

   2. Any undamaged communications infrastructure will be overwhelmed and may cease to function.

   3. Health and safety information will be disseminated as soon as possible by whatever means available.

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

5. All public information staff will endeavor to keep stakeholders adequately informed with clear, accurate, and complete reports of changing situations as soon as possible including connecting with those with alternate communication needs.

6. Public messaging before, during, and after the incident will be in a variety of formats and languages and made accessible to those with alternate communication needs.

7. Public messaging will include specific information as to what people with access and function needs should do in an evacuation and/or sheltering situation that is different from the actions recommended to the general population.

8. Public messaging for people with access and functional needs will also focus on community gathering points such as schools, local grocery stores, media outlets, churches, community centers, advocacy groups, and support agencies.

IV. CONCEPT OF OPERATIONS

A. General

1. The Thurston County Emergency Coordination Center (ECC) may be activated to provide coordination, and technical and administrative support to the incident. The State Emergency Operations Center may also be activated to support local efforts.

2. 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.

3. The size and scale of the emergency or disaster dictates the scope of ESF-15 activities.

4. The need for dissemination of essential information regarding the emergency or disaster to the community (i.e., what protective actions are necessary such as sheltering in place or evacuating affected areas, and where to find assistance such as overnight shelter, food, water, and animal care).

5. The need to provide information to the whole community, including limited English proficient populations, through a variety of methods, including the

news media, county agency and emergency websites, social media platforms, and other means.

6. Coordinating information prior to dissemination, to the extent possible and practical, with other responding local, state, tribal, and federal organizations.

7. Public information may need to be translated for LEP populations to include American Sign Language (ASL). Interpreters and translation services will be coordinated through the ECC utilizing available resources through Thurston County departments, TCOMM 911 (language line), local agencies and non-profits (i.e., community groups, faith communities, schools, etc.) providing such services. If local resources are not available, the ECC will request translation services from Washington State Emergency Management.

8. Local cities, towns and tribal governments within Thurston County are responsible for providing their residents with information on the emergency or disaster including the whole community and limited English proficient (LEP) populations.

B. Organization

1. Once the ECC has been activated, the ECC Manager will determine the need for additional warning and instructions. PIO staff will develop the messages and instructions for distribution to the public.

2. The ECC PIO will coordinate activities and information among the ECC, field PIOs, the Joint Information Center (JIC), and TCOMM.

3. In a large scale emergency or disaster, and/or when multiple jurisdictions are responding and the response and recovery effort may continue for an extended period, a Joint Information Center (JIC) or Joint Information System (JIS) may be established.

4. The ECC is responsible for establishing and maintaining a JIC. The JIC may be co-located with the ECC.

5. Public safety agencies and volunteer organizations will provide communications resources to the TCEM when requested and when resources allow.

6. TCOMM has primary responsibility for sending Emergency Alert System (EAS) messages.

C. Procedures

1. The level of ECC activation will determine the extent to which ESF 15 is engaged and will be determined by the ECC Manager.

2. The BOCC will provide a PIO to coordinate public information activities, as needed.

3. Communication and coordination with other local government, agencies and tribes will be coordinated using ECC procedures, WebEOC, Support Annex-D: Intergovernmental Coordination and any other means available.

4. Identified ESF 15 staff will participate in scheduled exercises and will train personnel needed for larger scale events.

5. The PIO may request the ECC to activate ESF 15 and additional resources through other agencies.

6. ECC may activate the JIC (or JIS) if multiple jurisdictions are activated and a need exists to coordinate public information.

7. During the response phase of the disaster event, ESF 15 personnel will coordinate the dissemination of disaster information. The PIO will provide public information news to the media via news releases, news conferences, media telephone inquiries, and other venues. The PIO's will share information directly to the public through traditional media and social media.

8. Press releases will be approved by the ECC Manager during activation or designated Emergency Management staff during non-activation. Approved press releases will be shared through TCEM's website and social media.

9. PIO and TCEM will coordinate dissemination of public information through the recovery period, providing information and instructions about county, state, and federal government emergency operations, plans for restoration, and instructions on how to apply for federal disaster assistance programs administered by the state and federal government.

10. Public information/alerts can also be sent out through Thurston County's alert and notification system which will send out by email, telephone and text messaging.

D. Prevention and Mitigation Activities

1. Refer to the Hazard Mitigation Plan for the Thurston Region.

2. Conduct hazard awareness public education.

3. Continue to enhance information dissemination during emergency situations.

E. Preparedness Activities

1. Conduct an all-hazards public education program.

2. Coordinate and prepare pre-scripted warning and public information messages for known hazards.

3. Prepare pre-scripted message templates including those for populations with Limited English Proficiency (LEP).

3. Maintain and update local media contacts (phone, email and fax).

4. Train public information staff on ECC procedures.

5. Train staff on TCEM's alert and notification system.

6. Provide training to local officials and emergency responders on working with the media.

7. Maintain and update a JIC/JIS Plan and identify suitable facilities for a JIC.

F. Response Activities

1. In coordination with the ECC Manager, develop and release public information on the situation. Utilize translation services identified in the JIC/JIS Plan as needed to provide messaging for LEP populations and those needing ASL translation.

2. Monitor media and social media. Manage and correct information, as needed.

3. Conduct news conferences and arrange interviews, as needed.

4. Ensure ESF-15 is staffed in coordination with the ECC Manager.

G. Recovery Activities

1. Conduct public education on the recovery process and programs.

2. Monitor media and social media. Manage and correct information, as needed.

3. Provide assistance to the ECC on the release of information to the public for debris management, distribution of supplies, etc.

4. Participate in after action briefings and develop after action reports for ESF-15.

5. Maintain records in accordance with ECC procedures.

V. RESPONSIBILITIES

A. Joint Primary Agencies

1. Board of County Commissioners

    a. Appoint a Public Information Officer (PIO), as well as a backup PIO.

2. Public Information Officer

    a. Represent and advise the ECC Manager on all public information matters relating to the management of the incident.

    b. Establish and coordinate emergency public information prior to, during and after an emergency/disaster.

    c. Prepare and distribute public information from county offices and departments through the ECC.

    d. Ensure the ECC Manager approves the release of all information.

    e. Coordinate the overall emergency public information efforts of Thurston County government.

    f. Maintain a media contact roster.

    g. Respond to media inquiries.

    h. Monitor news media coverage of the incident.

    i. Activates and operates the JIC/JIS as appropriate, including requesting additional PIO support.

3. Thurston County Emergency Management

    a. Coordinate with the PIO in the development of pre-scripted messages and press releases and social media messages.

    b. Identify concerns raised by the public, rumors, and other issues involving citizens so they may be addressed in public information activities.

c. Monitor social media and address concerns or rumors as necessary. Ensure PIO is informed on social media messaging.

d. Coordinate with local cities, state and federal agencies on the release of emergency information and instructions if applicable.

e. Provide facilities where media representatives can be briefed. Whenever possible, these facilities will provide telecommunications capabilities for the media use.

B. Support Agencies

1. Other Agency/Departments

   a. Make PIOs available to provide public information, editorial and graphics support, and subject matter expertise to ESF 15 operations upon request.

   b. Participate in after action, lessons learned activities and make revisions to improve response and recovery.

   c. Participate in training and exercise activities.

2. Media

   a. Disseminate warning messages and special news advisories provided by state and local government to the public as rapidly as possible.

   b. Participate in periodic tests of the EAS and other warning systems.

   c. Provide coverage of Emergency Management activities.

   d. Coordinate with the PIO and TCEM on public education programs.

   e. Coordinate information on emergency/disaster operations with the PIO or TCEM.

3. Thurston Area PIOs Emergency Network (TAPEN)

   a. Disseminate messages to partner agencies.

   b. Participate in training and exercise with TCEM.

   c. Provide PIO staff to work in the JIC.

4. Thurston 911 Communications (TCOMM 911)

   a. Public safety access point and dispatch center for Thurston County.

   b. Has primary responsibility for sending Emergency Alert System (EAS) messages.

5. Public Safety Agencies

   a. Disseminate messages to partner agencies.

   b. Participate in training and exercise with TCEM.

6. State/Federal Agencies

   a. WA State Emergency Management
   Coordinate assistance to local government in support of ESF 15.

VI. RESOURCE REQUIREMENTS

Thurston County Emergency Management will identify pre-designated facilities and equipment to support the ESF 15 function during disasters.

Once local resources are exhausted, resources may be requested through mutual aid or Washington State Emergency Management.

VII. REFERENCE AND SUPPORT PLANS

A. Department of Homeland Security, National Incident Management System

B. Washington State Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan

C. National Response Framework

VIII. TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

ASL – American Sign Language
BOCC – Board of County Commissioners
EAS – Emergency Alert System
ECC – Emergency Coordination Center
ESF – Emergency Support Function
HIVA – Hazard Identification and Vulnerability Analysis
JFO – Joint Field Office
JIC – Joint Information Center
JIS – Joint Information System
LEP – Limited Language Proficiency

NIMS – National Incident Management System
PIO – Public Information Officer
SEOC – State Emergency Operations Center
TAPEN – Thurston Area PIOs Emergency Network
TCEM – Thurston County Emergency Management
TCOMM – Thurston County Communications (911)
WAC – Washington Administrative Code

IX. **ATTACHMENTS**

None