

## **PUBLIC INFORMATION MANAGEMENT ANNEX**

Public Information consists of the generation of timely information and news releases in cooperation with local, state, federal governments before, during, and after emergency operations. It includes reports issued to the public through the news media, and 24-hour radio, telephone, and internet-based methods regarding prevention, preparedness, mitigation, response, and recovery in a joint effort to avoid or minimize loss of life and property if a disaster is anticipated or has occurred. Additionally, public information efforts should coordinate the printing of publications and flyers, as appropriate, for internal and external public information programs.

### **I. Purpose**

The purpose of this Annex is to provide guidance and procedures using existing communications personnel, facilities and news media outlets to inform the public of emergency preparedness, mitigation, response and recovery actions in the event of a natural, human-caused, or terrorist-related disasters. In addition, this annex will ensure the county

- provides guidance and procedures for coordinating emergency public information efforts in support of the county's response during disasters and emergencies
- assures citizens that appropriate local, state and federal governments are taking all necessary precautions and responsive measures to protect and preserve life and property
- advises citizens of restrictions and limitations imposed upon them during disaster situations
- provides for the effective collection, monitoring, management, and dissemination of accurate, useful, and timely public information to the media and for the public during disasters and emergencies
- provides long-term public education efforts related to hazard awareness, family protection planning, and emergency self-help

This Annex is not intended to define or supplant Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) for any particular agency but provide a framework for operations in the event of mutual aid between agencies. Special emphasis is placed on the use of mitigation, phased planning, and public education before an incident to increase the safety of the citizens of Larimer County.

### **II. Scope**

The provisions set forth in this Annex support the Larimer Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan and applies to all county departments, offices, staff and elected offices, as well as partner agencies assisting in public information management for Larimer County incidents.

Public Information Officers (PIOs) shall be capable of providing timely and effective information to protect public health and safety with procedures in place and tested to support a Joint Information System (JIS) and pre-designated Joint Information Center (JIC). Essential in this

process will be the establishment of protocols to interface with the media, elected officials, chief executives, legislative interests, and other VIPs. Concentration shall be upon providing timely and effective information to protect public health and safety. Finally, procedures shall include a process for obtaining and disseminating public information materials.

Regional services and assistance provided under this function shall include the delineation of responsibilities and actions to be taken in order to provide the general public with essential information and the documents of emergency actions and operations implemented or proposed by written, verbal, or photographic means. This information provided before, during, and after a disaster/emergency shall provide clear, concise, and accurate information on the existing situation in the disaster area, actions being taken by the authorities, and those to be taken by the populace. Every effort shall be made to minimize and counter rumors, hearsay, and half-truth information.

### **III. Primary and Supporting Agencies**

- Primary Agencies
  - a. Larimer County Public Relations Office
  - b. Larimer County Sheriff's Office
  - c. Larimer County Department of Health and Environment
  - d. Larimer County Natural Resources
- Supporting Agencies
  - a. Larimer Public Safety Answering Points
  - b. Larimer County Office of Emergency Management
  - c. Larimer Emergency Telephone Authority
  - d. Larimer Emergency Services Agencies
  - e. Assisting Agencies with PIO capacity and responsibility

### **IV. Authorities:**

- Larimer County Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan, as amended
- Larimer County Emergency Management Resolution establishing the Office of Emergency Management and its authorities
- Larimer County Code, Disaster Preparedness
- Colorado Revised Statutes Title 24, Article 33.5 Section 7, Colorado Disaster Emergency Act
- Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act, P.L. 93-288, as Amended

### **V. Assumptions**

- A public education and information program will help save lives and property during emergencies and disasters if the public knows how to prepare for them.
- Information is one of the first casualties of a disaster. Rumors abound and information is sketchy at best. It may be hours before officials know the facts. The lack of information or contradictory information will cause confusion.
- Information will be out to the public immediately through social media.

- In an emergency situation, the public will demand information about the emergency. The local print and broadcast media will perform an essential role in providing emergency instructions and status information to the public.
- Depending on the severity of the emergency or the media's conception of the severity of the emergency, regional and national media also will demand information, and may play a role in reassuring, or alarming, distant relatives of the disaster area population.
- Telephone communications may be disrupted or overloaded. Local and regional radio/television stations without emergency power may be off the air for lengthy periods of time.

## **VI. Situation**

- The public needs timely and accurate information for protection of life and property during response to, and recovery from a disaster or emergency situation.
- Local jurisdictions will provide immediate and vital information to the public regarding response and recovery activities.
- An emergency situation may occur with little or no warning. Therefore, the public must have advance understanding of the potential hazards affecting them and the protective actions to be taken. Pre-scripted messages may be utilized to pass initial information and instructions to the media and the general public.
- During an emergency situation, it is essential that the public be provided with timely, accurate and easily understood information on the protective measures to be taken to save lives and protect property. Emergency notification of community members through dispatch centers is covered under the Emergency Notification and Warning Annex to the Emergency Operations Plan and will therefore not be covered in this Annex.
- Centralized city, county and state coordination and dissemination of factual, official information is necessary to assure a well-informed public, to avoid or minimize the release of misinformation, and to deflate rumors.
- Should the Joint Information System (JIS) concept be activated, it may operate out of a Joint Information Center (JIC). All public information needs should be coordinated out of the JIC once established.
- Larimer Emergency Telephone Authority has a partnership with the National Weather Service, allowing all community members and media outlets to receive weather alerts directly.
- Larimer County has several daily newspapers which are distributed via print and internet throughout the county.

## **VII. Concept of Operations**

The primary and support agencies to this Annex will act as a team to address public information management considerations to ensure the flow of information to departments, agencies, media and the public. The following systems and procedures will be applicable to the response and recovery phase of any disaster or emergency situation.

### Incident Command System

In the beginning stages of an emergency or disaster situation, public information activities will be directed and coordinated by the agency having jurisdiction over the event. The on-scene public information personnel will coordinate and verify all facts before releasing any information.

### Emergency Operations Center

Once the EOC is activated, in the absence of a Joint Information Center, Incident Command will provide public information to the EOC for release to partners. The EOC will continue to work with Incident Command to release information they have approved, as well as countywide impacts outside the Incident Command's jurisdiction. Maximum use will be made of wire services, broadcast networks, departmental Public Information Officers, state, federal and local emergency management information personnel and photographers. Public information activities will continue to be directed and coordinated by the agency having jurisdiction over the incident.

### Joint Information System

To reduce inaccuracies and misinformation, Larimer County will use a joint information system (JIS) to coordinate information with participating local, state, and federal agencies. Once the JIC is established, all release of information to the public will be made via the JIC. This will include Incident Command, EOC, and all other support agencies. In the event the EOC receives information directly, it will be forwarded to the JIC via the EOC PIO Liaison.

### Joint Information Center

The Agency Having Jurisdiction (AHJ) of the emergency or disaster may elect to conduct public information functions in a single physical location to form an emergency Joint Information Center (JIC). The primary site for the JIC has been designated as the LCSO Administrative Office Building at 2501 Midpoint Drive, Fort Collins CO 80526. The back-up site will be at the Larimer County Office of Emergency Management at 4872 Endeavor Drive, Johnstown, CO 80534. Tests of the JIC will be performed during exercises which will enable habitual relationships in instances of actual disasters/incidents.

The JIC may include local, state, federal and private sector agencies. Once operational, local, state, federal and other agencies should coordinate news releases concerning emergency response and recovery activities through the JIC. Although emergency public information activities may take place at the EOC, a disaster field location, another Larimer County jurisdiction, or other locations as appropriate, information will be released only from the JIC once activated. Upon activation of the Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan (CEMP) and EOC, the lead PIO and the EOC Manager may decide to activate one or more of the following functions that make up a JIC.

#### 1. Public Call Center

- provides response, recovery, and mitigation information to people affected by the disaster via telephone "hotlines"

- responds to questions using official, verified, and releasable information
- refers calls as appropriate to various local, state, federal, volunteer, and private sector agencies
- maintains current and updated information records
- maintains a record of questions, responses, and actions
- monitors radio and television stations and informs the PIO Coordination Team of inaccuracies
- identifies rumors and misinformation and brings to attention of PIO Coordination Team

2. Public Information Officer Coordination Teams

- consist of representatives from the Larimer County, the Sheriff's Office, and specific local, state, federal, and private sector agencies
- are responsible for gathering, verifying, and producing information for dissemination to the media and public such as news releases, background information, fact sheets, public service announcements, briefings, and news conference materials
- respond to questions and requests from the media
- release information to media and public via news release, briefings, news conferences, interviews, public service announcements, etc.
- arrange for media interviews, tours, and special requests
- staff the media center as appropriate

Participating agencies should assign one lead representative to coordinate information from their agency with other team members before it is released to the public.

3. Media Center – The JIC will establish a central location for media briefings, conferences, and information distribution. Information should be coordinated through the PIO Coordination Team and with appropriate agencies and approved by the Lead PIO before it is released to the media. Media Center staff should make written records of pertinent information released at briefings and conferences. Staff should remain at the media center, as necessary, while the EOC is operational.

**VIII. Direction and Control**

Larimer County's public information program should:

- Provide support during the four phases of emergency management: mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery operations.
- Provide the public with accurate, timely, and easily understood event-related information concerning protective actions, route restrictions, health notices, and emergency assistance information.
- Control rumors.

- Coordinate information releases with all participating public and private agencies, emergency responders, and all levels of government to support public officials and media representatives in satisfying the public's demand for accurate and consistent information.
- Limit public information activities to County-specific events and actions. Municipal, state and federal governments are responsible for information related to their jurisdiction.
- The County's Incident Command System (ICS), Emergency Operations Center (EOC), and Joint Information Center (JIC) should support public information.
- Continuously evaluate and update methods to effectively communicate with communities whose primary language is not English.

### Requests for Information

All news releases concerning issues regarding emergencies or disasters will be coordinated by the lead PIO. Inquiries for information about the response to an emergency or disaster and the activation of the EOC shall be referred to the lead PIO for response.

- Incidents where the Sheriff's Office is the lead will be referred to the Sheriff's Office lead PIO.
- Incidents where the Department of Health and Environment is the lead will be referred to the Health PIO.
- Incidents where the County is supporting an incident within a municipality or special district will be referred to the lead jurisdiction's PIO.
- All other incidents will be referred to the County Public Affairs Manager or EOC lead PIO as needed.

## **IX. Roles and Responsibilities**

### **a. Larimer County**

#### Larimer County Office of Emergency Management

- Provide general oversight of the county's emergency management programs, including maintenance of the Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan
- Advise the Policy Group concerning emergency management needs before, during and after an emergency
- Maintain the EOC, which helps facilitate coordination among municipal and county partners and outside agencies
- Coordinate with the LCSO Dispatch Center, LCSO Emergency Operations Manager, and other PIOs to ensure situational awareness and coordinated messaging
- Coordinate with PIOs to include Spanish messaging as part of coordinated messaging procedures.

#### Board of County Commissioners

- Ensure availability to make critical decisions following a large-scale emergency or disaster.
- In consultation with the County Manager, execute the major emergency or disaster declaration as appropriate.

#### County Public Affairs Manager

- Coordinate with the LCSO Dispatch Center, LCSO Emergency Operations Manager, and other PIOs to ensure situational awareness and coordinated messaging
- Provide support to the JIC and EOC as appropriate and requested

#### Larimer County Sheriff

- Ensure availability to make critical decisions following a large-scale emergency or disaster.
- Provide the necessary space and personnel support to activate the Joint Information Center at the LCSO
- Coordinate with the LCSO Dispatch Center, LCSO Emergency Operations Manager, and the LCSO PIO to ensure situational awareness and coordinated messaging

#### LCSO Public Information Officer

- Coordinate with the LCSO Dispatch Center, LCSO Emergency Operations Manager, and other PIOs to ensure situational awareness and coordinated messaging
- Work in coordination with the LCSO Emergency Operations Manager to provide public information and updates regarding significant events in Larimer County

#### Department of Health PIO

- Coordinate with the Dispatch Center, LCSO Emergency Operations Manager, and other PIOs to ensure situational awareness and coordinated messaging
- Work in coordination with the Health Department to provide public information and updates regarding significant events in Larimer County

### **b. Public Information Officers**

- Mitigation Phase
  - Stay current and familiar with the latest techniques for emergency management information
  - Meet regularly with members of the media to foster a close working relationship
  - Conduct public education and media programs as needed
- Preparedness Phase
  - Maintain close liaison with local, state, and federal PIO's as well as the media to enhance public preparedness and awareness prior to an emergency, and to facilitate dissemination of actual incident information
  - Participate in emergency drills and exercises to test plans for effective and consistent information release
  - Attend PIO conferences and training sessions
  - Compile and prepare emergency information for the public in case of an emergency
  - Coordinate public education/awareness campaigns with the Office of Emergency Management

- Response Phase
  - Report to the EOC, upon activation
  - Contact the public and the media and inform them about the emergency
  - Serve as an official spokesperson and source for dissemination of official emergency related materials to the public
  - Regularly update websites with the latest information
  - Coordinate all public announcements with the Incident Commander and/or on-scene PIO
  - Issue news media releases from the EOC, or, if activated, establish and coordinate all actions at the Joint Information Center (JIC)
  - Provide for briefings with the participation of Policy Group personnel and other involved officials
  - Verify the authenticity of incoming information
  - Verify that duplicate or contradictory releases are not being made.
  - Take action to maintain control of rumors
  - After an emergency is terminated, continue to provide information to the media concerning recovery operations
  - Maintain current files and accurate records of all information released to the public and media which should include, but not be limited to:
    - Name, agency, and phone number of the release initiator.
    - Text, tape, or video of the news release.
    - Substantiating information for the release.
    - Date and time information received.
    - Date and time information released.
    - How and to whom the news release was issued.
  - These or similar responsibilities should apply to any PIO working on a Larimer County incident
  
- Recovery Phase
  - Continue to brief the media about continuing developments
  - Critique the public information response to the emergency with the media, OEM and agency heads
  - Incorporate appropriate recommendations to revise the plan
  - Release available statistics on disaster damage, injuries and fatalities
  - Inform the public on available assistance – and the location of shelters and disaster assistance centers
  - Provide the media information on the progress of recovery efforts
  - Rumor Control
    - Rumor Control is vital during emergency operations.
    - Sensitive or critical information must be authorized and verified before release. Unconfirmed rumors or information from unauthorized sources



may be responded to in the following manner: “We will not confirm until we have been able to check out the information through authorized sources. Once we have confirmed information, we will release it to all members of the media at the same time.”

- Do not release information that might hinder emergency response, prejudice the outcome of an investigation, or pose a further threat to public safety. Examples include:
  - Personal conjecture about the course of the emergency or the conduct of response
  - Speculation
  - Demeaning information/statements
  - Information that might compromise the effectiveness of response and recovery
- Confidential Information is not to be released. This includes:
  - The names of victims or fatalities prior to notification of next-of-kin. (Identification and cause of death shall not be released without authorization from the Coroner).
  - Home phone numbers of city/county personnel and volunteer emergency workers, fire station numbers, and unpublished city/county numbers without their consent.
- Media Access to the Scene
  - Every effort should be made to allow the media access to the disaster area, consistent with safety.
  - The Incident Commander may allow media representatives restricted access to the scene, accompanied by a member of the Public Information staff. This should be done with regard to the safety of media personnel, the impact on response, and the wishes and concerns of the victims.
  - The Public Information Officer should not allow media into the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) except under limited, controlled circumstances, and only with prior approval of the EOC Manager. Before being admitted to the EOC, media representatives shall display appropriate identification and shall be escorted by a member of the Public Information staff.
  - If it is not safe or practical to admit all media representatives to the scene, a media “pool” may be created, where media representatives select one camera crew to take video footage for all. If even such controlled access is impractical, a “staged” photo opportunity to tape response vehicles or support activities may satisfy the media's need for video footage.
  - Response personnel must be protected from unwanted media intrusion. Off-shift personnel should be provided uninterrupted rest. It may be necessary to provide security to facilities where response personnel are housed and disconnect the telephones to ensure privacy.

- Victims and families should have access to public officials without having to face media. Try to provide a secure entrance to city/county administrative offices, or arrange a briefing/interview room away from the media.
- Response personnel should not comment on the incident without knowledge and consent of the Public Information Officer or IC.
- Each PIO is responsible for the acquisition of appropriate equipment and supplies to support the public information and education program, and to ensure rapid activation of the JIC if necessary

#### **X. Resource Requirements**

Resources needed to support the effective operations under this Annex are addressed in Standard Operating Procedures developed and maintained by each Primary and Support Agency.

#### **XI. Annex Development and Maintenance**

The Larimer Office of Emergency Management is responsible for developing and maintaining this annex. This annex will be reviewed annually and updated as needed to remain current.

#### **XII. References:**

- Larimer Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan, as amended
- Larimer County Information Center Standard Operating Guidelines
- Larimer Emergency Telephone Authority, [www.leta911.org](http://www.leta911.org)