

PLEASANTS COUNTY EMERGENCY OPERATIONS PLAN
ANNEX D: PUBLIC INFORMATION

<i>Related Federal ESFs</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ESF #5: Emergency Management • ESF #15: External Affairs • Public Affairs Support Annex
<i>Related State Annexes</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annex M: Public Information
<i>Purpose</i>	<p>The purpose of this annex is to describe the county's public information system and local capabilities to be employed in the event of an emergency or disaster. This annex also describes the procedures necessary for activating the county's Joint Information Center (JIC) at the EOC/911 Center in St. Marys (or at a remote location) if necessary.</p>
<i>Primary Agencies</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pleasants County Public Information Officer (PIO) • Various Agencies PIO's
<i>Support Agencies</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pleasants County Office of Emergency Services (PCOES) • WV Emergency Management Division (WVEMD) • US Department of Homeland Security (USDHS)
<i>Authorities</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WV Code, Chapter 15, Article 5
<i>References</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>West Virginia Emergency Operations Plan</i>, WVEMD, as amended. • <i>National Response Framework</i>, USDHS, as amended.

I. SITUATION AND ASSUMPTIONS

A. Situation

1. Pleasants County is vulnerable to a wide variety of hazards.
2. Media outlets exist which can be used to inform the population of events that are occurring and how they may best respond to them.
3. There are two (2) weekly newspapers, 11 radio stations, three (3) television stations, and Suddenlink Cable in or near Pleasants County that may provide instructions during emergencies.
4. Additional media outlets outside of Pleasants County may also be utilized to provide emergency instructions.
5. Several agencies periodically distribute a variety of emergency public information materials to prepare citizens to protect themselves during emergencies.

B. Assumptions

1. During periods of emergency, the public needs complete information regarding protective actions to be taken for minimizing loss of life and property.
2. The public will respond positively to orders and requests from public officials.
3. There are times when an emergency strikes without warning and the normal public information system cannot react rapidly enough to properly inform the public about the hazard.
4. Local print and broadcast media will cooperate in broadcasting and publishing detailed emergency/disaster-related instructions to the public.
5. Some members of the media that are anxious to obtain information may create problems on-scene or release inaccurate reports.
6. There may be a need to coordinate public information with neighboring jurisdictions during large emergency/disaster incidents.
7. As members of the community, local emergency responders know the location of special needs individuals within their community.

II. CONCEPT OF OPERATIONS

A. General

1. The intent is to provide consistent, accurate, and timely information to the

public. All emergency services personnel should work together to release concise, beneficial information and eliminate contradicting public information releases. To accomplish this, Pleasants County may employ a Joint Information System (JIS) to ensure that all parties in response to an incident with a specialized area of expertise can be involved in the dissemination of information.

2. Public information should originate as follows.
 - a. If the County Public Information Officer (PIO) has been activated at either the county Emergency Operations Center (EOC) or Joint Information Center (JIC), all public information should originate from that individual at that location.
 - i. The County PIO should coordinate with the involved agencies PIOs to assist with public information releases.
 - ii. The network of the County PIO and these PIOs can be referred to as a Joint Information System (JIS). The JIC may be established at different locations depending upon the incident.
 - b. If the JIC has not been activated, information may be released from the EOC.
 - c. If the EOC has not been activated, the on-scene Incident Commander (IC) may release public information from the command post. The IC should make the PCOES Director aware of any information that is released from the command post.
3. Potential Problems
 - a. There are times, during quick onset emergencies, when the normal venues for disseminating public information cannot react quickly enough.
 - b. Rumors may be started and spread regarding the emergency incident. The public information system should be flexible enough to identify rumors and quickly (and definitively) issue corrective messages.
4. Periodic media briefings may be scheduled. The briefings should, if possible, be held from a single, easily accessible location. Uncontrolled media access to the scene should be strongly discouraged.
5. Coordination between governmental entities within Pleasants County and with neighboring jurisdictions is through the county EOC (or between neighboring EOCs).

6. Coordination between the local level and the state should be between the county EOC and the State EOC (SEOC). Pleasants County officials in the EOC may also be put into contact with officials from other counties through the SEOC.
- B. Joint Information Center Concepts and Operations
1. The Pleasants County JIC serves as the county's primary source for public information.
 2. The PCOES Director and Pleasants County PIO should decide when the JIC should be activated.
 3. The county PIO serves as the manager of the activated JIC.
 4. The JIC coordinates extensively with the Executive Section of the EOC.
 5. Normally, the JIC would not be activated if the EOC is not activated.
 6. The PCOES Director and County PIO may choose to coordinate the public information function from the EOC and *not* activate the JIC. Such a decision is acceptable; however, the public information tasks and regular EOC operations should not hinder each other. If confusion arises, the JIC should be activated.
 7. The physical JIC can be at an off-site location.
- C. Public Information for Special Needs Populations
1. Visually Impaired: Emergency Alert System (EAS) messages and news releases via radio, NOAA weather radio, and door-to-door notification.
 2. Hearing Impaired: EAS messages and news releases via television, print media, and door-to-door notification.
 3. Group Populations (e.g., nursing homes, school facilities, etc.): EAS messages and news releases via radio, television, and print media; NOAA weather radio, and through liaison with the head of that agency/facility.
 4. Direct contact from lists such as Senior Citizens.
- D. State and Federal Capabilities
1. As incidents expand and, naturally, public information needs increase, state and federal resources should be integrated into the overall JIS.
 2. State

- a. State assets respond under the appropriate sections of the *West Virginia Emergency Operations Plan*.
 - b. Normally, state agencies release public information regarding either a state response or regarding state assets that have been affected by the incident.
 - c. As in other annexes throughout the plan, state assistance with the public information function is requested through the local EOC.
3. Federal
- a. Emergency Support Function (ESF) #15 of the *National Response Framework* (NRF) ensures that sufficient federal assets are deployed during incidents requiring a coordinated federal response to provide accurate, coordinated, timely, and accessible information to affected audiences, including governments, media, the private sector, and the local populace.
 - b. External affairs resources are coordinated from the National Response Coordination Center (NRCC).
 - c. Local assets generally reach federal assets through state authorities. In most cases, federal assets may issue public information regarding federal response activities or other federal involvement in the incident. Local assets should continue to release information regarding the local situation.

III. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

- A. Pleasants County Public Information Officer
 1. Continually develop and disseminate public information during emergency incidents.
 2. Work with agency PIOs during an incident to develop releases.
 3. Develop and maintain working relationships with local and regional media.
 4. Provide information releases to the media.
 5. During an incident, review all media reports for accuracy.
 6. Supervise *public information responsibilities* within the EOC and/or JIC.
 7. Monitor for rumors and issue corrective messages should they be discovered.
 8. Designate personnel to handle public inquiries and supply them with updated information.

9. Arrange for appropriate local officials to speak with the media.
10. Disseminate public information materials for special needs populations.

B. Pleasants County Office of Emergency Services

1. Assist the county PIO in the supervision of the public information function.
2. Ensure the approval of all public information released during incident operations (by serving as liaison with commissioners).
3. Appoint, in coordination with the county commission, the Pleasants County PIO.

C. WV Emergency Management Division

1. Receives local requests for assistance within the public information function.
2. Coordinates state resources serving in a public information capacity.
3. Participates, as necessary, in the overall JIS.

D. US Department of Homeland Security

1. Coordinates ESF #15 activities.
2. Participates, as necessary, in the overall JIS.
3. Manages public information regarding federal assets in response to an incident.

IV. DIRECTION AND CONTROL

A. Whenever it is deemed necessary by the County Commissioners (with input from the PCOES Director), the County PIO should be activated.

1. The County PIO should be available to advise local officials and EOC personnel on communications with the media and public.
2. The County PIO may coordinate with on-scene personnel, local government representatives, and other experts to ensure that messages are accurate and that agencies participating in a JIS are included.
3. The County PIO has no authority over state and federal resources as well as public information representatives supplied by participating agencies. The county PIO simply serves as a coordinator and liaison to those individuals. The County PIO releases information as accurately as possible with the data

that is available. Any agency involved in the response has the right to choose not to participate in the JIS.

- B. The on-scene IC may request activation of the County PIO by contacting the PCOES Director, who should coordinate it with the County Commission.
- C. If the IC activates the command staff PIO position or disseminates any public information from the scene (when the EOC is not activated), he/she should coordinate with the PCOES Director. The PCOES Director should coordinate with pertinent other local officials to ensure appropriate monitoring of public information.
- D. Upon EOC activation, the command post relinquishes all public information responsibilities.

V. CONTINUITY OF GOVERNMENT

- A. Backups to the County PIO are appointed by the PCOES Director and County Commission on an as-needed basis.
- B. It is possible that an individual serving in the EOC may be tasked with public information responsibilities in the absence of the County PIO or a backup. This individual should then operate in accordance with this annex and under the supervision of the PCOES Director and Executive Section.

VI. ADMINISTRATION AND LOGISTICS

- A. Administration
 - 1. All press releases should be reviewed and approved by the IC when the EOC is not activated *before* they are released and subsequently coordinated with appropriate local officials.
 - 2. All press releases should be reviewed and approved by the Executive Section when the EOC or JIC is activated, again *before* they are released.
 - 3. Copies of all press releases should be maintained by the county PIO or IC.
 - 4. Public information representatives from state, federal, and private sector organizations may be asked to coordinate information for release to the

public (as part of the overall JIS). Such information includes (but is not limited to) health risks related to the hazard; type and availability of assistance; and geographic, geological, meteorological, and demographic information related to population protection.

B. Logistics

1. The county EOC contains the appropriate equipment necessary for managing the public information function.
2. If the JIC is activated and moved to an off-site location, the county PIO should ensure that the equipment necessary for operations (e.g., telephones, fax machines, computer terminals, media briefing space, tables/chairs, etc.) is available.

VII. PLAN DEVELOPMENT AND MAINTENANCE

- A. The PCOES Director is responsible for reviewing and updating this annex on a periodic basis. The director may solicit the current county PIO, and/or the local media when conducting this review.

- B. The PCOES Director should forward changes to the appropriate agencies.