

## **EMERGENCY SUPPORT FUNCTION (ESF) 15 EXTERNAL AFFAIRS**

Primary Agency: Chatham County Public Information Office  
Support Agencies: Chatham County Board Of Education  
Chatham County Building Safety & Regulatory Services  
Chatham County Health Department  
Chatham Emergency Management Agency  
Georgia Emergency Management Agency  
Municipal Public Information Officers

**Supporting information, documentation, activation instructions and checklists are contained in the Introduction to Emergency Support Functions Annex.**

### **I. Introduction**

#### **A. Purpose:**

1. Ensures that sufficient County assets are deployed to the field during a potential or actual Incident of Critical Significance to provide accurate, coordinated, and timely information to affected audiences, including governments, media, the private sector, and the populace.
2. The EOP institutes an integrated concept, termed “incident communications,” as the approach used to manage communications with the public during Incidents of Critical Significance. Incident communications incorporates the following processes:
  - a. Control: Identification of incident communications coordinating, primary and supporting departments and agency roles, and authorities for release of information.
  - b. Coordination: Specification of interdepartmental coordination and plans, notification, activation, and supporting protocols.
  - c. Communications: Development of message content such as incident facts, health risk concerns, pre-incident and post-incident preparedness recommendations, warning issues, incident information, messages, audiences, and strategies for when, where, how, and by whom the messages will be delivered.
    - (1) General guidance on the authority to release information is in accordance with existing plans, operational security, law enforcement protocols, designated coordinating and primary agency

assignments, and current procedures. Nothing in this annex limits the authority of authorities from releasing information regarding an incident under their jurisdiction, particularly if it involves immediate health and safety issues. Authorities retain the primary responsibility for communicating health and safety instructions for their citizens.

- (2) Integration and teamwork among County and municipal authorities is essential. Authorities are encouraged to contact CEMA Public Affairs as they release initial or follow-on information. CEMA engages with authorities as soon as possible during an actual or potential incident to synchronize overall incident communications to the public.

B. Scope: The emergency operations necessary for the performance of this function include, but are not limited to:

1. Preparedness

- a. Develop a public information program to educate the public regarding the effects of common, emergency, and disaster situations.
- b. Develop plans to coordinate with international, national, state and local news media for emergency operations, before, during and after emergency situations.
- c. Develop plans to conduct a multi-agency/jurisdiction coordinated public information program during emergencies and disasters; this includes the establishment of a Joint Information Center (JIC).
- d. Develop plans and programs to educate news media that ESF #15 is the primary information center during emergency situations.
- e. Develop procedures to organize and operate a media briefing area and/or a JIC.
- f. Develop and maintain pre-scripted EAS messages, news releases, and public service announcements, for all hazards to include hurricane and coastal storm, rainwater flooding, storm surge and tornado.
- g. Encourage development of disaster plans and kits for the public.
- h. Provide evacuation information to the affected public
- i. Participate in exercises and training to validate this annex and supporting SOPs.
- j. Update public information responder listing, as necessary.
- k. Develop and implement training programs for all ESF members.

- I. Develop and maintain a roster with contact information of all ESF personnel.
      - m. Ensure all ESF #15 personnel integrate NIMS principles in all planning. As a minimum, primary action officers for all ESF #15 agencies will complete ICS 200, 300, and 700 courses.
- 2. Response
  - a. Alert agencies whose personnel, equipment, or other resources may be used.
  - b. Provide timely and accurate EAS messages and news releases in common language and terminology to inform the public.
  - c. Provide emergency public information to special needs populations.
  - d. Coordinate with news media regarding emergency operations.
  - e. Provide mass notification to urban and rural populations and provide periodic media updates.
  - f. Execute a multi-agency/jurisdiction coordinated public information program.
  - g. Organize and operate a press briefing area and a JIC, as appropriate.
  - h. Supplement local emergency management public information operations, as necessary, and when resources are available.
- 3. Recovery
  - a. Continue public information activities to include updating the public on recovery efforts.
  - b. Anticipate and plan for arrival of, and coordination with, GEMA, ESF #15 personnel in the EOC, and the Joint Field Office (JFO).
  - c. Process and disseminate disaster welfare and family reunification information.
- 4. Mitigation
  - a. Support and plan for mitigation measures.
  - b. Support requests and directives resulting from the Governor and/or GEMA concerning mitigation and/or re-development activities.
  - c. Document matters that may be needed for inclusion in agency or state/federal briefings, situation reports and action plans.

## **II. Concept of Operations**

- A. County planning for external affairs functions recognizes responsibilities for providing information to their citizens. Nothing in this document should

be construed as diminishing or usurping those responsibilities. In the unlikely event that governments are unable to perform these responsibilities, the County Government may provide vital health and safety information to the affected population.

- B. ESF #15 identifies the procedures to resource the external affairs processes as described in this Plan. External affairs resources are coordinated by the ESF #15 representatives in the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) as directed by the County Public Affairs Officer. ESF #15 provides the County resource and implementation mechanisms to ensure delivery of the messages developed in coordination with the interagency core group (described in the Public Affairs Support Annex). The staff of CEMA coordinates messages with public affairs representatives from all involved departments and agencies. See the Public Affairs Support Annex for more detail.
- C. Response: During an Incident of Critical Significance, ESF #15 activities are implemented in coordination with the CEMA. The ESF #15 coordinator alerts additional supporting departments and agencies to provide representatives to the appropriate ESF #15 location, or to provide representatives who are immediately available via telecommunications (e.g., telephone, fax, conference calls) to provide support. External affairs components collocate with the NIMS Command Staff in accordance with the provisions of this Plan. ESF #15 components provide appropriate representatives available to deploy rapidly to the incident location.

### **III. Responsibilities**

- A. Chatham Public Information: In coordination with CEMA, the Chatham County Public Information Department has overall responsibility for coordination of this ESF and all information released to the media.
- B. Emergency Alert System (EAS): The EAS is a tool for authorities to quickly send important emergency information to a specific area. The EAS is designed to deliver EAS messages and to account for the needs of such special populations as the deaf and those with differing language requirements. (CEMA is the County executive agent for the EAS).
- C. General
  - 1. During an incident, County and municipal authorities share responsibility for communicating information regarding the incident to the public. These actions are a critical component of incident management and must be fully integrated with all other operational actions to ensure the following objectives are met:

2. Delivery of incident preparedness, health, response, and recovery instructions to those directly affected by the incident; and
  3. Dissemination of incident information to the public.
  4. The EOC structure provides a supporting mechanism to develop, coordinate, and deliver messages; it supports the Incident Commander or Unified Command and the associated elements of the ICS.
  5. County/municipal core groups develop, coordinate, and deliver information and instructions to the public related to:
    6. Assistance to the incident-affected area;
    7. Departmental/agency response;
    8. County/municipal preparations;
    9. Protective measures;
    10. Impact on non affected areas; and
    11. Law enforcement activities.
- E. Assignments to this core group are determined by the CEMA Office of Public Affairs (OPA) in accordance with jurisdictional and statutory responsibilities, operational tasks, areas of expertise and responsibility, and the nature and location of the incident.
- F. The CEMA OPA has primary responsibility for coordinating the County incident communications effort by:
1. Identifying the participants in the core group, and arranging conference calls and other activities necessary for coordination;
  2. Providing a leadership role during domestic incidents when significant interagency coordination is required; and
  3. Coordinating with municipal. Public and private organizations and agencies on matters related to dissemination of incident-related information to the public.
- G. Communications Team: County and municipal public affairs staffs operate as a team to ensure successful incident communications with the public. From initial notifications to final recovery actions, this team must operate and speak with a unified voice and consistent message that is coordinated not only with the different authorities involved in an incident, but also with affected jurisdictions. The organizational approach for public affairs and incident communications with the public relies on the organizations.
- H. Core Group of Agencies: At the County level, incident messages are developed, coordinated, and delivered by an interagency core group of the key departments and agencies involved in the incident.
- I. Emergency Operations Center: The EOC is the central point for coordination of incident information, public affairs activities, and media

access to information regarding the latest developments. In the event of a potential or actual Incident of Critical Significance, the EOC is activated to coordinate County, municipal, and private-sector incident communications with the public. Major announcements, daily briefings, and incident updates from the EOC are coordinated through County Public Affairs, affected leadership, and the interagency core group prior to release. This must be closely assessed and agreed upon in the early stages of an incident by all involved in incident communications with the public. This EOC is the physical location from which public affairs professionals from organizations involved in the response work together to provide critical emergency information, media response, and public affairs functions. The EOC serves as a focal point for the coordination and dissemination of information to the public and media concerning incident prevention, preparedness, response, recovery, and mitigation.