

# **CHATHAM COUNTY EMERGENCY OPERATIONS PLAN**

## **APPENDIX 15-1**

### **EXTERNAL AFFAIRS COORDINATION**

OCTOBER 2009

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## **ACRONYMS**

AD	Assistant Director
CCPIOA	Chatham County Public Information Officers Association
CEMA	Chatham Emergency Management Agency
DO	Duty Officer
DPIO	Deputy Public Information Officer
EAC	External Affairs Coordination (Appendix)
EAS	Emergency Alert System
EMAP	Emergency Management Accreditation Program
EOC	Emergency Operations Center
EOP	Emergency Operations Plan
ESF	Emergency Support Functions
FCC	Federal Communications Commission
GEMA	Georgia Emergency Management Agency
ICP	Incident Command Post
JIC	Joint Information Center
LPIO	Lead Public Information Officer
NIMS	National Incident Management System
NRF	National Response Framework
NWS	National Weather Service
PIO	Public Information Officer
PSA	Public Service Announcement
SCMPD	Savannah Chatham Metropolitan Police Department
SCPSS	Savannah Chatham Public School System
WEBEOC	Crisis Incident Management Software

## **DEFINITIONS**

**CEMA Signal:** An email group dedicated to the distribution of general, non-emergency information that may be of interest to the public.

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## **I. Introduction**

- A. The protection of Chatham County residents threatened by an Incident of Critical Significance is a primary objective of the Chatham County Emergency Operations Plan (EOP). As a part of the EOP, this External Affairs Coordination (EAC) Appendix has been designed to establish uniform policies for the effective development, coordination, and dissemination of information to the public in case of natural or technological emergency or disaster.
- B. Chatham County and the municipalities within the County have continuing public information programs that use various channels of communication, including mass media, to provide necessary information about local government activities and services to the general public.
- C. In an effort to improve public safety and to minimize the loss of life and property during periods of emergency, the public needs detailed information regarding protective actions.
- D. There are times, however, when disaster strikes without warning and the public information system cannot react rapidly enough to properly inform the public about the hazard. For this reason, it is important that prior to the emergency/disaster the public be made aware of potential hazards and of appropriate protective measures.
- E. In a major emergency or disaster, there may be large numbers of media representatives seeking information about the situation and about response actions. It is the policy of Chatham County to cooperate fully with the media in all phases of emergency management. Chatham County officials have developed these procedures in cooperation with local media to disseminate emergency information to the public. However, a large-scale emergency or disaster will attract regional and national media representatives who will be unaware of local media arrangements.
- F. The Chatham Emergency Management Agency (CEMA) has been tasked with ensuring that all media partners, both locally and nationally, are provided the most accurate and timely information during events of critical significance. With this in mind, CEMA created an External Affairs position within their organizational structure to ensure the development and implementation of this EAC Appendix. In collaboration with the Chatham County Public Information Coordinator and the CEMA Public Information Officer (PIO), the Chatham County EAC Appendix has been developed and will be followed for incidents of critical importance. As outlined in the EAC Appendix, in any incident of critical significance in which the Chairman of the Chatham County Commission declares, a "State of Emergency," the Chatham County Public Information Coordinator will assume the role of Chatham County Lead Public Information Officer (LPIO) and the CEMA PIO will assume the role of Deputy Public

Information Officer (DPIO). Both will be charged with the timely and accurate distribution of public information to the media. If the incident is likely to continue for consecutive days/weeks, both the LPIO and DPIO will be responsible for creating 12 hour shift schedules for their positions and any subordinate positions needed.

- G. To ensure rapid response of PIO support, the Chatham County Public Information Officers Association (CCPIOA) was developed to garner support from local PIOs to respond to Incidents of Critical Significance. The CCPIOA is a County interagency contact group incorporating public affairs representatives from County departments and independent agencies to increase awareness, teamwork, and interoperability among County incident communications staff. The CCPIOA is not charged to conduct formal policy review, but may assess interagency issues dealing with the EAC Appendix.
- H. In the event of an activation of the Chatham County Emergency Operations Center (EOC), all public information response personnel will immediately respond to the primary EOC (unless otherwise stated) which is located in the basement of the Old County Courthouse – Chatham County Administrative Legislative Center - located at 124 Bull Street, Savannah, GA 31401. The secondary EOC, which is to be used during hurricanes and special events (such as Saint Patrick’s Day), is located at the County Annex, 295 Police Memorial Road (off of Chatham Parkway), Savannah, GA 31405.

## **II. Purpose**

- A. This Appendix establishes policies and procedures and assigns responsibilities relating to the dissemination of public information to ensure that accurate and timely information is provided to Chatham County residents regarding potential and actual emergency incidents and major emergencies/disasters.
- B. This Appendix has been prepared to be consistent with the Georgia Emergency Management Agency’s (GEMA) EOP and the National Response Framework (NRF) for emergencies and disasters.
- C. The intent of this document is to provide a program using existing communications facilities and news media outlets to inform the public of emergency preparedness measures in the event of a natural, man-made, or terrorist-related disaster.
- D. A significant public information response will involve many Chatham County departments, municipalities, nonprofit and business organizations, and possibly State and Federal Agencies; this EAC Appendix will describe how these agencies coordinate to deliver timely and accurate messages regarding potential or actual Incidents of Critical Significance to the residents of Chatham County.

### **III. Scope**

- A. This Appendix establishes public information policies and procedures for natural, technological, and man-made emergencies or disasters that occur within or affect the residents of Chatham County.
- B. The EAC Appendix describes the mutual support PIO relationships of the county and its municipalities, the activities of the PIO Emergency Support Functions (ESF) and the organization and functions of the Joint Information Center (JIC.)

### **IV. Authorities**

- A. There are more than 50 Agencies represented in the CCPIOA. Each of these PIOs represents a government affiliated agency that may be called upon to assist with the response and recovery operations of a major incident. For the purpose of this document all PIOs in Chatham County including PIOs from municipalities and the private sector will be addressed as Chatham County PIOs.
- B. During routine operations, each PIO represents their respective agency. However, if an emergency occurs and the LPIO for a specific agency requests assistance, they may call upon the CCPIOA for additional external affairs support.
- C. CEMA is the lead response agency for all natural disasters that affect Chatham County including but not limited to Tropical Storms / Hurricanes, Fresh Water Flooding, Tornadoes, Storm Surge. Respectively, the CEMA PIO will assume the responsibility of LPIO during any natural disasters that affect Chatham County. In the event that the Chatham County EOC is activated, the Chatham County Public Information Coordinator will assume the role of LPIO and the CEMA PIO will assume the role of DPIO.
- D. In the event that a man-made or technological disaster affects Chatham County, the CEMA PIO will assist the LPIO for the incident with any support that is required.
- E. For clarification purposes, each hazard that affects Chatham County is outlined below. Located next to the hazard is the specific Agency and respective PIO who will assume responsibility for the distribution of public information during that specific hazard. In the event that an emergency (such as a bomb explosion) encompasses several response agencies, the LPIO will be listed first followed by the DPIO.
- F. For example, in the event that a bomb explodes at a Savannah school, the Savannah Fire Department PIO would serve as the LPIO in information dissemination until the victims are rescued and the fire is extinguished. At

which point, Savannah Chatham Metro Police Department (SCMPD) would assume investigative responsibilities and the SCMPD PIO would serve as the LPIO for the incident. Once the investigation has been terminated, the Savannah Chatham Public School System (SCPSS) would assume the role of LPIO.

## **V. Assumptions**

- A. During emergency situations and disasters the general public will request information about the emergency situation and instructions on proper response actions.
- B. The Emergency Alert System (EAS) will be utilized through the joint cooperation of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), the National Weather Service (NWS), the broadcast industry and Chatham County government. These organizations are considered part of the National EAS and will be activated appropriately according to established area, State and National EAS procedures.
- C. The media will request information about emergency situations and disasters. The local media, particularly television and radio, will perform an essential role in providing emergency instructions and up-to-date information to the public.
- D. Depending upon the severity of the emergency or disaster, or the media's perception of the severity of the emergency/disaster, regional and national media will also cover the story and request information and comment from local officials.
- E. Depending upon the severity of the emergency or disaster, telephone communication may be sporadic or impossible. Local and regional radio and television stations without emergency power may also be off the air. If this occurs, public address systems on emergency vehicles and door-to-door sweeps may be initiated.
- F. The demand for information will be overwhelming if sufficient staff is not available, and/or staff is not trained to operate from a pre-established set of procedures.
- G. Rumors or misinformation can cause unnecessary distress among citizens, provoke counter productive public actions, and impede response and recovery efforts.

## **VI. Implementation**

CEMA's public information efforts will focus on event-specific information. This information generally will be of an instructional nature focusing on such things as warnings, evacuations, and shelter options. Since public information is a critical

function of emergency management, this Appendix will categorize public information procedures and their implementation in the four phases of emergency management. Exact timelines for implementation of public information procedures will be discussed in the Concept of Operations section of this Appendix.

## **VII. Concept of Operations**

- A. During disaster situations, the County's primary public information coordination is comprised of the Chatham County Public Information Coordinator, better known as the LPIO for the County, and the CEMA PIO. The organization of the JIC may vary depending on the size and type of disaster and the JIC. Generally these elements include:
1. The chief spokesperson for CEMA in the CEMA office is the CEMA PIO or a designee who fields inquiries from the news media. The chief spokesperson at an Incident Command Post (ICP) is the lead-agency PIO until a JIC is established in the disaster area or at the site of the emergency. When a JIC is to be established, the LPIO and the DPIO will coordinate to ensure a smooth transition to field operations.
  2. The designated LPIO serves as the primary point of contact for the media for information regarding all disaster response, recovery, and mitigation programs provided by the responding public safety agencies. This includes providing the media with accurate and timely information on disaster operations, working with members of the media to encourage accurate and constructive news coverage, monitoring media coverage to ensure that critical messages are being reported, and identifying potential issues or problems that could have an impact on public confidence in the response and recovery effort. As an incident expands, it may be necessary for a JIC to be established where responsibilities are divided among PIOs staffing the JIC.
  3. Within the JIC, the Information Gathering Group is responsible for gathering incident information and packaging it in ways that are useful to key incident audiences.
  4. The Information Dissemination Group provides written and oral information to the media, public and other organizations. Ultimately, the mission of the Group is to disseminate approved information externally and internally. All information shall be timely, accurate, consistent and credible. The Group must determine how to reach the target audience quickly when urgent information must be shared.
  5. The Operational Support Group is responsible for establishing the JIC, ensuring that information technology needs for the set up in the JIC are accommodated, provide administrative support to PIOs, provide support to obtain needed supplies and equipment, assist with dissemination of

information from the JIC, and other administrative tasks to support the overall PIO operation.

6. The Liaison Support Group ensures that there is an official, informed presence at field sites where the public and media may be present.

**B. Coordinating Instructions**

1. **Prevention / Mitigation:** Prevention measures are coordinated between Chatham County departments, municipalities and CEMA to ensure that a unified message is delivered to the public. Prevention communications include:
  - a. Provide periodic tests of the emergency alert system.
  - b. Create, revise and distribute CEMA publications on hazard awareness.
  - c. Work with the Chatham County Public Information Coordinator to create public awareness broadcasts on Chatham County Government Channel 16.
  - d. Design and distribute periodic CEMA Signals to educate public in hazard awareness.
  - e. Collaborate with and promote projects with Chatham County Engineering and Public Works departments.
2. **Preparedness:** Preparedness for incident communications activities includes those measures taken before an incident to prepare for or mitigate the effects. Preparedness as it relates to incident communications with the public includes:
  - a. Coordinate group efforts of Chatham County and municipal PIOs who will be instrumental in public information distribution during Incidents of Critical Significance.
  - b. Develop regularly scheduled disaster exercises to train cadres of PIO personnel needed for large scale events.
  - c. Maintain a program to educate the public, particularly special needs groups, about the effects of common, emergency and disaster situations.
  - d. Coordinate and maintain a working relationship with the media; particularly with those who will disseminate emergency information to the public.

- e. List and maintain available media resources (call letters, names, addresses, and telephone numbers) that will disseminate emergency information to the public.
  - f. Develop and maintain pre-scripted EAS messages, news releases and Public Service Announcements (PSAs).
  - g. Continuously update and maintain essential contact lists for ESF 15, External Affairs at local, state and national levels.
  - h. Designate a JIC that will be the official point of contact for the media during an emergency.
  - i. Designate a facility where media representatives can be briefed, compose their news copy, and have telecommunications with their newspaper or station.
  - j. Establish a means to monitor and respond to rumors.
  - k. Ensure public information procedures meet standards set by the National Incident Management System (NIMS) and the Emergency Management Accreditation Program (EMAP).
3. Response: Response processes mitigate the effects of unexpected problems and facilitate orderly management of an incident. Response activities for incident communications with the public include:
- a. Rapid mobilization of public information resources to prepare and deliver coordinated and sustained messages to the public focusing on lifesaving/health preservation instructions, emergency status information, and other useful government information.
  - b. Activate a JIC near the EOC allowing PIOs to collaborate on a unified public message.
  - c. Designate a LPIO to coordinate a unified public message and to manage JIC.
  - d. Activate an area for the media where they may be briefed, compose their news copy, and have telecommunications with their newspaper or station.
  - e. Release information to the public and or media making certain that the appropriate authorities have agreed to the information being released.
  - f. Maintain contact with internal response partners through WebEOC application, bulletin board notices.



required. The CEMA AD works in a support role to the LPIO and JIC operations.

- C. CEMA Duty Officer: The CEMA Duty Officer (DO) serves as the Agency's 24-hour crisis monitor for the County. The DO reports incident-related information to the AD and makes recommendations regarding activation of the EOC and the PIO function. The AD may determine an EOC and or JIC activation is necessary through consultation with the CEMA Director. In the event activation of the JIC or EOC is ordered, the DO will have primary responsibility to initiate notification to EOC Support Staff and the EOC Partial Activation Team.
- D. CEMA Volunteers: CEMA Volunteers may be utilized to fill necessary roles within the Public Information Management structure to ensure effective management, communication, and operation of information. These volunteers will work directly with the LPIO and DPIO for directives/assignments based on need. Volunteers must be properly credentialed and badged.
- E. Chatham County Public Information Coordinator: The Chatham County Public Information Coordinator is responsible for the organization and distribution of public information during major natural disasters that affect Chatham County in which the EOC is activated. Each local government entity should identify a PIO for their agency who will assist the Chatham County PIO if called upon during EOC activation.
- F. JIC LPIO: If a disaster warrants the full activation of the EOC and a JIC, the Chatham County PIO will assume the role of LPIO and the CEMA PIO will assume the role of DPIO. The LPIO and DPIO will work 12 hour shifts. Upon arrival to the JIC both the LPIO and DPIO will schedule 12 hour shifts of JIC operators. ESF 15 partners will be contacted and directed to the JIC to assist with the coordination and distribution of a unified public message. See Tab C for JIC Operations details.

## **IX. Appendix Management and Maintenance**

- A. CEMA is the executive agent for Annex management and maintenance. The Annexes will be updated periodically as required to incorporate new directives and changes based on lessons learned from exercises and actual events. This section establishes procedures for interim changes and full updates of the Annexes.
- B. Types of Changes: Changes include additions of new or supplementary material and deletions. No proposed change should contradict or override authorities or other plans contained in statute, order, or regulation.
- C. Coordination and Approval: Any department or agency with assigned responsibilities within the EOP Annexes may propose a change to the plan.

CEMA is responsible for coordinating all proposed modifications to the Annexes with primary and support agencies and other stakeholders, as required. CEMA will coordinate review and approval for proposed modifications as required.

- D. Notice of Change: After coordination has been accomplished, including receipt of the necessary signed approval supporting the final change language, CEMA will issue an official Notice of Change. The notice will specify the date, number, subject, purpose, background, and action required, and provide the change language on one or more numbered and dated insert pages that will replace the modified pages in the EOP. Once published, the modifications will be considered part of the EOP for operational purposes pending a formal revision and re-issuance of the entire document. Interim changes can be further modified or updated using the above process.
- E. Distribution: CEMA will distribute the Notice of Change to all participating agencies. Notice of Change to other organizations will be provided upon request. Re-issuance of the individual annexes or the entire EOP will take place as required. Working toward continuous improvement, CEMA is responsible for an annual review and update of the EOP to include related annexes, and a complete revision every four years (or more frequently if the County Commission or GEMA deems necessary). The review and update will consider lessons learned and best practices identified during exercises and responses to actual events, and incorporate new information technologies. CEMA will distribute revised EOC Annex documents for the purpose of interagency review and concurrence.