

# EMERGENCY SUPPORT FUNCTION 15 – EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

## CEMP - ANNEX IV DOCUMENTATION



  
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08/03/2021

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08/03/2021

**Date**

Note: This Emergency Support Functions (ESF) is part Annex IV of the Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan (CEMP) and this version includes the 2021 revision. City of Seattle Mayor's Office Director of Communications acts as the current ESF Coordinator and collaborated with many partners for respective input.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>TABLE OF CONTENTS</b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b>Tables</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>Figures</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>1. STAKEHOLDERS</b> .....	<b>1-1</b>
<b>2. INTRODUCTION</b> .....	<b>2-1</b>
2.1 Purpose.....	2-1
2.2 Scope .....	2-1
<b>3. SITUATION</b> .....	<b>3-1</b>
3.1 Emergency Conditions and Hazards .....	3-1
3.2 Planning Assumptions .....	3-2
<b>4. CONCEPT OF OPERATIONS</b> .....	<b>4-1</b>
4.1 Organization .....	4-1
4.2 General Response .....	4-2
4.3 Planned Incident.....	4-2
4.4 No-Notice Incidents.....	4-3
4.5 JIC Operations.....	4-3
4.6 Remote Operations .....	4-3
4.7 Alternate EOC .....	4-4
4.8 Employee Messaging.....	4-4
4.9 Direction and Control .....	4-4
<b>5. RESPONSIBILITIES</b> .....	<b>5-1</b>
5.1 Prevention and Mitigation Activities.....	5-1
5.2 Preparedness Activities .....	5-1
5.3 Response Activities.....	5-2
5.4 Recovery Activities .....	5-2
<b>6. RESOURCE REQUIREMENTS</b> .....	<b>6-1</b>
6.1 Logistical Support .....	6-1
6.2 Communications and Data .....	6-1
<b>7. MAINTENANCE</b> .....	<b>7-1</b>
<b>8. TERMS AND DEFINITIONS</b> .....	<b>8-1</b>
<b>9. ACRONYMS</b> .....	<b>9-1</b>
<b>10. REFERENCES</b> .....	<b>10-1</b>

## **TABLES**

Table 1.....	1-1
Table 2.....	1-1
Table 3.....	3-1
Table 4.....	7-1

## **FIGURES**

No table of figures entries found.

# 1. STAKEHOLDERS

**Table 1**

PRIMARY AGENCY	ESF COORDINATOR
Mayors' Office	Mayor's Office Director of Communication

**Table 2**

SUPPORT AGENCIES	
All City Departments	

## 2. INTRODUCTION

### 2.1 Purpose

This document describes the roles and responsibilities of ESF 15. It explains how the City will manage and coordinate emergency public messaging during the response to and recovery from incidents. It supports efforts to maintain the community's trust by promoting openness and transparency in public messaging.

### 2.2 Scope

This document applies to all City departments and their Public Information Officers (PIOs).

## 3. SITUATION

### 3.1 Emergency Conditions and Hazards

The City of Seattle, its citizens, and transportation infrastructure are exposed to a variety of natural and human caused disasters such as severe weather, earthquakes, and acts of terrorism. The Seattle Hazard Identification and Vulnerability Analysis (SHIVA) identifies Seattle’s hazards and examines their consequences so we can make smart decisions about how best to prepare for them. It provides information regarding potential impacts of hazards to the people, economy, the built and natural environments of the City of Seattle. The SHIVA provides a foundation for all the City of Seattle’s disaster planning and preparedness activities. The list of all natural and human-caused hazards includes: Emerging Threat, Geophysical Hazards, Biological Hazards, Intentional Hazards, Transportation and Infrastructure Hazards, and Weather and Climate Hazards.

Daily the City engages in public messaging through PIOs assigned to individual agencies. Routine coordination of messaging is done at the agency level and through the Mayor’s Office.

For no-notice, daily incidents with limited impacts, several City agencies have the capability to initiate public messaging. During an incident, emergency public messaging provides vital information that: Describes the incident, what caused it, and known or potential impacts; Hazards and protective action information; Status of response operations; Instructions on how to obtain assistance; and How to volunteer or assist in the response and recovery.

During larger incidents, such as earthquakes, this routine public messaging capability provides the foundation for a much larger public messaging response centered on a Joint Information Center (JIC) located in the City Emergency Operations Center (EOC) within minutes, or during non-business hours, within a short period of time using on-call PIOs. The following departments and offices have PIOs:

**Table 3**

AGENCIES WITH PIOs	
City Clerk	Office of Arts & Culture
City Council	Office of Economic Development
City Light	Office of Housing
Department of Education and Early Learning	Office of Planning and Community Development
Department of Finance & Administrative Services	Office of Immigrant & Refugee Affairs
Department of Neighborhoods	Parks & Recreation
Ethics and Elections Commission	Human Resources Department
Fire Department	Police Department
Public Health – Seattle & King County	Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections
Human Services Department	Seattle Information Technology
Law Department	Seattle Channel
Office of Sustainability & Environment	Seattle Department of Transportation
Municipal Court	Seattle Public Utilities
Office for Civil Rights	Seattle Center

## 3.2 Planning Assumptions

- During an incident, given the potential for significant and extensive impacts, even a flawlessly executed response may be seen as a failure by the general public.
- During activation of the EOC, the City will disseminate information about the incident through a variety of communications channels.
- Coordination of public messaging for the City of Seattle will be centralized in JIC of the Seattle EOC.
- For incidents with direct or indirect regional impacts, public messaging is most effective when done in coordination with regional partners through a joint information system (JIS).
- During a significant incident, the Seattle area can expect local, national, and international media coverage with representatives from multiple news agencies arriving to report on what is happening.
- Communicating with the public through social media, such as Twitter, Facebook, and blogs, is an essential component of the City public messaging strategy.
- The City strategy for public messaging is constantly modified throughout the incident to ensure the public's need for information is met.
- The public develops its own situational awareness by obtaining information from the City, a variety of social media outlets, crowd mapping, and through communication with trusted sources such as family, co-workers, and friends.
- Since trust is an essential component of public messaging, the City must be perceived as a source of reliable, timely, accurate, and comprehensive information.
- The Mayor's Office maintains a roster of PIOs from all City departments who are prepared for emergencies and can be expected to report to the EOC, working under the direction of the ESF 15 Coordinator or his/her designee.
- Department directors endorse, encourage, and support, reassignment of department PIOs to the JIC during planned and unplanned incidents.
- PIOs are trained by OEM staff in critical External Affairs functions, including operation of the JIC at the EOC, and receive regular updates/training on related issues, e.g., hazards training, activation drills.
- The City communicates life-safety notifications to the public in ways that can be understood, regardless of language. Communications strategies have been developed to ensure notification to those with limited-English proficiency (LEP). Details can be found in the Alert & Warning Support Operations Plan.
- The City's comprehensive incident response policies, strategies, and practices can be found in the City Emergency Operations Plan (EOP).
- The City-specific operational procedures supporting response policies, strategies, and practices are maintained separately. Please refer to the Reference Section of this document if applicable procedures have been identified at this time.

## 4. CONCEPT OF OPERATIONS

### 4.1 Organization

When the JIC is activated, a team of City PIOs, under the direction of the ESF 15 Coordinator, carry out all aspects of emergency messaging. The Mayor’s Director of Communications is the City’s designated ESF 15 Coordinator.

The Mayor’s Director of Communications may appoint a JIC Supervisor to manage and lead operations in the Seattle JIC.

- ESF 15 Coordinator: the Mayor’s Director of Communications is responsible for all emergency public messaging during an incident.
- JIC Supervisor: designated by the Mayor’s Director of Communications; determines PIO roles, assigns tasks, interfaces with Mayor’s staff and EOC leadership, determines dissemination methods and timelines, develops messages and coordinates approval process, and coordinates with other JICs and agencies on messaging.
- Deputy JIC Supervisor: oversees several JIC staff and assists the JIC Supervisor with carrying out their duties.
- JIC Administrative Coordinator: helps with equipment, passwords, technical details, coordination, staffing, documentation, and other JIC logistics.
- Continuity Officer: maintains a chronological file with copies of all official communications PIOs distribute.
- VIP Coordinator: works with the City’s Director of the Office of Intergovernmental Relations, the Mayor’s Communication team, and the VIP team to facilitate scheduling of news conferences, site tours, and media availability.
- JIC Runner: confirms, clarifies and otherwise helps ensure a smooth flow of information between the JIC and the rest of the EOC. In a large-scale incident, a PIO Liaison may be assigned to an EOC Branch or ESF (such as King County) in order to accommodate the workload.
- Media Monitor Lead: assigns staff to answer media calls, researches, and follows the “community conversation” portrayed by media to ensure timely and accurate messaging. For some PIOs this might also include live TV or radio interviews.
- Lead Writer: writes news releases, advisories, talking points and fact sheets.
- Social Media Coordinator: Monitors social media and develops and posts responses when necessary.
- Alert and Warning Coordinator: drafts messaging and issues protective action notices/community notifications as necessary for AlertSeattle and other warning notification systems.
- Lead Researcher: Performs background checks, researches any necessary information – confirms or denies media rumors, gathers more in-depth information on emerging issues, ensures credibility of sources/resources, looks up what other agencies are producing, etc.



## 4.2 General Response

Unless otherwise directed, the JIC, under ESF 15, will be activated whenever the EOC is activated. The JIC, staffed by PIOs from all City departments, is the primary site and source of public information to the community using a variety of communications channels. Leveraging their combined expertise, the PIO team provides timely, accurate, and comprehensive information to the public. Public messaging activities include:

- Developing and disseminating the City’s public messages.
- Integrating public messaging strategy with other response operations.
- Coordinating messaging with regional counterparts.
- Briefing EOC staff on how the City’s messages are being received by the community.
- Contributing to the development of EOC Snapshot Report and Situation Report.
- Maintaining direct contact with all media sources including TV, radio, newspapers, social media, ethnic media, community blogs and other local, regional and international organizations.
- Ensuring that emergency information gets out to as broad a base as possible. Methods may include ethnic media, AlertSeattle and Alert King County opt-ins, the Community Communications Network (CCN), social media, and other forums as available.
- Ensuring that public messaging is accessible to all parts of the community, such as providing American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters, for any emergency news conference.

PIOs can use several outgoing communications channels to reach external audiences, including, but not limited to: news releases, Seattle Channel, the City’s public website, AlertSeattle, Wireless Emergency Alert (WEA) system, Emergency Alert System (EAS), the alert.seattle.gov blog, social media, and regional communications channels.

Activation of the EOC can vary from a few hours up to a rotating 24-hour schedule. There may often be times when JIC operations will not coincide with EOC shifts in the Operations Room, due to news cycles and media requests.

## 4.3 Planned Incident

When there is sufficient notice about a planned incident, such as a snowstorm or parade, messaging is initiated as soon as possible to give the public sufficient time to prepare.

The Mayor’s Director of Communications, JIC Supervisor, OEM Director, the lead agency PIO (as defined in the CEMP), and PIOs representing other departments (as needed), develop an initial public messaging strategy for preparedness. The OEM Director may also choose to convene a multi-department planning meeting to further develop the response plan, which would include a public messaging strategy.

In the hours and/or days preceding activation of the EOC, the Mayor’s Director of Communication and the JIC Supervisor coordinate the development and dissemination of pre- incident public messages. In this circumstance, the ESF 15 function is activated, but not the JIC. The lead department PIO is generally responsible for carrying out most of the public messaging. Other department PIOs are activated as needed to support the lead department and disseminate public messaging within their area of responsibility. Content about the incident (news releases, tweets, Facebook, and department blog posts) is posted to the City’s alert.seattle.gov blog, which provides one place for the public to get information.

Concurrent with this effort, the JIC Supervisor prepares to activate the JIC which includes: Briefing department PIOs on the situation; Establishing a schedule for staffing the EOC JIC; Participating in

planning meetings, facilitated by OEM, to develop the response plan; Coordinating with partners at King County and the state as necessary; Briefing the EOC Director on the plan for JIC operations.

Once the JIC is activated, the responsibility of issuing public messaging transfers to the JIC.

## 4.4 No-Notice Incidents

For unplanned EOC activations, Seattle OEM will notify all ESF representatives, including PIOs. For those incidents where communication systems may be out, PIOs are trained to respond to the EOC without waiting for instructions to do so. In the event of significant and widespread impacts, such as extended communication outages during an earthquake, public messaging could be delayed until PIOs are able to report for duty.

While notifications are being made, and depending on the nature of the incident, departments responding to the incident may initiate public messaging from the incident command established at the incident scene or through other means.

PIOs arriving at the EOC follow established EOC check-in procedures for all responders.

The first PIO(s) to arrive at the EOC will designate a JIC Supervisor and begin setting up the JIC. These duties include: turning on equipment, activating the media lines, getting logged onto the computer systems, signing into WebEOC, and generally organizing the room to ensure the JIC is ready to support the public messaging needs of the incident.

If the incident occurs during the workday, more PIOs may report to the EOC than are needed for an initial shift. Based on the JIC staffing plan approved by the EOC Director, some PIOs may be sent home with instructions to report back to the EOC for a later shift.

## 4.5 JIC Operations

Planned or unplanned activations of the EOC begin with a briefing conducted by the EOC Director. The Mayor's Director of Communications and/or the JIC Supervisor participate in this briefing. In addition, a JIC representative participates in briefings hosted by the EOC Operations Section Chief which are held periodically throughout the shift.

The JIC Supervisor will develop an initial public messaging strategy in coordination with the EOC Director and Mayor's Communication Director. As the incident evolves, the JIC Supervisor and Mayor's Communication Director coordinate with the EOC Director to continually adapt the public messaging strategy to meet the needs of the incident.

The JIC Supervisor reviews Situation Reports and Snapshot Reports to ensure information is consistent with public messaging.

The Seattle JIC may also include PIOs representing Public Health Seattle and King County, Seattle Public Schools, King County Metro, and other agencies.

The Seattle JIC may interact with JICs in other jurisdictions to coordinate messaging through a Joint Information System (JIS) ensuring information is consistent and not conflicting.

Information most likely to be coordinated using a JIS approach include: News conferences with elected officials; Regional fact sheets; Emergency proclamations and orders.

## 4.6 Remote Operations

There may be times when it is more practical for PIOs to work remotely from their home, field, office, or other designated site during activation. The JIC Supervisor and JIC Administrative Coordinator manage

and maintain all aspects of this activity in coordination with the EOC Director. Remote operations will depend upon the availability of adequate and viable alternate power and communication channels.

## **4.7 Alternate EOC**

In the incident that is catastrophic in nature, it is possible the Seattle EOC, including the JIC, may relocate to an alternate site. In that incident, the Seattle JIC may operate virtually, with some PIOs working from their offices or homes.

## **4.8 Employee Messaging**

The City is committed to keeping City employees informed about incidents. Department directors are responsible for keeping employees properly informed. Directors are in the best position to convey information in a manner that fits the needs of their organization and employees. This approach also ensures that such messages support, and not conflict with, critical department operations.

When the EOC is activated, department directors remain responsible for keeping their employees informed. Directors can reference EOC Snapshot Reports, Situation Reports, press releases, and other reports when developing employee messages.

Upon request, the JIC can assist directors by crafting general employee messages which summarize information about the incident. After review by the Mayor's Office, these messages are sent to department directors for dissemination. The Human Resources Department supports department directors by providing information about personnel policies, rules, and procedures as needed.

In an incident, when employees need to be notified immediately, the EOC Director may contact the Mayor's Office for authorization to send an email or AlertSeattle to all employees. PIOs in the JIC and OEM Staff Duty Officers may send these types of emails.

## **4.9 Direction and Control**

The Mayor's Director of Communication is responsible for city-wide coordination of messaging during incidents. This coordination usually occurs at the JIC but may also be accomplished virtually. As the incident evolves, responsibility for some areas of public messaging may be delegated back to specific departments.

## 5. RESPONSIBILITIES

### 5.1 Prevention and Mitigation Activities

The responsibility for prevention and mitigation activities related to emergencies falls to individual departments as part of their day-to-day operations. Examples include public outreach, customer newsletters, Seattle City Light and Seattle Public Utilities bill inserts, and providing emergency preparedness information to citizens on the City's public web site.

### 5.2 Preparedness Activities

#### Seattle OEM ESF 15 Liaison

- Update the ESF 15 document;
- Disseminate information about regional emergency communications seminars, workshops, and trainings;
- Attend monthly PIO meetings;
- Provide JIC training to City PIOs at least annually;
- Assist the JIC Supervisor in the development and delivery of training and exercises for department PIOs; and
- Update JIC procedures manual.

#### JIC Supervisor/s

- Meet with other jurisdiction PIOs to share information and develop plans;
- Train and develops new JIC Staff;
- Participate in OEM trainings and workshops;
- Attend Strategic Workgroup weekly meetings;
- Stay current on public information best practices during disasters;
- Maintain familiarity with City emergency plans;
- Participate or support OEM JIC training;
- Conduct one annual JIC exercise (EOC activation may substitute); and
- Participate in Seattle OEM sponsored EOC exercises.

#### City PIOs

- Maintain department news media lists;
- Stay current on public information best practices during disasters;
- Maintain familiarity with City disaster plans;
- Participate in training and exercises as directed; and
- Attend FEMA Basic and Advanced PIO training courses as time permits.

## 5.3 Response Activities

### General

- Define the public messaging strategy;
- Issue news releases and social media updates;
- Participate in the development of EOC plans;
- Coordinate media interviews;
- Assign PIOs to field incidents;
- Prepare materials and site for news conferences;
- Arrange for translation and interpreters;
- Notify County and State JICs when Seattle JIC is activated;
- Share information with other JICs;
- Monitor regional and State web sites, provide links to other jurisdictions' web sites and/or post information on joint web sites;
- Participate in local or regional webinars, video or telephone conference calls;
- Contact public information officers of other jurisdictions to exchange information or coordinate other activities, i.e., visiting dignitaries;
- Send a Seattle PIO to another jurisdiction's JIC to serve as a liaison;
- Develop and maintain JIC staffing plan; and
- Plan and coordinate visits by officials with the Office of Intergovernmental Relations.

## 5.4 Recovery Activities

Disaster-related response and restoration can be very costly. While not all costs are reimbursable, it is in the City's interest to make best use of funding that may become available through federal agency programs, such as Federal Emergency Management Agency, and insurance.

To assist with this effort, departments, organizations, or agencies with a lead or support role for this ESF are responsible for tracking and documenting of actual and anticipated costs related to the incident. Costs should be tracked based on guidance from OEM or the home organization.

Once the incident has passed and the EOC is deactivated, the JIC will likely also deactivate, but much like during pre-activation, public messaging may continue under the coordination of the Mayor's Director of Communication. In recovery, incoming calls to the EOC media line are redirected back to individual department PIOs for follow up.

## 6. RESOURCE REQUIREMENTS

### 6.1 Logistical Support

All JIC reference material, including City and PIO contact lists, employee directories, dictionaries, AP Stylebook, Thesaurus, City ESFs, media directories, other resource lists and the like, are accessible either on-line or hard copy in the JIC. **See References in EOC Response folder.**

GIS maps: designated GIS responders will be on-site during activation to produce maps for all sections and branches of the EOC, including the JIC.

Visuals other than maps, for use in press briefings etc.: See Seattle EOC Policy and Procedures Manual.

Language maps: A number of support materials are available on the City's InWeb at:  
<http://www.seattle.gov/neighborhoods/neighborhoods-and-districts>.

Logistics/Admin Support: This branch and section will maintain computers throughout the EOC, help with system-wide voicemail and e-mail, set up the media briefing room, coordinate transportation as needed, and more. See Seattle EOC Policies and Procedures Manual.

Canned messages on selected topics, City department mitigation brochures, e.g., power outage, landslide, snow/ice, preparedness brochures, City's inclement weather policy and other information provided by departments, agencies and organizations.

### 6.2 Communications and Data

City PIOs maintain ready access to all standard communication tools used on a daily basis, i.e., email, cell phones, web, social media, landlines, as well as other operational communication tools inside the EOC, i.e., department hotlines, 800 MHz radios, department call centers, portables, etc. See Seattle EOC Procedures.

## 7. MAINTENANCE

This document is an external plan as defined by the City of Seattle Emergency Management Program Planning Policy and follows the maintenance process, which includes a method and schedule for evaluation and revision, as described therein.

City of Seattle Mayor’s Office Director of Communications, as the ESF Coordinator, has primarily responsibility for this document and will ensure it is evaluated as outlined in the schedule with updates and revisions being made to ensure guidance remains current. City of Seattle Mayor’s Office Director of Communications will facilitate the evaluations in consultation and coordination with OEM.

**Table 4**

RECORD OF CHANGES			
DATE	TYPE	CONTACT	SUMMARY
April 16, 2021	Update	K Hudson	Administrative changes, such as adding EMAP-compliant verbiage.
August 7, 2018 July 26, 2018	Revision	S Formas L Meyers	Completed revision. Document voted and approved by DMC and EEB.
December 2017	Update	S Formas L Meyers	Completed annual update
December 2016	Update	B Strong L Meyers	Completed annual update
May 2015	Update	K Neafcy	Completed annual update

## 8. TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Nothing identified at this time.



## 9. ACRONYMS

ASL: American Sign Language

CCN: Community Communications Network

CEMP: Comprehensive emergency Management Plan

EAS: Emergency Alert System

EOC: Emergency Operations Center

EOP: Emergency Operations Plan

ESF: Emergency Support Function

JIC: Joint Information Center

JIS: Joint Information System

LEP: Limited English Proficiency

PIO: Public Information Officers

SHIVA: Seattle Hazard Identification and Vulnerability Analysis

WEA: Wireless Emergency Alert

## 10. REFERENCES

City of Seattle Joint Information Center Guide

Seattle EOC Procedures