

# **HAMILTON COUNTY EMERGENCY OPERATIONS PLAN**

## **ANNEX O - EMERGENCY SUPPORT FUNCTION #15 — PUBLIC INFORMATION**

**COORDINATING AGENCY:** Hamilton County PIO (Named For Each Event)

**SUPPORT AGENCIES:** Hamilton County PIO's (EMA, JFS, DOES)  
Hamilton County Board of County Commissioners  
Hamilton County Emergency Management/Homeland Security

### **I. PURPOSE**

Emergency Support Function (ESF) #15 — Public Information, addresses the organization necessary for the development, distribution and coordination of information to the public in the event of an emergency that requires county assessment, response, and recovery activities.

Each ESF representative is responsible for the dissemination of information that may be of value to other ESF representatives located in the Emergency Operations Center (Sometimes referred to as the Regional Operations Center, or ROC). This information sharing contributes to the response and recovery during an emergency/disaster of any type.

### **II. SITUATION**

- A. During a disaster the means of dispersing public information to victims at the site may be severely affected by overwhelming demand and/or damage to local media caused by the disaster. County and/or State assistance may be required to supply critical information to victims, responders, recovery personnel and members of the media. In addition, following a disaster, information may often be vague, erroneous or contradictory.
- B. In order to establish coordination and cooperation a Joint Information System (JIS) is formed. Local, county, state, and federal public information personnel will work within the JIS to establish cooperation and coordination with one another to ensure that consistent, accurate, timely and verified emergency public information (EPI) is released to the public and representatives of media to ensure public confidence and reduce public concern.
- C. Assumptions
  - 1. The Hamilton County Emergency Management Agency Public Information Officer (EMA PIO) maintains the support systems and information needs of ESF 15 during non-emergency times, in order to retain relevant contact information and documentation of emergency response events.
  - 2. The PIO for each emergency event is named by the County Coordinating Officer. The Hamilton County Public Information Officer (PIO) heads the Joint Information System (JIS) during county emergencies at the direction of the Executive Group in the Hamilton County Regional Operations Center. The County Coordinating Officer is the person from the County Administration who is working as part of the Executive Committee at the ROC.
  - 3. All county-level emergency information will be coordinated by the Hamilton County PIO, and approved by the County Coordinating Officer before release.
  - 4. To the maximum extent possible, local, and county organizations involved in emergency response and recovery operations, coordinate EPI and related information with the Hamilton County PIO or designee before release.

5. The Hamilton County EMA PIO maintains listings of media contacts and relies on those contacts for the dissemination of EPI.
6. The Hamilton County EMA PIO maintains a list of additional personnel that can serve as a back up PIO or additional resources for information collection.
7. The Hamilton County JIS has identified resource and personnel requirements for emergencies and is prepared to operate in the Hamilton County ROC, or near the site of the disaster as needed.
8. The Hamilton County EMA PIO develops and maintains Standard Operating Guidelines that detail specific actions, required resources and responsibilities during emergencies

### **III. CONCEPT OF OPERATIONS**

#### **A. Overview**

1. HCEM/HS is responsible for activating ESF #15 for assessment, response, and recovery activities during emergencies.
2. The Hamilton County PIO will act as the lead agent for ESF #15. Depending upon the severity of the emergency, PIO personnel from local, state and/or other agencies may also be requested to provide support during county-level emergency operations.
3. The Hamilton County PIO is responsible for ensuring that coordinated public information services are provided throughout a county-level emergency from assessment through response and recovery and that these services are provided in a cooperative manner with local, state, and federal PIOs as applicable.
4. The Hamilton County Board of Commissioners or their appointed representatives operating out of the Executive Group during county-level emergencies have ultimate control over the release of county EPI. Coordination is maintained between the County Commissioners, the County Coordinating Officer (CCO), and the Hamilton County PIO through ongoing Executive Group operations in the Hamilton County ROC and submission of all EPI and related news releases to the Executive Group for approval. When the Hamilton County PIO is operating out of the Disaster Field Office (DFO) or the Joint Information Center (JIC), EPI and related releases will be submitted to the CCO and the Hamilton County Board of Commissioners or their designee before release.
5. After EPI and media releases have been approved, copies will be given to ESF #5 for distribution to county personnel in the ROC, at the DFO, and at the site as needed.
6. The Joint Information Center (JIC)
  - a. The JIC is a physical location designed to support the gathering, verification, coordination and dissemination of accurate, accessible and timely information.
  - b. A single location for the JIC is preferable, but the system is flexible enough to accommodate virtual or multiple JIC locations. The Hamilton County PIO maintains a virtual JIC for use in a disaster.
  - c. Multiple agencies or jurisdiction may have their own PIOs present in the JIC.

- d. Press briefings should not be held in the JIC but at another location, such as the Cincinnati Police Academy at 800 Evans Street.
  - e. The Hamilton County PIO working within the JIS will obtain Executive Group approval for releases of EPI.
  - f. The Hamilton County PIO will also provide regular updates to ESF #5 Information and Planning on federal, state, county and local information.
6. County and local PIOs, following the JIS, will work in close coordination with each other for the development and release of information to the public. This information will also be posted in the Media Section of WebEOC.

## B. Relationships between Levels of Government

Partnership and teamwork, at all levels of government, are critical during disasters. The most important PIO activity is to disseminate clear, correct and factual information to the public in a timely manner. All levels of government must provide readily available emergency public information that will support emergency response and recovery.

During local emergencies requiring county, state and/or federal assistance, Federal, state, county and local PIOs will work cooperatively and in coordination with one another to ensure that timely, accurate, and consistent information is released. The Department of Homeland Security/Federal Emergency Management Agency DHS/FEMA encourages all agency PIOs co-locating with the local JIC.

### 1. Federal

- a. The DHS/FEMA lead PIO and staff are responsible for communicating information about what the federal government and FEMA are doing in response to the disaster, and how FEMA programs can help individuals and/or businesses recover.

### 2. State

- a. The state lead PIO, usually the Ohio EMA PIO, reports directly to the State Coordinating Officer (SCO) and serves as the primary point of contact for the state.

### 3. County

- a. The County PIO serves as the primary county point of contact for all media during disasters.
- b. The County PIO is responsible for ensuring all media are kept informed about emergency public information, particularly evacuation or shelter information.
- c. As the County media representative, the County PIO should be prepared to disseminate information about all phases of the emergency.
- d. News media often prefer to talk to County representatives and the County PIO should be prepared for such requests. If this occurs, the County PIO will prepare the County representative for media contact.
- e. The County PIO works at the direction of the Board of County Commissioners.

### 4. Local

- a. The local PIO serves as the primary local government point of contact for all media.
- b. News media often prefer to talk to local representatives and the local PIO should be prepared for such requests.
- c. The local PIO works at the direction of the local Chief Elected Official.

#### **IV. ORGANIZATION AND ASSIGNMENT OF RESPONSIBILITY**

All ESF #15 organizations are responsible for development of internal SOGs that support ESF #15 and ROC operations.

A. The Joint Information Center may be made up of the following personnel based on the incident:

- 1. Hamilton County PIO (Team Leader)
- 2. Public Information Field Team Member(s) (PIFTM)

B. Assignment of Responsibility

1. Hamilton County PIO will:

- a. Continuously staff and manage PIO activities during county assessment, response and recovery operations for the length of the emergency, including notification and activation of PIFTM(s), as needed.
- b. Provide coordinated briefings for media representatives.
- c. Release EPI as directed by the Executive Group and in coordination with other county, state, federal, and local PIOs.
- d. Ensure validation and approval of county news releases and related information by the Executive Group (through the County Coordinating Officer) before issuing to media representatives.
- e. Ensure coordination of all news releases through the JIS.
- f. Provide required reports of activities to ESF #5 team for inclusion in Situation Reports.
- g. Provide hazard specific EPI for preparedness, response, and recovery initiatives as needed.
- h. Be prepared to accompany personnel going to the site of the disaster if needed.
- i. Ensure cooperative Federal/State/County/Local JIC operations when activated.
- j. Coordinate visual documentation of the incident or event.
- k. Provide After-Action Reports as requested.

2. Public Information Field Team Member(s) will:

- a. Fulfill duties as assigned by County PIO.

- b. Monitor, post, and communicate to other PIOs through the virtual JIC.
  - c. Write EPI for approval by County PIO.
  - d. Research background information as needed.
  - e. Oversee on-site media management.
  - f. Communicate media needs to County PIO.
  - g. Coordinate with local PIOs as needed.
3. Hamilton County Emergency Management/Homeland Security will:
- a. Assist in providing updated information from ESF #5 to the PIO for inclusion in media releases.
  - b. Establish a Rumor Control/information Line to reduce E911 traffic, if requested by 911, the PIO, or the Executive Committee.
4. Other Available PIO Officers in County Agencies will:
- a. Provide County PIO or designee with support during emergencies as requested by HCEM/HS.
  - b. During County-level emergencies, submit for approval news releases, interviews with media, etc. to the County PIO.
  - c. As of the adoption of this plan, the following agencies have personnel that can fulfill the requirements of a Public Information Field Team Member.
    - 1) Hamilton County Emergency Management
    - 2) Hamilton County Department of Job & Family Services
    - 3) Hamilton County Department of Environmental Services

## **V. RESOURCE REQUIREMENTS**

- A. ESF #15 organizations will be responsible for the maintenance of their own agreements, SOPs, SOGs, MOUs and Resource Listings that document the equipment, supplies, and services available to them during emergencies. Additional support needs during an emergency may be requested through the Hamilton County ROC to ESF #7 — Resource Support. Emergency Alert System Message Templates will be available in the Resource Support List.