

Poweshiek County Emergency Management Agency

Emergency Support Function 15

Public Information

2024



Poweshiek County Emergency Management Commission

Plan Adoption Document

2024

We hereby certify that the attached/enclosed plans, portions of plans or Emergency Support Functions (ESF) to the Poweshiek County Comprehensive Emergency Response Plan have been approved and adopted by the members of the county Emergency Management Commission on this the 24th day in the month of July in the year 2024. This plan shall become part of the county emergency response and emergency operations plan once adopted.

Plans or ESFs Adopted:

ESF 15: Public Information, including all appendices and attachments

Dawn Hamilton
Chairperson, Emergency Management Commission

7/24/24
Date

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Chairperson, EMC-Printed

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Primary and Supporting Agencies

ESF Coordinator: Poweshiek County Emergency Management Agency

Primary Agencies:

Primary agencies that will take the lead in developing and implementing this ESF

Poweshiek County Emergency Management Agency

Designated/Jurisdiction Public Information Office

Chief Elected Officials

Support Agencies:

Major Agencies to support the Primary Agencies

Poweshiek County Sheriff/Communications Center

Grinnell Police Department

Local Media

Non-Governmental Organization Public Information Officers

Purpose

Why are we writing this ESF?

This Emergency Support Function (ESF) Annex describes how jurisdictions within Poweshiek County will provide and coordinate the release of emergency or disaster-related information to the media and the public. It is designed to improve the ability of all participating agencies and organizations to:

- To provide guidance for rapid alerting and warning to local jurisdictions and the public of an impending emergency or disaster.
- Quickly relay critical and potentially lifesaving information to those at risk.
- Provide timely, consistent information on the status of emergency operations.
- Coordinate the release of public information from all responding agencies.
- Assure the public that government is responding effectively to the emergency.
- Make credible and consistent information available to answer citizen inquiries.
- Provide ongoing and useful information regarding recovery activities.
- Ensure a system is in place to provide information and guidance to elected and appointed officials.
- Minimize and counter rumors, hearsay, and misinformation.

Scope

What does the ESF #15 annex cover?

ESF-15 Public Information applies to all individuals and organizations that may be involved in public information required to support disaster warning, response, and recovery operations in Poweshiek County.

Activities that fall within the scope of this function include:

- Providing a structured method for receiving and delivering emergency public information to the public and for coordination of information through official representatives.
- Serving as sole source for information about the incident and incident management.
- Serving as the sole contact point for news and media organizations.

Many agencies have designated Public Information Officers (PIOs) and existing departmental emergency public information plans and procedures. ESF-15 is not designed to take the place of these plans, rather it is designed to complement and support them.

<<< The intent of this ESF is to provide relevant information to the public that is needed to prepare, respond, or recover from an incident... It is not to be confused with 'news'. >>>

Situation

What is creating the need for this plan?

Any area of Poweshiek County could be affected by several types of disasters that would require warning and the dissemination of information and instructions to the general public.

Most organizations involved in disaster preparedness and response in Poweshiek County maintain the capability to provide information to the public at some level.

There are a variety of tools and systems available to assist with notifying and disseminating information to the public. These include the Poweshiek County outdoor warning system, the Emergency Alert System (EAS), NOAA All-hazards Weather Radios, media outlets, websites, and social media forums.

Poweshiek County citizens turn to television, radio, the NOAA radios, and the internet a majority of the time to receive emergency preparedness and response information.

When more than one jurisdiction or non-local government department PIO is involved during emergency operations, this may require coordination of public information through a Joint Information Center (JIC).

Planning Assumptions

What can we realistically assume when planning for incidents with a significant need for public information?

The timely dissemination of accurate, well-coordinated emergency public information will reduce the impact to life and property as well as help to maintain public trust and confidence.

Jurisdictions and organizations involved in response and recovery will cooperate and coordinate with other jurisdictions and organizations to ensure consistent information is disseminated.

The media assists in disseminating emergency information to the public.

A disaster may have negative impacts on the existing communication infrastructure or systems requiring the use of alternative methods to provide information to the public.

Disasters may impact individuals' ability to receive public information due to displacement, or limited access to television, phone, newspaper, the internet, social networks, etc.

Rumors or misinformation may be spread before, during, and after a disaster. This can cause unnecessary distress among the public, provoke counter-productive public actions, and impede response and recovery efforts.

The interest generated by a disaster may lead to requests for information or visits from a variety of public officials, dignitaries, or VIPs. Such requests will require coordination and resources.

All PIOs will have basic PIO training and receive training on relevant plans and procedures specific to the emergency public information function.

The media serving Poweshiek County will cooperate with local officials in the dissemination of information to the public.

Policies

What policies are in place that will govern the development [preparation / planning] and the use [response] of our notification and public information systems?

Policy Statement

Life-safety information and instructions to the public has first priority for release.

Local jurisdictions and emergency responders will be notified when an emergency or disaster has occurred that requires an emergency public information response.

Organizations that are responsible for providing emergency notifications/public information are responsible for maintaining the capability to do so.

ESF # 15 primary and support agencies will organize and coordinate efforts through the use of the Incident Command System.

Designated Public Information Officers will be trained to the appropriate NIMS/ICS level in order to function effectively with incident command, the emergency operations center, and/or the JIC.

Any and all media requests for interviews or information should be referred to the appropriate / designated Public Information Officer without exception. This prevents needless confusion and potentially erroneous information from being improperly released and reported.

Emergency public information actions before, during, and following any emergency will be determined by the severity of the situation as declared by involved entities.

Concept of Operations

General

Emergency response organizations, City and County government will coordinate and share the responsibility for notifying and informing the public regarding emergencies and disasters. Each organization will provide emergency notification and provide information to the public according to their plans and procedures.

Alerting and Notification

In smaller, more routine emergencies, emergency notification needs are handled by the local Incident Commander (IC).

On larger emergencies involving a larger geographical area, Poweshiek County can utilize the following to provide warning to the public:

- The county has a network of outdoor warning sirens that are owned and maintained by local jurisdictions. The sirens are used to alert the public of emergency situations. The County Communication Center has the primary responsibility to activate the sirens. Each jurisdiction also has the capability to activate local sirens.
- Public Safety personnel may use door to door and / or use of emergency vehicle PA Systems to notify residents of emergency situations
- Local Radio and / or designated EAS release point may be activated to provide alert and notification of emergency situations.
- NWS radios may be used to provide warning and emergency information for non-weather related incidents

Public Information

In most situations public information can usually be handled by an Incident Commander (IC) and/or a single organization's Public Information Officer (PIO) according to their organization's plans and procedures.

During disasters, when public information activities exceed the scope of individual agencies and/ or jurisdictions, dissemination of public information is coordinated with the lead PIO as designated by the Incident Commander or EOC Director. The PIO will confer with the ESF-15 Public Information Team to determine the need for a Joint Information Center (JIC).

- Location of the JIC will be identified by the PIO, based on the size, location, and the type of incident
- the EOC Director and / or Incident Commander will authorize the activation and location of the JIC

Public Information may be disseminated through the following venues in Poweshiek County: ***Note: All public Information is to be reviewed and authorized by the Incident Commander and /or EOC Director.***

- Scheduled Media Briefings
- Press releases
- Printed media [local]
- Local / Regional Radio
- City / County Web site
- Social Media content

Special Needs Populations – The Poweshiek County Central Point Coordinator [CPC] will serve as the primary point of contact for all Poweshiek County special needs service providers / agencies. Public Information will be disseminated through the CPC to providers via e-mail / phone call lists. It will be the responsibility of the service providers to make sure their respective clients are informed and take any appropriate actions.

See Appendix B for contact / resource information on the above

Preparation Activities

This is how primary and support agencies will prepare for the management and dissemination of Public Information in the event of a disaster.

- ☞ Develop capabilities to distribute emergency notifications and warnings to the Public

- ☞ Develop and / or participate in ESF related exercises and training activities.
- ☞ Evaluate the capabilities needed to accomplish the ESF #15 mission.
- ☞ Identify areas where public education programs (i.e., personal preparedness) are needed.
- ☞ Identify and develop job aids, procedures and checklists.
- ☞ Designate and train personnel to the appropriate NIMS/ICS requirements in order to function effectively with Incident Command, the emergency operations center, and/or the JIC.
- ☞ Identify potential locations for press conferences.
- ☞ Develop and maintain a list of needed equipment to activate the JIC.
- ☞ Develop and maintain an updated media contact list.
- ☞ Ensure representatives from the Primary and Support Agencies are trained and prepared to respond to the County EOC as ESF-15 Team Members.

Response Operations

How dissemination of public information will be managed to support response operations.

In smaller, more routine emergencies, notification and public information can usually be handled by an Incident Commander (IC) and/or agency Public Information Officer (PIO).

In larger incidents involving more than a single agency, organizations involved in the response will coordinate their notification and/or public information efforts.

In major emergencies /disasters or unique situations involving multiple agencies or jurisdictions the Poweshiek County EOC will be activated.

In situations when the Poweshiek County Emergency Operations Center (EOC) is activated, the ESF-15 Public Information Team will automatically be activated.

EOC

How the ESF # 15 Public Information Group will organize and operate within the EOC.

Mission

The mission of the ESF-15 Public Information Team is to ensure the provision and coordination of accurate, consistent, and timely information to meet the needs generated by emergencies / disasters affecting Poweshiek County. The ESF-15 Public Information Team will orchestrate the countywide coordination required to fulfill this mission.

PIO Designation

The EOC Director is responsible for designating the Public Information Officer (PIO) when the EOC is activated. The PIO will be responsible for overall coordination of public information activities associated with the incident. The PIO will lead the ESF-15 Public Information Team in the EOC and support the EOC Director.

Joint Information Center

When deemed appropriate, the PIO will establish a Joint Information Center (JIC) to facilitate the collection, coordination, and dissemination of public information for the county. The JIC provides the capability for public information representatives of local departments and agencies, nongovernmental organizations, government officials from state and federal governments to work together in a coordinated manner.

Joint Information System

The Joint Information System (JIS) describes all public information activities being conducted regarding the event including those outside the EOC and the JIC (i.e., public information functions being carried out at the scene and from departmental offices or other remote offices and locations).

The ESF-15 Coordinator will work to establish communications with all Joint Information System (JIS) components to facilitate the exchange of information. The use of an organized JIS will help to ensure interagency communication and the release of consistent information. Organizations participating in Joint Information System retain their autonomy.

As part of the JIS, the on-scene agency PIO will address media representatives at the incident site and keep the EOC and the JIC informed of these briefings.

SEE ATTACHMENT # 5 Poweshiek County JIC Operational Procedures for information regarding the set up and operation of the JIC.

Recovery Operations

Here is how communications during the recovery operation will be managed.

The PIO and support agencies will maintain operations as determined by the EOC Director / Incident Commander and will be based on the needs of the incident. During the recovery phase the ESF # 15 group will:

- Continue to distribute information as necessary
- Continue rumor control and news briefings.
- Coordinate visitor control to the EOC and to the disaster site(s).
- Supply information concerning status of disaster affected individuals or families through the American Red Cross.
- Distribute information on what to do when returning to your damaged home and how and where to apply for different types of disaster assistance
- Provide information regarding available disaster recovery programs and resources to the media and the public.
- Issue a final news release when the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) closes.
- Compile a written record of events, including any printed materials, news releases, tapes & clippings.
- Participate in after-action reports and critiques to assess effectiveness of information.

Annex Maintenance

How will this ESF Annex be maintained?

Maintenance

The ESF # 15 Coordinator will be responsible for the review of the Public Information Annex on an annual basis. Revisions will be made and the updated Annex forwarded to the Emergency Management Agency.

- Dissemination of the updated Annex will be made by the Emergency Management Agency following the guidelines as outlined in the Basic Plan.
- Significant operational changes in the plan resulting from exercises or actual events will be accomplished through the ESF # 15 planning team.

Exercises

The Poweshiek County ESF #15 – Planning Team and the Emergency Management Agency Coordinator will coordinate exercises in accordance with local needs and State / Federal requirements

Authority/Reference

Iowa Code Chapter 29C

Iowa Code 605