



Poweshiek County Emergency Management Agency

Emergency Support Function 9

Search and Rescue

2026



Poweshiek County Emergency Management Commission

Plan Adoption Document

2026

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 15th day in the month of April in the year 2026. This plan shall become part of the county emergency response and emergency operations plan once adopted.

Plans or ESFs Adopted:

ESF 9: Search & Rescue; Including all attachments and appendices

Dawn Hamilton
Chairperson, Emergency Management Commission

4-15-2026
Date

DAWN HAMILTON
Chairperson, EMC-Printed

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Table of Contents

Section One-Plan

Primary and Supporting Agencies.....	4
Purpose.....	5
Scope.....	5
Policies.....	5
Situation.....	6
Planning Assumptions.....	7
Concept of Operations.....	8
Plan Maintenance.....	15

Section Two-Appendices

Appendix 1- Roles & Responsibilities Quicksheet	
Appendix 2- EOC/ICP Position Checklist	
Appendix 3- Contact List	
Appendix 4- Resource List	
Appendix 5- Missing Persons/AMBER Alert/Alert Iowa Notification Process	
Appendix 6- United State National Grid System (USNG)	
Appendix 7- Maps	

ESF Coordinator

Poweshiek County Emergency Management Agency

Primary Agencies

Primary agencies that will take the lead in implementing this ESF

Poweshiek County Sheriff's Office
Grinnell Police Department
Poweshiek County Emergency Management Agency
Fire/EMS Departments

Support Agencies

Major agencies that support Primary Agencies

911 Communications
Poweshiek County Conservation
Poweshiek County Engineer's Office
Poweshiek County Public Health
Municipal Public Works Departments
Local/Regional Dive/Rescue/Recovery Teams
Local/Regional Search & Rescue Teams
Local/Regional K9 Teams
Local/Regional Air Medical Services
Local Volunteers

Iowa Civil Air Patrol
Iowa 71st Civil Support Team
Iowa Department of Natural Resources
Iowa Department of Public Safety
Iowa Homeland Security and Emergency Management
Iowa National Guard
Iowa Task Force 1

Federal Bureau of Investigations
Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, & Firearms

Purpose

Why are we writing this ESF?

The purpose of ESF 9 is to establish the framework for coordinating search & rescue operations within Poweshiek County. ESF 9 provides guidance for locating, extricating, and resources to individuals who are lost, missing, trapped, or otherwise endangered as a result of natural or human-caused incidents. This plan outlines the roles and responsibilities, coordination process, and resources for local agencies, mutual aid partners, and state and federal resources to ensure an effective, timely, and safe search & rescue response.

Scope

What does this ESF cover?

This plan is not meant to establish specific operating procedures, but rather establish framework that will provide guidance, coordination, and communication for all search & rescue operations within Poweshiek County, encompassing urban, rural, structural collapse, water, and lost/missing persons incidents. This plan applies to all phases of emergency management to include preparedness, response, and recovery. Typical activities in this plan will require close working relationships and coordination, collaboration, and communication with ESF-2: Communications; ESF-4: Firefighting; ESF-5: Incident Management; ESF-8: Health & Medical (EMS); ESF-11: Ag & Natural Resources; ESF-13: Public Safety & Security.

Poweshiek County does not have a dedicated Search & Rescue organization or agency. Most search & rescue operations fall within the mission of local fire/EMS services and law enforcement. This ESF will rely heavily on ESF 4 resources to carry out missions and tasks. The provisions of such services will be in accordance with local mutual aid agreements and established recognized standards and best practices for search & rescue. This ESF will address the following categories:

1. Urban Search & Rescue

Urban Search & Rescue (USAR) involves the location, extrication, and initial medical care of victims that may be trapped in confined spaces or collapsed structures resulting from disasters or emergencies such as tornadoes, explosions, or other structural failures. USAR activities may be supported by local agencies and when necessary, by regional or state specialty teams/resources and require coordination among multiple disciplines.

2. Wilderness Search & Rescue

Wilderness Search & Rescue (WSAR) involves locating, accessing, stabilizing, and evacuating individuals who are lost, injured, or in distress in remote or rural areas where access may be limited. Operations may occur in timber or forests, parks/trails, agriculture lands or other undeveloped areas within the county. WSAR activities may be supported by local agencies and when necessary, by regional or specialty teams/resources and require coordination among multiple disciplines.

3. Water Search & Rescue

Water Search & Rescue (WSR) involves locating, rescuing or recovering individuals who are missing, trapped, or in distress on or near bodies of water such as rivers,

lakes, ponds, and floodwaters. Operations may occur in open water, current flows, and ice, and involve both surface and below surface operations. WSR activities may be supported by local agencies and when necessary, by regional or specialty teams/resources and require coordination among multiple disciplines.

4. Missing Person

Missing Person searches involve the systematic search, location, and reunification of individuals who are lost, overdue, missing, or otherwise unaccounted for in urban, rural, or wilderness environments. These operations may result from disorientation, medical emergencies or problems, adverse weather, or other circumstances. Missing person searches are typically led by local law enforcement and supported by local agencies and when necessary, by state and federal specialty teams/resources and require coordination among multiple disciplines.

Policies

What policies are in place that will govern preparedness, response, and recovery efforts?

Each department or unit of government is responsible for its own search & rescue personnel, equipment, and resources and has the primary responsibility for incident preparedness, response, and recovery activities.

Each jurisdiction maintains control over their individual resources, however, will operate in accordance with the Incident Command System and operate within the goals, objectives, tasks and mission set by the Incident Commander.

Command and control of all search & rescue operations are directed by the Incident Commander from the Authority Having Jurisdiction, unless command has properly been transferred and accepted by another jurisdiction. In most search & rescue operations, the Unified Command structure should be utilized.

Situations

What is creating the need for this plan?

Emergency Support Function (ESF) 9: Search & Rescue is a key component of the County's Emergency Operations Plan. The need for this plan comes from a combination of urban and rural risks, limited resources, severe weather threats, and compliance with national standards—all of which require a coordinated, countywide search & rescue response plan. Below are some key points and risk factors as the primary reasons driving the need for this plan:

- Injured, Lost, or Missing Persons- Poweshiek County has a large expanse of rural farmland, timber, forests, wildlife areas and parks where hikers, hunters, fishers, and recreational users may become lost or injured and require search & rescue assistance. In the urban setting children or at-risk adults may wander away from home, school, or care facility prompting a need to search. Vehicles may be found abandoned in a remote area prompting ground and aerial search. Law enforcement may require the use of search teams as part of a missing person investigation.

- Structural Collapse or Entrapment- Many towns in Poweshiek County have aging architecture and buildings that may pose a collapse hazard. Some buildings may still be occupied by businesses or used as residential housing, and in some cases both which will require search and rescue if there is a structural failure. Additionally, a vehicle or machinery accident into a structure may pose a threat to structural collapse.
- Water and Ice Rescues- Poweshiek County is home to several bodies of water from public and private recreational lakes, farm ponds, and creeks. Boaters and swimmers may go missing; individuals or equipment may fall through the ice during winter recreational activities requiring cold-water or ice rescue/recovery operations. People or vehicles may become stranded in floodwater or swept downstream during flash flood events. Vehicles may be found in lakes either accidentally or intentionally prompting search and rescue efforts.
- Natural Disasters- Poweshiek County is no stranger to natural disasters. Tornadoes, high wind events, and other natural disasters may cause widespread damage to an area that may require search & rescue teams to look for missing or trapped people, assist with damage assessment, and assist in debris removal and access to areas.
- Compliance- The Federal Emergency Management Agency and Iowa Homeland Security and Emergency Management Department require counties to adopt and align with the National Response Framework (NRF), National Incident Management System (NIMS), and Incident Command System (ICS) and work towards the National Qualification System (NQS) to remain eligible for disaster reimbursement and federal grant awards.

Planning Assumptions

What can we realistically assume regarding our response to the above situations?

The timely and coordinated deployment of search & rescue resources will have a direct impact on the ability to respond to and recover from a disaster or large-scale incident. Some incidents may not require or affect all search & rescue resources at once or have a significant impact on all services. To this end, ESF 9 is based on the following assumptions:

- Departments will utilize their existing directives, procedures, and resources to the extent possible when responding to emergencies or disasters. All departments will work within the ICS framework when operating during an emergency or disaster.
- Existing department personnel and equipment will be able to cope with most day-to-day emergency situations either within their jurisdiction or the use of existing mutual aid agreements.
- During a major disaster or emergency incident, operations will likely go beyond the local capabilities and require specialty teams and equipment not readily available in Poweshiek County. This is especially true for structural collapse/failure incidents and below surface water incidents.
- It is reasonable to assume that a USAR incident may occur as a secondary event to a natural or human-caused incident. This may result in access delays, limited personnel and resources, and unique or uncommon rescue situations.

- It is reasonable to assume that volunteer organizations and spontaneous volunteers may play a role in search & rescue operations in varying capacities and must be coordinated through established incident command structures.

Concept of Operations

This section will describe how the Primary and Support agencies will organize and work to support the overall preparedness, response, and recovery efforts.

To the extent possible, ESF 9 departments and organizations will follow their normal day-to-day policy and procedures in carrying out designated tasks. Conflicts regarding mission, tasks, priorities, and responsibilities will be forwarded to the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) Executive/Policy Group (if activated), or the Incident Commander/Unified Command.

When and where applicable during search & rescue operations, the Incident Command or Unified Command should utilize the United States National Grid (USNG) system for mapping and location positioning. An alternative to the USNG will be Global Positioning System (GPS) coordinates. More information regarding mapping, County utilized technology and the USNG can be found in **Appendix F**.

Roles and Responsibilities

What defines a primary or supporting agency?

The county has identified primary and support agencies to ensure ESF 9 related activities are performed in an efficient and effective manner during all phases of the emergency management cycle.

- **Primary Agency:** Agencies or organizations that are assigned as the primary agency have been designated as such based on the agency's responsibility, authority, jurisdiction, functional expertise, resources, and capabilities in managing the assigned tasks and activities pertinent to this ESF. Primary agencies will take the lead (Incident Command) in ESF activities but may rely on additional primary or support agencies to fulfill ESF functions (Unified Command). Primary agencies may not be responsible for all elements of a given function, task, or mission related to ESF 9. Primary agencies may operate in a supporting role during mutual aid requests to other jurisdictions to support ESF 9 activities.
- **Support Agency:** Agencies may be assigned a support role if they have a substantial interest, mission, or related functions during incidents based on their role, capability, and resources. Organizations with a self-defined mission that include emergency or disaster response and/or recovery efforts may receive formalized tasking by governmental agencies based on their capabilities and resources.

When Search & Rescue services are needed for an incident response or recovery, an Incident Command Post (ICP) will be established, or the Emergency Operations Center will be activated. All activities related to ESF 9 will be coordinated at either the ICP or the EOC. Incident Command may use local resources and mutual aid to supplement their capabilities for unmet needs. Emergency Management should be utilized to assist in the coordination of resources for response and recovery efforts related to ESF 9.

When operations go beyond local mutual aid resources or the incident may span across a large area and/or several days, the EOC may be activated to coordinate additional support. When prioritization becomes necessary, coordinating resources will occur under a Unified Command. Requests for additional resources will be made through the EOC when activated or the Poweshiek County Emergency Management Agency when not activated.

ESF 9 has a primary mission of coordinating and conducting search and rescue operations to locate, extricate, and provide initial medical assistance to individuals who are missing, lost, trapped, or endangered due natural or human-caused incidents within their jurisdiction. Other general roles and responsibilities of ESF 9 are, but not limited to:

- Ensuring responder safety and maintain continuity of services during extended operations.
- Provide situation reports and damage assessments to the EOC/ICP.
- Education and training in search & rescue techniques and equipment.
- Assist with debris management and removal to gain access to blocked areas.

Preparedness Activities

How will primary and support agencies prepare for the management of Search & Rescue efforts and resources in the event of a major emergency or disaster?

- Conduct pre-planning familiarization with known parks, trails, and wilderness areas frequented by the public.
- Participate in drills and exercises to test existing plans and capabilities and develop inter-agency collaboration.
- Develop and maintain response policies, plans, and procedures.
- Assign personnel to function in the EOC or ICP to assist in the coordination of search & rescue tasks.
- Train personnel in the Incident Command System to help ensure coordination during incidents. The minimum level of training for all personnel is ICS 100 and NIMS 700. It is recommended that command and leadership level personnel take ICS 200 and NIMS 800 also.
- Conduct and offer routine training for personnel to remain proficient in their roles and responsibilities and gain new skills and certifications.
- Develop, maintain, and update equipment resources and lists
- Maintain their equipment, tools, and apparatus to ensure a constant state of readiness.

Response Activities

If there is a Search & Rescue emergency, or ESF 9 is activated, how will the response unfold and how will operations be coordinated?

Response activities are divided into two categories: On-Scene Operations and EOC Operations. The primary duties of On-Scene Operations are to manage tactical operations, conduct risk assessments, and request additional resources as needed through established mutual aid. EOC Operations the primary focus shifts to supporting on-going or long-term search & rescue needs by coordinating additional mutual aid, resources or special capabilities outside normal mutual aid, continuity of operations, progress and priorities, logistical support, communications, and coordination between local, state, and federal partners.

On-Scene Operations

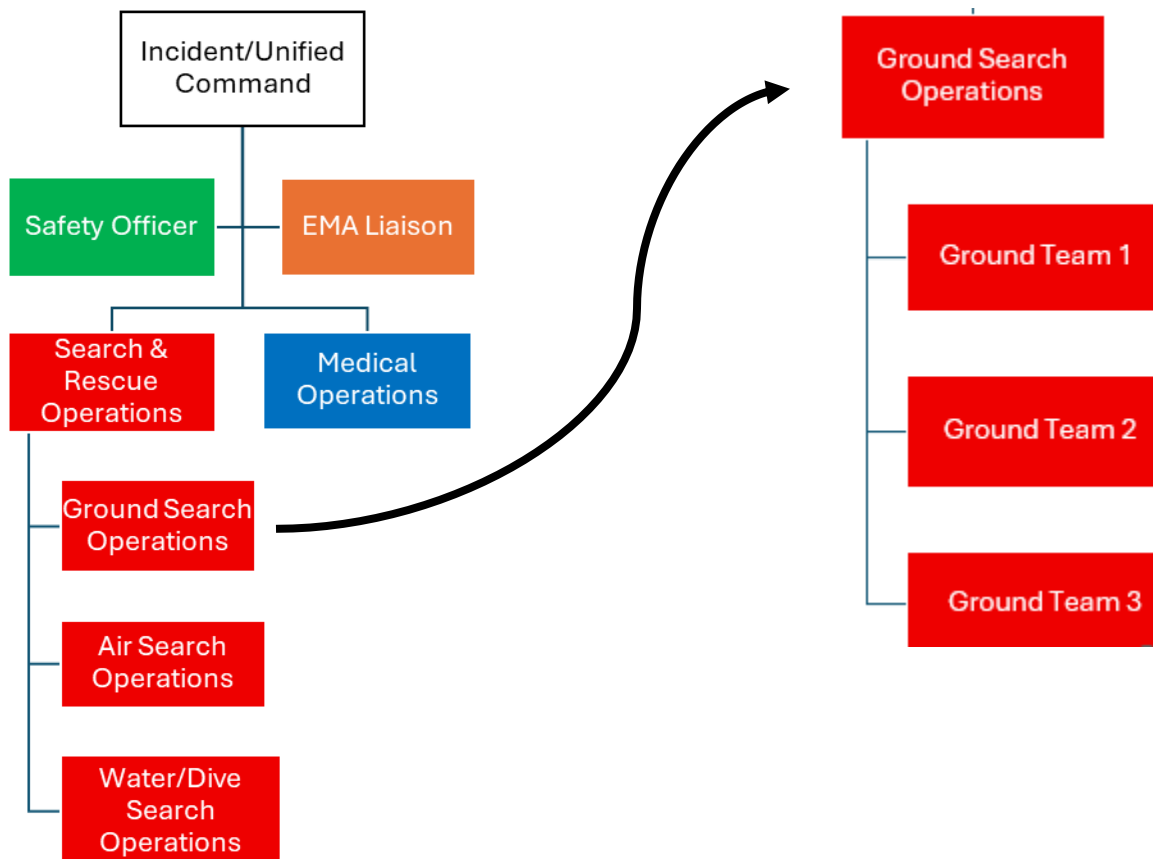
How will the initial response be managed?

Search & Rescue operations must begin with the establishment of Incident Command. Incident Command should be taken by the first arriving response unit. Command may be passed to a higher-ranking individual when they arrive on scene. In most search and rescue operations a Unified Command Structure should be established between the law enforcement agency having jurisdiction and the fire/EMS agency having jurisdiction using ICS principles.

Priority is given to life safety (responder and the public), establishment of a search area(s), establishment of search teams and equipment, and execution of search objectives, tasks, and missions.

When local resources are inadequate or exhausted, the Incident Commander or Unified Command may request mutual aid using existing mutual aid agreements through the dispatch center.

Requests for resources beyond existing mutual aid agreements, such as regional assets, specialty teams, or state resources must be requested through Poweshiek County Emergency Management.



Incidents requiring multiple jurisdictions and/or multiple agencies should be organized under a Unified Command structure.

If an incident is going to be prolonged over multiple days and/or over multiple areas and requires multiple agencies and jurisdictions, the EOC should be activated.

General On-Scene Response Objectives

What is my role and responsibility as the Incident Commander responding to a Search & Rescue Incident?

- Ensure responder and scene safety
- Establish Incident Command and the Incident Command Post location
- Assess the situation and request additional resources if necessary
- Transition to Unified Command if necessary
- Define search areas and prioritize
- Deploy search teams and conduct systematic search operations
- Coordinate with supporting agencies
- Provide medical care and evaluation
- Preserve evidence if necessary
- Document activities

General On-Scene Recovery Objectives

What are my roles and responsibility as the Incident Commander of a search & rescue incident in the recovery phase?

- Obtain search briefings from search teams
- Preserve evidence and scene integrity if necessary
- Conduct incident debriefings
- Release and return resources no longer needed.

EOC Operations

How will Search & Rescue related objectives be coordinated in a large-scale or expanding incident?

The Poweshiek County EOC may be activated to support field operations and serve as the central location for inter-agency coordination and executive level policy and decision making. ESF 5- Incident Management outlines in greater detail the functions and responsibilities of the EOC. Refer to that plan for further guidance.

EOC Functions- The EOC will facilitate the following functions/responsibilities:

- Overall coordination of emergency response and/or recovery efforts
- Establish incident objectives, goals, and metrics.
- Provide executive policy and decision making
- Coordination with agencies, jurisdictions, including mutual aid, state and federal resources.
- Collection, evaluation, and dissemination of information.
- Resource procurement, allocation, and tracking.

Activation- The EOC may be activated under the following general guidelines:

- Resource needs exceed local and normal mutual aid resources.
- Widespread or long-duration incidents that may last multiple days.
- Multiple agencies and jurisdictions are affected or responding.

- Multi-county, state, or federal assistance may be required.

Authorization- The following individuals may request the EOC be activated:

- Emergency Management/Designee
- Chief Elected Official/Designee
- Incident Commander

Notification Procedure

Requests to activate the EOC will be made through the Poweshiek County Dispatch Center and/or Poweshiek County Emergency Management. Contact lists are kept on file in the dispatch center and with Emergency Management who will make proper notification of EOC activation through Alert Iowa and normal means of communication.

Initial Reporting Requirements

When the EOC is activated the minimum reporting requirements to the EOC include:

- Emergency Management Coordinator
- Elected Officials of the jurisdiction
- Representative(s) from the primary response agency (agency having jurisdiction)
- Representative(s) from support agency(s)
- EOC General Staff (Operations, Logistics, Planning, Finance/Admin Section Chiefs)
- Specific requests by the authorized entity activating the EOC

Subsequent notifications to report to the EOC will be determined on an assessment of the situation and will be the responsibility of the above identified personnel to notify appropriate agencies/personnel to report.

EOC Facilities

There are two Emergency Operations Centers located in Poweshiek County. The primary location is listed first, and the secondary is listed second. Based on the location and complexity of an incident it will be determined by the elected officials and Emergency Management which EOC to utilize. Both EOC's are equipped similarly and can sustain 24/7 operations and are equally accessible for use as needed.

**Poweshiek County Public Safety Bldg
4802 Barnes City Rd
Montezuma, IA 50171**

**Grinnell Public Safety Bldg
1020 Spring St
Grinnell, IA 50112**

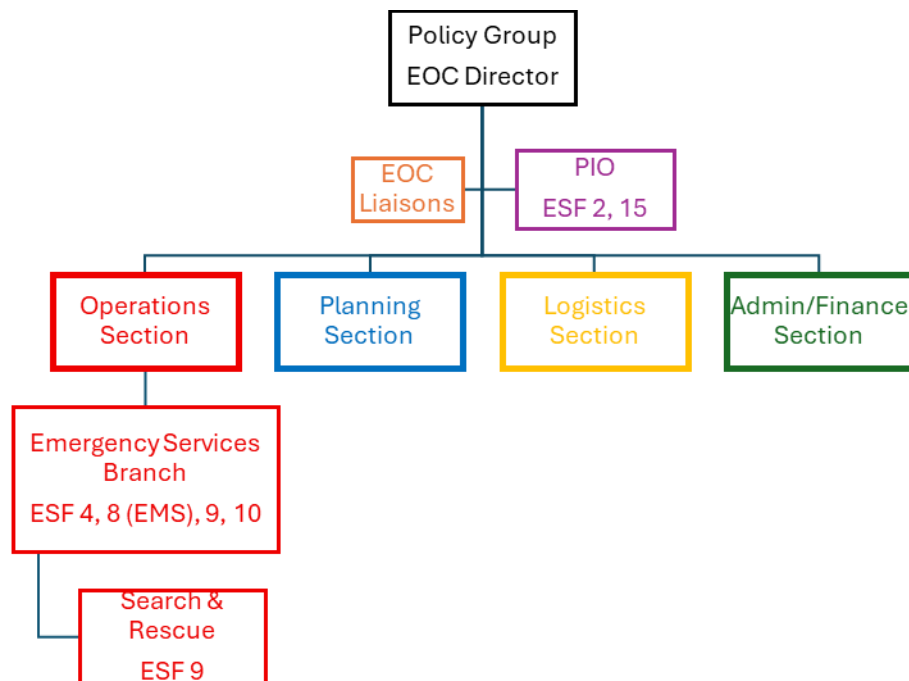
EOC Operational Levels

To be consistent with ICS principles, a graduated approach to managing emergencies and disasters is used. As the scope and complexity of the situation escalates, staffing levels within the EOC will increase as needed.

Level	Description	Minimum Staffing
1 (Monitor)	Small incident or event One Site One or more agency involved Potential threat of: Severe storm Escalating incident	Emergency Management (EOC Director) Additional Staff as Requested
2 (Partial)	Moderate event Two or more sites Several agencies involved Major scheduled event Limited evacuations Resource support required	EOC Director Requested ESF Groups Section Chiefs (as needed) Senior Elected Officials PIO
3 (Full)	Major event/incident Multiple Sites Regional disaster Multiple agencies involved Extensive evacuations Resource support required	EOC Director All ESF Groups All Section Chiefs Policy Group (elected officials) Liaison Officer All EOC General Staff

EOC Organization

In our EOC, ESF 9 is under the Operations Section and serves within the Emergency Services Branch. Based on the size, severity, complexity of the incident and/or availability of personnel, multiple people will serve in various roles (single role) within the Emergency Services Branch, or one person may serve in multiple roles under the Emergency Services Branch (dual/multi-role).



Communications

How will personnel and resources communicate during an EOC activated incident?

Informal Communications

Communications may be informal and direct to the intended party when exchanging information with other local, regional, and state counterparts following normal day-to-day practices and procedures. Informal communication may be used when there is a need to:

- Communicate with other primary or support agencies operating within an assigned mission or task.
- Communicate outside the EOC or ICP with personnel, resources, and other agencies to obtain information or available resources needed to assist in the implementation of plans, missions, or tasks.
- Coordinate and communicate closely with other active ESF groups within the EOC.

Formal Communications

Any communication that requires a change to the status of the operational plan or Incident Action Plan (IAP) goals and objectives must be formal in nature and follow the formal chain of command process. Formal communication may be used when there is a need to:

- Change or alteration of goals or objectives identified in the IAP.
- Resource requests outside of available on-scene or staged resources, or unmet resource needs.
- Situation/status reporting and progress reports
- Public information reporting

ESF 9 General EOC Response Objectives

What is my role and responsibility as the ESF 9 Representative in the EOC during the response phase?

Typical incident objectives that need to be performed within the EOC by the Search & Rescue ESF include but are not limited to:

- Serve as a liaison between related primary and supporting agencies.
- Monitor ongoing search & rescue related actions and activities.
- Assessing the need for additional support beyond normal mutual aid and reporting the need for additional resources.
- Receive and share with command staff situation status updates and needs related to search & rescue to aid in the development of situation reports and the Incident Action Plan.
- Participate in and provide search & rescue specific reports for EOC briefings.
- Assist in the development of incident objectives and goals.
- Provide search & rescue resources and personnel to meet incident needs, objectives, and goals.
- Coordinate search & rescue resources and staffing to ensure that the function can provide adequate service across multiple operational periods.
- Coordinate with other ESF's as needed.
- Coordinate and provide logistical support for operations.
- Provide technical assistance to General Staff and Policy Group as needed.

ESF 9 General EOC Recovery Objectives

What is my role and responsibility as the ESF 9 Representative in the EOC during the recovery phase?

This section involves the Search & Rescue related actions needed to help individuals and communities recover as soon as possible. Typical recovery objectives include, but are not limited to:

- Continue to coordinate search & rescue equipment, personnel, and supplies.
- Assist in damage assessments and debris removal and access as appropriate
- Prepare and submit cost recovery documentation, if appropriate.
- Participate in after-action meetings and submit documentation for after action reports.
- Demobilize mutual aid and other resources when they are no longer needed.

Plan Maintenance

How will this plan be maintained?

Maintenance

The ESF 9 Coordinator will be responsible for the review of this plan on an annual basis. If revisions are necessary, they will be made and the updated plan forwarded to the primary agencies.

- Dissemination of the updated plan will be made by Poweshiek County Emergency Management following the guidelines outlined in the Basic Plan.
- Significant operational changes in the plan resulting from exercises or actual events will be accomplished through an ESF 9 Planning Committee.

Exercises

The Poweshiek County Emergency Management Agency will coordinate and integrate the exercising of this plan to meet local needs and state/federal requirements as part of other ESF or incident specific exercises.