
PUBLIC INFORMATION

EMERGENCY SUPPORT FUNCTION 14 (ESF 14)

PRIMARY AGENCIES: Lake County Communications Department

SUPPORT AGENCIES: Lake County Sheriff's Office
Florida Department of Health, Lake County
Lake County Emergency Management Division
Lake County Municipalities
Lake EMS
American Red Cross
Other County Departments/Agencies
Lake County Hospitals
Lake County Schools

I. INTRODUCTION

Lake County is subject to various natural, technological, and human-caused disasters. At times of disaster, residents need immediate and accurate information regarding the emergency. Timely information enables residents to protect themselves and their property, as best they can, from the disaster.

A. Purpose

This annex provides guidelines for disseminating information to the public regarding emergencies and for providing information management during an emergency.

Public information is the use of all available means to provide residents with a description of the actions to be taken should a disaster threaten. Information includes data on the background and type of disaster, combined with the what, who, when, and why, if disaster is imminent.

In time of emergency, the public will be informed of the measures being taken to deal with the emergency, including all governmental decisions, recommendations, and instructions. Accurate information becomes vital when the public may otherwise accept rumors, hearsay, and half-truths that could cause panic, fear, and confusion. A flow of clear, concise, statements is imperative regarding disaster conditions and relief services available.

B. Scope

Emergency public information and related functions will be accomplished in three phases:

1. Non-Emergency

Information disseminated during non-emergency operations includes written disaster preparedness materials, public speaking engagements, news releases, news features, and radio and television public service announcements. This information is designed to instruct residents of potential hazards, and individual responsibilities and actions which can be taken to minimize loss of life and property during a disaster.

Ongoing activities also include the development of working relationships with media personnel and organizations to facilitate prompt accurate news coverage of disaster operations.

2. Emergency Information

Emergency information begins with a determination by appropriate authorities that conditions, which could result in an emergency situation, are present or probable impact on the threatened area will occur. Emergency public information and instructions will become specific, and accurate accounts of the existing situation will be primarily directed toward the survival, health and safety of the population within the disaster area.

3. Post Emergency

This phase begins after the disaster impact and continues until the needs for recovery and rehabilitation are satisfied. Releases will give estimates of conditions, what is being done to alleviate the problems, and descriptions of emergency assistance available, including where and how disaster survivors may apply for such assistance.

II. CONCEPT OF OPERATIONS

A. General

1. Policy

A Joint Information System (JIS) / Joint Information Center (JIC) will be activated under the National Incident Management System (NIMS).

2. Functions

Lake County is dependent upon the media for getting disaster warnings and information to the public. When a warning needs to be issued to residents and visitors, without prior information advising residents to monitor the media, the Emergency Alert System (EAS), cable override, and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Weather Wire System will be activated. Additional information dissemination systems include Lake County Emergency Management's Citizens Information Line, the TDD Hearing Impaired Line at 911 Dispatch, the County's Emergency Notification System, the Sheriff's Senior Watch program and the Multilingual Committee.

All initial warnings will advise residents and visitors to continually monitor the media for further updates and information. Thereafter, information will be released through the Joint Information Center (JIC) as described further in this annex.

3. Non-Emergency

The Lake County Emergency Management Division is responsible to coordinate, develop, and provide preparedness programs. These programs address the risks/hazards affecting the Lake County area (i.e. tropical weather, severe weather, hazardous materials, flooding, forest/wildland fire, major structural fire, sinkholes, and severe temperature hazards).

Lake County is in EAS Operational Area 7, which includes eight (8) counties.

Programs targeting the at-risk public will include live presentations, dissemination of written materials (brochures, newsletters, posters, etc.), public service announcements and proactive media relations.

The Lake County Communications Department will be responsible to develop a good working relationship with the local media through routine contacts. A media list updated no less than every six months will be maintained in a daily media notebook and the Emergency Information Guide.

The Lake County Communications Department is responsible to develop and maintain the public information plans and procedures for times of emergencies/disasters, this is to include updating media list, contact lists, training, public information materials, and methods of dissemination.

The Lake County Emergency Management Division will develop community relationships with groups and agencies that will promote public awareness to preparedness issues as well as develop policies and procedures for emergency activation.

4. Emergency

The Lake County Communications Department, Public Information Officer takes on the role as Public Information Officer (PIO) during times of emergencies/disasters. The PIO will be directly involved in warning the public. During major emergencies, the PIO will fully mobilize and disseminate emergency instructions and information to the public in the following order of priority:

- a) Lifesaving/health preservation instructions.
- b) Emergency status information.
- c) Other useful information, originated by the government or in response to media inquiries.

When an incident occurs that prompts activation of Incident Command, the JIS will be activated. The decision by the PIO supporting Incident Command to activate the JIS is based on the complexity of the situation and the need to ensure coordination and integration of messages.

In both the response and recovery phases, the Lead PIO will establish a Joint Information Center (JIC) and will designate the Lake County Board of County Commission Chambers or the Emergency Communications and Operations Center as sites for the media.

The Lead Public Information Officer, with assistance from the Emergency Management Division, will set up the Citizens Information Line (CIL) with available staff. It is the responsibility of the PIO to assure the accuracy and timely update of information disseminated by the CIL staff. The Lake County Emergency Management Division's published phone number acts as the Citizens Information Line during times of emergencies or disasters and will be staffed 24-hours a day until EOC operations have deactivated. The availability of this number and staffing will be publicized through the media during the activation. In addition to the CIL, the Lake County Sheriff's Office Communications Center will also receive the same information to accurately disseminate information through the County's TDD Hearing Impaired line and through the Sheriff's Senior Watch Program.

B. Direction and Control

1. Coordination Between Agencies

It is essential that the Emergency Public Information activity be recognized as a coherent system. A current contact list of area public information officers (designees) for local agencies and organizations will be maintained throughout the year (see Resource-Appendix 1). The Public Information Officer will assess the need for additional PIOs for emergency/disaster incidents. Contact will be made to affected areas to assess needs and offer assistance. The State Emergency Operations Center – ESF 14 will be contacted if further assistance is needed. A Joint Information Center (JIC) can be opened should the need arise. Space for a JIC can be opened in the County Administration Building in conjunction with the Emergency Communications and Operations Center. Other locations may be necessary depending on the location of the specific incidents.

Training for local PIOs will be made available through the Lake County Emergency Management Division or the Lake County Communications Department as needed or requested during the year.

C. Notification and Warning

1. Primary Agency and Staff

The Emergency Management Division will notify EOC staff of activation. Notification means will depend on time of day. Primary means of notification of senior staff is the email contact group, then

call down of additional personnel. The Lake County Emergency Management Division personnel, and volunteers will be immediately notified of activation, in order to staff the Citizens Information Line when necessary. Once the PIO has established the need, the back-up PIO will be notified as to when and where to report to duty. All EOC PIOs will adhere to a twelve-hour shift schedule. An area will be designated for off-duty rest and nourishment.

2. Notification and Warning of Support Agencies

In the event of a full-scale emergency, PIOs from the sheriff's office, Lake EMS, local hospitals, and ancillary agencies will be contacted to coordinate information pertinent to their agencies. In some cases, PIOs from affected agencies would activate together in the most appropriate location, on-scene, or in an area adjacent to the most appropriate EOC. Notification will be made through phone, fax, dispatch communications, and/or individual pagers.

The news media would be notified of the location and contact numbers of the PIO(s) involved. A media center would be established for the convenience of the PIO(s) and the media.

D. Response Actions

1. Information Dissemination

a) During smaller scale operations when the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) is not activated, information will be disseminated using the following methods:

(1) On-Scene Public Information

When an incident has occurred and response is limited to the scene, the Public Information Officer will respond to media inquiries regarding operations. If public action is required through the media, the coordinator, with the guidance of the division or the Incident Commander will coordinate the release of information.

(2) Telephone Inquiries

When an incident occurs, media inquiries may be handled over the telephone by the responsible

department or the Lake County Communications Department.

(3) Facsimile (FAX) Notification

The Lake County Communications Department has programmed the FAX numbers of all media outlets, as well as surrounding County Public Information Officers and dispatch communications fax numbers. Written public information materials may be disseminated to all outlets.

(4) NOAA Weather Wire

Information can be disseminated directly to the public through the NOAA Weather Wire Service. Emergency Management may provide the National Weather Service in Melbourne, FL with a written bulletin. The Weather Service will then retransmit that information verbally over their frequencies. Residents with a weather alert radio will receive a tone activating their radio and then the message.

b) Large Scale Emergencies

In the event of a large-scale emergency prompting public notification, activation of the Emergency Alert System (EAS), and when necessary, the issuance of evacuation orders, a Joint Information Center (JIC) will be activated. The Lake County Communications Department and the Lake County Emergency Management Division will activate ESF 14 Public Information in the EOC or appropriate location. All affected local PIOs will be notified as to the operations location. The media will be notified as to the activation and location of EOC or JIC.

c. Citizens' Information Line

The Citizens' Information Line (CIL) will be activated as soon as the Incident Commander or the Lake County Emergency Management Division determines the need. Once a need has been established, the normal Emergency Management operating line, will be staffed by designated employees and/or volunteers to answer calls from the public. The CIL will be activated with staff 24-hours a day until it is

determined that the immediate danger is over and/or operations have ceased.

2. Media Facilities

- a. The Joint Information Center will be set up at an appropriate location determined by the Lead PIO.
- b. All media personnel will log in at the BCC Chambers on the second floor of the County Administration Building, Emergency Communications and Operations Center or other designated area, and be escorted upon arrival. Media representatives will wear their press pass badge at all times.
- c. Photographic or camera crews will be allowed reasonable access to EOC operations when deemed appropriate by the Emergency Management Division Manager or designee and the PIO. At times, only a pool camera/video may be allowed.
- d. Interviews will be conducted away from the EOC room and other main working areas, preferably in the BCC Chambers, a location determined appropriate at the Emergency Communications and Operations Center or other office space, to eliminate interruptions of work in progress.

3. Scheduled Media Briefings

The Lead PIO, in conjunction with the Incident Commander, will schedule a minimum of one media briefing per day to be held at a time when the pertinent information can have the best possible media/public exposure (3 p.m.). The next scheduled briefing will be posted in the media area.

- a. The Lead PIO and/or ESFs will conduct any additional media briefings as often and in whatever form necessary.
- b. The Lead PIO can arrange additional briefings at the request of the Incident Commander.

4. Media Activity with Departments

ESF members will not speak to members of the media. Individual departmental/agency interaction with the media will be governed by the media policies established within this plan or by specific

orders from the County Manager, Incident Commander, or Emergency Management Division Manager.

5. Media Access to Elected Officials

Should it become necessary for the Governor, State Legislators, or County or municipal commissioners to enter the EOC, the media will be allowed access to them through the Lead PIO.

If, in the opinion of the Lead PIO and the Incident Commander, the presence of these individuals and the media begin to compromise the work in progress at the EOC, the County Manager, Incident Commander, or Emergency Management Division Manager may request that these activities be moved to another location in the Emergency Communications and Operations Center or to the Commission Chambers or other appropriate location.

6. Citizens' Information Line Operations

The Citizens' Information Line (CIL) may be staffed with up to 12 operators per shift. Citizens' Information Line staff consists of personnel from the Lake County Community Services Department.

All phone stations will be equipped with a laptop and access to white board CIL Information Book. The CIL will receive all media releases and pertinent EOC updates by the PIO for dissemination to the calling public. The CIL operators will provide information based on the information officially provided by the Lead PIO or designee. The CIL operators will not speculate or play "what if" with this information.

The CIL Supervisor or designee will attend all situation briefings and disseminate information acquired (verbally and through the situation report) to the operators.

Once an operator has detects a pattern concerning the same issue, he/she will advise the CIL Supervisor. The CIL Supervisor will coordinate with the PIO on duty to prepare a news release to address the issue.

If a caller asks a question which cannot be answered by the CIL staff based on the official information, the operator will complete an EOC message form and give it to the supervisor. The supervisor will ensure the message is delivered to the message center.

a) Health and Welfare Inquiries

In a mass casualty disaster, the CIL may receive calls from friends and family members concerned about the welfare of their loved ones. CIL operators should not respond directly to these inquiries. Health and Welfare inquiries will be noted on the EOC message form and provided to the appropriate agency as noted below.

(1) Locate and Notify

Inquiries into the whereabouts of a person(s) requiring a search to locate the person(s) or match name to known casualties should be provided to ESF 16, Law Enforcement. Notification to family regarding death or injury would only be handled by the agency assigned by ESF 16 or in conjunction with ESF 14.

(2) Messages

Messages for residents whose whereabouts are known should be passed to the RACES team for amateur radio or American Red Cross follow-up.

b) Offers/Requests for Assistance

Callers offering supplies, equipment or volunteer labor should be referred to ESF 15, Volunteers and Donations. If ESF 15 telephone lines are busy, the caller's name and call back telephone number and brief description of their donation should be noted on an EOC Message Form and given to the supervisor for dissemination.

Callers requesting assistance who are unable to access established programs, should also be referred to ESF 15, Volunteers and Donations, following the procedures covered above.

1. Joint Information Center (JIC)

In the event of a catastrophic event, public information teams from the State of Florida and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) may respond to the disaster area. If Lake County is the only county impacted, a Joint Information Center (JIC) will be established.

If the event impacts more than one county, the JIC may be set up at the Joint Field Office (JFO) or other centralized location. The Lead PIO will report to the JIC leaving an Operations PIO to de-escalate activities in the JIC.

III. RESPONSIBILITIES

A. Lake County Information Outreach Division

Lake County Information Outreach has the ultimate responsibility for the release of emergency public information for a disaster which threatens the public safety. Lake County Emergency Management coordinates the dissemination of emergency education information during non-emergency operations. Lake County Information Outreach maintains or arranges for:

1. The Joint Information Center (JIC);
2. Contact with media representatives;
3. ESF 14 Annex to the CEMP.

Lake County Information Outreach may act as the Lead PIO for smaller scale incidents at the request of the County Administrator, Incident Commander, or Emergency Management Director.

B. Director of Emergency Management

The Director of Emergency Management will notify the Lake County Information Outreach of the emergency and give instructions. The primary team consists of the Lead PIO and the designated support PIOs. During a full-scale emergency, other support personnel including PIOs from other departments and the staff of the Citizens Information Line (CIL) will be notified.

C. Lead PIO

The Lead PIO is the “official” spokesperson for the release of public information. All information will be coordinated and approved by concerned agencies and departments and released by the Lead PIO.

The designated “back-up” Lead PIO will be contacted and, if necessary, act as Lead PIO for the second twelve-hour shift. This schedule will continue throughout the duration of the emergency response and recovery phases. The Lead PIO will:

1. Ensure that the Joint Information Center (JIC) is fully set up and staffed with necessary PIOs for 24-hour coverage;
2. Notify PIOs from other departments of the EOC's activation and ensure that these PIOs are present at the EOC when appropriate;
3. Ensure that the Joint Information Center is fully equipped;
4. In consultation with the Incident Commander and/or Emergency Management Director, establish media policy and review all news releases;
5. Ensure that other PIOs on duty and the news media are briefed on a regular basis;
6. Be the official spokesperson for Lake County;
7. Keep the Incident Commander informed of developments during the emergency;
8. Establish policies on the use of the Emergency Alert System (EAS);
9. Ensure that arrangements have been made to accommodate the media;
10. Attend operational briefings; prepare news releases/situation reports for dissemination based on those meetings;
11. Brief the CIL staff in writing and meet with staff as needed;
12. Send out all news releases to media outlets, municipalities, agency PIOs, EOC Section Leaders, dispatch communications centers;
13. Monitor and file all incoming messages, weather bulletins, briefing papers, and other incoming paperwork;
14. Schedule media briefings in the JIC and phone interviews with broadcasting stations;
15. Maintain information board in JIC or designated area;
16. Prepare list of persistent rumors/questions needing to be addressed through news release or public statement, notify Incident Commander, address accordingly;

17. Ensure through Facilities Management equipment in JIC is in working order;
18. Coordinate information with outside agency PIOs.

D. Other Agency PIOs

1. Draft news releases concerning respective areas, give copy to Lead PIO;
2. Assist Lead PIO as assigned.

E. Citizens Information Line (CIL) Supervisor

The appointed CIL Supervisor for each shift will coordinate with ESF 5, Information and Planning, and ESF 14, Public Information, to ensure that the most current information is always available to citizens.

1. Ensure that the CIL is equipped and supplied.
2. Ensure adequate staffing of the CIL to respond to questions from the public via telephone.
3. Ensure that all calls and questions are logged.
4. Inform PIO of any rumors or misinformation detected or trends in calls.
5. Ensure that CIL staff is briefed with the latest situation reports and news releases.

IV. ONGOING PUBLIC INFORMATION PROGRAMS

- A. Media packages are distributed on an annual basis with hazard specific information.
- B. Handouts relative to specific hazards are prepared on an annual basis and distributed to the general public. Brochures include preparedness tips on what to bring to a shelter, i.e., medications, clothing, etc., and preparedness tips on measures which will minimize disaster-caused losses.
- C. Lake County Emergency Management staff conducts public speaking engagements to disseminate personal preparedness information to the general public, including the identification of vulnerable areas within the county.
- D. Pre-scripted news releases are developed with specific information on evacuation and survival needs, to be released before and after the disaster.
- E. Brochures and other written materials are distributed which include materials for registering Persons with Special Needs (PSNS). Presentations are conducted at civic groups, homeowners' associations, schools, nursing facilities, and other agencies or groups as requested.

V. RECOVERY**A. Recovery Phase**

During the recovery phase, attention will be focused on restoring channels of communication with the public. Appropriate information will continue to be released, particularly on the restoration of essential services, travel restrictions, disaster recovery centers, and assistance programs available. When time allows, action taken during the emergency/disaster will be addressed; and plans and procedures will be revised as necessary.

A. Procedures

1. ESF 14, Public Information, would continue to follow the operations of the response phase. Once operations of the EOC scaled down, ESF 14 would begin its scale down of CIL operators and ancillary staff. The Lead PIO would continue to release information, and schedule briefings until the EOC had been deactivated.

2. In the event of a large-scale disaster, the Lead PIO would coordinate and offer assistance to the State Emergency Management ESF 14, and/or FEMA ESF 14.