



County of Los Angeles

Emergency Public Information Plan

COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES EMERGENCY PUBLIC INFORMATION PLAN

PURPOSE\MISSION

The purpose of this document is to establish guidelines for an Emergency Public Information (EPI) plan based on the policies that were approved by the Los Angeles County Emergency Management Council on August 21, 2003, and to provide guidance when the County of Los Angeles gives information to the public in time of crisis or disaster. This plan also provides a framework for how the County provides accurate, timely, appropriate, consistent and coordinated information. Elements of this document will also be used when there is "pre-event" public concern about a possible emergency/disaster, and in the recovery phase after a major disaster.

The EPI mission is to provide timely and accurate disaster-related information to the media and the public during and immediately following an emergency/disaster. The purpose of EPI is to pro-actively alert, inform and reassure. Information will be accurate and timely, with messages that are clear and consistent. Alert and warning messages always have the highest priority in any emergency. It is also important that timely information and reassuring messages be developed and released to the public.

RELATIONSHIP TO THE EMERGENCY RESPONSE PLAN

This document complies with the requirements of the Operational Area (OA) Emergency Response Plan. Users of this document are expected to be familiar with the OA Emergency Response Plan and the Disaster Information Reporting Procedures (DIRP).

PROPONENT

The Chief Administrative Officer's (CAO) Office of Emergency Management (OEM) is responsible for developing plans for EPI. When the Los Angeles County Emergency Operations Center (CEOC) is activated, EPI will be directed and coordinated by the CEOC Manager (Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department).

POLICIES

The County of Los Angeles' Emergency Management Council approved the following EPI policies, which ensure that County departments are prepared to handle disaster-related media inquiries and public information in a timely responsible manner. This EPI plan implements these policies.

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- 1) In the event of a CEOC activation, the Sheriff's Department will coordinate all EPI consistent with these policies during the response phase of a disaster.
- 2) In the event of a CEOC activation OEM, in concert with the CAO's Public Affairs (PA) Office, will provide information to the Board of Supervisors; coordinate and disseminate information and news to County employees, the Emergency Digital Information System (EDIS), and the County's Disaster hotline, and ensure that information and news messages are sent to cities and school districts.
- 3) Each County department is responsible for establishing an EPI program to address their specific responsibilities.
- 4) Some emergencies, such as a terrorist event or threat, cause great public concern. In these instances, the Sheriff and CAO (Office of Emergency Management and Public Affairs) will work with the Board of Supervisors' public information officers and key departments to develop a specific EPI strategy to meet the needs of the emergency. This will not be limited to news media releases, but may include town hall meetings conducted by Board members, and public service announcements through radio and television public affairs programs. Additionally, press releases will be distributed through Operational Area partners (e.g., schools and non-profit organizations).
- 5) EPI will use all available and effective means of disseminating EPI messages. This includes press releases, radio and television, and the use of INFO LINE. Information pamphlets and brochures will be distributed in public places and notices will be provided to County employees.
- 6) The CEOC PIO function will be available to support public safety announcements by the Sheriff's Department, the Fire Department, the Department of Health Services, the Department of Mental Health, and the Department of Public Works. Copies of all departmental press releases must be sent to the CEOC.
- 7) CAO staff will place EPI information releases on appropriate County public websites.
- 8) CAO staff will share all County press releases with the cities and the California Office of Emergency Services simultaneously with their release to the news media.
- 9) CAO staff will keep the County Board of Supervisors updated and, when appropriate, include them as public information communicators. County Supervisors are credible and effective communicators who are an integral part of the communication process. The CAO's Public Affairs Office and the Office of Emergency Management will coordinate crisis communications with each district's public information officer.

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- 10) The Sheriff's Department is the administrator of the Emergency Alert System (EAS) and is responsible for the emergency alerting and warning function. The Sheriff is responsible for the content and authenticity of any EAS broadcasts made in the Los Angeles County Operational Area. Upon activation of the CEOC, the Sheriff's Department will also have the lead responsibility for emergency alerts and warnings over the statewide EDIS.
- 11) County departments will not make public statements regarding subjects or situations where they have no expertise, or where another department, a city government, a Federal agency, a State agency or a private organization is clearly the better choice to speak on the subject. County department staff will not speak on behalf of another agency without prior clearance of that agency.
- 12) County departments will not answer any questions relating to the number of deaths attributed to the emergency/disaster. All questions relating to deaths must be referred to the County Coroner's office. The PIO at the CEOC may answer questions about the number of deaths as long as the answers are based on information provided by the Coroner. The Coroner will provide continual updates to the CEOC regarding confirmed deaths.
- 13) The EPI plan will be tested during annual countywide emergency exercises.

SITUATION AND ASSUMPTIONS

THE SITUATION

The Los Angeles County Operational Area is the largest and most complex county in the nation with a population of almost 10 million residents in 88 cities and 137 named unincorporated areas, spread over 4,000 square miles of terrain that varies from coastal plains, to inland valleys, significant mountain ranges, and high desert. Because of this complexity, Public Information Officers (PIOs) and emergency managers need a common approach to providing information to the media and public during an emergency.

During an emergency or disaster, an uninformed public may have irrational fears fueled by rumors and a lack of knowledge of what is being done to resolve the situation. Without a coordinated EPI operation, various agencies may issue conflicting information, further confusing or alarming the public. It is in the best interest of the public and County government to provide timely, accurate, consistent and appropriate information.

ASSUMPTIONS

An effective EPI program helps the public understand what has happened and what they must do to safeguard themselves and their families. When the public understands unfolding events, it makes it easier for them to follow public safety instructions associated with the emergency/disaster. The following are assumptions which can be made regarding EPI:

- County government and the media share an interest in giving the public timely, accurate information – however, methods used to accomplish this may vary, depending on the conditions and needs of the emergency
- The media (print, radio, television) will go to any location and talk to anyone they feel can further their story
- Depending on the nature and size of the disaster or emergency, the media may come to the CEOC
- The media will want regularly scheduled updates of the ongoing emergency/disaster situation
- The media will want to interview government officials and emergency managers regarding the ongoing situation
- The State will cooperate with the Operational Area EPI plan

- Subject-matter experts (SMEs) are needed to provide additional information to the media during and after the emergency/disaster
- Personnel assigned to the PIO function in the CEOC have been trained in the use of Los Angeles County's Emergency Management Information System (EMIS)
- An effective EPI program will:
 - Improve the ability of the community to resolve or respond to emergency/disaster-related issues
 - Improve the community's support of emergency response and recovery operations
 - Reduce the impact of the emergency/disaster

CONCEPT OF OPERATIONS

GENERAL

The biggest threat to public confidence in government during an emergency is the absence of any information – this gives the impression that the County is not prepared to handle an emergency/disaster situation and is reluctant to take actions which could relieve anxiety the public might have about the situation. Government and the media share a mission to provide rapid, accurate information to the public. The County's goal is to work cooperatively with the media to provide valuable emergency, public safety, and recovery information to the public.

EPI ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF INFORMATION

Essential Elements of Information (EEI) are specific facts that a given agency needs for situational awareness. EEI will differ based on the agency needing the information and the specific type of disaster. In order to support EPI, EEI needs to focus on event information that PIOs will need to provide to the public, jurisdictions and other interested parties.

Below is a listing of EEI that is critical to EPI operations during an emergency/disaster. Most of the EEI can be satisfied by appropriate EMIS reports. The applicable EMIS report is listed in ***bold italics*** with the EEI.

- Casualties (deaths and injuries) – EMIS (cities) ***City Status Report*** and (County departments and selected special districts) ***Department Status Report/School District Status Report*** (the only official casualty information released by the CEOC will be confirmed by the Coroner and approved for release)
- Emergency/disaster-caused damage – EMIS ***Initial Damage Estimate Report***
- Damage-related costs – EMIS ***Initial Damage Estimate Report***
- Response-related costs – EMIS ***Initial Damage Estimate Report***
- Ability of the jurisdiction/agency to provide services – EMIS (cities) ***City Status Report*** and (County departments and selected special districts) ***Department Status Report/School District Status Report***
- Status of utilities – EMIS (cities) ***City Status Report*** and (County departments and selected special districts) ***Department Status Report/School District Status Report***

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- Prognosis (how are things going? - is the situation getting better or worse?, etc.) – EMIS (cities) ***City Status Report*** and (County departments and selected special districts) ***Department Status Report/School District Status Report***
- Major incidents and what is being done about them – ***EMIS Incident Report***
- Media queries and requests for general emergency/disaster-related information – ***No EMIS Report***

SEQUENCE OF OPERATIONS

PUBLIC AWARENESS/EDUCATION

Public awareness and education on emergency/disaster-related issues focuses on educational materials and news releases that assure the public that they can prepare for a disaster, and that government is behaving responsibly and doing all that is reasonable to prepare for an emergency. Agencies that prepare emergency/disaster-related educational materials for the public will share these materials with their PIOs to ensure that PIOs are fully aware of what is being provided to the public, and so PIOs can reinforce that preparedness message.

RESPONSE PLANNING

General

All agencies/jurisdictions must ensure that their planning complies with the requirements of SEMS, the Operational Area's Emergency Response Plan, and the Operational Area's DIRP. Jurisdictions or agencies that do not have a copy of the DIRP document can download it from the CEOC web site at www.lacoeoc.org and click on "EPI Resources."

Media Coordination

Government must work with the media in advance of emergencies and disasters to ensure that the needs of the stakeholders are understood and that relationships and protocols have been established to meet those needs. Government must engage the media in useful dialogue.

- Building effective media relationships will help avoid inappropriate public actions. The interests of the media establishment and those of the public are not always the same. The safety of the public and the proper management of an emergency are best served if information presented to the public is timely, accurate, and designed to alert, inform and reassure. Sensational "breaking news" may attract viewers and listeners; however, it may do nothing to create a feeling of calmness and well-being on the part of the public who are impacted by the emergency/disaster.
- It is important to work collaboratively with the media to ensure the dissemination of accurate information and to emphasize to the media its importance. Compounding the situation is the media's need for instant, real-time information versus the scientific/medical/technical community's need for careful evaluation before making any sort of response.

- Without advance planning and without proactive government statements, rather than serving as a responsible conduit for accurate information, the media can inadvertently exacerbate the problem.

EPI Communication Network

OEM, in collaboration with the Sheriff's Headquarters Bureau and the CAO's Public Affairs Office, has developed an EPI communications network that includes key points of contact at all County departments, cities, special districts, and other critical organizations that play a role in public information during emergency response and initial recovery. This includes emergency managers and public information officers. Additionally, the EPI communications network includes a list of key contacts for radio, television, daily newspapers, multilingual media and specialized publications. The EPI communications network includes names, agency work phone numbers, pagers, cell phone numbers, 24-hour contact numbers, fax numbers, and e-mail addresses. The CEOC's newsroom fax is programmed with media newsroom fax numbers and appropriate e-mail groups.

OEM has prepared a CEOC fact sheet which is on the county website. This fact sheet has basic information such as CEOC mission, structure, goals and staffing. The purpose of this fact sheet is to provide the media background material about the CEOC.

OEM will provide the media with an annual fact sheet on the County's emergency preparedness activities for the proceeding year. The purpose of this fact sheet is to provide the media with necessary background material on emergency preparedness activities to support media coverage during a disaster. Cities and special districts are encouraged to do the same.

OEM, in collaboration with key government representatives and emergency managers, develops and maintains a "third-party" endorsers" list – also known as "subject-matter experts" (SMEs). These SMEs are people from various disciplines, organizations, and government or regulatory agencies who can speak on behalf of the Los Angeles County Operational Area and deliver messages which lend credibility to the CEOC's public information statements.

ALERTING THE PUBLIC

The Sheriff's Department will alert the public using the following existing systems:

Emergency Alert System (EAS)

The Emergency Alert System (EAS) combines the government “messages” with the voluntary resources of the media to rapidly inform the public about emergency situations. Radio and television stations who participate in EAS voluntarily interrupt their regular broadcast to air government’s EAS messages.

EAS is a system for national, state, or local Emergency warning to the public. An EAS warning may be for a limited geographic area or widespread – large parts of a city, or sections of specified areas (such as a county or parts of adjoining counties or a part of a region; or several states or the entire nation). The EAS provides a means of quickly distributing emergency information to the public, via radio, television and cable. EAS is managed by the Sheriff’s Department. Cities may access EAS by coordination with the Sheriff’s Headquarters Bureau (SHB) which will relay requests to the Sheriff’s Communication Center (SCC) or, if activated, the CEOC.

EAS replaced the Emergency Broadcast System (EBS) on January 1, 1998. It is intended to provide a message which gives clear and understandable information about a specific risk. Following are the types of information normally provided:

- What is the hazard
- Where the hazard is located
- Where the risk will be in the future
- What is the potential effect on the public’s health and safety
- What the public should immediately do to protect themselves
- How much time the public has to take a recommended action

Emergency Digital Information System (EDIS)

The Emergency Digital Information System (EDIS) is a combination of a website, a newswire and a 24-hour broadcast service. Authorized agencies release text, pictures and sounds over EDIS using their own existing information. EDIS is an advanced digital tool that California’s emergency managers can use to alert and inform the news media and public. News media and the public access the latest EDIS information in many ways: over the Internet, via digital radio broadcasts, on their pagers, or by e-mail. EDIS bulletins, maps, pictures, and sounds are specially formatted for the computers and graphic systems used by today’s news media.

EDIS is designed to be disaster-resistant. A satellite distribution network constantly updates "mirror" EDIS servers in selected newsrooms and network facilities around the state. Even when public networks are clogged after a disaster, EDIS information is available statewide.

EMERGENCY RESPONSE OPERATIONS

General

Response procedures to be used during an emergency/disaster are outlined in the Los Angeles County Operational Area Emergency Response Plan (OAERP). The plan outlines procedures for numerous types of man-made and natural disasters (earthquake, civil disorder, power failure, terrorism, hazardous material spill, etc.). Additionally, agencies and jurisdictions must use the Operational Area Disaster Information Reporting Procedure (DIRP) to provide situational information or request assistance.

EPI is communicated to the public through the media or EAS. Upon activation of the CEOC:

- Press releases are issued on a daily basis at regularly scheduled intervals
- Regularly scheduled press conferences are held on a daily basis
- When the situation warrants it, spontaneous press conferences are held to answer the questions the media will have about changes in the ongoing event
- Telephone interviews with the media, assuring the public that the CEOC is assessing the ongoing situation and taking appropriate actions, occur during CEOC activations
- The Los Angeles County Operational Area website is updated to assure consistent messages

The CEOC maintains a listing of media outlets, with phone/fax/e-mail information. The media will be informed that (323) 980-2145, 2146 and 2147 are the telephone numbers for all incoming media inquiry telephone calls to the CEOC during an activation. Media inquiries may also be directed to the Sheriff's Headquarters Bureau, Media Relations Office at (323) 526-5541.

The Sheriff's Headquarters Bureau provides personnel for the functional CEOC PIO position. OEM provides management support personnel for this position. PIOs from other County departments may also be activated, depending on the nature of the emergency/disaster.

JOINT INFORMATION CENTER(s)

For a large-scale event, when multiple locations in the county are affected by an event, an Operational Area Joint Information Center (JIC), separate from the CEOC, is established at a location to be determined. State government agencies may have representatives at the JIC, along with local representatives from the affected area(s) of the emergency/disaster. The purpose of the JIC is to have a single centralized location where the media can receive press advisories, such as advisories and warnings, about the event and to provide consistent information. The Sheriff's Department has the responsibility for establishing a JIC in coordination with appropriate local and state agencies. The CEOC PIO will provide information such as press advisories and press releases to the JIC on a regular, ongoing basis as well as a liaison to the JIC. The Sheriff's Department will request the deployment of county department PIO staff to the JIC, when appropriate.

In the event of a Federally-declared disaster, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) will establish a Joint Information Center (JIC) at the Disaster Field Office (DFO), or at a site which is in very close proximity to the DFO. The purpose of the FEMA JIC parallels the purpose of the Operational Area JIC and the FEMA JIC may become the clearing house for all media releases, whether from the County or some other jurisdictions within the County. The FEMA JIC will have representatives from the Federal and State agencies as well as appropriate local and private agencies. The Operational Area JIC will provide a liaison to the FEMA JIC. The CEOC PIO and the Operational Area JIC will provide information such as press advisories and press releases to the FEMA JIC on a regular, ongoing basis as well as a liaison to the FEMA JIC. Normally, as the FEMA JIC becomes fully operational, the need for an Operational Area JIC diminishes.

ASSIGNMENT OF RESPONSIBILITIES

COUNTY (Operational Area) EMERGENCY OPERATIONS CENTER (CEOC)

Once activated, the CEOC will gather information from various sources and record it using EMIS. The CEOC will keep County departments, cities, and special districts informed of emergency/disaster-related media trends as well as areas of EPI emphasis and concern from a CEOC perspective.

COUNTY DEPARTMENTS

Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) -- County Office of Emergency Management (OEM) is responsible for developing and maintaining the Los Angeles County Operational Area Emergency Public Information Plan, and for working cooperatively with the Sheriff's Department, other County departments, cities, and special districts (including school districts, working through the County Office of Education) as appropriate, in developing and supporting this plan. OEM is responsible for putting press advisories on the Operational Area website and updating EMIS.

Sheriff's Department (LASD) is responsible for managing and coordinating EPI during emergency response operations in accordance with the DIRP and the OAERP.

Chief Administrative Officer's (CAO) Public Affairs Office coordinates the assignment of PIOs from other County departments to the CEOC on an "as needed" basis.

All County Departments are requested to report significant media concerns to their Lead/Contact County departments for transmittal to the CEOC. All county departments have access to EMIS and data can be transmitted to the CEOC through EMIS as well as the lead department. County department PIOs are responsible for EPI as it relates to their agency. If not assigned to the CEOC, it is the responsibility of the department PIO, using EMIS, to keep their lead department and the CEOC PIO informed of any activities related to the ongoing emergency/disaster. The response to all media questions relating to the emergency/disaster must be coordinated with the CEOC, so that it can be recorded in a log maintained by the CEOC PIO. It is the responsibility of County departments to ensure that their PIOs are trained to use the County's Emergency Management Information System (EMIS) in order to access information relating to an emergency/disaster.

Cities are responsible for EPI as it relates to their operations and geographical boundaries. They should coordinate their EPI with the Operational Area and other jurisdictions when appropriate. Additionally, cities are requested to use the DIRP and EMIS to report any significant media concerns. News releases can be pasted into an EMIS message for transmittal to the CEOC PIO section, when appropriate.

Special Districts are responsible for establishing an EPI program to cover their specific responsibilities. Special districts are requested to report significant media concerns to their Lead/Contact County department for transmittal to the CEOC. Annex C is a copy of the Special District Lead/Contact Department list as set forth in the DIRP.

Disaster Management Area Coordinators (DMACs) should work with their cities to ensure they are familiar with the Operational Area EPI plan and to assist them in the establishment of an effective local EPI program.

ADMINISTRATION AND LOGISTICS

COMMUNICATIONS MEANS

EMIS – EMIS is the preferred means of communicating between the CEOC and cities, County departments, and specific special districts. News releases can be pasted into EMIS messages for transmittal to the CEOC PIO, and for transmittal from the CEOC PIO to other EMIS users.

Phone and Fax – CEOC phone and fax numbers are available to lead departments and DMACs. County departments and special districts without EMIS access are asked to work with the CEOC through their assigned lead department. Cities, using EMIS, contact the CEOC directly, with simultaneous notification to their Contact Sheriff's station. If a city does not have EMIS access, EPI-related information is to be sent by the most expeditious means to the city's Contact Sheriff's Station.

Radio – The CEOC uses the Countywide Integrated Radio System (CWIRS) and Disaster Communication Service (DCS) amateur radios. Lead departments have the necessary radio systems and talk groups to contact the CEOC. Additionally, the State, County Fire, Sheriff, Public Works, Health Services, and the American Red Cross (ARC) have department-unique radios that operate from the CEOC for their purposes. If EMIS is not operational, cities may use DCS to contact their Contact Sheriff's station and the CEOC.

Satellite Communications – The CEOC has access to the state's Operational Area Satellite Information System (OASIS) and can communicate with the state via satellite if other forms of communication are interrupted.

Los Angeles County Operational Area Website – This website provides public access to information from the CEOC.

EMIS Website – This website provides EMIS users access to information from the CEOC.


FINANCE

All agencies and cities should establish tracking procedures for costs incurred in emergency response activities. EPI should have access to cost information, as it often becomes a media issue. During initial recovery operations, the effectiveness of Public Assistance (PA) and Individual Assistance (IA) programs become media issues and should be provided to EPI operations.

REPORTS

Effective with the activation of the CEOC, cities, County departments, and special districts may be requested to provide items of media concern as indicated in this plan.

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Approved by the Emergency Management Council on December 17, 2003



David E. Janssen
Chief Administrative Officer
Chair, Emergency Management Council