

Somerset County Emergency Operations Plan

ANNEX D - EMERGENCY PUBLIC INFORMATION

I. PURPOSE

Somerset County must be able to disseminate official information and instructions to the public before or during a potential or actual emergency or hazard event. This annex describes the means, organization, and process by which this information will be provided by the Somerset County government in a timely and useful manner.

II. SITUATION AND ASSUMPTIONS

A. SITUATION

1. The Somerset County EMA office has determined that an immediate release of emergency public notification must be accomplished for hazardous materials incidents and terrorist attacks using weapons of mass destruction (WMD). This will be accomplished using the Emergency Alert System and the NOAA Weather radio.

2. An earthquake that causes structural damage or a wide-scale utility outage will not provide an opportunity to alert the public before the event. Instead, the Somerset County EMA office will provide recovery information to the public through the use of the internet, broadcast and print media.

3. Because flooding situations, wildfire incidents, the approach of severe weather, or agricultural conditions involving blight and infestation are not immediate dangers, the EMA office may have hours or days in advance to get the public's attention. The office may use the broadcast and print media, the Emergency Alert System, the NOAA Weather Radio, or county and municipal emergency responders using sirens and public address system to warn the public of the approaching dangers and to provide preparedness or recovery information.

4. It is unlikely that a transportation-related mass casualty incident will create a danger to the county residents and visitors. There may be inconveniences, such as re-routed traffic during such an event. The EMA office will provide information to the broadcast and print media to keep the public informed on the incident.

5. County officials will most likely learn of disease outbreaks and epidemics from the medical community. The County EMA office will assist the State or local medical officials with coordinating and releasing information to the public during and after the outbreak.

6. Emergency contact information is located in the first few pages of the area telephone directories.

B. ASSUMPTIONS

1. The percentage of non-English speaking residents is so low that a means of warning residents in other languages will not be undertaken by the County EMA office. Although, there may be some tourists that do not speak English, they will most likely be with families or groups that have the capability of translating. Therefore, no consideration has been made in the County emergency public information program for non-English languages.

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2. Local broadcast and print media will cooperate with emergency managers to assist with warning the public of the hazard events and providing information on preparedness and recovery.
3. Landline and cellular telephone communications may be sporadic or impossible during a disaster event. Local broadcast stations without emergency power may be off the air.
4. A major disaster event such as a large regional wildfire, a large scale or unusual transportation-related mass casualty incident, a very large hazardous materials incident, or a terrorist attack involving WMD agents could bring into Somerset County a large number of out-of-state television media personnel. These media personnel could overwhelm the County Public Information program. Augmentation to the program will need to be requested from the State government.
5. The huge number of seasonal tourists could create difficulties due to the tourist's general lack of preparedness, the tremendous traffic congestion, and the overwhelmed public services and emergency responders.

III. CONCEPT OF OPERATIONS

A. GENERAL

1. At the start of any immediate or approaching disaster event, the Somerset County Regional Communications Center (RCC) shall immediately contact the County Emergency Management Director by all means possible. The County EMA Director or, at the request of the Director, the RCC shall contact the municipal emergency management director of the municipalities impacted by the disaster to inform them of all disaster information.
2. The Somerset County EMA Director shall initiate the release of emergency public information during an immediately dangerous situation such as a hazard materials release or a terrorist attack involving WMD agents. If the Director is not available, the EMA Assistant Director shall assume this responsibility. If neither the Director nor Assistant is available, the municipal EMA Director from the municipality in which the event is occurring shall notify the Maine Emergency Management Agency directly to activate the EAS and/or NOAA systems.
3. The County EMA Director may activate the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) during an immediate or phased disaster event, at which time the Public Information Officer (PIO) shall be present. The Public Information Officer shall report to and shall work from the EOC. Should it become necessary, a Media Center may be established in order to release emergency public information to the broadcast and print media.
4. It is the policy of the Somerset County government that there shall be only one release point for emergency public information; and this shall be the County EMA office.
5. Emergency public information activities shall be prioritized as follows:
 - a. Production and Dissemination of Information
 - b. Response to Public Inquiry
 - c. Monitoring and Control of Rumors
 - d. Media Relations

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Emergency public information is instructional and focuses on such things as warning, protective measures, and the general progress of events. Rumors are controlled by using a public inquiry telephone line, monitoring the media and confirmation of emergency public information before it is released to the media.

B. PHASED ACTIVITY: Increased Readiness during a Forecast Event

1. Review Emergency Operations Plans, EOC Job Aids, and Agency checklists and complete any preparedness activities.
2. Contact the PIO to report to the EOC.
3. Establish and maintain contact with the broadcast and print media.
4. Provide disaster preparedness information and brochures to the public for the forecasted hazard event.
5. Monitor the media.
6. The message content of "forecasted" emergency public information released should identify the hazard, estimate the time of impact, suggest property protection measures, list typical supply items needed for at least three days, provide evacuation instructions if necessary, inform on how often that public information will be released, and list any telephones numbers for further information.

C. LIMITED WARNING AVAILABLE

1. Determine if evacuations or sheltering-in-place will be accomplished and release this information to the public.
2. Activate the EAS and/or NOAA Weather radio warning systems.
3. The message content of "immediate danger" emergency public information released should identify the hazard, identify the areas at risk, advise on personal protection measures, list the actions being taken by emergency response personnel, inform on how often that public information will be released, and list any telephones numbers for further information.

D. RECOVERY

1. Continue to release emergency public information focusing on restoration of essential services, travel conditions, restrictions, and assistance programs available.
2. Monitor media reports and telephone inquiries for accuracy and respond as appropriate to correct rumors.
3. The message content of "recovery" emergency public information released should report on the current situation assessment and government actions, provide survival instructions to those still affected, identify where and how to get help, list health information, identify restricted areas,

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inform on how often that public information will be released, and list any telephone numbers for further information.

E. INTERNAL COORDINATION

1. Somerset County shall assign a primary Public Information Officer and assistant PIOs, as necessary. The primary PIO shall be the only point of dissemination of official emergency public information to the media from the County government. The County EMA Director shall review and approve all emergency public information before the PIO disseminates it. All emergency

public information shall be verified for its accuracy by the EMA office or the incident commander.

2. The Somerset County Media Center shall be located in the front foyer at the Somerset County Communication Building, 8 County Drive, Skowhegan, ME. The media shall receive press releases and briefings during a major emergency from the Media Center

3. Local media representatives who are known by the County EMA office will be provided a "Media Badge" that will allow them access to the Media Center. Media representatives not known to the County EMA office must provide a telephone number to their main office in order to authenticate their credibility. They will provide identification and will allow a (background check by RCC) to be completed on them prior to receiving a Media Badge.

4. In the event that a major or unusual disaster should occur and attract a convergence of national media outlets, the County does not have the facility, financial, or personnel resources to deal with the numbers of media that will arrive. A request for public information resources shall be immediately made to the Maine Emergency Management Agency. If the disaster is a criminal and/or terrorist incident, the public information responsibility shall be handed off to the Maine Department of Public Safety. The Somerset County government will assist the Maine DPS PIO with personnel and facilities. For such an emergency event, the Media Center shall be relocated to the County Commissioner's Conference Room, 41 Court Street, Skowhegan, ME.

F. INTERJURISDICTIONAL COORDINATION

1. Each municipality is responsible for providing emergency public information for any disaster events that are solely within their jurisdictions. The municipality may request emergency public information resource assistance from the County EMA office. The municipality must request the use of the EAS and/or NOAA Weather radio system through the County EMA office, unless they are unable to make contact with the County EMA office.

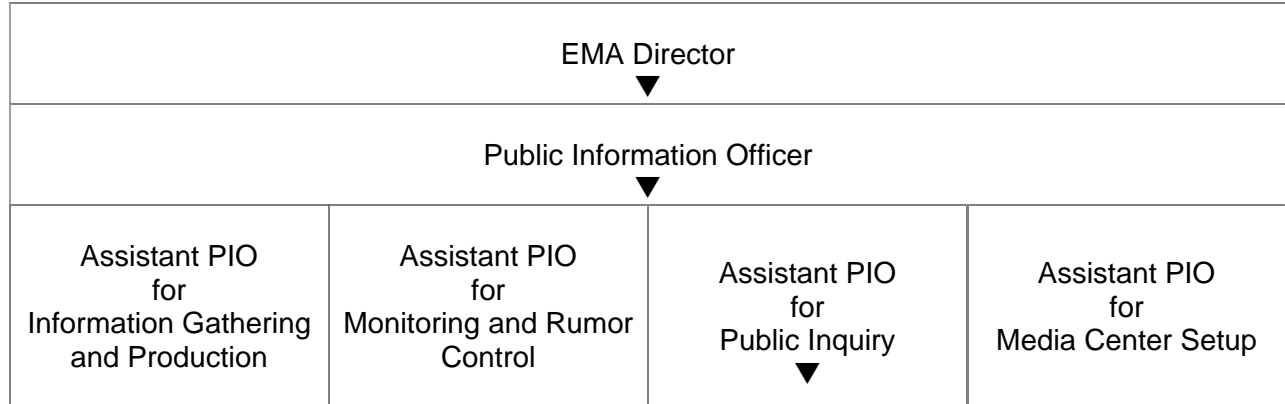
2. The County is responsible for providing and coordinating emergency public information for disasters that involve all or parts of the County. The County EMA office may request that municipal PIOs become a part of the County emergency public information system and assist at the County EOC and/or County Media Center. The County will request the use of the EAS through the Maine Emergency Management Agency. The NOAA Weather Alert system may be activated in the RCC.

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IV. ORGANIZATION AND ASSIGNMENT OF RESPONSIBILITIES

A. ORGANIZATION



All assignments may be handled by one person in a small event. This chart breaks out the areas of responsibility should the size of the event require additional manning.

B. ASSIGNMENT OF RESPONSIBILITIES

The following are Emergency Public Information responsibilities required during an emergency.

EMA Director: (OPERATIONS) (207) 474-6788

1. Initiates immediate emergency public warning information through the EAS and/or NOAA Weather systems or by Radio Pagers.
2. Approves releases of public information to the media.
3. Determines the location of the Media Center.
4. Acts in the role of the PIO when the emergency is small scale.

Public Information Officer (PIO): (COMMAND) (207) 474-7404

1. Produces and disseminates emergency public information.
 - a. Researches and verifies information for news releases.
 - b. Provides press/news releases and emergency information to the media.
 - c. Serves as the primary Spokesperson before the Media.
 - d. Schedules news conferences, interviews, and other media access.
2. Receives and responds to public inquiries.
3. Monitors and controls rumors.
 - a. Assigns personnel to monitor broadcast and print media reports.
 - b. Sets up phone banks and hotlines, as necessary.
4. Media Relations
 - a. Supervise the Media Center.
 - b. Coordinate media tours of the EOC and disaster sites.
5. Maintains a chronological record of media contacts and releases of information.

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V. ADMINISTRATION AND LOGISTICS

The Public Information Officer shall maintain a chronological record of media contacts and releases of information and a copy of all press releases.

Staffing for the Emergency Public Information program shall include the volunteer County Public Information Officer and municipal PIOs requested to augment the staff.

Emergency Public Information Facilities shall include:

FACILITY	LOCATION	POINT OF CONTACT
EOC	County EMA Office	County EMA Director
Media Center	County EMA Office	County EMA Director

VI. PLAN DEVELOPMENT AND MAINTENANCE

The County Emergency Management Director is responsible for the development, coordination and maintenance of this annex, and shall do so annually. The County Emergency Management staff shall develop and coordinate EOC job aids and agreements.

VII. AUTHORITY AND REFERENCES

The Maine EAS Plan divides the state into four Notification Region Areas. The County Director may request activation of EAS by contacting the Maine Emergency Management Agency or, if unable to reach MEMA, the State Police. Municipalities contact the County EMA to request activation of EAS.

The County Director has the authority to order the activation of the NOAA Weather Radio system from the RCC.

Agreements regarding the dissemination of public service announcements during emergency situations exist with between the Maine Emergency Management Agency and local Radio/Television stations.