

**OHIO EMERGENCY OPERATIONS PLAN  
EMERGENCY SUPPORT FUNCTION #15**

**EMERGENCY PUBLIC INFORMATION AND EXTERNAL AFFAIRS**

**PRIMARY AGENCY:** Ohio Emergency Management Agency

**SUPPORT AGENCIES:** All organizations and agencies that may be necessary for effective public information dissemination and external affairs in support of ESF-15 operations.

**I. INTRODUCTION**

A. Purpose

ESF-15 ensures that sufficient state-level assets are deployed during disasters, emergencies or statewide incidents of national significance to provide accurate, coordinated, and timely information to affected populations, governments, legislators and the media.

B. Scope

1. ESF-15 coordinates state actions to be taken to provide required public affairs support to local, state and federal disaster response elements. ESF-15 provides assistance to all state agencies that may require public affairs support, or whose public affairs assets may be employed during or a major disaster or emergency in the state of Ohio and/or an Incident of National Significance.
2. The resources, structures and support of this document, as well as all documents pertaining to the Public Information, the Joint Information Center and the Joint Information System are consistent with the principles of ICS and NIMS.
3. The provisions of ESF-15 apply to Governor's Declarations, Stafford Act Declarations, National Response Plan responses and any other situations designated by authority of the Office of the Governor, the Director of the Ohio Department of Public Safety, or the Executive Director of the Ohio Emergency Management Agency (Ohio EMA).
4. ESF-15 is organized into the following functional components: Public Affairs, Community Relations and Congressional/Legislative Affairs – including visits to impacted disaster areas by congressional officers and/or their staff. The primary functions of each of these areas are described in Section III, Concept of Operations, below.

## **II. POLICIES**

- A. Planning for external communications functions recognizes state agency and county government responsibilities for providing timely public information. If state agencies and county governments are unable to provide timely public information to those affected by emergencies, disasters or incidents of national significance, the Federal Government may be called upon to provide vital health and safety information to the affected population.
- B. External communications efforts shall be coordinated to support the dissemination of a unified message as directed by the Office of the Governor or the Executive Director of Ohio EMA.

## **III. CONCEPT OF OPERATIONS**

- A. External communications resources shall be coordinated by the Ohio EMA's Chief of Public Affairs in response to disasters, emergencies and incidents of national significance.
- B. External communications resources shall include, but not limited to: News Conferences, Interviews, Press Releases, Media Advisories, and Internet Postings.
- C. The Executive Director for the Ohio EMA, in coordination with the Chief of Public Affairs for Ohio EMA, will activate ESF-15 procedures. Ohio EMA's Chief of Public Affairs shall serve as the ESF-15 Coordinator.
- D. Once a determination has been made to conduct a CAS-I briefing, Ohio EMA Public Affairs staff and the public affairs staff for the Primary CAS Agencies shall be notified by the ESF-15 Coordinator, or his/her designee, of the time and location of the CAS-1 briefing. Depending on the nature of the situation, Public Information Officers of Primary CAS Agencies may accompany the Chief of Public Affairs for Ohio EMA to the briefing.
- E. Upon activation of Assessment Room or Emergency Operations Center operations, the Ohio EMA's Chief of Public Affairs will begin the process of activating the Joint Information Center (JIC), as detailed in the State JIC Crisis Communications Plan, the State JIC Operations Manual and the Ohio Emergency Operations Center Procedures/State JIC Activation.
- F. Once the JIC has been established, the ESF-15 Coordinator shall contact the public affairs staff for the Primary CAS Agencies and report on the operational status of either the State of Ohio's Emergency Operations Center (State EOC) and/or the JIC. Depending on the nature, surge and scope of the incident, all state agencies, who are signatories to the SEOP, will be expected to support the

JIC operations. These staff members will also be expected to serve in Subject Matter Experts roles.

- G. In addition to the activation of the State JIC, it may be necessary to activate a Field JIC. In the event that a Field JIC is activated, ESF-15 will remain as the primary coordinating document, supported by plans, procedures and/or SOPs relative to the activation of a Field JIC.

#### **IV. ORGANIZATION AND ASSIGNMENT OF RESPONSIBILITIES**

##### **A. ESF-15 Coordinator**

1. The Public Affairs Officer for Ohio EMA shall serve as the primary ESF-15 Coordinator. PAO staff, from Ohio EMA will serve as the primary JIC staffers. Upon a request being made by the Chief of Public Affairs for Ohio EMA, both the ESF-15 Coordinator and JIC staff duties may be assumed or supplemented by other state agencies.
2. The ESF-15 Coordinator will coordinate public affairs resources until it is determined by the Executive Director of Ohio EMA that they are no longer necessary.

##### **B. Ohio EMA Public Affairs**

Ohio EMA Public Affairs will provide support to ESF-15 activities and missions by:

1. Coordinating messages between county, state and federal governments and personnel through the JIC.
2. Gathering incident information.
3. Providing incident-related information through the media and other sources to individuals, families, businesses directly or indirectly affected by the incident.
4. Monitoring news coverage to ensure that accurate information is disseminated to the public.
5. Handling appropriate special projects such as news conferences and press operations for incident-area tours by government officials and other dignitaries.
6. Providing support and advice to the Executive Director of the Ohio EMA.
7. Overseeing the key functions of media relations.

### C. Community Relations

The Community Relations (CR) function of Ohio's Public Affairs Office will provide support to ESF-15 activities and missions by:

1. Preparing an initial CR Plan, with incident-specific guidance and objectives at the beginning the incident.
2. Conducting the CR function in a joint manner between local, state and federal personnel. Field teams are organized and dispersed throughout the affected area. The composition of the field teams should include people from the county(s) as well as the cultural, racial, and ethnic makeup of the affected population (including languages spoken) is taken into consideration to the extent possible when making field team assignments.
3. Coordinating closely with the affected counties to identify community leaders (e.g., grassroots, political, religious, educational, business, labor, ethnic) and neighborhood advocacy groups to assist in the rapid dissemination of information, to identify unmet needs, to establish an ongoing dialogue and information exchange, and to facilitate collaborative local, state and federal planning and mutual disaster recovery support.

### C. Congressional Affairs

The Congressional Affairs function of Ohio EMA's Public Affairs Office will provide support to ESF-15 missions by:

1. Working with the Legislative Liaison for the Ohio Department of Public Safety, contact will be established with Congressional/Legislative offices representing affected areas to provide information on incident activities in order to ensure an understanding of how the State EOC is coordinating response and recovery activities.
2. The State EOC-JIC will provide electronic copies of Talking Points and Situation Reports to the ODPS Legislative Affairs Office on a daily basis. Legislative Affairs will be responsible for disseminating this information to Congressional/Legislative leaders.
3. Organizing an initial Congressional/Legislative briefing as soon as feasible and conducting daily briefings thereafter.
4. Arranging for Incident site visits for Members of Congress and their staff.
5. Responding to Congressional inquiries.
6. Assisting in the development of written materials for presentations and making Congressional notifications.

7. Coordinating with Ohio EMA Operations and Recovery personnel on all Congressional affairs issues to ensure coordination of efforts.

**V. DEMOBILIZATION**

- A. Upon termination of the incident, the ESF-15 Coordinator shall close-out activities within the JIC and release staff.
- B. Should the situation warrant it, staff from the Public Affairs Office of the Ohio EMA will relocate from the Ohio EOC to the Joint Field Office to continue to support public affairs community relations missions.
- C. All CAS Agency personnel who work in support of ESF-15 shall participate in all After-Action Reviews.
- D. Ohio EMA Public Affairs will work to incorporate AAR recommendations into planning documents and standard operating procedures.