Handout 5-4: Managing Emergency Public Information

Managing Emergency Public Information

Emergency Public Information

Emergency public information serves many important functions. It can:

- Save lives and reduce injury. Knowing the proper protective actions to take enables people to reduce their risk.
- Protect property and the environment. Understanding how to mitigate risk to property and the environment may lessen the damage inflicted by disasters.
- Facilitate the tactical response by calming fears and managing expectations. People who know what to expect are more likely to follow instructions and allow responders to do their jobs.
- Educate and inform the public and change behavior or attitudes. An educated public is more likely to prepare for emergencies and be ready when they occur.

Public Information Process

The process of getting accurate information to the public is the same before, during, and after an incident and includes:

- Gathering information.
- Verifying the information.
- Coordinating the information.
- Disseminating the information.

Public Information Officer (PIO) Functions

The PIO supports the EOC. The PIO advises the Incident Commander, EOC Director, and the MAC Group on all public information matters relating to the management of the incident. The PIO handles:

- Inquiries from the media, the public, and elected officials.
- Emergency public information and warnings.
- Rumor monitoring and response.
- Media monitoring.
Public Information Officer (PIO) Functions (Continued)

The Public Information Officer (or, if there is no PIO, the EOC Director) manages public information through:

Developing **community awareness**, including:
- Demographics to select the right media to reach the audience.
- The jurisdiction’s and State’s governmental structures and how the various organizations or departments relate.
- Key players including those in government, the media, nonprofit organizations, etc.
- The community's recent disaster history.
- The community’s culture—the community’s values, concerns, and interests, and how can the population be reached through those interests.

Employing **emergency management knowledge**, including:
- Basic emergency management concepts, including the role of local, tribal, State, and Federal levels of government, the local emergency operations plan, and his or her organization’s role in an emergency.
- Incident Command System (ICS) structure and approach to incident management.
- National Incident Management System (NIMS) approach to the management of incidents.

Demonstrating **media relations skills**, including:
- Providing information and access to newsmakers.
- Demonstrating an understanding of media needs and operations.
- Respecting media deadlines.
- Maintaining open dialogue.

EOC Director’s Role

The EOC Director’s main role takes place in advance of any incidents—making sure the system is in place and that Joint Information Center (JIC) facilities are available and ready when the JIC needs to be in operation. This involves planning for accessible work space, electrical systems, phone lines, Internet access, space for camera trucks, and similar planning and logistics.

The emergency operations plan (or an annex to the EOP) should lay out how it all works—who has authority, what each person’s responsibilities are, what happens when State and Federal representatives come in, etc.

When an incident occurs, and the incident is of a size and scope to require a JIC, the EOC Director activates the JIC, and the preplanned systems go into effect.

In jurisdictions where there is no PIO function, the EOC Director may have expanded public information responsibilities.