ESF Coordinator:

Department of Homeland Security

Support Agencies:

All

Primary Agency:

Department of Homeland Security/Federal
    Emergency Management Agency

INTRODUCTION

Purpose

Emergency Support Function (ESF) #15 – External Affairs provides accurate, coordinated, timely, and accessible information to affected audiences, including governments, media, the private sector, and the local populace, including children, those with disabilities and others with access and functional needs, and individuals with limited English proficiency.[1]

Scope

ESF #15 encompasses all Federal departments and agencies that may require incident communications and external affairs support or whose external affairs assets may be employed during incidents requiring a coordinated Federal response. ESF #15 coordinates Federal actions to provide the required external affairs support to local, state, tribal, territorial, insular area, and Federal incident response entities.[2] ESF #15 integrates the components of Public Affairs, Congressional Affairs, Intergovernmental Affairs (local, state, tribal, territorial, and insular area coordination), Community Relations, and the private sector under the coordinating auspices of External Affairs. Another component, the Joint Information Center (JIC), ensures the coordinated release of information under ESF #15. The Planning and Products component of External Affairs develops all external and internal communications strategies and products for the ESF #15 organization. Personnel who work under the auspices of External Affairs must be familiar with the provisions of ESF #15 in the event that the ESF is activated. Non-Federal external affairs elements are fully integrated into ESF #15.

During an incident, local, state, tribal, territorial, insular area, and Federal authorities share responsibility for communicating information regarding the incident to the public. These actions are a critical component of incident management and must be fully integrated with all other operational actions to ensure the following objectives are met:

- Delivery of incident preparedness, health, response, and recovery instructions to those directly affected by the incident

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[1] Additional information about External Affairs can be found in the ESF #15 Standard Operating Procedure, located on the Department of Homeland Security (DHS)/Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Web site.

[2] The provisions of this annex apply to any incident for which the DHS Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs or the FEMA Director of External Affairs decides to activate the ESF in response to an incident where significant interagency coordination is required.

- Dissemination of incident information to the public, including children, those with disabilities and other access and functional needs, and individuals with limited English proficiency populations.[3]

The ESF #15 structure provides a supporting mechanism to develop, coordinate, and deliver messages. Federal department and agency communicators develop, coordinate, and deliver information and instructions to the public related to:

- Federal assistance to the incident-affected area

- Federal departmental/agency response

- National preparations

- Protective measures

- Impact on non-affected areas.

RELATIONSHIP TO THE WHOLE COMMUNITY

Individuals/Community Organizations

The public, both individuals and community organizations, have an important role in assisting with rapid dissemination of information, identifying unmet needs, and mutual support.

Local, State, Tribal, Territorial, and Insular Area Governments

Local, state, tribal, territorial, and insular area authorities retain the primary responsibility for communicating health and safety instructions for their population. Nothing in this annex limits the authority of these authorities to release information regarding an incident under their jurisdiction, particularly if it involves immediate health and safety issues. In the unlikely event that local, state, tribal, territorial, and insular area governments are unable to perform these responsibilities, the Federal Government may provide vital operational health and safety information to the affected population. Nothing in this document should be construed as diminishing or usurping those responsibilities.

Private Sector/Nongovernmental Organizations

The private sector is a component of external affairs. Coordinated communication and collaboration with the private sector supports effective incident response by integrating private sector capabilities and information into response operations. Information must be coordinated across various levels of government to identify needs, convey resources available for business recovery, and facilitate collaborative support for economic recovery.

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[3] Individuals with disabilities and others with access and functional needs are an integral—but often neglected—part of every community. Participation of the whole community requires equal access to national preparedness activities and programs without discrimination, meeting the access and functional needs of all individuals. This includes children; individuals with disabilities; others with access and functional needs; those from diverse religious, racial, and ethnic backgrounds, and people with limited English proficiency.

Information must be disseminated about response and other important information to the private sector through public outreach and education methods, such as media campaigns, workshops, roundtables, and trainings.

Federal Government

Pursuant to Presidential directive, the Secretary of Homeland Security is charged with ensuring that, as appropriate, information related to domestic incidents is gathered and provided to the public.

External affairs efforts are coordinated in support of unified public information as directed by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs or the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Director of External Affairs.

The DHS Public Affairs' National Joint Information Center (NJIC) is activated during incidents requiring a coordinated Federal response to serve as the Federal incident communications coordination center. The DHS/FEMA External Affairs Ready Room is also activated as needed in addition to all natural disasters and other incidents when DHS/FEMA is the lead Federal agency for coordinating communications.

The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) have communication centers to coordinate the release of public health and medical information to the whole community as appropriate. Specific information on Federal Government actions are described in the following sections.

CORE CAPABILITIES AND ACTIONS

ESF Role Aligned to Core Capabilities

The following table lists the Response core capability that ESF #15 most directly supports, along with the particular ESF #15 actions related to that core capability. Though not listed in the table, all ESFs support the core capabilities of Planning and Operational Coordination.

Core Capability	ESF #15 – External Affairs
Public Information and Warning	**External Affairs** • Provides accurate, coordinated, and timely information to affected audiences during incidents requiring a coordinated Federal response. • Provides communications support and advice to the leaders during an incident. • Conducts communications planning.

Core Capability	ESF #15 – External Affairs
Public Information and Warning (continued)	**Public Affairs** • Coordinates messages with local, state, tribal, territorial, insular area, and Federal governments from a NJIC. • Gathers information on the incident. • Provides incident-related information through the media and other sources in accessible formats and multiple languages to individuals, households, businesses, and industries directly or indirectly affected by the incident, including those with disabilities and others with access and functional needs. • Monitors news coverage to ensure that accurate information is disseminated. • Disseminates incident information to new media (official Web sites, social networking platforms) to ensure wide delivery of life saving information. • Maximizes the use of video and digital imagery to communicate during incidents. • Handles appropriate special projects, such as news conferences and press operations, for incident area tours by government officials and dignitaries. • Provides basic services, such as communications and supplies, to assist the news media in disseminating information to the public. • Oversees media relations. • Ensures effective communication of incident information to individuals with disabilities and others with access and functional needs through the use of appropriate auxiliary aids and services, such as sign language and other interpreters; captioning of audio and visual materials; and accessible Web site communications. **Community Relations** • Conducts outreach to the whole community, including limited English proficiency populations and those with disabilities and others with access and functional needs. Disseminates critical information to survivors and affected communities on available disaster assistance programs and other relevant recovery information. • Coordinates closely with the affected state(s) to identify community leaders (e.g., grassroots, political, religious, educational, business, labor, ethnic, and racial) and neighborhood advocacy groups to assist in the rapid dissemination of information, identify unmet needs, establish an ongoing dialogue and information exchange, and facilitate collaborative local, state, tribal, territorial, insular area, or Federal planning and mutual support for disaster response. Prepares an initial action plan to support Unified Coordination Group with incident-specific guidance and objectives. Develops and disseminates reports to key decision makers to provide situational awareness and share critical, actionable information gathered from the field. • Serves as the primary liaison between the Federal response operations and the community. Engages with community through door-to-door outreach, public meetings, and other external affairs activities. • Conducts assess, inform, and report (AIR) activities to improve situational awareness.

Core Capability	ESF #15 – External Affairs

Public Information and Warning (continued)	**Congressional Affairs**
	• Prepares an initial congressional affairs action plan to support the Unified Coordination staff with incident specific guidance and objectives.
	• Establishes contact with congressional offices representing affected areas to provide information on the incident.
	• Coordinates with congressional affairs staff from all Federal agencies involved in the response to ensure consistency and transparency in communicating with members of Congress.
	• Organizes congressional briefings.
	• Arranges for incident site visits for members of Congress and their staffs.
	• Responds to congressional inquiries.
	• Assists in the development of written materials for presentations and making congressional notifications.
	
	Intergovernmental Affairs
	• Promotes Federal interaction and implements information sharing with local, state, tribal, territorial, and insular area governments.
	• Informs local, state, tribal, territorial, and insular area elected and appointed officials on response efforts and recovery programs.
	• Disseminates information with the assistance of state municipal leagues, county associations, and tribal governments.
	• Promotes Federal interaction with tribal governments on all aspects of incident response operations.
	• Ensures inclusion of tribes in all aspects of incidents requiring a coordinated Federal response that affect tribes and incident response operations.
	
	Joint Information Center
	• Serves as a central point for coordination of incident information, public affairs activities, and media access to information regarding the latest developments.
	  – **Incident JIC:** Is the physical location where all public affairs professionals involved in the response work together to provide critical emergency information, media response, and public affairs functions.
	  – **Virtual JIC:** Links all participants through technological means (secure or non-secure) when geographical restrictions, incident management requirements, and other limitations preclude physical attendance by public affairs leadership at a central location.
	  – **Satellite JIC:** Is a forward-deployed component of an incident JIC.
	  – **Area JIC:** Multiple JICs may be used when there are multiple Joint Field Offices (JFOs) to support the area command Unified Coordination structure and whenever multiple JICs are operating in support of the same or related incidents and jurisdictions.
	
	Plans and Products
	• Educates the public in the aftermath of an incident requiring a coordinated Federal response through news advisories, press releases, prepared materials, fliers, and talking points.
	• Develops new media products for dissemination, such as blog posts, messages for social media, update messages, video, and digital imagery.

Core Capability	ESF #15 – External Affairs
Public Information and Warning (continued)	**Private Sector** • Provides strategic counsel and guidance to response leadership in actual or potential incidents. • Conducts outreach and education. • Promotes operational integration with the impacted private sector entity to support local economic response and recovery. • Supports situational awareness by engaging the private sector in information sharing efforts.

Agency Actions

Primary Agency	Actions

Department of Homeland Security (DHS)	**DHS Headquarters**
	• Coordinates Federal incident communications using a domestic communications strategy following an actual or potential terrorist threat or incident.
	  – **National Terrorism and Advisory System (NTAS):** Communicates information about terrorist threats by providing timely, detailed information to the public, government agencies, first responders, airports and other transportation hubs, and the private sector. It recognizes that Americans all share responsibility for the Nation's security and should always be aware of the heightened risk of terrorist attack in the United States and of what they should do. After reviewing the available information, the Secretary of Homeland Security will decide, in coordination with other Federal entities, whether an NTAS Alert should be issued. NTAS will be conducted within the guidelines listed in the National Prevention Framework.
	  – **Federal Interagency NTAS Coordination:** The White House Office of Communications, supported by DHS Public Affairs, will immediately assess the requirement for a public announcement with appropriate senior Federal counterterrorism communicators. Recommendations will be coordinated with the National Security Staff and the DHS Counter Terrorism Advisory Board, which makes a formal recommendation to the Secretary of Homeland Security about releasing an NTAS alert. Announcement of an NTAS alert will be conducted within the scope of the overall Federal communications strategy as directed by White House Office of Communications.
	• The following systems are used for any type of actual or potential incident to communicate pertinent preparedness or response information:
	  – **National Incident Communications Conference Line (NICCL):** A standing conference line designated, maintained, and supported by DHS Public Affairs as the primary means for interagency incident communications information sharing during an incident requiring Federal coordination.
	  – **State Incident Communications Conference Line (SICCL):** A dedicated Federal-state incident communications conference line.
	  – **Private Sector Incident Communications Conference Line (PICCL):** A standing line to provide timely information to critical infrastructure communicators.

Primary Agency	Actions
DHS (continued)	**Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA):** The organizational DHS/FEMA approach for external affairs and incident communications with the public includes the following coordination systems: • **Connectivity and Operations Center Support:** In the event that normal communications are lost or degraded, local, state, tribal, insular area, and Federal communicators coordinate with DHS/FEMA through respective emergency operations and command centers via the FEMA National Radio System. • **Integrated Public Alert and Warning System (IPAWS):** – Supports the President of the United States and other local, state, tribal, territorial, insular area, and Federal officials to provide critical emergency alerts and information to the American public during emergencies. – Provides authenticated alert messaging from emergency officials to the public via radio and television through the Emergency Alert System, cellular phones through the Commercial Mobile Alert System, and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) National Weather System All-Hazards Radio (NWR) through the HazCollect System.

Support Agency	Actions
General Services Administration	Maintains the following Web sites: – **USA.gov:** This Web site is the official Web portal of the U.S. Government and the agreed-upon site where relevant incident content is to be aggregated and curated. All Federal Web sites are mandated to link to USA.gov, which lends authority to its content and improves its appearance in search queries. – **GobiernoUSA.gov:** The Spanish-language sister site of USA.gov. GobiernoUSA.gov follows the same mandate to provide official government information to people with Limited English Proficiency. – **National Contact Center (NCC):** Also managed by the General Services Administration, the NCC serves as an information and referral service for the general public who seek information on a wide range of government programs, including those administered by the Executive, Legislative, and Judicial branches.
Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)	HHS, its agencies and partners working under ESF #8, educate and inform the public, health care professionals, policymakers, partner organizations, and the media in a timely, accurate, and coordinated way during the response phase of a public health and medical incident. HHS and DHS work together as the respective leads for ESF #8 and ESF #15 during a public health emergency.

Support Agency	Actions
Department of Commerce	**National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA):** NWR is a nationwide network of radio stations broadcasting continuous weather information direct from a nearby National Weather Service (NWS) office. NWR broadcasts NWS warnings, watches, forecasts, and other hazard information 24 hours a day. In conjunction with the Emergency Alert System (EAS), NWR provides an all-hazards radio network, making it a single source for comprehensive weather and emergency information. The Secretary of Homeland Security can use the NWR Network to send target alerts anywhere in the country. In addition, this type of activation also activates DHS/FEMA's EAS network at the local level. NWR also broadcasts warning and post event information for all types of hazards, including natural (e.g., earthquakes and volcano activity), manmade (such as chemical or environmental incidents), and terrorism-related hazards.
Department of the Interior	**Bureau of Indian Affairs** • Oversees the Tribal Assistance Coordination Group (TAC-G), consisting of multiple Federal partners, to assure the government to government relationship as it relates to cooperation, collaboration, information sharing, and emergency response. • Provides coordination support to DHS/FEMA by providing subject matters experts and tribal liaisons during incidents.
Department of Justice	• Through the Federal Bureau of Investigation, leads communications about the investigation if an incident is deemed to be terrorist-related. • Provides an ESF #15 external affairs officer, through the FBI or Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, if ESF #15 is activated. • Provides guidance, promulgates regulations, conducts investigations and compliance reviews, and enforces Federal civil rights laws, including their application to emergency management generally, and the use of appropriate auxiliary aids and services necessary for effective communication with individuals with disabilities and meaningful access to limited English proficient persons, such as the Americans with Disabilities Act, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, and the Civil Rights Act of 1964.
Department of State	• Serves, in conjunction with the White House Office of Communications, as the Federal lead for delivering communications pertaining to a domestic incident to international partners. • Leads communications for U.S. residents living overseas. • Uses the NICCL and SICCL protocols, in conjunction with DHS, during incidents when overseas incidents affect domestic audiences (or when use of these Federal communications protocols would benefit communicators responding to U.S. media).
Other Departments and Agencies	All Federal departments and agencies should support the National Response Framework ESF #15 organization and staff.
U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) and Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)	**National Response Team (NRT) JIC:** The EPA and DHS/USCG use the NRT JIC model to communicate with affected publics during oil discharges and hazardous materials releases. During instances when this model and ESF #15 are both activated, NRT JIC operations and ESF #15 align functions and communications efforts.

Support Agency	Actions
American Red Cross	The American Red Cross works collaboratively with state, tribal, territorial, insular area, and Federal government agencies, NGOs, the private sector, and local community officials as a direct provider of disaster relief services, including emergency sheltering, feeding, disaster-related health and mental health needs, disaster assessment, family reunification, and public information. Under ESF #15, the American Red Cross coordinates disaster messaging with Federal communicators and provides critical disaster relief and preparedness information to the public through proactive media outreach, its Web site (http://www.redcross.org), and social media platforms.

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