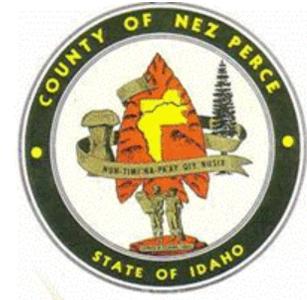




IDAHO REGION II STABILIZATION PLAN



Annex G

PUBLIC INFORMATION

This annex provides guidance on how to build vital public trust via timely, truthful, and open communication.

Leads: Public Information Officers

INTRODUCTION

A catastrophic, destabilizing event will have major psycho-social implications. To prevent fear from turning into panic, chaos, and anarchy, it will be necessary for the government to broadcast information frequently, truthfully, and continually.

A Tale of Two Cities. During 9/11, there was a surprising calm, a willingness to help, a mental toughness among the citizens that seemed to reverberate throughout New York City and beyond. However, in New Orleans, during Katrina, there was no comparable toughness; instead, there was chaos and crime and atrocity. What made the difference between the two? One critical difference was citizens feeling like part of the solution (in NY) and citizens feeling like they were being managed and ignored (in NO).

Doing It Right. Community starts with leadership; however, it is the citizens who will ensure the survival of the community. A sense of personal control will have to be immediately and repeatedly dispersed throughout the community to direct the survival focus of individuals from self-only benefitting behaviors to survival-through-community behaviors. This can only be accomplished if the citizens are treated as partners, and are given timely and complete messages which include community benefitting actions for the citizens to take.

People will accept leadership that instills trust. Credibility in a survival situation will be lost in one well intentioned misstep of hiding or slanting information. Therefore it is vital to err on the side of honesty than on the side of "management".

SCOPE

Public information activities include:

- Informing the public about immediate threats or hazards, their effects, and protective measures
- Coordinating local government's release of public information to the media
- Controlling rumors and reassuring the public
- Providing ongoing information about emergency operations and emergency services
- Providing ongoing information about recovery and community events
- Embedding pro-active tasks for the community to engage in as often as possible

POLICY

1. Information will be conveyed early and often. This must be a constant, conscious effort on the part of local government.

When possible, each new piece of information that is released to the citizenry must be coupled with some sort of action that the citizen can take. The reason for this is three fold:

- It eases the pressure on the community if each citizen is being proactive.
- It teaches the citizen that staying in their community, listening to the local officials through public information releases, is their best chance of survival.
- It provides direction for the mental/emotional/physical nervous energy that a citizen will have.

Each new update will increase the anxiety level of the citizen who feels utterly unprepared. However, by giving the citizen the exact course of action to take, the citizen will be able to direct that energy to purposeful good instead of toward panic or anarchy. The more dire the information, the more necessary it is to also provide the citizen with some sort of work/action/planning. For example, an announcement of "Currently, the county coroner states the death toll at 112 from the fires." would be coupled with an action for the citizens to take as well as the next time for update: "Citizens are urged to immediately begin moving brush and trash 20 yards from the perimeter of their dwelling. Due to lack of water pressure citizens must not attempt to use hoses to soak their areas. However, citizens should consider digging firebreaks, overturning earth around their dwellings. The next update will be given at 8 pm."

2. Information regarding fatalities will only be released by the County Coroner. **Timing is critical.** The coroner may need to issue preliminary assessments. People will get restless if 1- 2 weeks are needed to "fully assess the fatalities", especially in event of a pandemic or other event where death is likely to spread. Rumors will

This plan is only activated in the event of a national emergency and attendant local disaster/emergency declarations become the main news if the authorities are waiting for “proper authorization” or “full assessment” to release information to the public, which will create anxiety and chaos.

SITUATION AND ASSUMPTIONS

1. Normal means of communications may be either destroyed or largely incapacitated; therefore, only limited and incomplete information is anticipated until communications can be restored.

2. Rumors may develop, potentially causing unnecessary fear, confusion, and undesired public reactions. Accurate public information, provided to the general public in a timely manner, will minimize fear, curtail rumors, and provide a constructive means for dealing with the situation.

If those in charge of public information do not provide information with extreme speed and efficiency, the public will fill in its own gaps—out of your control. The only possible way to stop a rumor is to prevent it - starting with immediate, thorough, repeating, constantly fresh updates. This is necessary to keep calm and order.

3. A joint information center (JIC) may be established to coordinate emergency public information. This will be especially important if regional governance is adopted to formalize cooperation between the five counties. The JIC consists of the Public Information Officers (PIOs) from affected departments, and may be augmented with professional media personnel. The lead PIO is determined based on the incident or information to be communicated.

The JIC will be a media focal point, central repository of all public information in the jurisdiction during the emergency situation, and a clearinghouse for official media releases and dissemination of emergency public information for all organizations that are supporting emergency operations in the jurisdiction.

RISK COMMUNICATION vs PUBLIC INFORMATION

Risk Communication. Risk communication is a process which uses a psychological approach to message framing and mapping to articulate a message. Expected questions are anticipated in advance, and prepared messages are developed in response to these questions. An underlying premise is that the organization “speaks with one voice,” and “stays on message.”

While the theory behind risk communication is laudable, past application has been to “spin” and “manage the truth.” This approach will not work in a catastrophic environment. Government will be vulnerable to criticism and doubt due to past corruption, lies and public mistrust. The result is a complete loss of public influence or control, with chaos ensuing, as the government loses legitimacy.

Public Information. Effective public information is founded on “telling the truth” not “managing the truth”. Be open, up front, and honest. This approach seeks to speak with one purpose and ‘many voices’. The purpose is “to inform the public about the catastrophic event and how we will deal with it as a community” and there can be many voices to speak it.

PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICES FOR PUBLIC INFORMATION

1. Remember that no news is not good news. No news is no news. No news is frightening or upsetting. People will insist, and fairly so, that they need to know about anything that is impacting their lives. They will become restless and more likely to spread rumors, panic, or begin anarchy. Therefore, even when there is no new news, continue to issue updates at specific times. Do not allow more than an hour of time to pass without an update of some sort.

In order to hold the attention of the citizens, space out updates of various items throughout the hour. For example, the state of fuel availability can be announced every hour on the hour, the current fire danger and location can be stated on the half hour, the current threat assessment can be announced on the quarter hour, etc. This shows the public that the government is keeping them in the loop and literally buys time, as the public will look at the clock and wait for the next update.

By cycling updates on various situations and impacts throughout the day (eg: fuel rationing on the hour, health updates on the quarter hour, fire/rescue updates on the half hour, etc), the public will have time to process information mentally and emotionally, and will be less likely to react with anarchy and chaos while the local government and able-bodied citizenry work toward initial stability. For example:

“This is the 4:00 pm update on gas rationing. The situation is unchanged. People with even-numbered license plates may purchase up to 5 gallons of fuel beginning at 5:30 pm. The next update will be at 5:00 pm”.

2. The goal is community rebuilding, beginning with individual responsibility. Each message should include an action that the listener may take to better their own situation. Aim for at least two proactive responses by the public each hour. This may include anything from “citizens are encouraged to fill bathtubs and containers with fresh water at this time” to “citizens with even numbered license plates may purchase 5 gallons of fuel beginning at 2 pm” to “We are asking for any able bodied men who live within two blocks of xyz building to please assist in recovery efforts. Those outside of that radius are asked to stay where they are at this time, as there will be additional recovery efforts in other parts of the city that they will be needed for”.

There are always actions that can be taken by the citizenry, and it is imperative that the local officials begin the habit of citizens working proactively for the benefit of themselves and the community. By introducing steps of “continual situation improvement”

This plan is only activated in the event of a national emergency and attendant local disaster/emergency declarations

immediately during the crisis, the citizenry, who are generally unprepared emotionally, mentally, or physically for a crisis, will be directed how to better their own situation and the situation in the community as well as be passively absorbing the message of “The government is including every citizen and has the information that the citizen needs to survive, as long as the citizen does the directed steps”. The nervous energy of the unprepared citizenry will be directed into positive, rational actions which benefit the individual and the community.

3. Public information is not just about communicating. It is listening to the citizens, which is the other half of public information. Face to face meetings between elected officials and the public will be important. Consider holding town meetings at the neighborhood gathering points on a rotational schedule. This affords an opportunity for elected officials to put out orders and public service information in person and invite discussion. This will intentionally keep the lines blurred between “official” and “citizen”, as well as demonstrate that the government is working with and for the community and has nothing to hide, which will add to trust and cooperation.

4. Facilitate assistance between citizens. For example, arrange an environment that allows people with goods and services to connect with those who need goods and services, such as swap meets, “job fairs”, etc. Continually encourage neighbors to check in on each other. Offer tips and suggestions for community building.

5. Daily news segment on “continual community improvement”. This could be radio or TV or NET team presentation, featuring things that people can do to better their situation. These projects will help people become directly involved and invested in their community.

For example:

- A presentation showing how to make a regular bathroom toilet useable in the event of no electricity or sewer service. NET teams can follow-up to see which neighbors might need help or supplies, and connect them with the agencies that are set up to serve them.
- Requests from local government for assistance on various projects.

CONCEPT OF OPERATIONS

Public information needs to be both informative and useful...“state the situation, state a solution.” Providing this requires attention to media resources, location, and staffing.

Use Multiple Media Resources. The media outlets available during an extended crisis will depend on the extent of infrastructure degradation or collapse. Consider using all of the following as available:

1. If electrical power is available:

- Radio and television. Include backup systems, such as campus radio stations and low-power transmitters.
- 9-1-1 alerting systems. Consider limiting use for high priority messages.
- Local government websites and internet forums. If available, ensure applicable web addresses are disseminated using available media.

Websites will need to be updated at least every two hours during the crisis. New information should always be added, as that will help the community maintain a common goal. The information can be as simple as a new recipe, an update on a local community garden, various needs that the community has, or whether contact has been made with the outside and what that contact entailed.

2. If electrical power is unavailable (or available):

- Neighborhood Emergency Teams. NET Teams can go directly to the people. They can relay media releases and help share our store of preparedness knowledge, techniques, and experience.
- Neighborhood bulletin boards and/or newsletters. These can inform about the latest news, policies, social events, educational opportunities, goods and services for sale/trade, etc. Public notice boards were a major tool of government in the days before electricity. Designate a board in neighborhood gathering centers and section it off into five sections:
 - Section 1: Public policies and directives
 - Section 2: "Good advice" - such as water purification procedures
 - Section 3: Calendar or event log to keep people advised on upcoming events
 - Section 4: News items from shortwave radios or from other communities
 - Section 5: Open to the public. Possibilities: General public messages and a substitute for public mail service

Location. The JIC should be located within or close to the Emergency Operations Center. This provides access to decision-makers and rapid coordination of media releases. Satellite locations should be established at radio and television stations if these are available, and at incorporated towns.

Staffing. The core staff for public information are the people in the JIC. Consider a minimum of five people *per shift* for the following:

- JIC lead: The JIC lead:
 - Manages information flow, including timing and sequencing of releases
 - Supervises JIC staff activities
 - Coordinates final media releases with the chief elected officials

This plan is only activated in the event of a national emergency and attendant local disaster/emergency declarations

- Leads media briefings from the Emergency Operations Center.
- Information collection. Information is obtained from annex coordinators, and includes local inputs from citizens via the NET Annex Coordinator, and external inputs from credible sources via the Communications Annex Coordinator.
- Writers. Writers take the raw information/data, and place it in a media release template (Appendix 1).

The JIC staff at the Emergency Operations Center is augmented by:

- Satellite public information staff at radio and television stations, if these are available.
- Public information personnel at incorporated towns.
- Public information officers on temporary assignment to incident command staff for major events.
- Public information personnel working with website hosts.

PREPARATION

1. Work with annex coordinators to develop and disseminate information to encourage preparedness activities, awareness and encourage personal responsibility to minimize the loss of life and property during a disaster.
2. Coordinate with local college, etc. to use the Government Access Television channel to ensure a continuous flow of accurate public information.

RESPONSE

- ___ Review status with annex coordinators to determine requirements for initial news release
- ___ Contact other PIOs. Consider activating JIC
- ___ Within one hour, conduct an initial press briefing and develop a frequent schedule of open press releases:
 - ___ Status of disaster as known
 - ___ Briefings by chief elected officials
 - ___ Essential information from annex coordinators
- ___ Coordinate with local college, etc., and use the Government Access Television channel to ensure a continuous flow of accurate public information

This plan is only activated in the event of a national emergency and attendant local disaster/emergency declarations

- ___ Activate rumor control procedures
 - ___ If power and communications are available:
 - ___ Establish citizen information lines to handle calls from the public
 - ___ Update local government webpages, with an on-going news events log
 - ___ Provide information to the responders, media, NET Team Manager, and the public regarding the procedures to control the spread of rumors
- ___ Provide news release/updates hourly, or more frequently, to inform the media, NET Team Manager, and public of current status and essential information
- ___ Collect information from annex coordinators:
 - ___ Status of disaster
 - ___ Any specific types of volunteers or other assistance needed
 - ___ From NET Team Manager: examples of recovery efforts, and actions being taken to alleviate problems
- ___ Collect information concerning status of neighborhoods from NET Team manager
- ___ NET Teams: distribute copies of news releases to neighborhood gathering points

This plan is only activated in the event of a national emergency and attendant local disaster/emergency declarations

Appendix 1 – Media Release Preparation Template

Scripts

Scripts are necessary in order to prevent confusion, to keep a record of the situation, and to prevent omitting of pertinent facts. The information gatherers will complete one sheet for every contact made. The information gatherers will complete the top portion of the form, then hand it to the writers for streamlining and insertion of action, if one is not already suggested by the source of the information (for example, if the fire chief is giving the information, but requires no action on the part of the citizenry at that time, then the writer will insert a pre-formed action for the citizen). This form will then be given to the JIC lead for dispersal.

Script Form: (To be completed by the information gatherers)

The current date/time is: _____

This message is regarding: (insert annex, incident, or situation here) _____

Location is: _____

Source for this information: _____

The situation is (circle one): changed unchanged unknown at this time

Message: _____

What is being done about this situation: _____

(To be completed by the writers)

Action for citizen to take (related or not): _____

Next Update will be at: _____