Emergency Support Function #15 - External Affairs

Primary Agency
Assistant Director of University Relations
President and Cabinet

Secondary/Support Agencies
Office of Emergency Preparedness
City of Radford Fire Department
Radford University Police Department
Information Technology Departments
Student Health Services
Health Department
Department of Social Services
Virginia Department of Emergency Management
Local Print and Media Outlets
Joint Information Center (JIC)

Introduction

Purpose:
Emergency Support Function (ESF) #15 – External Affairs is responsible for keeping the public informed concerning the threatened or actual emergency situation and to provide protective action guidance as appropriate to save lives and protect property. University Relations will be responsible for all communications after the initial crisis message(s) from the police or Office of Emergency Preparedness. The Radford University Police or Office of Emergency Preparedness may send additional critical messages in order to protect the campus community. These messages will be sent to University Relations so that following releases can be communicated to the public with a consistent theme.

Scope:
To manage information during an incident so that the most up to date and correct information is used to inform the public. This emergency support function will use media reports to support the overall strategy for managing the incident. This function will coordinate with all agencies involved with the incident so that one message is used for public information to avoid any conflicts of released information. This may require the formation of a Joint Information Center. The location of this center will be determined by the emergency type and location. This emergency support function is organized into the following functional components:

- Public Affairs
- Community Relations
- Legislative Affairs
- International Affairs
Policies:
During an emergency the Public Information Officer will:

- Disseminate information by appropriate means, to include any university and local alert systems, media outlets, social media, cable channel, the Emergency Alert System, NOAA All-hazards radio, and the locality’s website;
- Clear news releases with the EOC before releasing them to the media;
- Encourage news media to publish articles to increase public awareness; and
- Ensure information is accurate and released in a timely manner.

Concept of Operations

General:
In an emergency or disaster it is important to provide timely and accurate information to the public and to the media outlets. News coverage must be monitored to ensure that accurate information is being disseminated. The locality needs to be prepared to keep local legislators and other political figures informed.

Organization:

Public Affairs is responsible for coordinating messages from the various agencies and establishing a Joint Information Center. University Relations will gather information on the incident and provide incident related information through the media and other sources to keep the public informed. Public Affairs will monitor the news coverage to ensure the accuracy of the information being disseminated. Public Affairs will handle appropriate special projects such as news conferences and press operations for incident area tours. The Public Affairs Support Annex provides additional details on responsibilities.

Community Relations will prepare an initial action plan with incident-specific guidance and objectives, at the beginning of an actual or potential incident. They will identify and coordinate with the community leaders and neighborhood groups to assist in the rapid dissemination of information, identify unmet needs, and establish an ongoing dialogue and information exchange. The Commonwealth and FEMA deploy a joint Community Relations Team to the locality to conduct these operations.

Legislative Affairs will establish contact with the state legislative and congressional offices representing the affected areas to provide information on the incident. The locality should be prepared to arrange an incident site visit for legislators and their staffs. Legislative Affairs will also respond to legislative and congressional inquiries.

International Affairs, if needed, will work with the Department of State to coordinate all matters requiring international involvement.
Actions

- Evaluate the situation;
- Monitor national and state level news coverage of the situation (if applicable);
- After coordination with the University EOC, time permitting, the PIO will begin to disseminate emergency public information via news releases to the local news media;
- The content should be coordinated with adjacent jurisdictions and the City EOC;
- Emphasize citizen response and protective action;
- Develop accurate and complete information regarding incident cause, size, current situation, and resources committed;
- Continue to keep the public informed concerning local recovery operations;
- Assist the Health Department in disseminating public health notices, if necessary;
- Assist state and federal officials in disseminating information concerning relief assistance; and
- Document expenses.

Responsibilities

- Establish a working arrangement between the City PIO, the local EOC and local radio stations, television stations, and newspapers;
- Encourage local newspapers to periodically publish general information about those specific hazards, which are most likely to occur, such as flooding and industrial accidents;
- Prepare and provide general information as appropriate to special groups such as the visually impaired, the elderly, etc.;
- If necessary, designate a phone number and personnel to handle citizen inquiries;
- Assure the availability of back-up generators at local EAS radio stations;
- Arrange regular press briefings;
- Coordinate the release of information through public broadcast channels, and written documents; and
- Maintain an up-to-date telephone and fax number list for all local news organizations.