

U.S. Coast Guard
Crisis Communications Plan
Hurricane/ Natural Disaster
COM 562
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July 2019



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Introduction

The U.S. Coast Guard is one of five armed services founded in 1790. The Coast Guard under the Department of Homeland Security is a multi-mission, maritime force offering a unique blend of military, law enforcement, humanitarian, regulatory, and diplomatic capabilities. These capabilities are carried out through three broad roles: maritime safety, maritime security, and maritime stewardship. Within these roles is the response to natural disasters, predominantly hurricanes.

This crisis communications plan is intended to provide guidance of public affairs activities associated with a hurricane threatening or making landfall, but many scenarios will be more complex or require intervention at various levels. Hurricane season begins June 1 and ends November 30. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) provides information on hurricane and tropical storm predictions. Hurricane response operations may be varied based upon unit missions and local needs.

Natural Disaster Audience and Stakeholders

The following is a generic list of audience and stakeholders for natural disasters such as hurricanes. Stakeholders may vary by state and other local non-profits and agencies.

Public

The public has a role to play in disaster preparation, heading evacuation notices, and post-disaster recovery efforts. The public is also the taxpayer and/or volunteer who supports all the other stakeholders in their efforts.

Media

Local TV, radio, and newspapers should be regularly contacted before, during and after a disaster. Local media will often share broadcast with national affiliates to keep local and national public informed.

Federal

FEMA- A system in place today by which a presidential disaster declaration of an emergency triggers financial and physical assistance. FEMA has the responsibility for coordinating government-wide relief efforts.

Office of External Affairs, Public Affairs-FEMA-News-Desk@fema.dhs.gov or 202-646-3272

EPA- protect human health and the environment. Ensure all parts of society--communities, individuals, businesses, and state, local and tribal governments--have access to accurate information sufficient to effectively participate in managing human health and environmental risks.

EPA Press Office- press@epa.gov

NOAA- daily weather forecasts, severe storm warnings, and climate monitoring to fisheries management, coastal restoration and supporting marine commerce, NOAA's products and services support economic vitality and affect more than one-third of America's gross domestic product.

NOAA Communications-@NOAACOMMS

State

This section will vary by state. Some common contacts will be governor's office, state Department of Homeland Security and Emergency Management, state environmental department, National/ Air National Guard, etc. Below is one example.

FLORIDA STATE EMERGENCY RESPONSE TEAM (SERT) - Working together to ensure that Florida is prepared to respond to emergencies, recover from them, and mitigate against their impacts.

Florida Division of Emergency Management- (850) 815-4000

Disaster Relief/ Religious Agencies

RED CROSS- Required by Congressional charter to undertake disaster relief activities to ease the suffering caused by a disaster. Emergency assistance includes fixed/mobile feeding stations, shelter, cleaning supplies, comfort kits, first aid, blood and blood products, food, clothing, emergency transportation, rent, home repairs, household items, and medical supplies.

THE NATIONAL ORGANIZATION FOR VICTIM ASSISTANCE- provides social and mental health services for individuals and families who experience major trauma after disaster, including critical incident debriefings.

THE VOLUNTEERS OF AMERICA- is involved in initial response services aimed at meeting the critical needs of disaster victims, such as making trucks available for transporting victims and supplies to designated shelters. It also collects and distributes donated goods and provides mental health care for survivors of disaster.

THE CATHOLIC CHARITIES USA DISASTER RESPONSE- is the organization that unites the social services agencies operated by most of the 175 Catholic dioceses in the United States. The Disaster Response section of Catholic Charities USA provides assistance to communities in addressing the crisis and recovery needs of local families.

THE INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF JEWISH VOCATIONAL SERVICES (IAJVS)- is an affiliation of 26 U.S., Canadian, and Israeli Jewish Employment and Vocational and Family

Services agencies that provides a broad spectrum of training and employment initiatives needed in disaster.

THE LUTHERAN DISASTER RESPONSE (LDR) - provides for immediate disaster response, in both natural and technological disasters, long-term rebuilding efforts, and support for preparedness planning through synods, districts, and social ministry organizations.

Local County and City Emergency Agencies

This section will include county sheriff and highway patrol, city fire and police departments, county and city officials, school administration, and can include prominent figures in local businesses and community advocates.

Threats

The following are potential threats the U.S. Coast Guard will have to address during a natural disaster such as a major hurricane.

Life

The U.S. Coast Guard is a life-saving service with the predominate mission being search and rescue at sea and in waterways. The most important threat to address is the risk of life lost during a hurricane. Risk of life includes members of the public unable to evacuate an effected area and first responders at various governmental and private levels, and their families.

Property

Damage to property is another major threat. While the Coast Guard has little capability to reduce threats to property in a fixed land location, mitigating risk to vessels in effected areas can be addressed before and after a hurricane. Property includes commercial, recreational, and governmental vessels and assets.

Environment

Environmental threats consist predominantly of pollution from damaged property entering waterways and sensitive wildlife areas but can also include ground pollution. Oil and hazardous materials from vessels and industry near waterways is the greatest risk. Coast Guard missions include the oversight of pollution removal from waterways and sensitive wildlife areas along the water that falls under federal jurisdiction.

Economic

The Coast Guard maintains federal navigable waterways. Damage and obstruction to waterways is a risk to commerce and recovery after a storm. The Coast Guard may play a role in ensuring obstructions and pollutions are cleared safely so business may resume as quickly as possible.

Political

The Coast Guard is funded by taxpayer dollars. Political disputes or underperformance by the Coast Guard risks recovery efforts and future funding to better respond to natural disasters. A lack of public trust to respond quickly and effectively is a risk to the before mentions risks and the Coast Guard itself.

Communication Objectives

All communication with the public and media about the impact of a natural disaster and the Coast Guard's response should be honest, accurate and forthcoming in order to build trust and encourage actions to increase safety and security. Primary message objectives are as follows.

- Ensure the safety and welfare of the impacted public and the safety of our responders.
- Concern for the environment in which we're operating.
- Ensure citizens are as knowledgeable and empowered as they can be with regards to safety from environmental hazards, and property ownership options concerning disposition of impacted vessels.
- Provide timely information about response efforts and keep all stakeholders informed of ongoing operations.
- Maintain awareness of affected ecosystems and wildlife.

Communication Methods

Information will be disseminated to the media and the public through several communication channels including the following.

Press Release- Press releases will be focused strictly on factual operations, involved parties/agencies, a timeline of events, evolving safety and pertinent statistics with visuals and imagery.

Press Conference- Scheduled as appropriate to meet operations objectives and media cycle deadlines. Press conferences should be used for announcing new and significant changes and will provide press packs as needed.

Media interviews/ embeds- Media interviews and embeds will be granted on a case-by-case scenario depending on operations. No exclusives shall be granted to any one media outlet, but original story ideas will not be shared with competing media outlets. When space is limited,

media pools will be advised. Specific ground rules will be established and adhered to in all instances.

Coast Guard webpages- Currently existing local Coast Guard sites will disseminate information for public access. This will include but is not limited to press releases, video and imagery, fact sheets and flyers, and internal stories.

Coast Guard Social Media- Social media will be utilized in conjunction with the release of information to the media by press release or conference with links back to full information and details. Social media will be monitored for rumors and misinformation to correct in a timely manner. Response to the public will be done professionally and quickly to the best of the ability of the monitoring individual(s).

Community meetings/ Town Halls- Participation in community meetings and town halls are encouraged depending on operations. Face-to-face by appropriate Coast Guard members and subject matter experts will be used to dispel rumors, answer individual questions/concerns, receive feedback and continue to build trust and understanding.

Internal Briefings- Internal briefings will be done in accordance with the Incident Management Handbook and set by the Planning department. Members not required at specific meetings will be briefed by the department directors/chiefs or others designated and will likewise distribute print materials as needed.

Key Messages:

The following messages are critical to information communication through the previous methods.

1. Hurricanes and other natural disasters can be deadly and our ability to conduct rescues can be diminished or non-existent at the height of a storm. Be prepared, stay informed and heed storm warnings.
2. When it comes to response and preparedness, the most important link in the chain is you: prepare your home and property for the season, have an emergency plan and points of contact.
3. People in distress should use 911 to request assistance whenever possible. Social media should not be used to report life-threatening distress due to limited resources to monitor the dozens of social media platforms during a hurricane or large-scale rescue event. Residents should become familiar with their local city, county and state emergency services' reporting resources early, and use the reporting tools available in their local area.

Media Relations and Resources

The following is guidance to use for media interactions during a response with appropriate appendixes of worksheets to use in a joint information center. When possible [Gov Delivery](#) will continue to be the method of distribution of press releases and media advisories for both national and local media. If unavailable, a local list of contacts and methods should be used.

Media Contacts

Local Newspaper(s): Name

Phone

Email

Local ABC Affiliate: Name

Phone

Email

Local NBC Affiliate: Name

Phone

Email

Local CBS Affiliate: Name

Phone

Email

Local Fox Affiliate: Name

Phone

Email

Local radio Affiliate(s): Name

Phone

Email

AP/ Wire Service:

Phone

Email

Media Interviews and Press Briefings/Conferences

Media interviews and press briefings/conferences shall be granted as often as possible and appropriately for operations. Depending on the operations and media interest, briefings can be held in the morning and mid-afternoon with brief follow-up interviews afterward. Press briefings and conferences should be held in a space that either is close to operations but will not affect safety or visual/audio quality, or in a space with clean background and quiet for sound clarity. Space should be able to accommodate multiple reporters and camera equipment. Nearby parking may also need to be secured for TV station vans. Spokesperson(s) should be prepared before the arrival of media with a specialist from the joint information center. The PIO will moderate the press briefing/conference to set the ground rules, time limits, and take notes for questions that need further follow-up. PIO may also be a spokesperson if incident commander or other subject-matter-experts are unavailable. Press kits should be provided and include the latest press release,

contact information, and if available a fact sheet, incident commander/unified command members bios, maps and or imagery/graphics.

Media Embarks

Media embarks will be granted with incident commander approval when operations allow for safe involvement for media and crew, and there is a media interest. If there is a greater interest than capacity to safely accommodate, a media pool will be offered for the media to select representatives. The pool is determined by the members of the media.

Media Worksheets

The following documents can be used for media during a response in the joint information center. The following worksheets can be found in the National Response Team Joint Information Center Model for Emergency Support Functions.

Media Query Record

Media/ Social Media Analysis Worksheet

Press Release Template

Media Advisory Template

Spokesperson Request worksheet

Media Briefing Script/Worksheet

Social Media

The following is guidance to use for social media interactions during a response. Social media is used to communicate directly with the community. When possible, use an existing social media site with a pre-established audience to reach the target audience to the maximum. This can be as large as regional Coast Guard to local police and fire department pages. Social media policy of the used platform should continue to be honored unless changes are agreed upon by unified command. Starting a new feed for a short-term response would cause communications setbacks but hashtags could assist in narrowing communication to response. Due to limited time and resources, Twitter and Facebook should be the two primary platforms.

Twitter

Due to space limitations, save short and concise updates for Twitter- 140 characters. Include a URL to official releases or relevant Facebook page for more information. Twitter can be posted to more frequently within operational tempo. Include a unified command approved hashtag. Use the following steps for tweeting in the beginning of a response.

- Make an initial tweet about incident- who, what, where, when.
- Establishment of incident or unified command with link to press release, response hashtag if appropriate.
- Continue with basic facts and updates with hashtag.
- Share photos and graphics of safety or exclusion zones as appropriate.
- Respond to questions asap, while discouraging the use of inappropriate language and hate speech.

Facebook

Facebook tactics are similar to Twitter. More information and visuals can be shared on Facebook. Live streaming should be done with caution, have unified command approval, and used if response is unable to allow traditional media coverage for safety or security concerns. Additionally, monitoring other responder and local community pages could help verify if information is reaching the right audience at the right time, and correct any errors in misinformation. Include a unified command approved hashtag. Use the following steps for tweeting in the beginning of a response.

- Make an initial post about incident- who, what, where, when.
- Establishment of incident or unified command with link to press release, response hashtag if appropriate.
- Continue with basic facts and updates with hashtag.
- Share photos and graphics of safety or exclusion zones as appropriate.
- Respond to questions asap, while discouraging the use of inappropriate language and hate speech.

Joint Information Center Positions

Any and every crisis response is required to have at least a Public Information Officer as part of the incident or unified command. The following positions are expandable and retractable based on the geographical and impact scale and duration. Further guidance can be found in the National Response Team Joint Information Center Model for Emergency Support Functions.

PIO- The Public Information Officer will support the Incident Commander, the Unified Command and establish and demobilize a Joint Information Center. They will advise on public information issues and concerns and keep the media and public informed of ongoing operations. The PIO will also analyze coverage in media and public perceptions to develop information strategies. As appointed by the Incident Commander, the PIO will be selected based off skill, ability and qualifications including completion of incident command structure courses and qualification for a type three or above incident. If the Incident Commander is unable to act as the

spokesperson for the response, the PIO shall be the spokesperson with the support of subject matter experts.

APIO/ JIC Manager- Selected by the PIO, The JIC Manager will supervise daily operations of the JIC and can fill-in for the PIO on an as needed basis. The JIC Manager will ensure proper organization, internal information flow and provide training or coaching as needed. The JIC Manager will be selected by the PIO based on skill, ability and qualifications including completion of incident command structure courses and possible type three or above qualifications.

APIO/ Information Gather- The Information Gatherer collects information on ongoing activities and media coverage. Depending on the size of the response, duties could be one or all of the following: fact gathering, status board, media monitoring and analysis, and rumor control. The APIO for information gatherer is selected by the PIO or JIC Manager and should have experience in crisis communications, public affairs and basic IS courses.

APIO/ Information Products- The Information Products role is responsible for written products including press releases, media advisories, PSAs, fact sheets and visuals including photo, video, graphics and managing an external website. Depending on the size of the response, duties could be one or all of the following: writer, imagery specialist, website specialist, or administrative assistant. The APIO for information products is selected by the PIO or JIC Manager and should have experience in crisis communications, public affairs and basic IS courses.

APIO/ Media Relations- The APIO for media relations will respond to media inquiries, maintain contacts and prepare speakers and venues for interviews and briefings. Depending on the size of the response, duties could be one or all of the following: media relations, speaker support specialist, field specialist. The APIO for media relations is selected by the PIO or JIC Manager and should have experience in crisis communications, public affairs and basic IS courses.

APIO/ Community Relations- The APIO for community relations develops and coordinates community outreach programs and participates in community meetings to respond to inquiries. Depending on the size of the response, duties could be one or all of the following: community relations, community support specialist, social media specialist. The APIO for community relations is selected by the PIO or JIC Manager and should have experience in crisis communications, public affairs and basic IS courses.

JIC Requirements/Resources

The following is a list of requirements for the establishment of a JIC.

- A dedicated space with electricity if possible.

- At least one dedicated phone line and number for media calls. This should shift from an office number or work cell to a separate number.
- Paper and pens/ markers to track contacts, information, inquiries and responses.
- A computer or laptop with internet connection (could be hotspot).
- Tables and chairs.
- Poster post-it or white/chalk board for status of operations, contacts, etc.
- Camera gear for imagery.
- Properly trained and skilled staff with corresponding qualifications.

Resources

The National Response Team Joint Information Center Model for Emergency Support Functions handbook is the primary source reference for hurricane and disaster response. Completion of FEMA Incident Command System courses are also preferred and often required.