

# Massachusetts Emergency Support Function 15

## ***PUBLIC INFORMATION AND EXTERNAL AFFAIRS***

### **Responsible Agencies**

#### **State Agencies**

##### ***Primary State Agency***

Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency

##### ***Supporting State Agencies***

Governor's Press Office

Executive Office of Public Safety and Security

Mass 2-1-1

#### **Supporting Federal Agencies**

Federal Emergency Management Agency

# 1.0. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1. Purpose

The Massachusetts Emergency Support Function 15 (MAESF-15) *Public Information and External Affairs* Annex provides a framework for coordination and collaboration across state agencies regarding public information needs, issues, and activities before, during, and after a disaster or emergency in the Commonwealth to ensure the delivery of timely, accurate, and accessible public messages and warnings. In addition, this annex details how the Commonwealth will provide public information in the event of a disaster and describes the authorities, policies, and procedures to prepare and deliver coordinated, timely, accurate, and accessible messages to the general public in response to emergency incidents requiring state support.

## 1.2 Scope

This annex is applicable to agencies and departments in the Commonwealth, as well as affiliated public information partners, with a role in supporting public information and external affairs related activities in response to incidents requiring state support.

In a disaster or emergency, multifaceted coordination is needed to ensure that the state is responsive to the informational needs of its residents and accurate, accessible, and timely information is disseminated.

MAESF-15 encompasses public information and external affairs and includes the following objectives:

- **Public Information:** provide incident-related information through a variety of media and other sources to individuals, families, businesses, and industries directly or indirectly affected by the incident.
- **External Affairs:** Coordinate with the liaison officer in providing information to members of local and state government on the incident and the status of state supported activities.

## 1.3 Policies

This annex supports and does not supplant local public information plans or policies.

This annex does not limit the authority of tribal and local authorities to release information regarding an incident under their jurisdiction, particularly if it involves immediate health and safety issues. Tribal and local authorities retain the primary responsibility for communicating health and safety instructions for their population.

General guidance on the authority to release information is in accordance with existing plans, designated coordinating and responsible agency assignments.

## 2.0 SITUATION AND ASSUMPTIONS

### 2.1. Situation

Information is a basic need during an emergency. Providing clear, accurate, accessible, and timely information to the general public before, during or in the aftermath of a disaster or emergency is critical. A significant disaster or emergency may be of such magnitude that dissemination of information to the impacted area may be severely hampered. In addition, both within and outside the impacted area, the demand for information concerning the disaster or emergency may be overwhelming.

### 2.2. Planning Assumptions

- There will be a strong need for the general public to get disaster assistance information. The timely dissemination of accurate, accessible, well-coordinated emergency public information will reduce the impact to life and property as well as help to maintain public trust and confidence.
- The Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency's (MEMA) Public Information Officer (PIO) understands the relevant plans and procedures specific to the emergency public information function.
- MEMA's communication methods and systems relied upon to notify/inform the public are operational and tested on a regular basis.
- Effective communication methods to assist with notifying and disseminating information to the general public have been established by MEMA. These communication methods include TV, radio, and print media, Massachusetts Alerts (a public safety alerting app), the Integrated Public Alert and Warning System (IPAWS) which includes the Emergency Alert System (EAS) and Wireless Emergency Alerts (WEAs), MEMA's website and social media accounts, Mass 2-1-1 and other alert and notification tools.
- Many disasters or emergencies occur rapidly, hampering the ability of response organizations, local and state government to provide comprehensive information to everyone impacted at the onset.
- A disaster or emergency may create a significant demand for information from a wide variety of sources which may exceed capabilities. Some situations may require the provision of enhanced or supplemental public information resources.
- The interest generated by a disaster or emergency may lead to requests for information or visits from a variety of public officials, dignitaries, or VIPs. Such requests will require coordination and resources.
- A disaster or emergency may impact individuals' ability to receive public information due to displacement, or limited access to television, phone, newspaper, the internet, social networks, etc.

- Some individuals depend on visual methods of communication to receive emergency messages.
- Regarding personal preparedness and protective action, some individuals will require advanced warning and/or emergency directives.
- Some individuals may require information through different methods and may need more time to process emergency messages before they decide to take protective action.
- Audience factors (i.e., personal perception, language, cultural beliefs, age, etc.) will impact what an individual hears, how they will interpret the emergency information, and how they will act on that emergency information.
- Public information efforts will rely heavily upon the cooperation of commercial media organizations.
- Extensive destruction of media communications facilities and loss of electrical power may severely disrupt the normal flow and dissemination of information in the disaster area.
- In the aftermath of a disaster, information is often erroneous, outdated, vague, difficult to confirm, and contradictory.
- Rumors or misinformation may be spread before, during, and after a disaster. This can cause unnecessary distress among the public, provoke counter-productive public actions, and impede response and recovery efforts.

## 3.0 CONCEPT OF OPERATIONS

### 3.1. General

This annex will be activated at the direction of the MEMA Director or State Emergency Operations Center (SEOC) Manager when there is potential for or an actual disaster situation impacting the Commonwealth. MEMA will notify the primary agency at the time of the SEOC activation to provide overall coordination of MAESF-15. All other agencies with responsibilities under MAESF-15 will serve as support agencies. The primary agency will provide direction to and work in conjunction with the support agencies to cohesively coordinate the activities of MAESF-15. In instances where MEMA serves as the primary agency, MEMA's PIO, or designee, will provide direction to, and work in conjunction with, the support agencies to coordinate activities associated with this annex.

MAESF-15 will act as the central coordinating entity for receiving and disseminating public information during state disaster operations. Information flow to the SEOC will occur directly from news media reports, social media, and from Mass 2-1-1. Information will also flow from WebEOC inputs, the SEOC Planning Section, MAESF-15 representatives in the SEOC, the MEMA Regional Emergency Operations Centers (REOCs) coordinating with local EOCs, local officials, and Joint Information Centers (JIC)/Joint Information System (JIS) to the SEOC.

Information will flow from the SEOC in the form of media briefings, press releases, social media messages, WebEOC, and Situational Awareness Statements.

## **3.2. Organization**

- All personnel and activities associated with MAESF-15 will operate under the Incident Command System.
- The Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency (MEMA) has been designated the primary agency for MAESF-15.
- Each MAESF-15 agency shall designate a minimum of two persons who can serve as a representative for their agency at the SEOC to support MAESF-15 activities. The designated agency representative should have the capability and authority to reach back to his/her own agency/department to request public information resources and obtain necessary information to support the response to the incident.
- MAESF-15 reports to the SEOC Public Information Officer.

## **Joint Information Center/Joint Information System**

Depending upon the scope of the event, a 'virtual' Joint Information Center (JIC), also referred to as the Joint Information System (JIS) may be stood up to coordinate the collection, verification and dissemination of information. PIOs from impacted agencies and organizations will coordinate messaging with physically co-locating to a JIC.

At the request of MEMA's SEOC Manager, a Joint Information Center (JIC) may be activated. The JIC will serve as a single point to collect, verify, and disseminate information to the general public and may be located at the SEOC facility itself or another location.

In the event that the JIC is activated, all emergency public information activities, including media inquiries, will be coordinated through the JIC. The JIC will become the central coordination point for all emergency public information and external communications activities. To the extent possible, the JIC will be staffed with PIOs from all agencies and organizations involved in the event.

In the event that a Presidential disaster declaration is issued under the Stafford Act and a Joint Field Office (JFO) is activated, the state JIC may co-locate at the JFO in order to facilitate coordination with Federal officials. There may also be other incidents that result in Joint Information Centers (JICs) established and operated by another entity (such as nuclear power plants, certain law enforcement incidents, etc.) In this case, MEMA's PIO and/or MAESF-15 representatives will work within these other JICs, as appropriate, to coordinate public information.

## **3.3. Notification**

MEMA will notify MAESF-15 points of contact for each activated agency to report to the SEOC to coordinate SEOC public information, support public information related request, and provide situational awareness from various related sources (i.e., news outlets and social media). Each

MAESF-15 agency is responsible for securing sufficient staff on a continuous basis to support and to carry out the activities tasked to their agency.

## **3.4 Activities**

### **a. Prevention Actions**

Responsible agencies for MAESF-15 should conduct the following prevention actions:

- Communicate and share information across agencies with public information responsibilities.
- Collaborate and coordinate on public information related prevention initiatives.
- Identify potential emergency public information related issues and collaborate to develop recommended protocols, procedures, and policies to prevent or mitigate their effects.
- Regularly provide emergency preparedness information to the public/media throughout the year through news releases, website, social media accounts, public outreach events and other methods.

### **b. Preparedness Actions**

Preparedness for incident communications actions includes those measures taken before an incident to prepare for or mitigate the effects. Responsible agencies for MAESF-15 should conduct the following preparedness actions:

- MEMA will convene regular meetings of MAESF-15 stakeholders and/or Emergency Support Function Team to review and update the MAESF-15 annex and standard operating procedures.
- Develop and maintain internal agency operational plans and procedures, resource directories, and emergency contact lists to support MAESF-15 activities (including, but not limited to; support agency/ department contact lists, resource lists, and SOPs).
- Ensure policies and procedures are in place to access directory information and quickly notify personnel in support of this annex.
- Continually evaluate the capabilities required to accomplish the MAESF-15 mission, identify any gaps, and leverage resources to address them.
- Manage the resolution of MAESF-15 after-action issues.
- Ensure that MAESF-15 stakeholders notify MEMA of staff changes.
- Participate in exercises and training in order to test, validate, and provide working experience for MAESF-15 liaisons on this annex and related procedures.
- Ensure representatives from the coordinating agencies/ departments are fully trained and prepared to respond to the SEOC as MAESF-15 support in a disaster or emergency.

- Coordinate with media outlets, including multilingual media outlets, and access and functional needs stakeholders, to prepare emergency information for the general public.
- Coordinate with the media to ensure that news conferences from the SEOC include closed captioning as well as American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters to ensure that the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community are serviced.
- As necessary, coordinate with the SEOC communication unit to periodically test emergency broadcast and alerting systems.
- Implement a comprehensive public information program to include news conferences, news releases, fact sheets for media and local organizations, updates for websites and social media accounts, and outreach to those with access and functional needs.

### **c. Response Actions**

Response actions mitigate the effects of unanticipated problems and facilitate orderly management of an incident. Upon receiving notification to report to the SEOC in preparation of an incident, MAESF-15 agencies will complete the following actions commensurate with emergency priorities within the state and based on the availability of resources.

#### **Pre-Impact**

- Provide appropriate representative(s) to the SEOC to support MAESF-15 pre-impact activities if needed.
- Review existing plans and procedures.
- Test communications systems.
- Notify the appropriate point of contact at each respective agency/department to pre-position resources.
- Provide emergency information to the general public to ensure public safety and health through a wide variety of methods.
- As needed, coordinate with MAESF-1 *Transportation*, to provide preparedness information to the public that can be posted on variable message boards and other transportation-related information portals.

#### **Initial Response**

- If an agency/department has not already done so, provide appropriate representatives to the SEOC to support MAESF-15 activities.
- Gather incident related information through direct communications links with operational units (on-scene personnel, local Emergency Management Directors and PIOs, local government officials, MEMA REOCs, and other local and state agencies/organizations) in the field and/or their appropriate coordinating entities.
- Assess priorities and strategies to meet the most critical public information needs.
- Coordinate with media outlets, including multilingual media outlets, to prepare and disseminate emergency information for the general public.

- Provide emergency information to the general public to ensure public safety and health through a wide variety of methods.
- Monitor social media activity and media coverage of the incident and verify accuracy and consistency of information by consulting SEOC sources.
- Maintain communications with the SEOC Manager and the Operations Sections Chief. Obtain status reports, and keep the SEOC informed of progress of assigned tasks.
- Ensure full coordination of activities with other groups within the SEOC to assist in the development and maintenance of a common operating picture.
- Collect and analyze information relevant to MAESF-15. Provide situational awareness information for reports and/or statements to the SEOC Planning Section as needed. In addition, use information provided by the SEOC Planning Section to plan effective support actions.
- Coordinate initial news conferences.
- Coordinate with Mass 2-1-1 to manage requests from the general public for disaster related information.
- As needed, coordinate with MAESF-1 *Transportation*, on public messaging that can be posted on variable message boards and other transportation-related information portals.
- Implement predetermined cost accounting measures for tracking MAESF-15 resources, and other costs incurred during emergency response actions.

### **Continuing Response**

- Conduct ongoing re-assessment of priorities and strategies to meet the most critical public information needs.
- Continue to gather information from operational units in the field and/or their appropriate coordinating entities.
- As needed, continue to coordinate with MAESF-1 *Transportation*, on public messaging that can be posted on variable message boards and other transportation-related information portals.
- Continue to coordinate with other MAESFs as appropriate to anticipate projected public information needs.
- Continue to maintain communications with the SEOC Manager and the Operations Sections Chief on progress of assigned tasks.
- Continue to provide information to the Planning Section as needed to update Situational Awareness Statements.
- Assess ongoing staffing needs, based on operational developments and level of interest from the media and general public.
- Provide updates concerning disaster conditions and state actions taken in support of the incident. Ensure that information is going out in an accessible, timely and accurate manner.



- Continue to monitor social media activity and media coverage of the emergency incident through a variety of methods.
- Monitor media, social media and Mass 2-1-1 for rumors and respond accordingly with corrective information.

#### **d. Recovery Actions**

- Coordinate the MAESF-15 support of recovery activities.
- Coordinate with support agencies to ensure financial tracking of all deployed assets and adequate cost accounting measures are being used. Generate summary reports and share with the SEOC.
- Coordinate with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) regarding the status of disaster declarations, types of assistance available to disaster victims, and recovery center locations.
- Provide information to the appropriate agencies/ organizations, the media, and the general public regarding the status of disaster declarations, types of assistance available to disaster survivors and recovery center locations.
- Ensure MAESF-15 agencies/departments and other support agencies provide appropriate records of costs incurred.
- When requested, participate in the Joint Field Office.
- Conduct an MAESF-15 after action review.
- Draft recommendations for after-action reports and other reports as appropriate.

#### **e. Mitigation Actions**

- Identify potential emergency public information issues and collaborate to develop or recommend plans, protocols, procedures, and policies to prevent or mitigate their effects.
- As needed, conduct assessments of MAESF-15 capabilities to identify potential resource shortfalls.
- As needed, develop plans to mitigate identified shortfalls of resources.

## **4.0 RESPONSIBILITIES**

### **4.1. MAESF-15 Primary Agency Responsibilities**

Upon activation of this annex, the primary agency, or designee will have the following responsibilities:

- Regularly meet and coordinate with MAESF-15 supporting agencies, to:

- Maintain a list of critical contacts, noting any changes to MEMA Operations
- Maintain a list of ESF-specific assets which could be deployed during an emergency
- Maintain the ESF-15 Toolkit
- Report any unmet needs to MEMA Operations
- Staff the MAESF-15 work station at the SEOC.
- Identify and coordinate MAESF-15 staffing requirements at the SEOC.
- Maintain Situational Awareness, monitor weather conditions, and ensure a state of readiness for the ESF.
- Coordinate with responsible agencies/departments to prioritize and strategize the most critical public information needs.
- Maintain fact sheets, instructions and procedures, and other readily available pre-scripted information on a wide range of all- hazards topics to support the rapid dissemination of public information. Pre-scripted information is verified on a regular basis to ensure that it is current and accurate.
- Coordinate with MAESF-15 responsible agencies to develop and disseminate timely, accurate, and accessible emergency information to the general public, and the media. Information related to the incident may include but is not limited to; warnings, instructions for protective actions, transportation, and sheltering locations, availability of local, state, and federal recovery programs, and emergency information telephone numbers and websites. In addition, when appropriate, information may also include disaster associated threats, incident facts, health risk concerns, anticipated and on-going emergency response efforts, and pre-incident and post-incident recommendations.
- Monitor social media activity and media coverage of the incident and address any inaccuracies immediately.
- Collect, and analyze information associated with the emergency and relevant to MAESF-15. Verify the source of information and the creditability of the source.
- Maintain communications with the SEOC Manager, the SEOC Operations Sections Chief, and MEMA Communications Center. Obtain status reports, and keep the SEOC informed of progress of assigned tasks.
- Provide situational awareness information for reports and/or statements to the SEOC Planning Section as needed.
- While Primary Agencies are designated in advance, this may be subject to change during an SEOC Activation, dependent on the specific circumstances and needs of the incident, and therefore the agency most appropriate to take the primary assignment.

**a. Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency**

- Receive and disseminate public information relating to emergency preparedness, response and recovery activities.

- The MEMA PIO serves as MEMA’s official spokesperson and primary news media point of contact for inquiries relating to emergency preparedness and support operations.

## **4.2. MAESF-15 Supporting Agency Responsibilities**

### **a. Governor’s Public Press Office**

- Coordinate with MAESF-15 agencies/departments to provide resources to support public information needs.

### **b. Executive Office of Public Safety and Security**

- Provide support staff for augmenting MAESF-15 staffing needs as needed.

### **c. Mass 2-1-1**

- Serves as the Commonwealth’s primary telephone information call center during times of emergency. Mass 2-1-1 will respond immediately to field calls regarding the emergency and direct callers to services most appropriate for their needs.
- Provide situational awareness to the SEOC to include number of calls, nature of assistance requested, rumors, etc.

### **d. Other Agencies**

- The Federal Emergency Management Agency and other agencies not explicitly covered in this annex may have authorities, resources, capabilities, or expertise required to support MAESF-15 activities. These agencies may be requested to support MAESF-15 activities as needed.

## **4.3. Other Agencies**

Other agencies not explicitly named in this annex may have authorities, resources, capabilities, or expertise required to support MAESF-15 activities. These agencies may be requested to support MAESF-15 activities as needed.

# **5.0. ADMINISTRATION AND LOGISTICS**

## **5.1. Staffing**

As required by Massachusetts Executive Order 144, all MAESF-15 responsible agencies/departments must designate at least two personnel to act as SEOC liaisons. These

liaisons should be knowledgeable about the resources and capabilities of their respective agencies and have access to the appropriate authorities for committing said resources and capabilities.

The PIO maintains a list of MEMA personnel who have completed the appropriate training to serve in the PIO role. These personnel may serve as MAESF-15 lead in the event that the PIO is unavailable, or may be used to augment MAESF-15 staffing for larger incidents.

If Mass 2-1-1 is being utilized, personnel from Mass 2-1-1 may be asked to report to the SEOC as a liaison between the two facilities.

## **5.2 Mutual Aid**

The process for requesting mutual aid from entities either within or outside of Massachusetts is described in the “Mutual Aid” section of the State CEMP Base Plan.

## **5.3 Annex Review and Maintenance**

This annex will be updated every two years at a minimum, in accordance with the Emergency Management Program Administrative Policy, and will ensure that appropriate stakeholder input is incorporated into updates. Additionally, the annex will be reviewed following any exercise or activation of the plan that identifies potential improvements. Revisions to this annex will supersede all previous editions and will be effective immediately.

# **6.0. AUTHORITIES, RESOURCES, AND REFERENCES**

## **6.1. Authorities**

Massachusetts Executive Order 144

See Authorities section of the State CEMP Base Plan

## **6.2. Resources**

See Resources section of the State CEMP Base Plan

## **6.3. References**

- Massachusetts Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan
- Massachusetts Radiological Emergency Response Plan
- MEMA Continuity of Operations Plan
- Regional Catastrophic Coordination Plan

- Emergency Alert System Plan
- SEOC ESF SOP Guidance Document
- Threat Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment (THIRA)
- Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment (HIRA)
- State Hazard Mitigation Plan