



# **Developing an Emergency Risk Communication (ERC)/Joint Information Center (JIC) Plan for a Radiological Emergency**

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## **Abstract**

This document provides best practices for nuclear power plant licensees and local response organizations on developing an Emergency Risk Communication (ERC) and Joint Information Center (JIC) plan for a radiological emergency. The purpose of an ERC/JIC plan is to ensure the delivery of understandable, timely, accurate, consistent, and credible information to the public, the media, and other stakeholders during a radiological emergency. This document contains example materials for use or adaptation by licensees and local emergency response organizations.

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## 1.0. Introduction

### 1.1 Objectives

This document provides guidance for nuclear power plant licensees and local emergency response organizations on developing an Emergency Risk Communication (ERC) and Joint Information Center (JIC) plan for a radiological emergency. The purpose of an ERC/JIC plan is to ensure the delivery of understandable, timely, accurate, consistent, and credible information to the public, the media, and other stakeholders during a radiological emergency.

This document contains sample statements for use or adaptation by commercial nuclear power plant licensees and local response organizations in developing their own emergency risk communication plan. The sample statements may also be used by other facilities subject to radiological emergencies, such as research reactors and radiopharmaceutical manufacturers. The document expands on the guidance provided in other guidance documents for radiological emergencies, such as NUREG-0654/FEMA-REP-1 (“Criteria for Preparation and Evaluation of Radiological Emergency Response Plans and Preparedness in Support of Nuclear Power Plants”).

### 1.2 Background

The accident at the Three Mile Island Unit 2 nuclear power plant in March 1979 highlighted the need for effective communication with the public, the media, and local and State emergency response officials. The accident led to an overhaul of emergency planning regulations and guidance. The overhaul specifically included planning standard 10CFR 47(b)(7):

Information is made available to the public on a periodic basis on how they will be notified and what their initial actions should be in an emergency (e.g., listening to a local broadcast station and remaining indoors), the principal points of contact with the news media for dissemination of information during an emergency (including the physical location or locations) are established in advance, and procedures for coordinated dissemination of information to the public are established.

NUREG-0654/FEMA-REP-1 (“Criteria for Preparation and Evaluation of Radiological Emergency Response Plans and Preparedness in Support of Nuclear Power Plants”) establishes criteria for implementation of the above planning standard based on the conditions and technologies of the time. For example, it specifies that:

1. Each licensee shall provide space that may be used for a limited number of the news media at the near-site emergency operations facility.
2. Each principal organization shall designate the points of contact and physical locations for use by news media during an emergency.

Based on existing regulations and guidelines, each licensee and local response organization is responsible for developing their own ERC/JIC plan for a radiological emergency. The lack of clear guidelines for developing the ERC/JIC plan has resulted in a lack of consistency in communication facilities, equipment, tools, strategies, and skills. It has also resulted in a lack of consistency by industry and offsite officials in reporting events. To illustrate: a nuclear power plant suffered a steam generator tube failure in 2000. The licensee was quick to state there was no release of radioactive materials while the Nuclear Regulatory Commission stated there was a minor release of radioactive materials.

Communications technology has changed radically within the past decade. For example, response times by the media, as well as blogs, citizen reporters with cell phones, and social media such as Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube, have changed how information about emergencies is delivered

and received. Without an effective Emergency Risk Communication/Joint Information Center plan, the plethora of “talking head experts” can easily likely overtake facts.

## **2.0 Elements of the ERC/JIC Plan**

The ERC/JIC plan should include a list of the elements contained in the plan. Section 2.1 provides a sample list of such elements.

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## 2.1 Sample Statement Regarding Elements in an ERC/JIC Plan

The [insert name of organization] ERC/JIC plan contains the following elements:

- Letter of Endorsement by Senior Management
- Objectives and Assumptions
- Management Structure
  - Incident Command System
  - Joint Information Center
- Management Policies
  - Message Clearance and Approval
  - Disclosure of Identifiable Private Data about Individuals
  - Authorization for Media Interviews
  - Notifications
  - Communication Coordination
  - Emergency Risk Communication Preparedness
- Communication Tasks
  - Leadership Tasks
  - Media Relations Tasks
  - Message Development Tasks
  - Partner/Stakeholder Outreach Tasks
  - Web Site Tasks
  - Administrative and Technical Support Tasks
  - Studio/Broadcast Tasks
  - Media Monitoring/Research Tasks
  - Hotline Tasks
  - Community Education Tasks
  - Employee Communications Tasks
  - Subject Matter Expert (SME) Communications Tasks
  - Policymaker/Legislative Communications Tasks
  - Information Management Tasks
- Information Dissemination Methods
  - Emergency Broadcasts
  - News Conferences
  - Individual Media Interviews
  - News Releases
  - Web Site Updates
  - Call Centers/Hotline Services/Telephone Messaging
  - Social Media
  - Other Media
  - Communicating with Special Needs Populations
- Joint Information Center (JIC) Structure
  - Incident Joint Information Center (I-JIC)
  - Virtual Joint Information Center (V-JIC)
- ERC/JIC Plan Maintenance

Each element is described in the plan.

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## 2.2 Sample Checklist of Elements in a Comprehensive Emergency Risk Communication Plan

- Identify all anticipated scenarios for which emergency risk communication plans are needed, including worst cases and low probability, high consequence events.
- Describe emergency risk communication roles and responsibilities for different emergency scenarios.
- Designate staff who will assume emergency communication roles and responsibilities.
- Designate who will lead the emergency risk communication effort.
- Designate who within the organization will be responsible and accountable for implementing designated emergency communication actions and activities.
- Identify who will need to be consulted during the emergency risk communication process.
- Identify who will need to be informed about emergency risk communication actions and activities.
- Designate who will be the lead communication spokesperson and backup spokespersons for different emergency risk communication scenarios.
- Identify, train, and prepare second and/or third shift spokespersons – a necessity given 24/7 media coverage or a prolonged event.
- Identify procedures for information verification, clearance, and streamlined approval.
- Identify procedures for coordinating emergency risk communication efforts with partners (for example, with emergency response organizations, law enforcement, elected officials, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), special interest groups, and government agencies at the local, county, state, and federal level.
- Identify procedures to secure required human, financial, logistical, and physical support and resources (such as people, space, equipment, support services, and food) for emergency risk communication operations during a short, medium and prolonged event (24 hours a day, 7 days a week if needed).
- Identify agreements on when, how, and under what conditions information will be released.
- Identify the organization with primary responsibility for developing messages and communications regarding specific issues of concern or specific stakeholders; prepare and sign memorandums of agreement.
- Identify and maintain a list of stakeholders and partners who will receive emergency risk communication products in advance of mass distribution.
- Identify policies regarding employee contacts with the media.
- Include regularly checked and updated traditional media contact lists (including after-hours news desks).
- Include regularly checked and updated partner contact lists (day and night).
- Identify procedures for testing, on a regular basis, the accuracy of all information contained in contact lists.
- Identify the schedule for exercises and drills to test the emergency risk communication plan.
- Identify subject-matter and technical experts (for example, university professors, consultants, and practitioners) who can be called on to support emergency risk communication efforts; know in advance their perspectives, viewpoints, and ability to communicate complex scientific or technical information in plain language.
- Identify key target audiences.
- Identify preferred emergency risk communication channels (for example, emergency radio broadcasts, telephone hotlines, radio and television announcements, news conferences,

Web site updates, text messaging, social media postings, and faxes) to communicate with the public, the media, nearby residents, key stakeholders, and partners.

- Include message maps for all anticipated or frequently asked questions from key internal and external audiences.
  - Check the consistency of all information contained in message maps, fact sheets, Web sites, question-and-answer documents, frequently asked question (FAQ) documents, media kits, audio-visual material, template press releases, media talking points, and other emergency risk communication products.
  - Include maps, charts, graphics, video clips, and other supplementary emergency risk communication materials compatible with specific media formats and needs.
  - Include a signed endorsement of the emergency risk communication plan by the organization's director.
  - Identify a process for revising and updating previously approved messages and related emergency risk communication products.
  - Include procedures for posting, revising, and updating emergency risk communication information on the organization's Web site.
  - Include procedures for posting, revising, and updating information shared through social media networks.
  - Include emergency risk communication task checklists for the first 2, 4, 8, 12, 16, 24, 48 hours, and 72 hours.
  - Include procedures for evaluating, revising, and updating the emergency risk communication plan on a regular basis.
  - Include procedures for tracking and analyzing media coverage (including social media and Web site traffic).
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### **3.0 ERC/JIC Letter of Endorsement by Senior Management**

An ERC/JIC plan should begin with a section containing an endorsement letter from senior management. A sample letter of endorsement is provided in Section 3.1.

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### 3.1 Sample ERC/JIC Letter of Endorsement by Senior Management

[Insert Date]

The [Insert Facility Name] recognizes the need to communicate understandable, timely, accurate, consistent, and credible information in a radiological emergency. During a radiological emergency, the need for information is critical. Heightened fear and misinformation can impede efforts to reach affected individuals and groups. Armed with factual information, affected individuals and groups can be a powerful ally in addressing the emergency.

An effective Emergency Risk Communication (ERC) and Joint Information Center (JIC) plan is a resource multiplier. Many of the potential adverse outcomes of a radiological emergency can be mitigated through the implementation of an effective ERC/JIC plan.

Affected individuals and groups must feel empowered to take protective actions in the event of a radiological emergency. For response efforts to be successful in a radiological emergency, response officials must be able to instill in people a sense of safety and trust. Communication strategies and messages focused on safety and trust allow people to take the steps needed to protect themselves and their families.

Implementation of the ERC/JIC plan will help the [Insert Facility Name] meet the communications needs and expectations of the media, public, employees, public officials, emergency response officials, and other stakeholders. We hope to never have a radiological emergency. However, if we do, it is essential we be prepared to communicate effectively.

Sincerely,

[Insert Senior Management Name]

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#### **4.0 ERC/JIC Objectives and Assumptions**

An ERC/JIC plan should include a section describing ERC/JIC objectives and assumptions. A sample statement of objectives and assumptions is provided in Section 4.1.

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## **Section 4.1 Sample Statement of ERC/JIC Objectives and Assumptions**

### **Introduction**

Effective emergency risk communication is an essential part of the response to a radiological emergency. Communicating effectively during a radiological emergency serves multiple purposes. These include:

- informing and instructing widely divergent audiences (e.g., the public, the media, employees, customers, emergency responders, public officials, and other stakeholders);
- minimizing stress, anxiety, and fear;
- encouraging the adoption of appropriate protective actions by individuals and organizations;
- building trust;
- minimizing or dispelling misinformation or rumors.

The [Insert Name] ERC/JIC plan provides the framework needed for understandable, timely, accurate, consistent, and credible communication during a radiological emergency. The plan provides a framework for a coordinated response by all those involved in emergency response.

The [Insert Name] ERC/JIC plan is intended to systematically address the roles, responsibilities, and resources needed to provide information to affected individuals, groups, and partner organizations during a radiological emergency. An effective, well thought out ERC/JIC plan will save precious time if a radiological emergency happens. Lines of authority and relationships with response partners need to be built before a radiological emergency occurs, not during the emergency.

[Insert Name]'s ERC/JIC plan is based on best practice and principles. The ERC/JIC plan is an integral part of [Insert Name]'s overall emergency response plan.

### **ERC/JIC Objectives**

1. Ensure an efficient flow of understandable, timely, accurate, consistent, and credible information during a radiological emergency.
2. Facilitate communication among key internal and external partners.
3. Provide needed information to all involved parties through the media and other information channels.
4. Promote informed decision-making by involved parties.
5. Persuade all involved parties to engage in recommended protective actions.
6. Elicit cooperation among all involved parties.

### **ERC/JIC Assumptions**

1. Dissemination of understandable, timely, accurate, consistent, and credible information among stakeholders (affected, interested, and influential target audiences) is critical to the effectiveness of the overall response to a radiological emergency.
2. Different types of information will need to be communicated to different target audiences.
3. It is highly likely that during a radiological emergency there will be widespread circulation of conflicting information, misinformation, and rumors.
4. Communication must be coordinated among all relevant response organizations to ensure consistent messages.

5. It is highly likely during a radiological emergency that particular individuals and groups will be hard to reach.
  6. Affected and interested individuals and groups will have a high demand for information during a radiological emergency.
  7. People who experience a radiological emergency may experience anxiety, depression, family disruption, violence, substance abuse, absenteeism, and other related physical and mental health symptom; every effort must be made to prevent such negative outcomes.
  8. The nuclear power plant licensee, in coordination with other organizations, is responsible for keeping the public, the media, employees, public officials, emergency response officials, and other stakeholders informed about the facility's actions during a radiological incident.
  9. Understandable, timely, accurate, consistent, and credible information is key to maintaining public trust and reducing possible health or safety consequences.
  10. Verified information must be released as quickly as possible, even if all the details are not yet known.
  11. Erroneous information must be corrected immediately; erroneous information can become "common knowledge" and difficult or impossible to refute later.
  12. Monitoring the media and responding rapidly to correct mistakes is vital.
  13. The concept of "people first" should motivate communication actions.
  14. Response officials must express appropriate levels of caring, concern, and empathy to be trusted.
  15. Information about the emergency intended for stakeholders must often be repeated several times; people typically do not process (hear, understand, and remember) information under stress as well as they do under normal circumstances.
  16. Panic is one of the many widespread myths about public response to emergency warnings; panic occurs in very particular circumstance that rarely, if ever, can be found in an actual emergency (see Exhibit 4.1: The Myth of Panic).
  17. Information about the emergency must be communicated using multiple media (for example, through radio, television, newspapers, hotlines, and Web sites) to ensure messages are heard and understood.
  18. Effective communication during a radiological emergency requires a coordinated response by the licensee and response partners, including federal, state, regional, county, and local government agencies; hospitals; educational institutions; and NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations).
  19. Emergency risk communications should serve to:
    - convey the status of the emergency and actions to protect people and the environment;
    - reduce uncertainty and dispel rumors in order to minimize counter-productive behaviors;
    - exemplify professionalism;
    - reassure the public, the media, employees, emergency responders, public officials, and other stakeholders that the emergency is being handled appropriately;
    - provide people with messages that create a sense of hope, self- and group efficacy, safety, calm, and connectedness.
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## Exhibit 4.1 The Myth of Panic

Emergency risk communication plans frequently list panic avoidance as a major goal. Panic describes an intense, contagious fear causing individuals to think only of themselves.

Panic is typically associated with images of masses of people screaming, fleeing, and trampling over one another. However, studies indicate panic is rare. It is one of the many widespread myths about public response to emergency warnings.

Most people respond cooperatively and adaptively to disasters and emergencies. Seven of the most important risk factors for panic include:

- the perception there is only a small chance of escape;
- the perception there are limited escape routes;
- the perception there is a high and immediate risk of death or serious injury;
- the perception there are limited or no resources available for assistance;
- the perception that survival is on a “first come, first served” basis;
- the perception there is a lack of effective emergency management;
- the perception that emergency response authorities are not credible.

In a comprehensive review of the research literature on public response to warnings of a nuclear power plant accident, Mileti and Peek point out:

It cannot be overemphasized that the public simply does not panic in response to warning of impending disasters, including nuclear power plant accidents. This myth is largely the result of movie producers who depict masses of screaming, fleeing, completely panicked individuals in dangerous scenarios. This is not to say that people never panic, but panic only occurs in very particular circumstance that rarely, if ever, can be found in an actual emergency. These conditions include people being in a closed room with an immediate and clear source of death, and the presence of an escape route for which it is obvious that there is insufficient time for everyone to escape with their lives. Note that panic behavior is different from elevated stress, which is a psychological response that the public and media often label as panic. The negative consequence of the myth of panic is that warning officials are reluctant to tell the truth or may withhold warning information because they are afraid of causing panic. . . . people typically respond to warnings by doing everything in their power to obtain more information. Thus, withholding information from the public — whether that information is good or bad — is quite detrimental to the overall warning process.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> (Source: Mileti, D. & Peek, L. (2000). The Social Psychology of Public Response to Warnings of a Nuclear Power Plant Accident. *Journal of Hazardous Materials*, 75:181-194)

## **5.0 ERC/JIC Management Structure**

An ERC/JIC plan should include a section describing the management structure for emergency risk communications. A sample statement regarding the management structure for emergency risk communications can be found in Section 5.1.

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## **Section 5.1 Sample Statement Regarding the Management Structure for Emergency Risk Communications**

### **1. Incident Command System**

The [Insert Name] has adopted the Incident Command System (ICS) structure to respond to a radiological emergency. Under the ICS structure, the [Insert Name]'s Public Information Officer (PIO) is a member of the Command Staff and coordinates emergency risk communication and information dissemination activities. Such activities are conducted in concert with others in the emergency response network.

The PIO or designee reports to the leader in the ICS structure, the Incident Commander. Activities undertaken by the PIO and emergency risk communications team include:

- news conferences;
- media interviews;
- press releases;
- media advisories;
- postings to the organization's Web site;
- media monitoring;
- rumor control;
- other duties as needed or assigned.

### **2. Joint Information Center**

In a radiological emergency, all emergency risk communication activities will be coordinated through a Joint Information Center (JIC). The JIC is described in greater detail in a later section of this document.

The JIC is designed to disseminate information and instructions to interested and affected parties through news conferences, press releases, media interviews, media advisories, and other means as needed. Public and news media inquiries are handled through the JIC.

The establishment of a JIC is based on the following assumptions.

- The media will come to a JIC only if they believe they will receive important information and will have their questions answered.
  - The media will go where the story is.
  - The JIC should be located as close as possible to the scene of the emergency but out of the way of harm.
  - Every organization participating in the emergency response should be encouraged to send a representative to the JIC.
  - Every participating emergency response organization should be encouraged to refer journalists to the JIC.
  - At least one JIC representative should be available round-the-clock to respond to media and other inquiries.
  - At least one JIC representative should be available round-the-clock to report to the Incident Commander or Unified Command.
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## **6.0 ERC/JIC Management Policies**

An ERC/JIC plan should include statements regarding ERC/JIC management policies. Sample statements regarding ERC/JIC management policies can be found in Sections 6.1 to 6.6.

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### **Section 6.1 Sample Statement Regarding Message Clearance and Approval**

All information released to the public, the media, employees, public officials, emergency response partners, and other stakeholders must be internally cleared in a timely manner. In a radiological emergency, it is important messages be identified as:

- pre-cleared;
- require clearance;
- questionable.

Only with the approval of the Public Information Officer or designee, in coordination with the emergency management team, will information be released.

Every effort should be made to obtain pre-event clearance of emergency risk communication messages. In a radiological emergency, information voids will be filled by others. Messages that might normally take several hours or days to get the proper clearances, cross clearances, and coordination may have to be released in minutes.

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## **Section 6.2 Sample Statement Regarding the Disclosure of Identifiable Private Data about Individuals**

Incident reports received by emergency response organizations may contain identifiable private data about individuals. Identifiable private data about individuals shall not be disclosed, except as noted below.

As used here:

- "Disclosure" or "disclose" means the communication of identifiable private data to any individual or organization outside the [Insert Name].
- "Private data" means information, recorded in any form or media, that relates to the status of individuals or their use of resources and services.
- "Identifiable private data" means any item, collection, or grouping of data that makes the individual or organization supplying it, or described in it, identifiable.

The PIO or designee will evaluate identifiable private data about individuals and determine the minimum amount necessary for emergency response purposes. The PIO or designee will evaluate to whom is it necessary to share this information. The disclosure of identifiable private data about individuals will vary depending on the type of emergency, how the information is acquired, who may be affected, and how much interest there may be at the time in determining who the individual is. This information may require written approval from managers in the human resources and legal departments prior to being released.

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### **Section 6.3 Sample Statement Regarding Authorization for Media Interviews**

All decisions regarding media interviews will be made by the Public Information Officer or designee in consultation with designated spokespersons, subject matter experts, partner organizations, and other relevant parties. Authorization to participate in a media interview will be based on:

- appropriateness of the interview, topic and venue;
  - availability of selected staff in light of primary responsibilities;
  - potential for exacerbating versus calming public fear or anxiety;
  - potential for relating information that cannot or should not be disclosed;
  - the impact the information conveyed on other organizations;
  - the assessed intent of journalist or other media representative.
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## **Section 6.4 Sample Statement Regarding Notifications In a Radiological Emergency**

Timely notifications of an emergency to all relevant stakeholders are critical to the effectiveness of the emergency response. Notification lists should be based on answers to the following types of questions:

- Which departments in your organization need to be notified?
- Which managers in your organization need to be notified?
- Which emergency response organizations need to be notified?
- Which elected or appointed officials need to be notified?
- Which government agencies need to be notified?
- Which non-governmental organizations need to be notified?
- Which media organizations need to be notified?
- Which additional stakeholder groups, based on the specific nature of the emergency, need to be notified?

The Public Information Officer or designee will ensure notifications have occurred by checking off names of pre-identified stakeholders on worksheets. Worksheets with complete contact information (day and night) will be developed for each pre-identified stakeholder to be notified (For a sample worksheet, see the “Worksheet for Notifications” in the appendix).

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**Section 6.5 Sample Statement Regarding Coordination of Communications with Emergency Response Partners**

Coordination of communications between the [Insert Name] and its emergency response partners is critical to the effectiveness of the response. Coordination helps ensure consistency in messaging.

To facilitate coordination, the Public Information Officer or designee will take all practical steps to share information with key partners in advance of the release of information to the media or other stakeholders.

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## Section 6.6 Sample Statement Regarding Emergency Risk Communication Preparedness

Emergency risk communications preparedness is an ongoing process that ensures the delivery of understandable, timely, accurate, consistent and credible communications in a radiological emergency. The following is a checklist of preparedness actions needed for effective emergency risk communications.

### Checklist

- Assess the information needs of the public, the media, public officials, emergency responders, and other stakeholders and identify ways to meet these needs.
  - Identify important stakeholders and subgroups within the audience as targets for your messages.
  - Identify credible third parties who could support your messages.
  - Train staff in emergency risk communication skills.
  - Recruit spokespersons with effective presentation and personal interaction skills.
  - Anticipate questions and issues that might be raised by stakeholders.
  - Set up a system to monitor what appears in the media, on web sites, and in other online sources of information.
  - Prepare and pre-test messages before offering them to stakeholders.
  - Set up a system for practicing media interviews.
  - Determine who will conduct news conferences.
  - Set up a system to confirm facts.
  - Establish an organizational protocol for all contacts with the media.
  - Ensure all staff are aware of the organizational protocol for contact with the media.
  - Establish an efficient clearance and approval procedure and ensure all staff are aware of the clearance and approval procedure for the release of messages to the public, the media, and other stakeholders.
  - Determine the resources needed to carry out the emergency risk communication plan.
  - Ensure all staff are aware of policies regarding the disclosure of identifiable private information about individuals.
  - Rehearse with your lead media spokesperson prior to media contact.
  - Determine how you would greet, register and handle journalists who arrive at the site of the emergency.
  - Develop a triage system for prioritizing and responding to media requests and inquiries.
  - Develop media contact lists.
  - Evaluate previous interactions with stakeholders and review lessons learned.
  - Review what others have learned about communications during radiological emergency events or exercises.
  - Determine the resources needed to carry out the emergency risk communication plan.
  - Prepare, in advance, fact sheets, news release, answers to frequently asked questions, web site materials, audio visual materials (for example, graphs, maps, photographs, and video clips), biographical sketches, telephone hot line scripts, and other communication materials relevant for a radiological emergency; share these materials for vetting and possible use by emergency partner organizations.
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## **7.0 ERC/JIC Communication Tasks**

An ERC/JIC plan should include a section describing communication tasks. A sample description of communication tasks can be found in Section 7.1.

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## Section 7.1 Sample Statement Regarding Emergency Risk Communication Tasks

In a major radiological emergency, emergency response organizations may receive hundreds or thousands of inquiries each day from the media, the public, employees, response partners, public officials, and other interested parties. These inquiries must be managed in an organized fashion to avoid chaos. One device for accomplishing this is to organize emergency risk communication activities according to tasks. For example, communication teams can be organized around one or more of these communication tasks:

- leadership tasks;
- media relations tasks;
- message development tasks;
- partner/stakeholder outreach tasks;
- Web site tasks;
- administrative and technical support tasks;
- studio/broadcast tasks;
- media monitoring/research tasks;
- hotline/call center tasks;
- community education tasks;
- employee communications tasks;
- subject matter expert communications tasks;
- policymaker/legislative communications tasks;
- information management tasks.

Each task is described below. Many of these tasks are done routinely during non-emergency times. One of the major differences between emergency and non-emergency risk communications is the stress placed on organizational staff and routine communications systems caused by staff shortages, unfamiliar territory, large workloads, deadlines, and time pressure.

### **Leadership Tasks:**

- arrange for the preparation and distribution of the written emergency risk communication plan;
- ensure all relevant individuals have copies of the ERC/JIC plan;
- ensure all relevant individuals are trained in how to implement the ERC/JIC plan;
- activate and implement the Emergency Risk Communication/Joint Information Center plan based on a careful assessment of the situation;
- meet with organization leadership shortly after emergency notification to review emergency risk communication strategies and activities;
- arrange to bring in needed resources—human and logistical—as specified in the ERC/JIC plan;
- assemble the emergency risk communication teams shortly after emergency notification, brief them on the event, consult with them on what needs to be done, and delegate tasks and assignments;
- contact other responding organizations to learn what emergency risk communication activities they are planning;
- distribute the predetermined policy guidance documents (for example, policy on information clearance and approval);
- contact and confirm availability of pre-determined lead spokespersons;
- review the strengths, weaknesses, and training of lead spokespersons;
- brief the lead spokespersons and review with them their responsibilities;

- remind all employees about organizational policies regarding contacts with the media;
- ensure notification of those in and outside the organization who should be informed when an emergency occurs (Note: given the importance of notifications, consider assigning at least one staff member responsibility for maintaining the notification lists and for confirming notifications have occurred);
- ensure coordination and dissemination of information with other organizations before its release;
- provide periodic briefings on emergency risk communication strategies with organization leaders;
- provide periodic briefings on emergency risk communication strategies with the emergency risk communications team;
- provide periodic briefings on emergency risk communication strategies with select stakeholders;
- arrange for the conduct of news conferences;
- implement the predetermined strategy for coordinating internal and external communication activities;
- determine operational hours for emergency communication activities, including shift changes (Note: reassess the shift change schedule every 12-24 hours);
- carry out all leadership responsibilities and tasks in a calm, professional manner;
- be aware of, and respond appropriately to, signs of stress among staff (including yourself). Signs of stress include:
  - mental signs (for example, difficulty concentrating, forgetfulness, exercising poor judgment, seeing only the negative, anxious or racing thoughts, constant worrying)
  - emotional signs ( for example, moodiness, irritability, short temper, agitation, restlessness, inability to relax, depression)
  - physical signs (for example, dizziness, chest pain, rapid heartbeat, sensitivity to loud noises)
  - behavioral signs (for example, overeating, isolating oneself from others, procrastinating or neglecting responsibilities, using alcohol, cigarettes, or drugs to relax, nervous habits such as nail biting and pacing)

### **Media Relations Tasks:**

- organize and conduct news conferences;
- produce and distribute timely news releases and other materials for the media;
- respond to media requests and inquiries;
- provide support for spokespersons;
- coordinate responses to media inquiries.

### **Message Development Tasks:**

- develop and distribute draft talking/message points
- implement predetermined procedures for information verification, approval, and clearance;
- create drafts of news releases, fact sheets, question and answer sheets (Q&As), speeches, video scripts, public service announcements, and other communication materials;
- create appropriate graphics and other visual material to support messages and other communication materials;
- ensure information contained in communication materials is accurate, current, and cleared for release;
- ensure coordination and consistency of messages internally and across other responding organizations.

### **Partner/Stakeholder Outreach Tasks:**

- maintain open channels of communication with partners and stakeholders located in interested or affected governmental, non-governmental, not-for-profit, and private sector organizations;
- coordinate announcements and releases of information with partner organizations.

### **Web Site Tasks:**

- post pre-developed Web page for use on the organization's Web site;
- establish and maintain links to other Web sites;
- post information about the event on the Web site;
- oversee prompt updating of materials to the Web site;
- develop, as needed, password protected Web sites to share information within the organization and among partner organizations;
- determine who needs to approve posting and updating of information on the Web site;
- review and assess Internet/Web site visits and use.

### **Administrative and Technical Support Tasks:**

- manage essential administrative and technical tasks;
- distribute emergency risk communication materials.

### **Studio/Broadcast Tasks:**

- activate equipment and support the broadcast of news conferences and other media events;
- record and log all news conferences and other media events.

### **Media Monitoring/Research Tasks:**

- scan print and broadcast media for information that could help or hinder the response effort;
- scan Web sites for information that could help or hinder the response effort;
- scan blogs for information that could help or hinder the response effort;
- scan logs from hotlines for information that could help or hinder the response effort;
- scan social media (for example, Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube) for information that could help or hinder the response effort;
- analyze and summarize information on stakeholder knowledge, attitudes, and behavior;
- analyze and report feedback from other teams for patterns and cross-cutting trends.

### **Hotline/Call Center Tasks:**

- establish hotlines for all relevant stakeholders (for example, the public, the media, employees, employee families, elected officials, emergency response partners, etc.);
- respond to hotline requests for information;
- distribute requests for information by the public, the media, employees, employee families, elected officials, emergency response partners, and other stakeholders to the appropriate person or organization;
- coordinate with other responding organizations the function and use of the hotlines.

### **Community Education Tasks:**

- facilitate meetings of interested or affected communities or special populations
- identify public education needs;
- develop and ensure distribution of educational materials on radiation and other radiological issues to interested or affected communities and special populations;
- develop public information campaign materials if needed.

**Employee Communications Tasks:**

- identify and open predetermined channels for communicating with employees;
- work with other team members on message development and dissemination;
- arrange for regular briefings of employees and employee families;
- coordinate information dissemination efforts with other teams;
- provide feedback from employees to other communication team members.

**Subject Matter Expert (SME) Communication Tasks:**

- identify and open predetermined channels for communicating with subject matter experts;
- coordinate with subject matter experts in partner organizations;
- arrange and conduct regular briefings for subject matter experts;
- respond to requests and inquiries from subject matter experts;
- provide feedback from subject matter experts to other communication team members.

**Policymaker/Legislative Communications Tasks:**

- identify and open predetermined channels for communicating with policymakers;
- distribute communication materials and updates to elected officials/legislators/special interest groups;
- respond to requests from elected officials/legislators/special interest groups;
- arrange routine briefings for selected policymakers;
- work with other team members to evaluate materials for policymakers;
- provide feedback from policymakers to other team members.

**Information Management Tasks:**

- collect, review, and finalize informational materials;
  - maintain a database/log of emergency risk communication materials;
  - facilitate clearance of printed materials and messages;
  - centralize and streamline information products to be released.
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## **8.0 ERC/JIC Information Dissemination Methods**

An ERC/JIC plan should include a section describing information dissemination methods. Sample statements describing information dissemination methods typically used in a radiological emergency can be found below.

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## Section 8.1 Sample Statement Regarding Information Dissemination Methods

In a major radiological emergency, all appropriate and available information dissemination methods should be used. The use of multiple communication channels (for example, radio, television, Web sites, and call centers) can substantially increase the reach and visibility of messages and recommendations.

Information dissemination methods include:

- **Emergency Broadcasts.** Used to provide information and instructions to the public through Emergency Alert System broadcast messages and follow up Special News Broadcasts.
- **News Conferences.** Used to simultaneously convey information to all interested news media.
- **News Releases.** Used to disseminate important information to the news media and through them to the public.
- **Individual Media Interviews.** Used to respond to individual media requests for information.
- **Web Site Updates.** Used as an efficient way for providing background information, updates, and responding to frequently asked questions.
- **Call Center/Hotline/Telephoning Messaging.** Used to respond to inquiries from stakeholders and the media and to provide recorded messages about the incident.
- **Social Media** (for example, Twitter, YouTube, and Facebook). Used to convey information to interested parties and subscribers.
- **Other Media for Disseminating Information.** Used to supplement other information dissemination methods. May include video news releases, audio news releases, blogs, and other information dissemination techniques.
- **Information Dissemination Methods for Communicating with Special Needs Populations.** Special needs populations include individuals who have disabilities, live in large group settings, are elderly, are children, are from diverse cultures and/or have limited English proficiency (or are non-English speaking), and are transportation disadvantaged

Sample statements for each information dissemination method can be found in Sections 8.2 – 8.9.

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## **Section 8.2 Sample Statement Regarding Emergency Broadcasts**

(Source: Federal Emergency Management Agency (2002). Emergency Broadcast Process and Instructions. Interim Radiological Emergency Preparedness (REP) Program Manual)

The careful preparation of information and instructions to be made available to the public through Emergency Alert System (EAS) broadcast messages and follow up Special News Broadcasts are an essential facet of preparedness. Typically, the EAS is used for this purpose; however, other means, such as the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) weather service or other broadcast media, may be used. This notification should be made promptly and be accompanied by an explanation of the existing situation and accurate statements of the protective action decisions (if any). When time constraints for the EAS message limits the inclusion of requisite information and instruction to the public, Special News Broadcasts should immediately follow the EAS message to include this necessary information and instruction. Emergency instructions and informational messages should be clear, succinct and complete; demonstrate authority; and be presented in an appropriate style or format.

Procedures for providing emergency information and instructions are discussed in FEMA-CPG-1-40, "Emergency Alert System," and FEMA-CPG-1-41, "Emergency Alert System, A Program Guide for State and Local Jurisdictions." In addition, pre-distributed emergency public information brochures are an important resource during a radiological emergency. With all of these resources available, emergency broadcast messages should be developed with one objective: to provide information on the status of a radiological emergency and inform the public about what actions (e.g., evacuation or shelter) they should take to protect themselves. By focusing on this objective, emergency broadcast messages can be kept relatively short. Thus, broadcasts can provide important instructions quickly and instructions can be rebroadcast at periodic intervals. If the emergency situation warrants, Special News Broadcasts may be used to better inform and instruct the public.

### **1. Coordination**

There should be clear and direct lines of communication between the protective action decision making authority, the preparer of emergency broadcast messages, and the person responsible for activation of the EAS or other broadcast media and actual delivery of the message. If possible, these individuals should be co-located. If not, dedicated telephone lines and committed facsimile capabilities, and Internet connection capabilities, should be available to allow both oral communication and transmission of hard copy information. Backup communication systems, such as encrypted VHR radios or cellular telephones, should be designated and available for this purpose. It is particularly important that the person making protective action decisions review emergency broadcast messages, preferably a hard copy, prior to broadcast. All parties involved in the alert and notification process should thoroughly coordinate their activities relative to the activation of the alerting system and development and dissemination of the EAS message.

This coordination should include information about the scheduled times for alerts and notifications, the essential text of the EAS message, including identification of the emergency status and authorized protective action decisions. When possible, hard copies of EAS messages should be transmitted to each of the relevant parties prior to broadcast.

When multiple jurisdictions have authority for emergency broadcast activation, it is important to coordinate both message content and the timing of the message delivery.

The coordination of messages cannot occur unless there is effective communication among all parties responsible for providing information to be used in the EAS messages. Ideally, there

should be a dedicated capability for simultaneous, multiparty communications. This can minimize critical time delays in reaching concurrence on EAS messages and in implementing activation procedures. In an actual emergency, many radio and television stations will be on the air continuously reporting on the status of the emergency and providing supplemental information to the public. Thus, the EAS message can be clearly differentiated from other messages and focus on pertinent protective actions to be taken by the affected person.

## **2. Content**

Emergency broadcast messages should be developed to include the following content as appropriate:

2.1 Identification of the authority (e.g., governor, county executive, or mayor) issuing the emergency message.

2.2 Description of the emergency. The nature and extent of the emergency should be described in terms understandable to the public.

2.3 Subsequent EAS messages should include all new information.

2.4 Clear identification of the audience. The message should convey who is at risk and for whom protective actions are intended by using familiar landmark descriptions, e.g., rivers, railroad tracks, interstate highways, buildings, local government jurisdictions (counties, townships, villages, and towns) or zip codes specified in the plan. If appropriate, reassuring information may be provided to guide the actions of those who are not in the immediate area where protective actions are warranted.

2.5 Information on sheltering. Sheltering instructions should be provided. Instructions should be provided for transients as well as information regarding restricted access areas. Provisions for children in schools in affected areas should be described.

2.6 Information on evacuation. Evacuation instructions should include who is to go, where to go, and how to get there, i.e., the population at risk, evacuation routes, and the location of reception/congregate care centers. When appropriate, the EAS message should include information for:

- transportation-dependent persons;
- handicapped persons;
- institutionalized persons;
- parents regarding their children in school or day care centers;
- evacuees.

2.7 Emergency “hotline” telephone numbers should be provided for those needing special assistance and for public inquiries.

2.8 When the administration of radio-protective drugs, e.g., potassium iodide, is recommended, procedures for obtaining medication and instructions for its use should be provided.

2.9 When early ingestion pathway protective measures are recommended, instructions for their implementation (e.g., wash fruits and vegetables gathered from gardens) should be provided.

2.10 Instructions to stay tuned to the emergency broadcast stations should include indications at the end of the broadcast on when additional information can be expected.

### **3. Comprehensibility**

Information must be conveyed in an easy to understand way.

#### 3.1 Language

EAS broadcast messages should be presented with clear language that adequately conveys the significance of the information while succinctly specifying the needed emergency actions. Geographical locations should be expressed in familiar terms, using well known references and landmarks. Legal descriptions or map coordinates should be avoided.

#### 3.2 Brevity

Communications specialists indicate that emergency broadcast messages should be as short as possible in order for the public to comprehend the content of the messages. While it may be possible to develop and broadcast short messages of several minutes in length for natural hazards, it is difficult to develop EAS broadcast messages for commercial nuclear power plant accidents within this time frame because of the need to link protective actions decisions to impacted, familiar landmarks and multiple reception centers.

Thus, state and local governments involved in radiological emergency preparedness should attempt to develop pre-scripted emergency broadcast messages that are as short and succinct as possible, but sufficient in length to adequately address the most important questions and concerns. EAS messages are generally up to 2 minutes in length. If the emergency situation warrants, Special News Broadcasts may be used immediately following the relatively brief EAS message to provide additional information and instruction to the public.

#### 3.3 Clarity and Coherence

Clarity and coherence of content presentation are essential in order to promote prompt and appropriate actions. The message should specify the site of the emergency, circumstances and other conditions related to the emergency. Emergency broadcast messages should provide a smooth flow and logical sequence of information.

#### 3.4 Consistency and Comprehensiveness

The content of EAS broadcast messages should be consistent with the state or local plan, annually distributed public emergency information materials, and previously broadcasted messages. The message should reference public emergency information materials that provide reinforcement and non-vital information. When circumstances dictate that information relayed over the EAS broadcast stations differ from that included in previously distributed and broadcast emergency information materials, such differences should be clearly identified to avoid confusion.

#### 3.5 Repetition

Repetition is an element in an effective EAS broadcast system. Effective messages should include repetition of the key information, as well as a regularly scheduled repeating of all messages until new information is available and messages are updated. Repetitions serve to confirm important information about purpose, context, source and emergency actions expected of the public. It is possible that during the emergency a radio or television station may provide continuous reporting on the response to the emergency.

### **4. Format**

Pre-scripted EAS broadcast messages can contribute to important time savings when the rapid flow of information is essential. Several things should be considered in selecting a format for pre-

scripted messages. The chosen format should enable the development of clear, accurate and complete messages in a minimum amount of time.

A decision should be made as to the number of pre-scripted messages that should be prepared. Procedures should be established for reviewing messages prior to broadcast to ensure that:

- the newest or most vital information is presented near the beginning of the message;
- the message is organized so that all similar information is presented together;
- any changes in emergency status or protective action decisions are delineated;
- information no longer applicable is deleted;
- information contained in the message is consistent;
- all protective action decisions are contained in the message, including those from earlier broadcasts;
- the status of all affected areas, including any areas where protective actions identified in previous broadcasts have been lifted, is presented;
- message content is clear and concise;
- both new and critical information is repeated within the message.

## **5. Delivery**

Responsible offsite response organizations should have the capability to provide both an alert signal and an instructional message within the 10-mile Emergency Planning Zone (EPZ) within about 15 minutes {exercise goal: in a timely manner (urgently and without undue delay)} of the decision by authorized offsite officials to activate the alert and notification system. (A possible exception to this exists in sparsely populated areas between 5 miles and 10 miles from the nuclear power plant where, in exception areas approved by FEMA, the time can be extended to 45 minutes.) Deploying information in a timely manner is a critical element of the prompt public emergency notification system.

The person having the responsibility for physically activating the EAS broadcast station should act only after receiving instruction from the designated offsite official vested with the decision-making authority to issue protective action decisions and authorize activation.

Timing of alert signals and media message broadcasts should be closely coordinated. Procedures should be established to ensure that there is close coordination with parties responsible for siren activation (or other alerting mechanisms) and EAS broadcast activation and to ensure that all parties are aware of the scheduled time for both events. These procedures should ensure that emergency messages are broadcast immediately following cessation of the siren, or at least within five minutes after siren activation.

It is important that all designated radio and television stations broadcast the message at the designated time. The Emergency Planning Zone population should have a listing of EAS broadcast stations and instructions to immediately tune to one of these stations when alerted. A capability should exist for monitoring these stations to ensure that correct messages are broadcast at the designated time and repeated with the designated frequency, e.g., every 15 minutes.

A well-coordinated emergency broadcast program requires 24-hour-staffing capability with competent and knowledgeable personnel. Individuals tasked with preparation of instructional messages and with activation of the EAS broadcast system should be properly trained. They should know how, and by whom, they will be notified to initiate the EAS broadcast message and activate the EAS broadcast stations. They should be familiar with procedures for: message development, coordination of message content and delivery with participating jurisdictions, establishment of communication with primary and backup EAS stations and completion of the authentication process. Personnel should be properly trained in the operation of their primary and

backup equipment. This primary and backup equipment, especially equipment necessary for emergency broadcast activation, should be checked periodically to make sure that it is operational. Substitute personnel should be identified and trained in the event that primary personnel are unavailable to perform these tasks.

In summary, EAS broadcast messages are the primary vehicles for transmitting important emergency instructions and information to the public. They should be clear, concise, simply stated, and authoritative if they are to be effective. With careful planning and a flexible, imaginative approach to the form and content of EAS broadcast messages, this goal can be achieved

### **Addendum: Comprehensibility, Language, and Readability**

Clear language for an emergency broadcast, as well as all emergency communications, refers to the ease with which a given passage of text can be read and understood. As indicated by the National Incident Management System Integration Center of the Federal Emergency Management Agency,

“The use of plain language in emergency response is matter of public safety, especially the safety of first responders and those affected by the incident. It is critical that all local responders, as well as those coming into the impacted area from other jurisdictions and other states as well as the federal government, know and utilize commonly established operational structures, terminology, policies and procedures.”<sup>2</sup>

In determining comprehensibility and readability<sup>3</sup>, two basic factors should be considered: sentence length and vocabulary difficulty.

The longer the average sentence length, the more difficult the information is to understand. More complex and more difficult language usually is associated with longer sentence length. Sentence length is also related to the complexity of the sentence structure. For example, as the number of dependent clauses in a given sentence increases, so does the intellectual sophistication needed to comprehend the material.

Language that can be described, as “bureaucratic” should be avoided. Language that is overly technical or legalistic should be avoided. Everyday terms and expressions should be used wherever possible.

The higher the proportion of words classified as “difficult”, the higher, or more difficult, the passage rating will be. Word difficulty affects readability in the following ways:

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<sup>2</sup> NIMS Integration Center, NIMS Alert, “NIMS and the Use of Plain Language,” December 19, 2006 NA: 023-06

<sup>3</sup> Several formulae have been developed to predict comprehensibility and readability. These include the Dale-Chall Formula, the Flesch Reading Ease Formula, the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level Formula, the FOG Readability Formula, and the SMOG Readability Formula. The Dale-Chall formula is a vocabulary-based formula. The Flesch Reading Ease Formula and the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level Formula base their readability scores on the average number of syllables per word and number of words per sentence. Microsoft Word, as part of its spelling and grammar checker, can display readability scores for a document using the Flesch Reading Ease Formula and the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level Formula.

(a) Over-reliance on words with three or more syllables increases the difficulty rating of the passage.

(b) Over-reliance on words not found in lists of familiar words increases the difficulty rating of the passage. Several Web sites contain lists of familiar words, including the Dale-Chall list.

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### Section 8.3 Sample Statement Regarding News Conferences

During a radiological emergency, it is important to get factual and appropriate information to the public as quickly as possible via the news media. Getting this information to the media during an emergency will typically require several news conferences.

News conferences provide reporters with the facts of the event as known and what is not known. They provide information on steps being taken to respond to the emergency. They provide opportunities for reporters to ask questions.

The two basic elements of a news conference agenda are listed below.

#### 1. Opening/Introductory Remarks and Speaker Presentations

The opening/introductory remarks and speaker presentations at a news conference provide confirmed and appropriate facts. Opening/introductory remarks and speaker presentations are typically given by speakers from the represented organizations. Speakers typically provide information about:

- the who, what, where, why, when, and how of the emergency;
- what is being done by emergency response organizations;
- what people should be doing.

#### 2. Questions and Answers

The opening/introductory remarks and speaker presentations are typically followed by a question and answer session. The person moderating the news conference should:

- allow time for questions from journalists;  
**(Note: Failure to allow time for questions may encourage journalists to go elsewhere for information. It may also result in journalists deciding not to attend the news conference.)**
  - direct questions from journalists to the appropriate person;
  - consider closing the Q&A with a repetition of key messages.
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## Section 8.4 Sample Statement Regarding the Logistics of a News Conference

Effective news conferences can be major undertakings. They require hard work, attention to detail, and preparation to be successful. Staff responsible for organizing news conferences should use the following checklists to ensure all appropriate actions are taken.

### 1. Checklist Regarding Location of the News Conference

- Consider holding the news conference at a hotel or public building in a central location if you don't have access to a convenient and appropriate off-site location.
- Make sure the room is not too large as otherwise there may be lots of empty seats, giving the impression that few journalists attended.
- Make sure there is sufficient room and places for all the speakers to stand or sit (for example, a long table or sufficient space behind the podium for the speakers to stand).
- Ensure there is adequate open space for television cameras, lights and microphones.
- Provide technical support and seating convenient for different media (such as forward seating for radio and open space in the front for photographers).
- Provide access to the internet (for example, through wireless connections or dedicated computers).
- Ensure there are an adequate number of electrical outlets.

### 2. Checklist Regarding Timing of the News Conference

- Accommodate local and national media deadlines.
- Remember journalists have busy schedules.
- Because of deadlines, often the best time to hold a news conference is from 9:00 A.M. – 10:30 A.M. on a weekday morning or 3 P.M. – 4 P.M. on a weekday afternoon, although this may vary by locality.
- Consider when to end the news conference. If you want to make the 12 noon, 6 P.M. or 11 P.M. television or radio news programs, keep in mind some news crews may need time to travel or edit tape.
- If you are going to set restrictions, such as limited photo access or limits on the number of seats available, put the restrictions in writing and communicate them to the media in advance.
- Plan around competing events and other activities that may prevent journalists from attending the news conference.
- In fast-breaking emergencies, consider holding at least two news conferences per day (thereby allowing the spokesperson to gather more information, to come back the same day to give more in-depth information, and to say: "I don't know the answer to that now but I will try to have more information for you later today).
- Quickly release critical information.

### 3. Checklist Regarding Notifications of the News Conference

- Send a notice of the news conference by email, fax, or other means.
- Include in the notice of the news conference:
  - the location;
  - the start and finish times;
  - the date;
  - the agenda or brief description of what will be covered;

–names and titles of speakers.

- Bear in mind that newsrooms are often swamped with releases, faxes, and invitations to events.
- Don't call unnecessary news conferences; if it's not worth their time, the media will only be angered.
- Ensure all emergency response partners have been notified of the news conference with sufficient time for feedback.
- Be considerate of the time of reporters and others when scheduling a news conference. If no new information is to be reported, let the reporters know ahead of time.

#### **4. Checklist Regarding Materials for the News Conference**

- Put together a media kit or media packet for journalists attending the news conference. Include in the kit or packet:
  - the agenda or brief description of what will be covered;
  - press releases;
  - fact sheets;
  - the names and titles of speakers;
  - biographical information (including photographs, if possible) of speakers, subject-matter experts, and others as appropriate;
  - contact numbers;
  - copies of any reports or documents that would be useful to reporters covering the event;
  - visual material (such as maps, charts, timelines, diagrams, drawings, photographs of the facility);
  - information sheets containing locations of local hotels, restaurants, coffee shops, etc.;
  - other materials as appropriate.
- Consider handing out a page at the outset of the session with the names, titles and responsibilities of the presenters.
- Decide in advance whether handouts are needed
- Make sure you have plenty of copies of media packets or information materials in case more people attend than expected.
- If the speaker is giving a presentation for which there is a text, you may want to wait and hand out the text after the talk so reporters will stay and listen. However, it's advisable to tell the media you will provide a text of the presentation so they are not irritated by having to take unnecessary notes.
- Have a sign-in sheet for journalists attending.
- Use the sign-in sheet to update your media contact list.

#### **5. Checklist Regarding Preparations for the News Conference**

- Set up the room for the number of people you expect.
- Set up a podium or front table, if appropriate.

- Provide water for the speakers.
- Make sure microphones, chairs, lighting and water are in place at least 30 minutes prior to the event.
- Notify all partner organizations you are having a news conference.
- Decide what partner organizations to invite to attend or participate in the news conference.
- Don't be disappointed if fewer people show up than expected – attendance is hard to predict.
- Try to limit the length of the news conference to less than 30 to 45 minutes, but be flexible.
- Have staff available to assist journalists before, during and after the event.
- Arrange for assistants to be on hand to help distributing media kits or packets, managing the sign-in sheet, directing journalists to telephones, and handling any last-minute details.
- Select a moderator for the news conference who will set the ground rules.
- Consider setting the following ground rules:
  - all reporters asking a question must first be recognized by the moderator;
  - each reporter recognized by the moderator will be allowed to ask one question and one follow-up question;
  - all questions should be directed to the moderator who in turn will direct the question to the appropriate speaker;
  - all reporters should, if possible, indicate which speaker they would like to direct their question.
- Determine beforehand which speaker will make the opening remarks.
- Introduce each speaker, and decide when the question/answer period ends.
- Discuss camera placement with camera crews and movement during the event.
- Supply the necessary hook-ups for electronic media, including lighting and audio (microphone).
- Develop anticipated questions and answers for speakers.
- Rehearse the speakers if time allows, asking them basic challenging questions.
- Make your formal opening statement brief – around three to seven minutes
- Make sure you mention all pertinent information (for example, who, what, where, when, why and how) in your opening statement.
- Allow time for questions (typically at least 10 to 15 minutes).
- As a general rule, limit the number of speakers to no more than three and limit speaking time to no more than 5 minutes.
- If additional people are available to answer questions, have them sit in the front row or off to the side, where they can easily be called on and be seen by the audience when speaking.
- Start on time – journalists work to deadlines and need time to complete their story on time.
- Remember: a news conference is held primarily to allow the media to ask questions, not attend a lecture.

## 6. Checklist Regarding Follow-Up to a News Conference

- Thank reporters for attending.
- Allow time at the conclusion of the news conference to arrange photographs.
- Tell reporters how unanswered questions raised in the news conference will be handled and provide call-in number or web-site information.

- Tell reporters when the next news conference will be held, if one is scheduled.
- Offer to fax, email, or post to the Web site materials for those journalists who were unable to attend.
- Consider following the news conference with a media availability session where all the partners are available as a panel to talk to media one at a time but can hear each partner's comments.
- Make sure your staff knows where to direct telephone calls from journalists calling after the event.
- Monitor media coverage following the news conference.
- Recognize reporters often pay attention to comments (both positive and negative) about news stories and may integrate the comments into future stories.
- If requested, set up one-on-one interviews with subject matter experts or speakers.

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## Section 8.5 Sample Statement Regarding Guidelines for the News Conference Moderator

### Checklist

- Ensure the lead spokesperson has a predetermined message for the news conference (If they do not have a message or something new or interesting to say, you may not need to hold a news conference.)
  - Set a time limit for each speaker prior to starting the news conference
  - Introduce yourself, including your name, title, spelling of your name, and pronunciation of your name
  - Explain the format of the news conference
  - Provide the time frame (usually no more than 30 to 45 minutes)
  - Read all or the most important part of the most recent news release if changes have been made
  - Refer the reporters to any handout materials
  - Introduce the speakers, including their titles
  - Provide the correct spellings and pronunciation for the names of all speakers (especially for speakers with names having an unusual spelling or pronunciation)
  - Refer reporters to the biographical sketches of the speakers in the media packet
  - Invite the speakers to present, indicating the approximate amount of time they will be speaking
  - Begin the presentations by the speakers
  - Begin the question and answer period
  - Lay out the ground rules for the question and answer period, such as:
    - one question and one follow up question per reporter;
    - being recognized by the moderator before asking a question;
    - stating your name and what media organization you represent
  - Always allow time for a few questions from reporters
  - Avoid letting one reporter dominate the time available for questions and answers
  - End the news conference, announcing the time for the next scheduled news conference
  - If there is no scheduled news conferences to follow, let the reporters know how they can find about where and when the next news conference will occur
  - Inform the reporters if news conferences are scheduled by partner organizations
  - Consider making one or more of the speakers available at the end of the news conference
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## Section 8.6 Sample Statement Regarding the Opening of a News Conference

Welcome, ladies and gentlemen to [insert time: today's; this morning's; this afternoon's; tonight's] news conference.

My name is [insert name and title].

We will be presenting information at this news conference on [insert topic].

I will briefly read the latest news release.

With us today are [insert names and titles].

Biographical information for each person presenting at this news conference can be found in the media packet at the back of the room or given to you when you entered.

We will begin the news conference with a brief statement from [name the individual; indicate the spelling and pronunciation of the person's name; state their organizational title].

We will also have statements from [name the individuals; indicate the spelling and pronunciation of the person's name; state their organizational title].

We will then open the floor to your questions. We will be available for [insert number] minutes today.

Please allow me to recognize you before asking a question.

Please restrict yourself to one question and one follow up question.

Please identify who you are and what media organization you represent

(at the end of the Q&A)

Because of ongoing emergency operations, we will have time for two more questions.

Thank you for your questions.

We will now adjourn.

The next scheduled news conference will be in this same room at [insert time].

Following the news conference, staff will be available to help you with any further needs.

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**Section 8.7 Sample Statement Regarding Media Interviews**

A media interview is a question-and-answer session usually done on a one-to-one basis between an organizational spokesperson and a reporter. Media interviews are typically initiated by the reporter. The purpose of the media interview is to relay information from the organization to the reporter and to respond to questions from the reporter.

The Public Information Officer or designee will select spokespersons from a pre-approved list for media interviews. Once a media interview is completed, the interviewed staff member must promptly send a summary of the interview to the Public Information Officer or designee. The summary should provide, at a minimum, the reporter's name, the name of media organization, the questions asked, the topics covered, and any concerns resulting from the interview. The interviewed staff member should immediately contact the Public Information Officer or designee if questions or concerns raised during the interview need an urgent response. If staff are contacted directly by a reporter for a media interview, the staff person should direct the reporter to the Public Information Officer or designee at [Insert telephone number].

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## Section 8.8 Sample Statement Regarding Pitfalls in a Media Interview

- **Don't assume you are the right person to be interviewed.** Discuss with the reporter the specific topic of the interview before the interview to ensure you are the right person to be interviewed.
- **Don't assume you know what the first question from the reporter will be.** Consider asking the reporter in advance what the first question will be.
- **Don't allow the interview to stray from the topic.** Offer (1) to cover additional topics during a separate interview or (2) put the reporter in touch with someone who is better able to respond than you.
- **Don't let a reporter put words in your mouth.** The reporter may use inflammatory or emotionally laden words. Do not repeat them.
- **Don't accept a question that is improperly framed.** Rephrase a question if it contains leading or loaded language, and then answer the question.
- **Don't assume the reporter is correct about facts.** Be on guard for claims that someone has made an allegation or has shared damaging information. Instead of reacting to such information, say: "I have not heard that" or "I would have to verify that before I could respond". Do not allow the reporter to start a fight.
- **Don't volunteer more than you want to say.** If a reporter persists after you've answered a question by asking the question again, then stop. Wait for the next question or say: "That was my answer. Do you have another question you would like me to address?" Say it without sarcasm, defensiveness or annoyance.
- **Don't go "off the record."** There is no absolute assurance that what is said "off the record" will not be reported.
- **Don't assume your knowledge or position alone qualifies you to answer questions.** Work with your colleagues to anticipate as many questions as possible. Determine if you are the best person to answer the question. If you are, draft the answers to as many as time permits. Nuances count. A word change here or there may make the difference as to how well your answer is received. Write your first draft of the answers then edit them or have them edited. Identify the key words in the answer. Identify the main points you want to make and put them first. Put the "bottom line" up front. Does it ring true?
- **Don't go into an interview without at least three key messages.** Have prepared message points and make them at the very start of the interview. Try to get across your key message points in sound-bite format in fewer than 27 words and less than nine seconds. Be prepared to elaborate on your prepared message points.
- **Don't guess or fake it when responding to questions.** If you do not know the answer or cannot answer, say so. Give the reason why you do not know or can't answer. For example, if it's not in your area of expertise, say so and then bridge to what you do know.
- **Don't speak disparagingly of others, not even in jest.**
- **Don't assign blame or point fingers.** Stick to what you know and what your organization is doing.
- **Don't fight your battles using the media.** Remind the journalist that professionals often have legitimate differences of opinion.
- **Don't buy into extreme or baseless "what if" questions.** Rephrase the question in a way that addresses the legitimate and warranted concerns.
- **Don't depend on the reporter to remember what was said.** Use a tape recorder to record sensitive interviews, if necessary. Be sure the reporter knows you are doing this before the interview.

- **Don't ask journalists to allow you review their articles or interviews.** Offer to clarify information for the reporter as they prepare their story. If a reporter shows you the story, understand he or she expects you to correct errors of fact not viewpoints that may differ from yours.
  - **Don't try to answer all parts of a multiple-part question.** Break down multiple-part questions and answer each part separately.
  - **Don't raise issues you do not want to see in print or on the news.**
  - **Don't say "no comment" to a reporter's question.** People often interpret "no comment" statements as showing guilt, hiding something, lying or covering up. Instead, state why you cannot answer the question. For example, say the matter is under investigation, the organization has not yet made a decision, or simply that you are not the right person to answer the question. If appropriate, indicate follow-up actions you are willing to take, including providing referrals or providing further information by the reporter's deadline.
  - **Don't assume you have been quoted correctly.** Have someone monitor media coverage and check whether your statements were edited incorrectly or out of context. If significant errors are discovered, seek further coverage to correct mistakes and get your points across.
  - **Don't miss the reporter's deadline for the interview.** If you miss the reporter's deadline, your perspective may go unrepresented in the reporter's story.
  - **Don't assume facts speak for themselves.**
  - **Don't assume the interview will be easy.**
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## **Section 8.9 Sample Statement Regarding Methods for Responding Effectively to Challenging Questions in a Media Interview**

### **Responding to sensational, negative or unrelated questions**

Answer the question in as few words as possible, without repeating the sensational or negative elements, then return to one or all of the three key messages – recommended “bridging phrases” to help do this include the following.

- Let me emphasize again what I said before...
- The overall issue on the table, from my perspective, is...
- What’s important to remember about this issue is...
- What I can tell you about this issue that might be helpful is...
- What I’m really here to discuss is the critical importance of...
- What all these issues boil down to is...
- What is really important for your [readers/viewers/listeners] to know is....

### **Responding to character attacks**

Do not attack the character of an adversary. It may be necessary to question the science, issues or goals, but not someone’s character. For example, say, “I can’t speak for Dr X. You’ll have to ask him/her. What I can address is....”

### **Responding to machine-gun questioning**

Be aware that a reporter might ask questions rapidly, quicken the pace, or frequently interrupt your responses. One response to this is to say, “Please let me answer this question”. Control the pace and take time to think.

### **Responding to microphone feeding and pausing**

Be aware of situations in which a good answer has been given to a controversial question, and the reporter says nothing while the cameras continue to roll. Silence on air does not make for interesting viewing unless the spokesperson is reacting nervously or uncomfortably so be aware of non-verbal cues. Avoid a “deer-in-the-headlights” appearance, fidgeting, wiping of the brow and shifting frequently in the seat. It is the reporter’s job to fill the airtime so relax and wait for their next question.

### **Responding to a hot microphone**

Assume the microphone is always on – including during “testing” and chatting before and after the interview.

### **Responding to a sensational question with an A or B dilemma**

Reject both A or B if neither is valid. Explain by saying “there’s actually another alternative you should consider”, and give the message point. Use positive words and correct inaccuracies without repeating the negative.

### **Responding to a surprise prop**

The reporter attempts to hand over a report, a document, a prop, a videotape or a supposedly contaminated item (such as a glass of “contaminated” water). Avoid taking “ownership” and refuse to take or touch the item. Alternatively, accept it but quickly set it aside and out of view of cameras. React by saying, “I’m familiar with that specific report, and what I can say about the issue is…” or “I’m not familiar with that report, but what is important to keep in mind is…” and then return to your key messages.

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### **Section 8.10 Sample Statement Regarding Non-Verbal Communication Skills**

People are often highly attentive to non-verbal cues, especially in high-stress emergency situations. Non-verbal cues can be even more important than verbal communication. A list of non-verbal cues and their possible meanings is provided below. The exact meaning of the non-verbal communication will depend upon on the situation and the culture in which it occurs.

Ways of minimizing the effects of negative non-verbal messages include:

- practicing the presentation or interview with colleagues;
- asking communication experts within or outside the organization to critique non-verbal communication displayed in a simulated interview or news conference;
- critiquing yourself based on a videotaped practice interview.

<b>Non-Verbal Behavior</b>	<b>Possible Negative Perceptions</b>
Poor eye contact	dishonest, closed, unconcerned, nervous, lying
Sitting back in chair	not interested, unenthusiastic, unconcerned, withdrawn, distancing oneself, uncooperative
Arms crossed on chest	not interested, uncaring, not listening, arrogant, impatient, defensive, angry, stubborn, not accepting
Infrequent hand gestures/body movements	dishonest, deceitful, nervous, lack of self-confidence
Rocking movements	nervous, lack of self-confidence
Pacing back and forth	nervous, lack of self-confidence, cornered, angry, upset
Frequent hand-to-face contact/ resting your head in your hands	dishonest, deceitful, nervous, tired, bored
Hidden hands	deceptive, guilty, insincere
Speaking from behind barriers (podiums, lecterns, tables)	dishonest, deceitful, withdrawn, distancing oneself, unconcerned, not interested, superior
Speaking from an elevated position	superiority, dominant, judgmental
Speaking indoors behind a desk	bureaucratic, uncaring, removed, distant, uninvolved
Touching and/or rubbing nose	doubt, disagreement, nervous, deceitful
Touching and/or rubbing eyes	doubt, disagreement, nervous, deceitful
Pencil chewing/hand pinching	Lack of self-confidence, doubt
Jingling money in pockets	nervous, lack of self-confidence, lack of self-control, deceitful (hint: empty change from your pockets beforehand)
Constant throat clearing	nervous, lack of self-confidence
Drumming on table, tapping feet, twitching	nervous, hostile, anxious, impatient, bored
Head in hand	bored, tired, frustrated
Clenched hands	anger, hostile, uncooperative
Locked ankles/squeezed hands	deceitful, apprehensive, nervous, tense, aggressive
Palm to back of neck	frustration, anger, irritation, hostility
Tight-lipped	nervous, deceitful, angry, hostile
Licking lips	nervous, deceitful
Frequent blinking	nervous, deceitful, inattentive
Slumping posture	nervousness, poor self-control
Raising voice/high-pitched tone of voice	nervous, hostile, deceitful
Shrugging shoulders	unconcerned, indifferent
<b>Non-Verbal Behavior</b>	<b>Possible Positive Perceptions</b>
Excellent eye contact	honest, open, competent, caring,

	empathetic sincere, dedicated, confident, knowledgeable, interested
Sitting slightly forward in chair	interested, enthusiastic, concerned, cooperative
Open hands	open, sincere
Speaking outdoors in low-wind conditions	dedicated, hardworking, involved, concerned
Hand to chest/heart region	open, honest, dedicated, sincere
Erect posture	self-confident, self-controlled, assertive, determined
Lowering voice	self-assured, honest, caring



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## Section 8.11 Sample Statement Regarding Methods for Responding to Anticipated Questions in a Media Interview

Consider using this five step model for responding to anticipated questions in a media interview.

In your answer, you should...	by...
1. Express empathy and caring in your first statement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-- using words and gestures conveying authentic listening, caring, or empathy</li> <li>-- using a personal story</li> <li>-- using the pronoun "I"</li> </ul>
2. State your key messages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-- limiting the total number of messages to no more than three messages</li> <li>-- limiting the total number of words used (typically less than 30 words or 9 to 15 seconds)</li> <li>-- using positive words</li> <li>-- setting the messages apart by using words, pauses, or inflections</li> </ul>
3. Provide supporting information for your messages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-- using at least two to three supporting facts</li> <li>-- using analogies</li> <li>-- using a personal story</li> <li>-- citing credible third parties</li> </ul>
4. Repeat your key messages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-- using approximately the same words used in step 2</li> </ul>
5. State future actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-- listing specific next steps</li> <li>-- providing information about where to get additional information</li> </ul>

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## **Section 8.12 Sample Statement Regarding Guidelines for Correcting Errors by Journalists**

- Remain calm and composed when speaking to reporters or editors about errors and mistakes.
  - Contact the reporter directly and point out errors only if the errors are significant. (Do not complain about trivial mistakes or omissions.)
  - Ask the reporter to amend the office file copy of the story.
  - Consider asking the reporter to make an appropriate change in their next story. (Note: this can be controversial and may lead to a difficult discussion with the journalist.)
  - Avoid embarrassing the reporter who made an error by naming him/her during a news or press conference or briefing.
  - Avoid, if possible, going to the reporter's editor or producer – this should only be done if there is a major mistake, and if the reporter will not acknowledge the mistake and make the requested correction. By going over the reporter's head you may ruin any working relationship you have developed.
  - If the error occurs in the stories of several different reporters, or if the story is picked up by a wire service, and if the error is deemed major, then correct the error during the next media interview, news release, or news conference without naming the individuals responsible for the error.
  - Recognize the difference between errors and differences in points of view – differences in points of view will generally not be corrected.
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### Section 8.13 Sample Statement Regarding News Releases

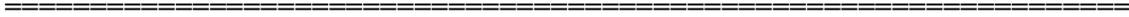
The news release is a short, written summation detailing facts and viewpoints. It is nearly always written by the organization involved with, or affected by, the event. The news release's primary intended audience is reporters covering the incident who will use the information to write a story. Once received by reporters, the news release may be printed, broadcast, or uploaded verbatim or nearly verbatim, used only as a reference by the reporter, or ignored completely.

#### News releases should follow the following guidelines

1. Format your news release using the standard format for producing a news release (see Section 8.14). Reporters and editors are more likely to read the release if it uses the standard news release format and contains information about who, what, where, when, why, and how.
2. Your release should go on your organization's letterhead, preferably with your logo.
3. At the top left hand side of the page, or in the top center, write in bold-face the words "**PRESS RELEASE**" or "**NEWS RELEASE**" in all capital letters or with the first letter of each word in capital letters.
4. Move down two lines. Write in bold-face "**For Immediate Release:**" in all capital letters or with the first letter of each word in capital letters.
5. Next to, or immediately below the words, "**For Immediate Release:**" put the date of the release.
6. Immediately below, or to the right of, "**For Immediate Release:**" write the word "**Contact:**" or "**Contact Information:**" in bold-face. Next to this write a contact phone number that reporters may call for additional information. Some organizations add the name of a contact person, the name of a department, and an email address. If this option is chosen, the contact person should be your organization's public information officer or spokesperson.
7. Two lines below the date and contact information put your headline. Your headline should be bold, in a larger font, with the first letter of each word capitalized. Some organizations prefer to center the headline. The headline should be a brief summary (no more than two to three lines) of what your news release is about. It needs to be informative and grab the attention of the reporter or editor. Keep in mind journalists receive many news releases each day. The headline should be clear, to the point, and encourage the reader to read the rest of the release. You can include a subheading to provide more information and entice the reader to read on.
8. Two lines below your headline insert the name of the town or city where the release is coming from, followed by a dash. This is called the dateline. You can boldface the city if you choose. (for example, **Washington, DC -** )
9. After the dateline is where your text begins. The first paragraph of your release should be brief and include information pertaining to who, what, where, when, why, and how. Everything you want the reader to know quickly should be in this paragraph.

10. You should double-space your text and use a 12 point font, such as Times New Roman or Arial. Some organizations indent paragraphs. Others do not. Leave plenty of white space in your press release. Use ample margins around your page.
11. The remaining paragraphs of the release should provide information you believe will interest the reader.
12. Your next to last paragraph should be similar to your first paragraph.
13. Your last paragraph should state: "For more information, call..." or "Visit our Web site at www... for information materials." You should direct the reader to a place where they can get more information on the issue.
14. A couple of spaces below your final paragraph, centered on the page, put "###". This signifies the end of your release.
15. At the end of the release (after your last paragraph and before the ###), consider including a couple of sentences about your organization. This can include what your organization's mission is or what your organization is tasked to do. At the end of the description, refer the reader to your organization's Web site.
16. If the news release goes beyond one page, then include the word "- **MORE** -" or "- more -" under the last line on the first page. Some organizations write this word in capital letters and use bold-face. Others do not.
17. If the news release goes on to a second page, write the headline, or a shortened version of the headline, and "Page 2."
18. Keep your sentences short with an occasional longer sentence to break the monotony.
19. Keep the news release brief. Keep it to no more than two pages and to the point. Refer readers to a phone number or Web site they can go to for additional information.
20. Present only facts; leave out editorializing.
21. Avoid using acronyms, jargon, and technical language.
22. **Have a least one communicator and one subject matter expert proofread the news release.** A pair of "fresh" eyes may catch mistakes you missed. A major typo or mistake can discredit your release. Most people have trouble proofreading their own writing. Ask a colleague to proofread it for you.
23. If it's a local event or topic, indicate the name of the town or city in the headline. This will increase the likelihood the local media will pick up the story.
24. Include in the news release authentic statements of empathy, caring, and compassion, especially when there is high concern, high stress, or harm to people, property, or the environment. It is typically best for these statements to come from a senior leader of the organization. The statements should be set off with quote marks. For example, "Our thoughts and prayers go out to the employees injured in this accident and to their families" stated [insert name of senior official]. Or, "I know many people are worried and concerned about events happening at the facility. As a community, I believe we can make it through this difficult time," stated [insert name of senior leader].

25. Make sure your release is clear and simple.
26. Perform a readability test to ensure the news release is between the sixth and eighth grade reading-level.
27. Some online news services require a summary of your news release. This is because some media outlets will distribute only your headline, summary, and a link to your news release.
28. Make sure your release gets all of the organizational clearances and approvals needed.
29. Make sure you share your release with partners for vetting before releasing to the media.



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## Section 8.14 Sample Statement Regarding the News Release Format

The news release should following the format provided below.

**[Organization’s name on letterhead with logo]**

### News Release

**For Immediate Release:** [Insert date]

**Contact:** [Insert name of media representative]

[Insert name of organization]

[Insert telephone number]

[Insert fax number]

[Insert email address]

[Insert after-hours telephone number]

[Insert Web site]

**[Insert headline here, bold-faced, with the initial letter of each word in capital letters]**

**[City, State]** – [Insert Date] – [Text goes here, often double-spaced with indented paragraphs]

[First paragraph: short (less than 30 words), containing the most important information]

[Second, third, fourth ... paragraphs: short, containing supplemental information. Try to include a quote from leadership within the first few paragraphs]

If the news release is more than one page long, insert the following:

– **more** –

Center the word at the bottom of the page, then continue onto the next page with a shortened headline and page number as follows:

[Insert shortened headline] – Page 2

[Next to last paragraph: similar to your first paragraph]

[Last paragraph: put “For more information, call...” or “Visit our Web site at www....for information materials.”]

Put at the end of the release:

End

Alternatively, put at the end of the release:

###

Place “End” or “###” on the left or centered. This lets the reporter or reader know they are at the end of the news release.

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**Section 8.15 Sample Statement Regarding the Content of a News Release**

The purpose of the news release is to answer the basic questions: who, what, where, when, why, and how. This requires the news release to be at least several paragraphs in length.

First paragraph: Provide two to three short sentences describing the current situation. This paragraph addresses questions relating to who, what, where, why, when, and how.

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Next paragraph (optional): Provide a quote from an official or senior manager demonstrating leadership and expressing caring. This paragraph should address the question, “Why is this issue or event important?”

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Next paragraph (Optional): Provide information on actions that are being taken.

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Next paragraph (Optional): Provide information on actions that will be taken.

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Next paragraph (Optional): Describe coordination activities with your emergency response partners.

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**Section 8.16 Sample Statement Regarding the Organizational Web Site**

The [Insert Name] will maintain a Web site for the public and an internal Web site for employees. The [Insert Name] may also establish specialized Web sites for specific groups (for example, for the media, health care professionals, or emergency responders). The Web site will include a page with updated emergency risk information. The Web site team will post on the Web site press releases, fact sheets, advisories, and other information in a timely fashion.

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**Section 8.17 Sample Statement Regarding Call Center/Hotline Services/Telephone Messaging**

The [Insert Name] will establish call centers/hotlines for public and employee inquiries. The [Insert Name] may also establish specialized call centers/hotlines for specific groups (for example, for the media, health care professionals, public officials, reception centers, or first responders). The call centers will have the capacity to handle a large number of inquiries. The [Insert Name] call centers will have a toll free number.

The public and employee call centers/hotlines operating out of the Joint Information Center will have the capacity to handle approximately [insert number] incoming telephone calls. In case of a surge, pre-established agreements or contracts to increase capacity will be implemented.

The call centers/hotlines will supplement the public access telephone line [insert telephone number] and employee access telephone line [insert telephone number]. Calls to these numbers during a radiological emergency will be screened (via an automated phone system or staff who cover the line) and transferred to the call centers/hotlines if needed.

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## **Section 8.18 Sample Statement Regarding the Use of Other Media, Including Social Media**

People immediately affected by a radiological emergency will use a variety of sources to obtain information. In addition to friends, neighbors, relatives, and traditional media outlets (radio, television, newspapers, and magazines), people will use many other sources of information. Several examples are provided below. (Additional information regarding sources of information can be obtained in the document "Emergency Support Function 15: External Affairs Standard Operating Procedures." Department of Homeland Security. January 2009. Annex R.)

### **1. Text Messaging**

Text messaging, or texting, is a colloquial term referring to the exchange of brief written messages between mobile phones, over cellular networks. While the term most often refers to messages sent using the Short Message Service (SMS), it has been extended to include messages containing image, video, and sound content. Individual messages are referred to as "text messages" or "texts".

The most common application of the service is person-to-person messaging. However, text messages can also be sent to and from automated systems.

Consideration should be given to establishing the ability to send text messages to key stakeholders, including residents living within the 10 mile and 50 mile Emergency Planning Zones (EPZs).<sup>4</sup> Text messaging, or texting, is the common term for the sending of short text messages from cell phones using the Short Message System (SMS). It is available on most digital mobile phones and many personal digital assistants (PDAs).

### **2. Twitter**

Twitter is a free social networking service that allows users to send information or updates to others with short messages, not exceeding 140 characters. Twitter requires an account be established.

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<sup>4</sup> To facilitate a preplanned strategy for protective actions during an emergency, there are two Emergency Planning Zones (EPZs) around each nuclear power plant. The exact size and shape of each EPZ is a result of detailed planning which includes consideration of the specific conditions at each site, unique geographical features of the area, and demographic information.

The two EPZs are described as follows:

#### **Plume Exposure Pathway EPZ**

The plume exposure pathway EPZ has a radius of about 10 miles from the reactor site. Predetermined protective action plans are in place for this EPZ and are designed to avoid or reduce dose from potential exposure of radioactive materials. These actions include sheltering, evacuation, and the use of potassium iodide where appropriate.

#### **Ingestion Exposure Pathway EPZ**

The ingestion exposure pathway EPZ has a radius of about 50 miles from the reactor site. Predetermined protective action plans are in place for this EPZ and are designed to avoid or reduce dose from potential ingestion of radioactive materials. These actions include a ban of contaminated food and water.

Source: <http://www.nrc.gov/about-nrc/emerg-preparedness/protect-public/planning-zones.html>

Twitter is similar to text messaging. What makes Twitter different is it allows users to follow comments made by another person or organization. Whenever a person signs up “to follow” somebody on Twitter, they are able to instantly receive updates from that person, or organization. It is this feature of Twitter that makes Twitter and similar social networking systems potentially useful for emergency risk communications. For example, the technology allows users to send status updates via their cell phone, laptop, PDA (personal digital assistant), smart phone, or other mobile devices.

Messages sent through Twitter are broadcast in “real time” to followers. Twitter can be accessed from anywhere electronic signals can be received.

Twitter is capable of handling a large amount of traffic. “Followers” can be targeted, such as residents within the 10 mile Emergency Planning Zone. Use is initiated by entering a url (Web page address) in the Twitter profile or by sending the url to followers. Messages are called “Tweets.” The number of Tweets person receives from Twitter is directly proportional to number of followers a person has. An additional feature of Twitter is TwitterFeed. TwitterFeed can automatically send titles of updates to users.

One potential use of Twitter, and similar technologies, is that they allow users to access help quickly by posting questions or requests. For example, a Twitter user can post an urgent request such as, “I need urgent help on ...” . In a matter of minutes, help can be offered. Twitter users can also post the latest news related to an event or answer questions from concerned co-workers, families and friends.

Twitter has the potential to assist communicators in performing a variety of other emergency communications tasks. For example, it can be used as a tool for collecting live feedback from people engaged in emergency response activities. Twitter messages can also be monitored for rumors.

As with any new technology, Twitter has the potential for abuse and misuse, including possible security concerns. However, Twitter has communication features that can add substantial value to emergency risk communications.

### **3. Wikipedia**

Wikipedia is a free, web-based, collaborative, multilingual encyclopedia project supported by the non-profit Wikimedia Foundation. Wikipedia contains over 13 million articles (three million in the English Wikipedia). The articles have been written collaboratively by volunteers around the world. Almost all of its articles can be edited by anyone with access to the site. It was launched in 2001 and is currently the largest and most popular general reference work on the Internet.

Critics of Wikipedia have questioned (1) its reliability and accuracy; (2) its susceptibility to vandalism; (3) its susceptibility to the addition of spurious or unverified information; and (4) its departure from the expert-driven model of encyclopedia building. Wikipedia currently serves both as a popular Internet encyclopedia and as a source of updated news about events.

### **4. Social Networking**

Social networking such as Facebook, MySpace, and LinkedIn are internet sites that allow users to connect online to one other. Most social networking sites require members to be invited or accepted into the network. The power of these sites during an emergency was vividly demonstrated during the shootings at Virginia Tech. For example, student Facebook users posted real-time updates on victims more rapidly than information communicated through traditional communications channels.

## **5. Video and Photo Sharing**

Sites such as YouTube (video sharing), Flickr and Picassa (photo sharing) allow users to send video or still images during an emergency.

## **6. Podcasts**

Pod casts are video or audio clips that are made available to users. The audio or video file is uploaded to a server and made available to users. Users can download the file to their personal computer or audio device. Podcasts can be used for the broadcast or rebroadcast of news conferences, speeches, instructions, or other information.

## **7. Blogs**

Blogs offer opportunities for an organization to give stakeholders a place to go to hear commentary by the organization on particular news stories or to check facts being reported by the media. A blog is a type of Web site maintained by an individual or organization with regular entries of commentary, descriptions of events, or other material such as graphics or video. There are currently millions of blogs. Entries are commonly displayed in reverse-chronological order. The ability for readers to leave comments in an interactive format is an important part of many blogs.

## **8. Other Media**

Other media that should be considered include video news releases, audio news releases, virtual worlds (a computer-based, simulated environment, such as Second Life, in which users interact with each other through virtual representations of themselves), internet forums, message boards, and any other source of information people may use in an emergency. Holding constant all other variables, the more channels for delivering messages to users, the more effective the emergency risk communication will be.

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## ***Section 8.19 Sample Statement Regarding Communicating with Special Needs Populations***

(Source: Emergency Support Function 15, External Affairs Standard Operating Procedures, Appendix 1 to Annex E. Department of Homeland Security. January 2009.)

A special team should be activated in a radiological emergency to communicate with audiences who are not likely to receive messages through mass media channels. Based on the nature of the radiological emergency, the team should identify the most effective method for reaching out to these special populations. The team should work closely with partner organizations to communicate effectively with these populations. The team should also, if needed, identify vendors who can provide special specialized services, such as translation or sign language services.

Individuals with special communication needs make up a sizeable portion of the U.S. population. Before, during, and after a radiological emergency, members of these populations may need additional information related to topics such as transportation, supervision, and medical care.

Special needs populations include, at a minimum, individuals who:

- have disabilities;
- live in large group settings;
- are elderly;
- are children;
- are from diverse cultures and/or have limited English proficiency (or are non-English speaking);
- are transportation disadvantaged.

The provision of timely and potentially lifesaving information to members of these populations before, during, and after a radiological emergency must be ensured.

### **1. Planning Assumptions for Communicating to Special Needs Populations**

To effectively communicate to special needs populations, members of the special populations team should:

- have a sound working knowledge of accessibility and nondiscrimination requirements applicable under Federal disability and civil rights laws;
- be familiar with the demographics of the population of people with special needs who live in their community;
- engage in efforts to remove communication barriers faced by members of the special needs populations within the affected area;
- involve a variety of people from the special needs population in identifying communication needs during an emergency;
- identify existing, and develop new, resources within the community.

### **2. Strategies for Communicating with Special Needs Populations**

The needs of each special population must be considered. For example, Federal civil rights laws require equal access for, and prohibit discrimination against, people with disabilities in all aspects of emergency planning, response, and recovery. Equal access applies to emergency information pertaining to:

- preparedness;
- notification of emergencies;

- sheltering in place;
- evacuation;
- transportation;
- communication;
- shelters;
- distribution of supplies;
- food;
- first aid;
- medical care;
- housing;
- application for and distribution of benefits.

Preparations need to be made for individuals with a variety of limitations, including individuals who are deaf, hard of hearing, have speech impairments, or need information presented in a visual format. Auxiliary aids and services may be needed to ensure effective communication. These may include closed captioning, pen and paper, or sign language interpreters through on-site or video interpreting.

Individuals who are blind, have low vision, or have cognitive disabilities may need information presented in an audio format, materials in large print, or people to assist with reading and filling out forms.

Service animals have access to the same facilities and evacuation assets as the humans they service, under the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990.

Additionally, steps need to be taken to ensure persons with limited English proficiency have meaningful access to communication regarding programs, services, and information provided to the general public. Individuals who do not speak English or have limited English proficiency may need information in a language other than English, or an interpreter who can relay information to them.

Given these considerations, it is essential when communicating information before, during, and after a radiological emergency to ensure:

- respect for the civil rights of ethnically diverse populations;
- coordination and collaboration with experts on Civil Rights;
- use of communication methods reflecting cultural competence;
- use of specialists in cultural competence to assist in disseminating information;
- use of communication staff, whenever possible, familiar with the culture of the affected special needs population.

## **9.0. JIC Structure**

An ERC/JIC plan should include a section describing the Joint Information Center. Samples statements regarding the structure of a Joint Information Center can be found in the following Sections.

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## Section 9.1 Sample Statement Regarding Establishing a Joint Information Center (JIC)

A Joint Information Center (JIC) is:

a central point for coordination of incident information, public affairs activities, and media access to information regarding the latest developments. In the event of incidents requiring a coordinated Federal response, JICs are established to coordinate Federal, State, tribal, local, and private-sector incident communications with the public.

(Public Affairs Support Annex PUB-1, Department of Homeland Security, January 2008, <http://www.fema.gov/pdf/emergency/nrf/nrf-support-pa.pdf>)

The Joint Information Center concept evolved with the Incident Command System (ICS). ICS established a clearly defined management scheme for responding to disasters and emergencies. After the Department of Homeland Security was created, it became a requirement that all first responder organizations implement the ICS in all security-related incidents.

Two types of Joint Information Centers should ideally be established to effectively deal with the communication challenges posed by a radiological emergency: an Incident Joint Information Center, or I-JIC, and a Virtual Joint Information Center, or V-JIC.\*

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\* Other types of JICs include:

- **Satellite JIC:** A Satellite JIC is typically smaller in scale than an Incident JIC. A Satellite JIC is established to provide flexible capability for timely release of information. A Satellite JIC may also be established to support a specific news event.
  - **Area JICs:** Area JICs are established when multiple JICs are operating in support of the same or related incidents and jurisdictions. Area JICs are typically used when there are multiple field offices supporting the Incident Command System structure. Coordination between the Area JICs is important to ensure mutual awareness and consistency in messaging and public instructions among all participants.
  - **National JIC:** A National JIC is activated when an incident requires a coordinated Federal response. Incidents of great magnitude with high media interest may require Federal coordination, especially incidents of long duration or that affect a large area of the country.
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**Section 9.2 Sample Statement Regarding Establishing an *Incident Joint Information Center (I-JIC)***

An Incident Joint Information Center (I-JIC) is a physical location where public affairs representative from organizations involved in the response work together to respond to media inquiries and perform other public affairs functions. The I-JIC serves as a focal point for the coordination and dissemination of emergency risk information to the public, media, employees, public officials, response organizations, and other stakeholders during a radiological emergency.

The I-JIC should be located close to the site of the emergency but not so close as to pose a risk to the participants. It is typically located outside the 10 mile Emergency Planning Zone (EPZ). The location may change depending on the requirements of the emergency. In most cases, the I-JIC is established at, or is virtually connected to, the Emergency Operations Center.

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### **Section 9.3 Sample Statement Regarding Functions of an Incident Joint Information Center (I-JIC)**

In a radiological emergency, the I-JIC serves as the focal point for all public affairs activities and media access. The I-JIC remains in operation for as long as the situation warrants. The I-JIC is designed to handle communication on a larger scale than could be effectively managed by a single organization. The I-JIC can be expanded or contracted to meet the needs of the emergency.

All emergency response and partner organizations are encouraged to participate in, and share the resources of, the I-JIC. If participation is not feasible, the non-participating organization is encouraged to coordinate all communication activities with the I-JIC.

Through the I-JIC, (1) information can be provided to the media, the public, and other stakeholders in a timely and consistent fashion; and (2) organizations involved in managing and responding to the emergency can work together in a cohesive manner and respond with coordinated messages. By maintaining a centralized communication link, the I-JIC helps ensure communication resources are managed well and duplication of effort is minimized. The use of a I-JIC also allows for tracking and maintaining records. These records can later be analyzed and evaluated to improve performance.

All participating organizations in an I-JIC may continue to use their own mechanisms for releasing emergency risk information. However, all releases of information should be coordinated with the I-JIC

The I-JIC should be led by the lead organization's Public Information Officer (PIO). The lead organization's PIO must ensure that these primary I-JIC functions are effectively performed:

- gather incident data;
- obtain verified, up-to-date information from appropriate sources;
- inform the media and the public about the event and about personal protective actions;
- serve as the primary source of understandable, timely, accurate, consistent, and credible information about the incident, the response, and the recovery effort;
- identify potential issues or problems that could have an impact on the response and recovery effort;
- employ techniques for obtaining feedback from the media, the public, and selected target audiences regarding response and recovery efforts.

The primary emergency risk communication activities of the I-JIC are:

- hold news conferences;
- issue news releases;
- respond to media requests for interviews;
- respond to inquires from the media, the public, and other interested parties;
- produce emergency risk communication materials.

Other I-JIC activities include:

- notify the media that the JIC has been activated;
- hold briefings for JIC staff members;
- hold briefings for partner organizations;
- establish mechanisms to ensure coordinated information;

- develop approved fact sheets, core messages, message maps, talking points, media kits, and other background material;
  - identify trends in media reporting;
  - identify and responding to rumors and misinformation;
  - monitor the physical and mental wellbeing of the JIC staff and the JIC staff's family members;
  - monitor media and public interest in the situation;
  - write situation assessment reports.
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## **Section 9.4 Sample Statement Regarding Logistics of an Incident Joint Information Center (I-JIC)**

A typical I-JIC includes the following work areas.

- I-JIC staff work area
- Media briefing area/news conference room
- Media monitoring area
- Media registration area and security
- Work area for journalists, including break room and restroom facilities
- Work area for spokesperson(s)
- Storage area
- Work area for telephone hotline/call center teams
- Break room and restroom facilities for JIC staff

Sufficient workspace should be reserved for staff and equipment.

- Staff members responsible for handling inquiries from the media, the public, and key stakeholders
- News release writers
- Supervisors
- Staff members who to collect, collate, and review news releases, fact sheets, and other emergency risk communication materials
- Staff members who conduct media monitoring activities
- Status boards
- Maps
- Copiers, computers, projectors, flip charts, white boards, printers, and fax machines

Additional space that is separate but convenient to the other workspaces is needed at an I-JIC for (1) news conferences and (2) a work area for reporters. The news conference room needs to be large enough to accommodate a large number of newspaper, television and radio reporters, as well as photographers, and camera crews.

I-JIC personnel arriving at the facility should enter through a designated entrance. Each I-JIC staff member should be required to sign a log sheet at the I-JIC staff registration desk and get an I.D. badge or name tag. The I-JIC operations manager should provide a copy of the roster to the facility security for subsequent check-ins.

Equipment and supplies needed at a I-JIC may vary with location. At a minimum, computers, fax machines, and adequate power outlets and telephone lines should be available. Provided below is a checklist of I-JIC equipment and supplies. The I-JIC should have secure internet access and secure wireless routers to serve staff and the media.

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## 9.4.1 Checklist of Equipment and Supplies for I-JIC Staff Work Areas

### Equipment

- Fax machine (with pre-programmed numbers for fax releases to media and partners)
- Telephones
- Computers (with internet capability and loaded with e-mail distribution lists and other communication materials)
- Laptop computers (with internet capability and loaded with e-mail distribution lists and other communication materials)
- Printers for every computer
- Copiers
- Tables and chairs
- Cell phones/pagers/personal data devices
- Visible calendars
- Message boards
- Refrigerator and microwave
- Conference tables
- Color copier
- A/V equipment
- Flow charts, bulletin boards, status boards
- Area maps
- Flip charts and easels
- Podium for news conference rehearsals
- TVs with cable hookup
- Portable microphone
- Extension cords
- VHS VCR Player
- CD-ROM/DVD Player
- Secure wireless router(s)
- Secure network access devices(s)
- Thumb (Flash) drives
- Other**

### Supplies

- Paper shredder
- Badges for JIC staff members and sign in log sheet
- Copier toner
- Printer ink
- Paper
- Pens and pencils
- Markers
- Highlighters
- Erasable markers
- Overnight mail supplies
- Sticky notes
- Tape

- Notebooks
  - Poster boards
  - Standard press kit folders
  - Organized B-roll in beta format (keep VHS copies available for meetings)
  - Formatted computer disks
  - Telephone directories
  - Color-coded everything (folders, inks, etc.)
  - Baskets (to contain items you're not ready to throw away)
  - Organizers to support your clearance and release system
  - Expandable folders (with alphabet or days of the month)
  - Staplers (lots of them)
  - Paper punch
  - Paper cutter
  - Three-ring binders
  - Organization's logo on a sticker
  - Colored copier paper
  - Paper clips (all sizes)
  - Other**
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## 9.4.2 Checklist of Equipment and Supplies Checklist List for I-JIC News Conference and Media Work Areas

### News Conference Room

- Projector
- Back up projector and/or extra projector bulb
- Computers
- Easels
- Flip Charts
- Emergency status signs
- I-JIC podium sign
- Public address system (podium microphone, portable microphones, microphone feed box)
- Lectern
- Lighting
- Table and chairs for speakers
- Printers
- Table for computer
- Area maps
- Name plates for speakers
- Other**

### Media Registration Area

- Desks with chairs
- Media directories
- Badges for media representatives
- Sign-in log/registration sheets
- Other**

### Work Area for the Media

- Telephones
  - Telephone directories
  - Multiple electrical outlets
  - Extension cords
  - Desks/chairs or tables/benches to accommodate several reporters
  - Internet access
  - Copiers
  - Fax machines
  - Printers
  - Break room and restroom facilities
  - Other**
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## **Section 9.5 Sample Statement Regarding Staffing of an Incident Joint Information Center (I-JIC)**

Under normal operations, the I-JIC typically uses two 12-hour shifts or three eight-hour shifts. Depending upon the level of the emergency and the extent of media interest, the I-JIC lead Public Information Officer and operations manager may elect to suspend most I-JIC operations during non-business hours, typically overnight. However, a duty officer and support staff should be available 24/7 to respond to calls, monitor media reporting, and perform other duties as needed. A telephone based menu with information updates can also be used to receive calls.

The I-JIC operations manager is responsible for determining shift changes. The administrative support supervisor is responsible for informing staff of the time for shift changes and ensuring shift changes take place.

During a shift change, incoming JIC members should:

- Arrive 30 minutes prior to shift change;
- Sign in and receive badges;
- Participate in a briefing by the Public Information Officer or designee.

Outgoing shift members should:

- Brief incoming shift members;
- Turn over logs, notes and other pertinent data;
- Sign out and turn in badges.

At maximum capacity, a I-JIC can be very large. As shown in the following checklist, many job positions may need to be filled.

### **I-JIC Staffing: Checklist of Positions**

- Administrative Support Coordinator
- Administrative Support Staff
- Assistant Lead Public Information Officer
- Audiovisual Production and Support Team Leader and Members
- Elected Officials Hotline/Call Center Team Leader and Members
- Emergency Responders Hotline/Call Center Team Leader and Members
- Employee Liaison Officer
- Employee Family Liaison Officer
- Facility Operations Manager
- Facility Operations Deputy Manager
- Government Liaison Officer
- Lead Public Information Officer
- Legal Counsel
- Media Hotline/Call Center Team Leader and Members
- Media Monitor Team Leader and Members
- Media Registration Coordinator
- Medical Professional Hotline/Call Center Team Leader and Members
- Mental Health Advisor

- News Conference Room Manager
- News Conference Room Manager Assistant
- Non-Lead Public Information Officers
- Partner Organizations Liaison Officers
- Public Hotline/Call Center Team Leader and Members
- Reception Centers/Congregate Care Centers Liaison Officers/Coordinators
- Researchers
- Security Team Leader and Officers
- Special Needs Population Liaison
- Spokespersons
- Staff Support Team Members
- Technical Advisors
- Technical Hotline/Call Center Team Leader and Members
- Web Site Manager/Webmaster
- Writers

Every position does not to be filled. Positions can be combined or eliminated depending on the needs of the situation.

Position assignments should be made in advance with people trained in performing the task. Because of shift work and absenteeism, ideally at least two to three persons should be available to perform the functions associated with each position.

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## **Section 9.6 Sample Statement Regarding News Conferences Conducted at an Incident Joint Information Center (I-JIC)**

One of the primary means for the I-JIC to communicate with the media during a radiological emergency is the regularly scheduled news conference. The lead Public Information Officer, in coordination with partner organizations, should establish the schedule of news conferences.

During a major radiological emergency, there should be a minimum of two to three news conferences each day. News conferences should continue to be held for as long as the size of the media contingent covering the event warrants. News conferences should be scheduled to help reporters meet news deadlines. Many deadlines have become shorter due to modern communications technology. In some cases, reporters ask questions or ask for comment seconds or minutes after the event has occurred.

Although the specific times for news conferences vary by situation and location, a typical daily news availability schedule may be as follows:

- morning news conference;
- afternoon news conference;
- evening news conference.

If a radiological emergency occurs during the evening or early morning, every effort should be made to hold the first news conference before noon to meet media deadlines. If the emergency happens in the late morning or early afternoon, every effort should be made to conduct the first news conference before 3 p.m. It should be noted, however, that the time needed by the media for preparation and editing has decreased due to digital connections, internet streaming video, and other technologies.

News conferences should be scheduled to fill media voids. Frequent media briefings or news conferences are highly recommended. If there is no new information on the emergency to report, the briefing or news conference can be used to present information or provide answers to more detailed questions about science, technology, a process, or a procedure being used by response teams. Alternatively, the news briefing or conference can be used to present information or answer questions about the activities, processes, and technologies being used by partner organizations.

If there is no new news to report, it is useful to alert the media to this fact and inform them about the agenda in advance. The reporter can then decide to attend or not.

Prior to each news conference, the news conference room manager should advise the media of the briefing protocol. The room manager should also provide information on facilities and services available to reporters.

At the news conference, spokespersons from the involved organizations should provide statements, update information, and be available to respond to questions. Presentations, if made, should be kept brief – typically no more than three to seven minutes each. Selected experts should be available during each news conference to respond to questions or provide additional details as needed.

A summary of each news conference should be prepared by a designated staff member. This summary should be provided to all I-JIC members and all spokespersons.

At least 30 minutes before each news conference, the lead Public Information Officer should meet with those who will participate in the news conference. The following agenda items should be discussed at the pre-meeting:

- the opening statement;
- the order of presenters;
- time allocated for each presenter;
- anticipated questions;
- handling of questions;
- the use of visual material;
- the closing statement.

Between news conferences, a list of anticipated questions should be developed by the I-JIC communications staff. Responses to the questions should be reviewed, discussed, and rehearsed before the news conference.

Additional guidelines for conducting a news conference can be found in previous sections of this document.

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**Section 9.7 Sample Statement Regarding I-JIC Media Advisories and News Releases**

One of the primary means for the I-JIC to communicate to the media during a radiological emergency is through news releases. News releases are described earlier in this document. Samples of I-JIC news releases and related materials can be found in the appendices. The lead Public Information Officer or designee, in coordination with partner organizations, should review and approve all news releases.

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## Section 9.8 Sample Statement Regarding Personal and Professional Characteristics of the Lead Spokesperson

In almost all emergencies, a designated lead spokesperson is a necessity. The public and media tend to like and trust a familiar face and voice. The image or voice of the lead spokesperson is often the first message an organization sends out during an emergency. Having a lead spokesperson also simplifies information flow and promotes consistency in message content.

To be effective, the lead spokesperson must:

- possess excellent media skills;
- have sufficient authority or expertise to be accepted as speaking on behalf of the organization;
- possess or work to develop good professional relationships with important members of the media and other important partners and stakeholders;
- be able to learn quickly;
- respond to sensitive questions within his/her area(s) of expertise in a professional and sensitive manner;
- effectively respond to hostile questions;
- stay on message yet remain flexible and able to make decisions quickly offer examples, anecdotes and stories;
- provide effective on-the-spot responses to media enquiries;
- express technical knowledge or complex information in a way that can be easily understood by journalists and by the average person;
- remain calm and composed at all times;
- express caring, listening, empathy and compassion;
- work well under pressure or high emotional strain;
- accept constructive feedback;
- share the spotlight;
- call on the expertise of others;
- express thanks to others and share praise;
- take responsibility for things that go wrong;
- present the appropriate tone for the audience;
- defer, delegate, and redirect questions to others as needed;
- be
  - perceived as authoritative and credible by stakeholders, partners and the public;
  - at ease with the media;
  - knowledgeable (generally and specifically) about the emergency, its dynamics and its management;
  - a subject-matter expert on the event or able to delegate to subject-matter experts;
  - resourceful.

- Even while under intense pressure and stress, the lead spokesperson must be able to:
  - stay on message;
  - avoid straying intentionally or inadvertently from prepared points;
  - use bridging techniques, if needed, to re-direct the conversation.
  - Only those things appropriate for quotes should be expressed, even in jest. There is no such thing as “off the record”. The lead spokespersons must be continually aware of the potential media pitfalls outlined in the section on media interviews in this guidance document.

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## **Section 9.9 Sample Statement of Skills Needed by the Lead and Other Spokespersons**

During an emergency, the lead spokesperson and other spokespersons are the public face of the organization. In order to deal effectively with the media during a radiological emergency, the following skills are needed.

### **Listening Skills**

- Listen to, acknowledge and respect fears and anxieties.
- Remain calm and in control, even in the face of fear, anxiety and uncertainty.
- Offer authentic statements and actions that communicate compassion, conviction and optimism.
- Provide people with ways to participate, protect themselves, and gain or regain a sense of personal control.

### **Presentation Skills**

- Focus on what is known.
- If a question cannot be answered immediately, share information about what follow-up actions will be taken and where to get additional information.
- Be honest, candid, transparent, ethical, frank and open.
- Remember first impressions are lasting impressions – they matter.
- Avoid humor because it can be interpreted as uncaring or trivializing the issue.

### **Messaging Skills**

- Be extremely careful in saying anything that could be interpreted as an unqualified absolute, for example, “never” or “always”. It only takes one exception to disprove an absolute.
- Balance bad news with three or more positive, constructive, or solution-oriented messages.
- Avoid mixed or inconsistent verbal and non-verbal messages.
- Demonstrate media communication skills (verbal and non-verbal) including avoidance of major traps and pitfalls – for example, speculating about extreme worst-case scenarios, saying “there are no guarantees,” repeating negative words used in allegations or accusations, or saying “no comment.”
- Develop and offer three concise key messages in response to each major concern.
- Continually look for opportunities to repeat the prepared key messages.
- Use clear non-technical language free of jargon and acronyms.
- Make extensive but appropriate use of visual material, personal and human-interest stories, quotes, analogies and anecdotes.
- Find out who else is being interviewed and make appropriate adjustments.
- Monitor what is being said by others.
- Avoid attacking the credibility of those with higher perceived credibility.
- When possible, use research to help determine responses to messages.
- Acknowledge uncertainties and challenges.

### **Organization Skills**

- Plan emergency risk communications programs well in advance, conduct scenario planning, identify important stakeholders, anticipate questions and concerns, train

spokespersons, prepare messages, test messages, anticipate follow-up questions and rehearse responses.

- Provide information on a continuous or frequent basis.
- Ensure partners (internal and external) respond with coordinated messages.
- Have a contingency plan for when partners (internal and external) disagree.
- Plan public meetings carefully – unless they are carefully controlled and skillfully implemented they can backfire and result in increased public outrage and frustration.
- Encourage the use of face-to-face communication methods, including sessions with experts, workshops, and poster-based information exchanges.
- Ensure facts offered have gone through the appropriate clearance process.

### **Leadership Skills**

- Be the first to share bad or good news.
  - Be highly visible.
  - Be readily available to speak.
  - Take the first day of an emergency very seriously – drop other obligations.
  - Take ownership of the issue or problem; avoid blaming others.
  - Avoid guessing – check and double-check the accuracy of facts.
  - Be able to cite other credible sources of information.
  - Admit when mistakes have been made – be accountable and responsible.
  - Seek, engage and make extensive use of support from credible third parties.
  - Lead the way by example.
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## **Section 9.10 Guidelines for Establishing a Virtual Joint Information Center (V-JIC) for a Radiological Emergency.**

The primary purpose of a Virtual Joint Information Center (V-JIC) is to link participants who cannot physically come to the physical Joint Information Center because of geographical restrictions, transportation problems, incident management requirements, or other limitations. The Virtual Joint Information Center (V-JIC) links participants through technological and electronic means. Depending on the type of information being shared, links among participants in the V-JIC can be set up to be secure or non-secure.

The V-JIC allows participants to coordinate messages. It can be used to improve upon, add to, or replace most of the activities that take place at an Incident Joint Information Center.

As Akins points out (see the Appendix: The Virtual Joint Information Center: A Technological Tool for Emergency Communication):

“While technological capabilities have until relatively recently limited the structure of a JIC to a physical location, advances in computer hardware and software, the Internet and access to it, and a rethinking of JICs and message production have enabled the inception of the electronic-only, virtual JIC or V-JIC.”

As many authors have observed, we now live in an era of instant news. Audiences want, and are receiving, news about what is happening almost immediately. Even traditional printed news sources, such as newspapers, are now maintaining Web sites and blogs. Stories appearing on newspaper Web sites are now competing with radio and television outlets and other Web sites for immediacy. The Internet means that media organizations can now put out information quickly in a variety of formats for a global audience.

In almost every major event, audiences go directly to the source of the news if they have a high interest. Examples of organizations experiencing this phenomenon are frequent. For example, on September 11, 2001, CNN’s Web site registered 11 million hits. In the years since, the number of users accessing Web sites for news has increased significantly.

In the US there are millions of Internet users who connect with the Internet every day to get news. When a major event occurs, such as a radiological emergency, the Web sites of emergency response organizations will likely be inundated with millions of hits. The Web sites of emergency response organizations will likely serve as a primary source of information for reporters, members of the public, family members of those involved, key government officials, and others. Users will expect the information provided on the web site to be complete, accurate and up-to-the-minute. Users can also now witness first hand what is happening as it happens.

As Gerald Barone, a noted expert on emergency communications has noted, there are four basic reasons why the traditional I-JIC fails to meet changes in technology and changes in audience expectations:

1. Assembly of responders
2. Participation of those not present
3. Lack of infrastructure
4. Web site management and infrastructure

### **1. Assembly of Responders**

Barone notes the assembly of the communication team in a single physical location is the very definition of the JIC. In actual practice, key JIC staff may not be able to assemble on scene after notification. During that time, the story of the event may have been told so frequently by all the major news media covering the story that in most cases public attention has already moved to new stories.

For example, the Indian Point nuclear power plant in New York State is a twenty-minute or less helicopter flight from the major television stations in New York City. It is no more than an hour's drive using a satellite truck. If a radiological emergency occurs, all media outlets will have been alerted. The initial reports can be expected to be broadcast within minutes after the event.

The first hour of the emergency response is the "golden hour" because of its importance in providing timely, accurate, and credible information. If potential JIC members are some distance away, they may still be packing or driving while news stories are being written or produced.

## **2. Participation By Those Not Present**

While the intention of the JIC is to have all key members present, actual experience has demonstrated it is often not feasible. Potential key members of the JIC who may not be present include subject matter experts with special expertise in elements of the response. In a major event involving a nuclear power plant owned by a corporation, the power plant licensee may require approval of messages from upper management before releasing information. Upper management may, however, be located in a different city and time zone. To insure accuracy, the Public Information Officer may also need verification of information by outside experts who are available by phone, email or fax but who may not be physically present.

It is likely that critical members of the communication team will not be physically present in the JIC. This will result in the slowing down of the sharing of information or deterioration in information quality or accuracy.

## **3. Lack of Infrastructure**

Most of today's offices are equipped with computers with high speed Internet access. Other tools include databases containing critical contact information, including contacts lists for reporters, executive leadership, employees, government officials, response organization managers, and external resources. What happens in a typical response is the public information officers from organizations represented at the JIC are required to leave their office equipment behind. In addition, despite considerable expenditure and effort, it is not unusual for communications technology at an I-JIC to fail, resulting in the JIC staff having to resort to alternate, and often less sophisticated means, for conducting communication operations.

## **4. Web site Management and Infrastructure**

Web sites for both news organizations and those involved in a major news story have become one of the most significant means of distributing information to interested audiences. Web sites have become central to communication functions of most organizations where they are used to communicate with the media and with segmented audiences.

To be effective, an I-JIC Web site needs a content management technology that allows a number of people without programming skills or extensive web experience to effectively manage content. Such technology is often not available. The Web site must also be hosted on servers capable of delivering potentially high bandwidth content such as digital images and video and with the capability of withstanding many millions of hits.

The fundamental problems of the I-JIC can be met by placing all I-JIC communication functions on an Internet platform. This includes information gathering, drafting of documents, editing, approvals, and distribution using email, fax, and Internet-based telephone messaging. It also includes web content management, inquiry management, and automated audience contact information generation and control. The Internet platform should use commonly adopted communication tools such as internal email and secure chat rooms to facilitate communication among team members. Further, the Internet platform should document all activities, thereby enabling effective tracking and reporting of communication activities.

Barone notes that a V-JIC addresses the four primary problems identified with the traditional JIC:

1. Assembly of responders
2. Participation of those not present
3. Lack of infrastructure
4. Web site management and infrastructure

### **1. Assembly of Responders**

Members of the V-JIC can become operational in the time it takes to get to a computer with an Internet connection. That means their office, their car, or a hotel room. After signing in with a pre-authorized password, team members can immediately participate in information preparation and approvals, response to inquiries, tracking news reports and scheduling upcoming news conferences. Any authorized user can distribute approved information via email, fax or using text-to-voice telephone messaging.

It is essential in a V-JIC operation that several members of the V-JIC be physically present at the Joint Information Center. For example, the Public Information Officer should be present to work and confer directly with the Incident Commander/Unified Command. JIC staff need to be available to respond to and escort members of the media who may arrive on scene.

Use of the V-JIC can reduce the number of reporter inquiries. When reporters find they can get the information they need delivered directly to their computers or digital devices, their need to visit the scene or the I-JIC is lessened. The option of submitting questions via the Web site further reduces the need for calls or visits, providing the inquiries receive a fast response.

### **2. Participation of Those Not Present**

In the V-JIC model, Barone, Atkins, and others have pointed out that JIC membership is not limited to those physically present. Membership is given to all those with access. Access levels are controllable. Different members can be given access to different functions and information. Also, the system can be designed to facilitate both internal communication and external communication with individuals and groups who are not formal members of the V-JIC. For example, individuals and groups can be given access to selected information via the Web site that is not available to the general public. This capability can be used, for example, to communicate with leaders who cannot be physically present but who wish to be kept fully informed.

The inquiry management function of a virtual communications center is especially useful when operated in a V-JIC setting. All inquiries are logged into the system regardless of whether they came in via the inquiry function on the external Web site, through phone calls, through traditional email, or through newer media such as Texting, Facebook, and Twitter. Even with a widely dispersed communication team, the PIO or task leaders can review all inquiries and see who has asked which questions, what the responses have been, and how quickly the JIC members have responded. Rumors can be quickly identified and addressed in new information updates and quality control issues quickly spotted, including violations of pre-release of changing information.

This ability to review real-time communication activity can be extended to agency and executive leadership who are not on scene, provided they are given the appropriate security access.

### **3. Lack of Infrastructure**

The infrastructure needed to operate a virtual JIC consists of computers with Internet access—preferably high speed access. Cell phones are also essential, particularly for responding to reporters and other stakeholders. Cell phone numbers of responders can be provided on the Web site and in information releases. Care should be taken to distribute the call load if volume is heavy.

Given current technology, even with a V-JIC, a place to hold a news conference is still required.

### **4. Web site Management and Infrastructure**

In a V-JIC, users have full control of the entire Web site including the ability to launch entirely new Web sites for specific information purposes. All content is managed not as a separate communication function but fully integrated within the normal information development and distribution process. When a news release is drafted, edited, and approved, the PIO or designee can release it by going through two basic steps: (1) posting the information to the Web site, and (2) distributing it to contact lists by email, fax, or text-to-voice telephone messaging. All this is accomplished in seconds by selecting options within V-JIC system.

One significant advantage of this is the ability to have a continuous flow of updates. Media representatives or stakeholders coming to the V-JIC Web site can add their name to the mailing list so future updates can automatically be emailed to them. This can greatly diminish incoming phone calls.

A V-JIC Web site should be able to withstand millions of hits per day. The cost of providing this capability can be distributed across multiple users making it feasible for even smaller organizations to have full access to this capability. The V-JIC can be continually updated and modified, which increases usefulness.

Another important benefit is documentation. Barone has noted documentation is a critical element of I-JIC operations. A V-JIC eliminates the need for most documentation staff. The V-JIC system itself tracks and records all activities including the participation of every member. This documentation capability is highly valuable for post-incident briefings and after-action reports.



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## Section 9.11 Sample Statement Regarding the Needed Capabilities of a Virtual Joint Information Center (V-JIC)

The following is a checklist of needed V-JIC capabilities.

- Capability to provide Web access by team members (users)
- Capability to provide 24/7 high capacity throughput/bandwidth that can handle millions of requests for data (text, images and video)
- Capability to store data from the primary data center in a geographically separated back-up data center
- Capability of being used for communications with internal, external, and guest groups
- Capability to scale to a virtually unlimited number of users, guests, and contacts
- Capability to monitor media and online communication activity
- Capability to contact media and online sources such as bloggers
- Capability of a virtually unlimited amount of storage for content, including images and video
- Capability to provide secure access by users for pre-approved functions
- Capability to provide application and security controls for guests to pre-approved documents
- Capability to change the status of the site between private, protected, and public
- Capability for drafting, storing, and archiving documents, including message maps, with draft/version control
- Capability for built-in approval process by document type
- Capability to store and archive pre-approved message maps and other communication materials, such as fact sheets and maps
- Capability to reduce the response time to inquiries and frequently asked questions
- Capability to easily post approved documents to the web site without information technology support staff intervention
- Capability to notify the media, the public, and other stakeholders via: email, text messaging (with two-way acknowledgement), fax, automated text-to-voice calling (with acknowledgement tracking)
- Capability to feed to Web sites
- Capability to feed to Social Media (such as Twitter, YouTube, Facebook, MySpace, etc.);
- Capability to handle inquires directly via e-mail or by phone
- Capability to track and archive responses with each inquirer for subsequent follow up and research
- Capability to efficiently solicit feedback from stakeholder
- Capability to be used with minimal training (less than two hours)

There are many technologies that can perform these capabilities. Ideally, all of these capabilities should reside in one system. Having them all in one system can significantly enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of team members who may be working remotely.

However, there are lower tech alternatives to using one system. For example, in the Appendix on V-JICs, Atkins points out that:

“perhaps the least costly, and the easiest to establish and adopt for agencies or organizations, is not a discrete V-JIC, but the use of various components that comprise the modern-day office. These would include the computer; Internet connectivity; e-mail; an intranet or Internet repository for files, such as Microsoft’s SharePoint© system; an online, real-time, instant messaging program such as AOL Instant Messenger; and a telephone or two-way radio.”

The key to the adoption of a V-JIC is ease of use.

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## **10. ERC/JIC Plan Maintenance**

The ERC/JIC plan must be maintained. A sample statement regarding plan maintenance is provided in Section 10.1.

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## **Section 10.1 Sample Statement Regarding ERC/JIC Plan Maintenance**

The ERC/JIC plan must be consistently and continuously reviewed, practiced, and modified to stay current. In addition, training exercises should be scheduled so everyone with an identified role and responsibility under the plan and protocol can practice carrying out their function.

As part of plan maintenance, the following activities should be conducted.

- Each emergency risk communication task leader should annually review his/her strategy
  - Each emergency risk communication task leader should annually incorporate changes to his/her strategy based on feedback received from other task leaders.
  - The ERC/JIC plan should be revised annually and distributed to all members of the emergency risk communications team.
  - All details in the ERC/JIC plan related to contacts with the media and other stakeholders (for example, telephone, email, fax, Web sites) should be reviewed, at a minimum, on a quarterly basis.
  - All staff identified in the ERC/JIC plan (for example, spokespersons, news conference moderators, Web site managers, call center/hotline operators) should receive specialized training in their emergency risk communication tasks.
  - Tests, drills, and exercises should be carried out regularly on the elements of ERC/JIC plan to confirm participants are prepared to respond effectively to an emergency.
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# Appendices

# Appendix 1:

## Worksheet for Media Contacts

Site Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Use this worksheet to plan your communications with the media in the event of a radiological emergency. Be sure to consider the media's coverage in the past during the planning process.

<b>Media</b>	<b>Contact Information</b>	<b>Past Coverage History of the Organization</b>
<b>Newspapers</b>		
<b>Radio Stations</b>		
<b>Television Stations</b>		
<b>Other Media</b>		



## Appendix 3:

### Worksheet for Notifications

<b>Notifications</b>			
Use this worksheet to identify organizations and individuals who need to be notified in the event of a radiological emergency. Be sure to include both day and evening contact information.			
<b>Group</b>	<b>Notifications (check those that apply)</b>	<b>Contact</b>	
		<b>Who</b>	<b>How (Day/Evening)</b>
	1.		
	2.		
	3.		
	4.		
	5.		
	6.		
	7.		
	8.		
	9.		
	10.		
	11.		
	12.		
	13.		
	14.		
	15.		

# Notifications

Use this worksheet to identify organizations and individuals who need to be notified in the event of a radiological emergency. Be sure to include both day and evening contact information.

Group	Notifications (check those that apply)	Contact	
		Who	How (Day/Evening)
	16.		
	17.		
	18.		
	19.		
	20.		
	21.		
	22.		
	23.		
	24.		
	25.		
	26.		
	27.		
	28.		
	29.		
	30.		
	31.		
	32.		

## Notifications

Use this worksheet to identify organizations and individuals who need to be notified in the event of a radiological emergency. Be sure to include both day and evening contact information.

Group	Notifications (check those that apply)	Contact	
		Who	How (Day/Evening)
	33.		
	34.		
	35.		
	36.		
	37.		

# Notifications

Use this worksheet to identify organizations and individuals who need to be notified in the event of a radiological emergency. Be sure to include both day and evening contact information.

Group	Notifications (check those that apply)	Contact	
		Who	How (Day/Evening)
	38.		
	39.		
	40.		
	41.		
	42.		
	43.		
	44.		
	45.		
	46.		
	47.		
	48.		

# Notifications

Use this worksheet to identify organizations and individuals who need to be notified in the event of a radiological emergency. Be sure to include both day and evening contact information.

Group	Notifications (check those that apply)	Contact	
		Who	How (Day/Evening)
	49.		
	50.		
	51.		
	52.		
	53.		
	54.		
Other	55.		
	56.		
	57.		
	58.		
	59.		
	60.		
	61.		
	62.		
	63.		
	64.		

## Appendix 4:

### Call Center/Hotline Tracking Form

Time of Call: \_\_\_\_\_ a.m. p.m.

**Nature of call:**

Information Requested or Provided

- Clarify recommendations
- Current status of the incident
- Topic 1 \_\_\_\_\_
- Hot topic 2 \_\_\_\_\_

Request for referral:

- For more information
- For follow up
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

Feedback:

- Information regarding a specific contact with the organization
  - Information about recommended actions
  - Information about ability to carry out recommended actions
  - Information about other topics (specify)
- 
- Rumor or misinformation verification (briefly describe)

**Outcome of call:**

- Appeared to satisfy caller based on scripted information
- Referred caller to:
  - Expert
  - 
  - 
  - 
  -

**Action needed:**

- None

Return Call urgency:

- Critical (respond immediately)
- Urgent (respond within 24 hours)
- Routine

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Call taken by: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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## **Appendix 5:**

### **Principles and Techniques for Effective Media Communication**

Listed below is a summary of the principles and techniques of effective media communication. This summary is based upon a review of the scientific and practitioner literature.

#### **1. Demonstrate respect for the media by keeping them well informed of decisions and actions.**

- Establish good working relationships with the media before an emergency arises.
- Include journalists in emergency response training exercises.
- Be polite and courteous at all times, even if the reporter is not.
- Avoid embarrassing journalists.
- Provide information for on-site journalists on the location of electrical outlets, public telephones, rest rooms, hotels, restaurants and other amenities.
- Avoid being defensive or argumentative during interviews.
- Include elements in interviews that make a story interesting to the media, including examples, stories and other aspects that influence public perceptions of risk, concern and outrage.
- Use a wide range of communication techniques to engage and involve people.
- Adhere to the highest ethical standards – recognize that people hold you professionally and ethically accountable.
- Strive to inform editors and journalists of preparedness plans for a radiological emergency.
- Offer to follow-up on questions that cannot be addressed immediately.
- Strive for “win-win” media outcomes.

#### **2. Plan thoroughly and carefully for all media interactions**

- Assess the cultural diversity and socioeconomic level of the target populations.
- Assess internal media-relations capabilities.
- Recognize that all communication activities and materials should reflect the diverse nature of societies in a fair, representative and inclusive manner.

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- Begin all communication planning efforts with clear and explicit goals – such as:
    - informing and educating;
    - improving knowledge and understanding;
    - building, maintaining or restoring trust;
    - guiding and encouraging appropriate attitudes, decisions, actions and behaviors; and
    - encouraging dialogue, collaboration and cooperation.
  - Develop a written communication plan.
  - Develop a partner communication strategy.
  - Establish coordination in situations involving multiple agencies.
  - Identify important stakeholders and subgroups within the audience as targets for your messages.
  - Prepare a limited number of key messages in advance of potential emergencies.
  - Post the key messages and supporting information on your own well-publicized web site.
  - Pre-test messages before using them during an interview.
  - Respect diversity and multiculturalism while developing messages.
  - Train key personnel – including technical staff – in basic, intermediate and advanced media communication skills.
  - Practice media communication skills regularly.
  - Never say anything “off-the-record” that you would not want to see quoted and attributed to you.
  - Recruit media spokespersons who have effective presentation and personal interaction skills.
  - Provide training for high-ranking government officials who play a major role in communication with the media.
  - Provide well-developed talking points for those who play a leading role in communication with the media.
  - Recognize and reward spokespersons who are successful in getting their key messages included in media stories.
  - Anticipate questions and issues that might be raised during an interview.
  - Train spokespersons in how to redirect an interview (or get it back on track) using bridging phrases such as “what is really important to know is...”.
  - Agree with the reporter in advance on logistics and topic – for example, the length, location, and specific topic of the interview – but realize that the reporter may attempt to stray from the agreed topic.
  - Make needed changes in strategy and messages based on monitoring activities, evaluation efforts and feedback.
  - Work proactively to frame stories rather than waiting until others have defined the story and then reacting.
  - Carefully evaluate media communication efforts and learn from mistakes.
  - Share with others what you have learned from working with the media.

### **3. Meet the functional needs of the media**

- Assess the needs of the media.
- Be accessible to journalists.
- Respect their deadlines.
- Accept that news reports will simplify and abbreviate your messages.
- Devise a schedule to brief the media regularly during an emergency, even if updates are not “newsworthy” by their standards – open and regular communication helps to build trust and fill information voids.

- 
- Refer journalists to your web site for further information.
  - Share a limited number of key messages for media interviews.
  - Repeat your key messages several times during news conferences and media interviews.
  - Provide accurate, appropriate and useful information tailored to the needs of each type of media, such as sound bites, background videotape, and other visual materials for television.
  - Provide background material for journalists on basic and complex issues on your web site and as part of media information packets and kits.
  - Provide explanations and interpretations for numbers: can easily be misinterpreted or misunderstood.
  - Stick to the agreed topic during the interview – do not digress.
  - If you do not know the answer to a question, focus on what you do know, tell the reporter what actions you will take to get an answer, and follow up in a timely manner.
  - If asked for information that is the responsibility of another individual or organization, refer the reporter to that individual or organization.
  - Offer journalists the opportunity to do follow-up interviews with subject-matter experts.
  - Strive for brevity, but respect the reporter’s desire for information.
  - Hold media availability sessions where partners in the response effort are available for questioning in one place at one time.
  - Remember that it benefits the reporter and the organization when a story is accurate.
  - Before an emergency occurs, meet with editors and with journalists who would cover the story.
  - Work to establish durable relationships with journalists and editors.
  - Promise only that which can be delivered, then follow through.

#### **4. Be candid and open with journalists**

- Be first to share bad news about an issue or your organization, but be sure to put it into context.
- If the answer to a question is unknown or uncertain, and if the reporter is not reporting in real time, express a willingness to get back to the reporter with a response by an agreed deadline.
- Be first and proactive in disclosing information about an emergency, emphasizing appropriate reservations about data and information reliability.
- Recognize that most journalists maintain a “healthy skepticism” of sources, and trust by the media is earned – do not ask to be trusted.
- Ask the reporter to restate a question if you do not understand it.
- Hold frequent media events to fill information voids.
- Do not minimize or exaggerate the level of risk.
- Acknowledge uncertainty.
- Be careful about comparing the risk of one event to another.
- Do not offer unreasonable reassurances (i.e. unwarranted by the available information).
- Make corrections quickly if errors are made or if the facts change.
- Discuss data and information uncertainties, strengths and weaknesses – including those identified by other credible sources.
- Cite ranges of risk estimates when appropriate.
- If credible authorities disagree on the best course of action, be prepared to disclose the rationale for those disagreements, and why your organization has decided to take one particular course of action over another.
- Be especially careful when asked to speculate or answer extreme or baseless “what if” questions, especially on worst-case scenarios.
- Avoid using absolutes (for example, the words “never” or “always.”)
- Tell the truth.

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## **5. Listen to the target audience**

- Do not make assumptions about what viewers, listeners and readers know, think or want done about risks.
- If time and resources allow, prior to a media interview, review the available data and information on public perceptions, attitudes, opinions, beliefs and likely responses regarding an event or risk. Such information may have been obtained through interviews, facilitated discussion groups, information exchanges, expert availability sessions, public hearings, advisory group meetings, hotline call-in logs, and surveys.
- Monitor and analyze information about the event appearing in media outlets, including the internet.
- Identify with the target audience of the media interview, and present information in a format that aids understanding and helps people to act accordingly.
- During interviews and news conferences, acknowledge the validity of people's emotions and fears.
- Be empathetic.
- Target media channels that encourage listening, feedback, participation and dialogue.
- Recognize that competing agendas, symbolic meanings, and broader social, cultural, economic or political considerations often complicate the task of effective media communication.
- Recognize that some audiences will be primarily concerned about whether people are being treated fairly in terms of access to information, care, and resources.

## **6. Coordinate, collaborate and act in partnership with other credible sources**

- Develop procedures for coordinating the activities of media spokespersons from multiple agencies and organizations.
- Establish links to the web sites of partner organizations.
- Recognize that every organization has its own culture and this culture impacts upon how and what it tries to communicate.
- To the extent possible, act in partnership with other organizations in preparing messages in advance of potential emergencies.
- Share and coordinate messages with partner organizations prior to media interviews or news conferences.
- Encourage partner organizations to repeat or echo the same key messages – such repetition and echoing by many voices helps to reinforce the key messages for target audiences.
- In situations involving multiple agencies, determine information clearance and approval procedures in advance when possible.
- Aim for consistency of key messages across agencies – if real differences in opinion do exist be inclined to disclose the areas of disagreement and explain why your organization is choosing one course of action over another.
- Develop a contingency plan for when partners cannot engage in consistent messaging – be prepared to make an extra effort to listen to their concerns, understand their point of view, negotiate differences, and apply pressure if required and appropriate.
- Devote effort and resources to building bridges, partnerships and alliances with other organizations (including potential or established critics) before an emergency occurs.
- Consult with internal and external partners to determine which organization should take the lead in responding to media enquiries, and document the agreements reached.
- Discuss ownership of specific topics or issues in advance to avoid one partner treading upon the perceived territory of another.

- 
- Identify credible and authoritative sources of information that can be used to support messages in potential emergencies.
  - Develop a plan for using information from other organizations in potential emergencies.
  - Develop contact lists of external subject-matter experts able and willing to speak to the media on issues associated with potential emergencies.
  - Cite as part of your message credible and authoritative sources that believe what you believe.
  - Issue media communications together with, or through, individuals or organizations believed to be credible and trustworthy by the target audience.

## **7. Speak clearly and with compassion**

- Be aware that people want to know that you care before they care what you know.
- Use clear, non-technical language.
- Explain medical or technical terms in clear language when they are used.
- Use graphics or other pictorial material to clarify and strengthen messages.
- Respect the unique information needs of special and diverse audiences.
- Express genuine empathy when responding to questions about loss – acknowledge the tragedy of illness, injury or death.
- Personalize risk data by using stories, narratives, examples and anecdotes that make technical data easier to understand.
- Avoid distant, abstract and unfeeling language about harm, deaths, injuries and illnesses.
- Acknowledge and respond (in words, gestures and actions) to the emotions people express, such as anxiety, fear, worry, anger, outrage and helplessness.
- Acknowledge and respond to the distinctions people view as important in evaluating risks, such as perceived benefits, control, fairness, dread, whether the risk is natural or man-made, and effects on children.
- Be careful to use risk comparisons only to help put risks in perspective and context, and not to suggest that one risk is like another – avoid comparisons that trivialize the problem, that attempt to minimize anxiety, or that appear to be trying to settle the question of whether a risk is acceptable.
- Give people a sense of control by identifying specific actions they can take to protect themselves.
- Identify significant misinformation, being aware that repeating it may give it unwanted attention.
- Recognize that saying “no comment” without explanation or qualification is often perceived as guilt or hiding something – consider saying instead “I wish I could answer that. However...”.
- Be sensitive to local norms, such as those relating to speech and dress.
- Always try to include in a media interview a discussion of actions under way by the organization and actions that can be taken by the public.

## Appendix 6:

### Sample News Release Announcing the Opening of a Joint Information Center

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NEWS RELEASE

CONTACT: [name of contact]PHONE: [number of contact]

Date:

Joint Information Center Opened

[Insert location of JIC] At [insert time] today, the [insert organization name] received reports of [insert information on nature of the incident]. Due to this situation, a Joint Information Center (JIC) is being opened at the [insert location]. See attached map. A JIC is a centralized communications facility that serves as a central point for public affairs activities, media access, and coordination of emergency information.

[Insert actions being taken]

Spokespersons from the [insert organization name] and [insert names of other organizations and partners] will be available in the JIC to provide immediate updates on the situation and developments that may occur as a result of the situation. News conferences, background information, and opportunities to conduct interviews with public officials and subject matter experts will be available at the JIC.

Note to Reporters, Editors, and Assignment Desks

Reporters should enter the [insert description] entrance of the building. All reporters must sign in. All reporters must have credentials. A media workroom, equipped with telephones and other supplies, is available at the JIC. A JIC representative will be present to meet with media representatives. All news briefings will be held in the JIC news conference room.

For information updates by telephone, a media telephone bank has been installed at the JIC. The following telephone number is FOR MEDIA USE ONLY: [insert telephone number]

Please do not release this number to the public. This is for media use only. The public will be given a different number for information.

[Insert address, phone number for media and directions or a map to JIC]

## **Appendix 7:**

### **Sample Joint Information Center News Release**

CONTACT: [insert name of contact] PHONE: [insert telephone number of contact]

Date: [insert date]

#### JOINT INFORMATION CENTER NEWS RELEASE

(Note: Items in brackets below are to be filled in)

At [insert time] today, the [insert name of organization] received reports of [insert information on the nature of the incident];

We have a [insert information on the existing plan, procedure, operations] in place for just such an [insert emergency or event]. We are being assisted by [insert names of partners] as part of the response.

The situation is [insert “under” or “not yet under”] control. We are working with experts and our partners to [insert “contain this situation,” “determine how this happened,” or “determine what actions may be needed to prevent this from happening again”].

Additional information will be provided as soon as possible.

## Appendix 8:

### Sample Script for Immediate Responses to Media Inquires

Consider using any or all of the following scripts if the media is "at the door" and you need time to assemble the facts for the initial I-JIC news release. Getting information out quickly and getting the facts right are among the most important priorities. It is important not give in to pressure from reporters to confirm or release information before you have confirmation. The following are responses which may help give you time to collect and confirm facts.

#### Sample Scripted Responses:

1. If the reporter is on the telephone inquiring about the emergency

“We’ve just learned about the situation and are trying to get more complete information now. How can I reach you when I have more information?”

“All our efforts are directed right now at bringing the situation under control. I would prefer not to speculate about event.” How can I reach you when I have more information?”

“I’m not the [expert; authority] on your question. Let me have your name and I will call you right back.”

“We’re preparing a statement on that now. Can I [fax; e-mail] it to you in about [insert time?”]

“The answer to your question is on our Web site. Have you checked our Web site? If you leave me your name and contact information, I will send you our next update.”

2. If the reporter has arrived in person at the site of the emergency

“This is an evolving situation. I know you want as much information as possible right now. While I work to get answers to your questions, I want to tell you what we can confirm right now: [insert information].”

“At approximately [insert time], a [insert brief description of what happened based on available facts].”

“At this point, we do not know [insert information, such as persons exposed, injuries, deaths, etc.].”

“We have a [insert information such as information about a system, plan, procedure, operation] in place for just such an emergency.”

“We are being assisted by [provide details: for example, the fire department, the Emergency Management Office, local law enforcement, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, the school system, the FBI, the Red Cross, etc.) as part of our emergency response plan.”

“The situation is [under] [not yet under] [currently beyond our] control.”

“We are working with [insert names] to [contain this situation; determine how this happened’ determine what actions may be needed to prevent this from happening again].”

“We will continue to gather information and release it to you as soon as possible. I will be back to you within [insert amount of time] to give you an update. As soon as we have more confirmed information, it will be provided.”

“We ask for your patience as we respond to this emergency.”

## **Appendix 9:**

# **The Virtual Joint Information Center: A Technological Tool for Emergency Communication**

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### **Introduction**

#### *The use of tools in information sharing*

Few would argue with the premise that didactic processes are made possible by the effective transfer of information. Little would result in the classroom or corporate boardroom if the knowledge of one entity was not transferred to others. Further examination would also demonstrate these functions are made more productive through the effective use of specific tools. Historically, the stone tablet, papyrus scroll, book, slate chalkboard, and PowerPoint<sup>®</sup> software have been used to transfer or share information publicly.

As audiences and information needs become more specific, so must the tools used to reach and meet the needs of those audiences. One example would include how government agencies, businesses, and other organizations utilize specific products and methods to share information with the news media. The products generated by government or response organizations include the news release, the interview, and the news conference. Reporters have come to expect this manner of information flow, and incorporate it into their news production procedures.

#### *Information-sharing products used for news production*

The news release is a short, written summation detailing certain events, viewpoints, or reactions to an event. It is nearly always written by an organization involved with or affected by the event. The news release's primary intended audience is reporters covering the incident. Once received by reporters, the news release may be printed, broadcast, or uploaded verbatim or nearly verbatim, used only as a reference by the reporter, or ignored completely.

The interview is a structured question-and-answer session usually on a one-to-one basis between an agency official and the reporter, and is often initiated by the reporter. On less frequent occasions, it may be initiated by the organization. The purpose of the interview is to relay information from the organization to the reporter.

The news conference is a question-and-answer session conducted by the organization and usually having several reporters present. It is nearly always initiated by the organization, rarely by a response partner, and never by the reporter. Typically, introductory comments are given by someone from the organization followed by the question-and-answer portion.

#### *Technological changes impacting information-sharing products*

Until the past few decades, technological standards and shortcomings limited the options for the creation and distribution of these products – the news release was once written on a typewriter and mailed, later sent via facsimile, and now is almost exclusively composed on a computer and e-mailed to reporters and posted on the organization’s Web site. In the past, interviews occurred face to face or via the telephone; today in addition, they can be via e-mail, satellite video, or Internet audiovisual two-way communication. News conferences were limited in a similar manner as interviews, but today can utilize similar methods.

This paper, updated in 2009 from the version written in 2007, will present information on how the current concepts and utilizations of *joint information centers* or JICs, frequently conducted within the confines of a physical location, may be improved upon with the addition of or replacement with an electronic method of operational communication called a *virtual joint information center*, or V-JIC.

### **The use of a joint information center**

The Incident Command System (ICS) describes a public information officer (PIO) as being a crucial task position within the command staff, and describes a JIC as a useful tool for the PIO (U. S. Department of Homeland Security, 2004). ICS formed in the 1970s following devastating wildfires in California, and the JIC concept began “around the time of the eruption of Mount St. Helens” (AudienceCentral, 2007b, para. 1). The volcano exploded in March 1980.

Academic research about the use of a JIC is quite rare. Table 1 shows the number of articles written during the past 10 years found in academic databases using the terms “risk communication,” “crisis communication,” and “joint information center.” These terms are commonly used by governmental agencies practitioners who create the aforementioned news products regarding events in which their organizations are involved. The search used the EBSCO service for an inquiry within the databases shown. The parameters requested all peer-reviewed material from January 1997 to 2007; the search was not limited to full-text results. While the search undoubtedly did not capture all articles, it does reflect the abundance of risk communication scholarship and the paucity of research on joint information centers.

*Risk communication* is a decades-old term with a large amount of scholarship supporting it, and whose meaning is generally defined as:

an interactive process of exchange of information and opinion among individuals, groups, and institutions; often involves multiple messages about the nature of risk or expressing concerns, opinions, or reactions to risk messages or to legal and institutional arrangements for risk management (Committee on Risk Perception and Communication - National Research Council, 1989, p. 322).

Table 1  
Incidence of communications-related search terms in major academic databases

Term	Risk communication	Crisis communication	Joint information center
Number of articles containing term	2,155	932	5*

\* Of the five, only one article concentrated on JICs

Databases queried were Academic Search Premier, Business Source Premier, CINAHL Plus with Full Text, Communication & Mass Media Complete, Education Research Complete, ERIC, MEDLINE, Military & Government Collection, PsycARTICLES, PsycINFO, SocINDEX with Full Text.

*Crisis communication*, a more recent term, is generally defined as sharing information about “an event that is an unpredictable, major threat that can have a negative effect on the organization, industry, or stakeholders if handled improperly” (Coombs, 1999, p. 2).

A third type is an integration of the two, and is logically called *crisis and emergency risk communication* or CERC. Developed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to assist public health entities and their response partners present information about chaotic situations, CERC enables practitioners to develop a communications plan that is “strategic, broad based, responsive and highly contingent” (Reynolds & Seeger, 2005, p. 49).

A JIC is defined by the federal government as “a facility established to coordinate all incident-related public information activities. It is the central point of contact for all news media at the scene of the incident” (U. S. Department of Homeland Security, 2004, p. 37). JICs are where information is gathered, verified, and used to produce news products, and released to the media and other stakeholders.

Other tasks accomplished in the JIC include:

(a) Monitoring news coverage to ensure accurate information is being disseminated and received properly, while correcting incorrect information about the emergency response that appears in the news media; (b) managing news conferences and press operations for disaster area tours; (c) providing basic facilities to assist the news media in disseminating information to the public and to credential media representatives; (d) providing all stakeholders directly or indirectly affected by the emergency with access to timely and accurate information about response, recovery, and mitigation activities and their limitations; and (e) ensuring government communication resources are managed effectively and duplication of effort by departments is minimized (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2005, p. 3).

Not surprisingly, communications personnel at JICs make use of relevant equipment such as computers, telephones, fax machines, and two-way radios.



## The structure of a corporeal joint information center

Figures 1 and 2 show a simplified model diagram of a corporeal JIC using guidelines from the Federal Emergency Management Agency, or FEMA (2006, pp. 12, 25).

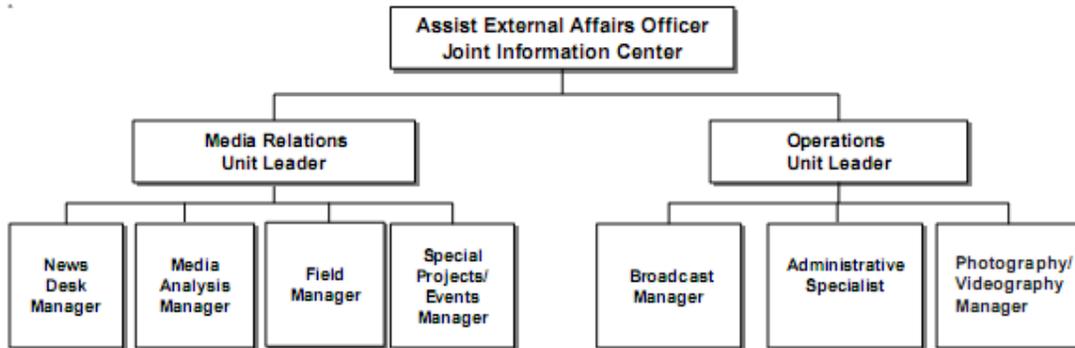
Each manager or specialist is responsible for gathering and refining information, and transforming it into a particular product. The media analysis manager, for example, reads, listens to, and watches news reports about the incident. He or she then creates a summary and analysis of the news coverage daily or as needed (Federal Emergency Management Agency, 2006, pp. 20-21). Each staff person typically would accomplish their work much as any office worker does, using the rudimentary tools of computer, printer, e-mail, Web, and fax.

Even using these electronic tools, the corporeal nature of the JIC creates limitations of available space and response time, according to Marc Mullen, vice president of PIER Systems, a provider of electronic-based, or virtual JICs (V-JICs). The selection and preparation of the physical facility can easily cause significant delays in producing and releasing crucial information:

There is yet to be any incident where people were ready for it; where they had the (JIC) room ready. Unless it's a dedicated communications center; then people still have to drive to it. The place for a V-JIC comes when you have to respond – when you get to any major or sudden event (M. Mullen, personal communication, April 10, 2007).

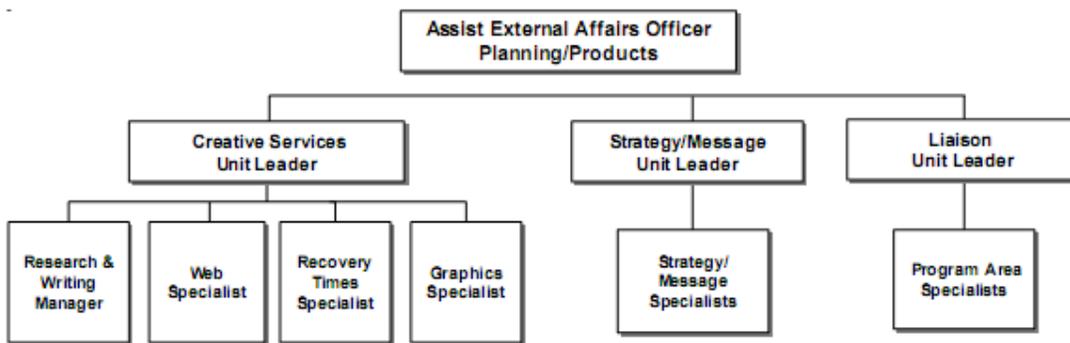
If providing information more rapidly is more likely to occur when using a V-JIC, why are there not more systems in place? Certainly cost is a factor in adopting any technology, but the reasons are likely more complex. There is an abundance of research on the adoption of new ideas or technologies, called *diffusion of innovations* that provides insight and avenues for disseminating V-JICs more broadly.

Figure 1  
Media relations and operations portion of federal joint information center model



Source: FEMA Public Affairs Field Guide

Figure 2  
Creative services, strategy and liaison portions of federal joint information center model



Source: FEMA Public Affairs Field Guide

### Diffusion of innovations

Diffusion of innovations is a stalwart model of how ideas, products, systems, and technologies are dispersed and accepted or rejected. Since its beginning more than 40 years ago, the more than 5,000 related research studies make it among the top social science frameworks developed (Haider & Kreps, 2004; Singhal, 2005). Its chief designer, the late Everett Rogers, defined diffusion as “the process in which an innovation is communicated

through certain channels over time among the members of a social system” (Rogers, 1995, p. 5) and an innovation as “an idea, practice, or object that is perceived as new by an individual or other unit of adoption” (1995, p. 12). Rogers identified and typified groups by how quickly they adopt an innovation. Ranging from fastest adoption to slowest, the groups are innovators, early adopters, early majority adopters, late majority adopters, and laggards (McAnany, 1984).

Research is mixed regarding the adoption of Web-based tools – Pradelli and colleagues found only gradual use of Web-based collaborative tools (2006, p. 125) in their study of five manufacturing and retail industries. There is evidence to suggest the diffusion model is applicable to study the public sector (Frederickson, Johnson, & Wood, 2004), and more specific research on public health entities finds that various characteristics of the group itself factor into how quickly it embraces an innovation (Rivera & Rogers, 2006). Not surprisingly, management is found to play a crucial role in adoption as well (Peansupap & Walker, 2006).

### **An example of technological adoption**

This example of hesitancy for acceptance of an information system such as the V-JIC is similar to the challenges faced by the integration team for the Information Network for Public Health Officials (INPHO) described by Seymour and Muskopf (2003, pp. 574-594). The first challenge faced was the lack of understanding of the value of the project. The INPHO project occurred in the mid-1990s and several public health personnel “had never used e-mail” (2003, p. 579) at the time. The V-JIC systems are also in figurative toddlerhood, and may not yet be salient to potential users, management, and budget-keepers at public health agencies. “No company will use a V-JIC if they don’t understand the need to communicate ... we spend time looking at the management aspect of it, rather than what button do I push to do which task” (M. Mullen, personal communication, April 10, 2007).

The second challenge faced by INPHO was fear of the Internet. While time has quelled that general fear among most in public health, one can still find varying levels of comfort with computer technology within the workplace. The INPHO solution was the creation of foundational policies about Internet use (Seymour & Muskopf, 2003, pp. 580-581). Similarly, a solution for greater V-JIC adoption would involve orientation to small groups of interested or enthusiastic participants, experimentation, and drafting policy about the use once the systems are purchased. Rogers referred to such a group as innovators, and described them as venturesome, “able to cope with a high degree of uncertainty about an innovation at the time he or she adopts” (1995, p. 282), and who “play a gatekeeping role in the flow of new ideas into a system” (1995, p. 283). Obviously, identifying the innovators and utilizing them as supporters may increase the likelihood of the project moving forward.

The third challenge faced by INPHO was fear of attack on the system by hackers; those who would attempt to gain unauthorized access to the system for nefarious purposes. Each of the V-JICs profiled for this paper require special access for uploading or writing information onto the system, and any adoption of a V-JIC system should be prefaced with consideration of laws and policies governing protection of confidential information including state statutes and the federal Health and Insurance Portability and Accountability Act.

The INPHO group also faced the challenge of lack of trust between agencies and departments. For projects to succeed, partners must work through any conflicts they have; the differences may still exist afterward, but the process discloses information from all parties and hopefully establishes a clearer dialogue. One solution offered by Mullen of PIER Systems appears to be able to alleviate some of this lack of trust while helping to ensure familiarity with the system. “Tools are only valuable if they are maintained. A tool that is easy to use in a crisis is easy to use everyday; we encourage our clients to find a daily application for it” (personal conversation, April 10, 2007). This everyday use will present

opportunities for partners to work through conflicts during low-stress, nonemergency times as well.

The remaining challenges faced by the IPHO team, lack of trust in the network provider, the abundant number of existing networks, lack of telecommunications infrastructure, and lack of resources (Seymour & Muskopf, 2003, pp. 582-585) have lesser similarities to adoption of a V-JIC with the exception of funding to maintain the project. As with many computer systems (compared to the one-time purchase of individual components), there is likely to be a continuing maintenance fee and prospective adopters should determine the capability to sustain a project before adopting it.

Examples of positive and negative consequences in information release  
Being proactive and forthright with information during a crisis is a fundamental tenet of crisis communication (Bullock, Haddow, & Bell, 2004). In their study, Taylor and Perry (2005) found about half of organizations going through a public crisis used their Internet site to provide information about the event. Even with an active campaign of information, rumors about the incident will be pervasive (Glass, 2001). CDC, often used by public health professionals as developing the standards for practice, promotes *be first, be right, be credible* as a mantra for communications professionals (Reynolds, Hunter-Galdo, & Sokler, 2002).

Research and case studies demonstrate the value of a forward-moving public information campaign and the hazards of delaying, thwarting, or stemming the flow of information (Mebane, Temin, & Parvanta, 2003). Vicki Freimuth, the former director of CDC's communications program and colleagues (2000) remind the practitioner of the value in using tested and accepted communication theories when developing messages and campaigns. Earlier, Knight and Pretty (1997) discovered a measurable, detrimental financial impact to corporations that failed to provide adequate information in times of crisis.

Additional consequences of a non-optimal communications effort during an emergency may include a delay in setting up a JIC, as happened in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma following the 1995 bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building. According to the incident's after action report, it took nearly four days for agencies to activate a JIC on site (Oklahoma Department of Civil Emergency Management n.d.).

In Toronto, Ontario, government and response agency leaders failed at times to provide a coordinated message during the 2003 SARS epidemic to the media and public. This led to “moments of factual dissonance” (Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, 2005, p. 7) among leaders from the local to the international level, and may have led to another ramification outlined by the review board. The group concluded that “Fear is worse than the disease, and fear drives fear” (2005, p. 6) and that a proactive and forthright communications effort was the way to improve the situation.

Another example is the 2003 wildfire season in California. The review panel found “significant positive effect on the timeliness and effectiveness of information management when compared to large incidents that did not use a JIC” (Mission-Centered Solutions, 2003, p. 11).

One approach that has shown success in other public health situations may also have value for CERC; that of the precautionary principle. In general, the principle dictates that unless harm can be shown to result from an action, and if the action may improve the situation, it should be considered an option (Ozonoff, 2002). Applied to proactive communication efforts is the imploration to “communicate with the public, even when the facts are not clear” (Stoto, 2002, p. 546).

With even this small sampling of cases, it should be evident that research shows a benefit from proactive and forthright communication efforts, and the precautionary principle would encourage it, barring evidence that information would cause harm. The JIC, while not

a frequent topic of academic research, is a formal component of federal plans and guidelines and provides the model and mechanism for gathering, confirming, utilizing, and releasing information about a significant event to the media, the public, and other stakeholders.

While technological capabilities have until relatively recently limited the structure of a JIC to a physical location, advances in computer hardware and software, the Internet and access to it, and a rethinking of JICs and message production have enabled the inception of the electronic-only, virtual JIC or V-JIC. In the following section, an overview is provided of the concept of V-JICs and a comparison of available platforms.

### **The virtual joint information center (V-JIC)**

The Internet and the accompanying improvements in the capability of computer systems to create, distribute, and receive information have together created new methods of knowledge transfer and new opportunities for those wishing to utilize them.

The lack of scholarly research about V-JICs in and of itself is not surprising. The concept is relatively new; the structure is temporary (used most frequently for infrequent crises); the number of users is small – most likely only in the hundreds if not a smaller number of communications professionals; and a V-JIC is a “behind the scenes” tool, much like a operational status board.

However, by viewing the concept of V-JICs as another form of *virtual community*, similar to electronic forums and online social networks, more studies do surface. Hsiu-Fen (2006) found that trust in the structure of a virtual community and the organization operating it was positively linked to amount of use of the community. Other studies found that electronic interaction and increased information sharing are linked (Sharpton & Jhaveri, 2006), online work within an electronic community structure can lead to improved work

offline (Graff, 2006), and how the site is designed and who designs it may affect how well users can accomplish tasks on the site (Faiola & Matei, 2005).

Ideally, a V-JIC system should be able to allow staff to conduct all tasks they would be able to in a physical JIC. To do so, the V-JIC system must at a minimum contain a method of transmitting, receiving, and storing written products.

### **Examples of V-JIC systems**

One of the early commercial V-JIC systems, the Public Information Emergency Response or PIER Systems was developed by Gerald Baron. Baron's public relations firm represented the company Olympic Pipeline in 1999 when a massive gasoline spill ignited and killed three people (Baron and Company, n.d.; McClary, 2003). PIER Systems was developed based on his experiences providing information during the emergency.

Preparing for a potential hazard triggered the development of a second V-JIC system. The Umatilla, Oregon facility of the federal Chemical Stockpile Emergency Preparedness Program (CSEPP) is one of several in the country with the mission to safely store, disarm, and destroy stockpiles of chemical weapons. The staff created an electronic status board and Smart Book (Umatilla County Emergency Management 2005; Umatilla Joint Information Center, 2007) with hyperlinks to information crucial to the agency and its stakeholders in the event of a chemical leak, spill, or explosion.

Third, Oregon's state health department has developed its own V-JIC platform. Although located behind password protection and unavailable to the public or media (Oregon Department of Human Services, 2007), a brief demonstration tour in early 2007 showed a robust site with varying levels of security and easy-to-use features to post and retrieve information about an incident (C. Holmgren, personal conversation, February 16, 2007).

The three previously mentioned systems are designed to be specifically crisis-oriented V-JICs. However, the Stargazer system, created by the nonprofit Stargazer Foundation, offers certain social contact applications free of charge to individuals, families, and small nonprofits (Stargazer Foundation, 2007). For government agencies and other entities that wish to utilize the JIC features of the Web-based communication system, a nominal fee is charged.

In addition, new social networking products and systems are on the forefront of Internet technology. Web sites such as Facebook, LinkedIn, and Ning are used by families, friends, and professional associates to share information (e.g., messages, images, files); these same functionalities are found on proprietary V-JIC systems.

A sixth system is perhaps the least costly, and easiest to establish and adopt for agencies or organizations. It is not a discrete V-JIC, but the use of various components that comprise the modern-day office. These would include the computer; Internet connectivity; e-mail; an intranet or Internet repository for files, such as Microsoft's SharePoint<sup>®</sup> system; an online, real-time, instant messaging program such as AOL Instant Messenger; and a telephone or two-way radio. For the purposes of this paper, this system will be referred to as a *fractional V-JIC*.

## V-JICs in action: case studies

One may better understand the various functions and usefulness of a V-JIC through an examination of their use. The following section describes events using the fractional V-JIC and the PIER Systems for news response to environmental events.

### *Gastrointestinal illness outbreak – Ohio – 2004*

In summer 2004, the Ohio Department of Health (ODH) along with staff from other local health departments in the state, the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency, and staff from CDC assisted the Ottawa County Health Department in their investigation of 1,450 cases of gastrointestinal illnesses in visitors to and residents of South Bass Island, located in Lake Erie, just offshore from Port Clinton, Ohio. At the time, this was the second-largest waterborne infectious disease outbreak in the nation. The investigation determined the likely cause to be widespread groundwater contamination due to failing septic systems, the particular geologic features of the island, and heavy use of water and septic systems because of large numbers of visitors during the height of the tourist season.

Staff (including the author) from ODH's Office of Public Affairs activated a physical JIC in the Ottawa County Courthouse, about 2 miles from the county health department – the command center for the incident. At the JIC, the public communication efforts served to provide information to the media, residents, and visitors on the island; elected officials; response partners; and other interested parties. The methods used combined typical features of a physical JIC (i.e., staff gathering at a single location to produce news products) with elements of a virtual JIC (i.e., using existing office electronic methods to gather, confirm, use, share, and disseminate information). This dual configuration fits the term fractional JIC. The JIC was activated for 11 days, and responded to more than 2,100 inquiries from media and those calling into the public information line. Because ODH had adequate staffing and technical capability to establish an information line call center at its headquarters, it was

decided to conduct that portion of the public information operation there, rather than at or near the JIC. Information used by the information line staff was produced at the JIC (about a 2-hour drive away), and e-mailed early each day. Later, metrics about the number of calls each day were sent from the information line center to the JIC, and incorporated into other material, such as Web site updates and fact sheets.

Media monitoring is another typical function at a JIC. Because this outbreak received a great deal of media interest and inquiries, a robust monitoring operation was necessary. Rather than set up televisions and radios in or near the JIC, staff at ODH headquarters coordinated a multi-city effort to monitor the media. Nearly all TV news coverage came from two cities; Toledo to the west and Cleveland to the east. The ODH media monitoring coordinator requested the public information officer (PIO) from each city to monitor the news coverage in their community and forward a written report via e-mail. The coordinator from ODH combined those reports with additional examples from news Web sites into a single daily report, and sent that report via e-mail to the JIC.

In an effort to provide adequate information about the progress and process of the public health and environmental investigations into what was making people ill, information was posted on the ODH Web site, and links to the content were provided to response partners for linking from their sites. The news products generated included news releases, fact sheets, and at the conclusion, a series of summary reports from the various agencies involved in the event.

#### *BP Oil Refinery Explosion – Texas – 2005*

AudienceCentral, owner of the V-JIC platform PIER Systems, highlights several case studies on the company's Web site (2007a). Among them is the explosion at the BP Oil Refinery in 2005 that killed 15 and injured nearly 100 people. The narrative highlights how the

information staff of 21 worked from five different locations from Texas to London, England to gather and disseminate information for the 300 media and other stakeholders making inquiries. The team produced nearly 90 news products, and used the V-JIC to push content to a public Web site that received more than 900,00 site hits (AudienceCentral, n.d.).

*Future cases: V-JICs and pandemic influenza*

Medical experts predict a pandemic of influenza is inevitable, but the timing of the novel virus with characteristics of high transmissibility and high morbidity or mortality is not known. Recommendations from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services indicate social distancing may be a viable non-pharmaceutical intervention in lieu of vaccine. Given that, and the likelihood public health communications staff will be called upon to continue working during a pandemic, the remote access and ability to collaborate electronically with one another using a V-JIC system will be invaluable.

Recommendations

*General*

Not surprisingly, the recommendation from any vendor producing a V-JIC software system is to purchase a V-JIC software system. More impartially speaking, however, several agencies small and large from the local to the federal level of government have bought or created their own V-JIC systems used for communication response. Gerald Baron, creator of the PIER Systems and likely the most vocal champion of the technology in a still too-quiet arena, beseeches organizations to understand the new paradigm of media today. “Now is too late,” is not only his klaxon, but the title of his most recent book on the topic.

This author echoes Baron’s value placed on the importance of early and continual proactive communication, particularly during a crisis, and especially by a government agency

leading the response to the crisis. Such action will require not only management's philosophical agreement to this ideal, but their fiscal commitment of resources.

In the past, that commitment included general office equipment; today it includes computers, Internet access, cell phones, pagers and other electronic gear – thus continued expansion of technology tied to communications capability is well within the realm of present approaches.

As organizations in the private and public sector consider adopting a V-JIC system, they may find themselves doing so with few others among their peers – the community of Rogers' innovators remains relatively small. Those numbers may increase more steadily if some of the following five recommendations are followed; the lead in the effort may need to come from government at the federal level in order to establish the broadest base of standardization and acceptance.

*List of specific recommendations*

1. Establish a V-JIC advisory committee comprised of representatives from the industry, as well as communications professionals from government agencies at the federal, state, and local level, with those agencies having some emergency response aspect to their mission.

2. Add V-JIC operations into the Homeland Security Exercise and Evaluation Program.

3. Provide a summary evaluation of all existing V-JIC systems similar to the work done on Crisis Information Management software (U.S. Department of Justice, 2002).

4. Purchase or develop a V-JIC system at the federal level, partnering with a significant response agency such as U.S. Health and Human Service, U.S. Department of

Homeland Security, or the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Distribute this system free of charge to state and local government agencies.

5. Join with local academic centers and universities to develop a series of research studies on V-JICs and their integration into public information efforts.

*Details of listed recommendations*

By establishing an advisory group, greater investigation into the current state of technology can be accomplished more easily. The agencies involved should be those that typically have an active role in crisis response. This would include but not be limited to public health, emergency management, hospitals, law enforcement, and fire departments. The advisory group can also capture best practices from organizations utilizing a V-JIC system.

The Homeland Security Exercise and Evaluation Program (HSEEP) has a mission to provide consistency to exercises conducted by numerous types of agencies at all levels of government. They also provide to agencies with training and material to encourage self-sufficiency (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, n.d.). By having HSEEP incorporate V-JIC systems within its training, it will help establish an accepted endorsement from the source looked to as the national standard of exercise excellence.

Another recommendation that may help establish standards within V-JIC platforms and would be invaluable as a “buyer’s guide” is to produce a systematic analysis similar to one done on critical incident management software conducted by the U.S. Department of Justice in 2002. The goal of that study was to compare software packages along similar criteria as much as possible, and to provide questions to consider and ask the potential vendor (U.S. Department of Justice, 2002).

Precedent exists for free software or data systems provided to states and communities; CDC, for example, offers the National Electronic Disease Surveillance System and Epi Info™ free (CDC, 2007). If a “parent organization” such as CDC or FEMA were to provide

access to a large V-JIC system free to state and community government response agencies and retain a role as system administrator, the national agency could have easy access to news products being created and status reports of the incident.

Finally, a partnership between academic institutions and V-JIC users, be they the system developers or government agencies, should provide the opportunity for rigorous scholarly data to fill the deficit in material about how the systems are being used, any measurable benefit or effect there might be on the users of the system, and how well the structure of a V-JIC improves the communications response to a crisis or public health emergency.

The number of professional career news reporters is decreasing (Samuelson, 2007), but the number of Internet bloggers and people with cell phone cameras is up. Satellite news channels feed the airwaves 24 hours a day. There is no lack of people, amateur or professional, able to provide information of varying degrees of completeness and accuracy about events or organizations. The need for organizations to be able to respond actively with their own information quickly is crucial, and efforts to do so may be made more productive through the use of a virtual joint information center.

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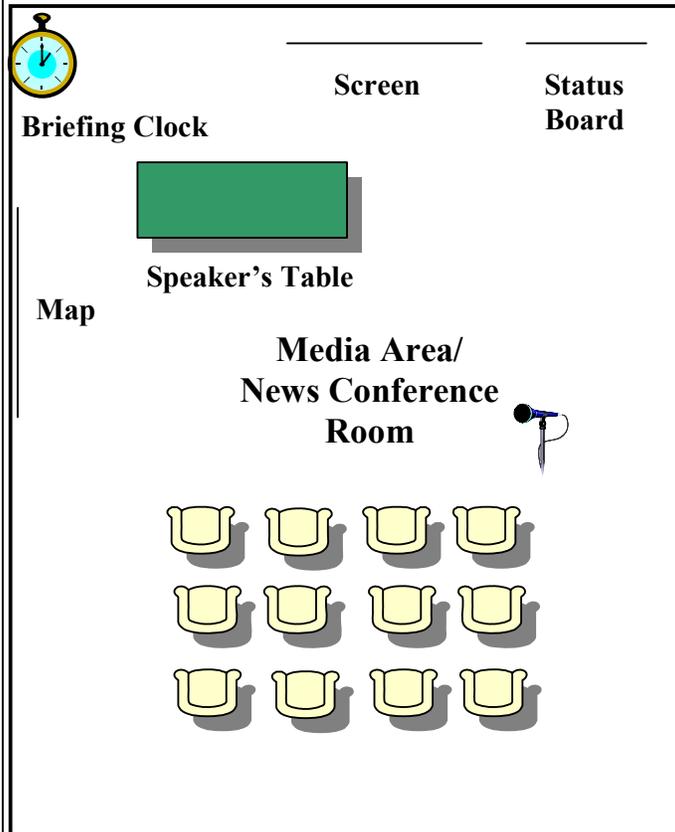
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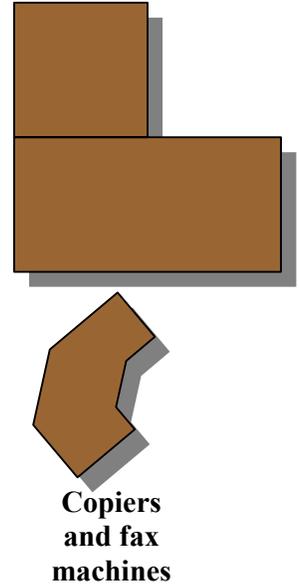
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**Appendix 10:  
Sample I-JIC Floor Plan**



**Break area/restrooms**  
**I-JIC Staff Work Areas**



**Work Area for Journalists  
(Including Break Room and Restroom Facilities)**

**Media Registration Area and Security**

**Media Monitoring Area**  
**Work Area For Telephone Hotline/Call Center Teams**

**Work Area For Spokesperson(s)**

**(Note: This floor plan may be out of scale for an actual radiological emergency. A larger work space may be needed for public information officers from response organizations and I-JIC staff.)**

