



## **Regional Emergency Support Function #14 Media Relations and Communications Outreach**

### **Regional Coordinating Organizations**

Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments

### **Local Coordinating Agencies**

Alexandria  
Arlington County  
Bowie  
College Park  
District of Columbia  
Fairfax  
Fairfax County  
Falls Church  
Frederick County  
Gaithersburg  
Greenbelt  
Loudoun County  
Montgomery County  
Prince George's County  
Prince William County  
Rockville  
Takoma Park

### **State/District Government Outreach Organizations**

District of Columbia Media/Community Relations Offices  
Maryland State Media/Community Relations Offices  
Virginia State Media/Community Relations Offices

### **Federal Government Outreach Organizations**

Federal Agency PIOs

### **Public and Private-sector Outreach Organizations**

Greater Washington Board of Trade  
Employers  
School Districts  
Consortium of Universities  
News and Public Affairs Outlets  
Functional Entity PIOs (i.e., Transportation, Utilities, Health, and Safety)

## I. Introduction

### A. Purpose

The goal of Regional Emergency Support Function (R-ESF) #14—Media Relations and Communication Outreach is to provide accurate, authoritative, and timely regional information to news media representatives before, during, and after a regional incident or regional emergency, thereby supporting the National Capital Region (NCR) partners as they work to protect the health and safety of citizens in the NCR.

Media Relations and Communications Outreach primarily focuses on coordination with local jurisdictions regarding communication of regional information to the public through the media, employers, schools, universities, and community organizations. This regional information will focus on issues related to regional essential services during and after potential or actual regional public emergencies. The information usually will be about issues away from what is happening at the site of a regional incident or regional emergency.

### B. Scope

This R-ESF discusses the policies, responsibilities, and concept of operations for the R-ESF #14 elements before, during, and after a regional incident or regional emergency. R-ESF #14 would be utilized in the event of a local public emergency that has regional or multi-jurisdictional implications.

R-ESF #14 is a support function for a range of authorized parties including the chief administrative officers (CAOs) from the jurisdiction directly affected by the incident, other jurisdictional CAOs, officials/managers of other R-ESFs, or regional experts in functional area R-ESFs.

The mission of R-ESF #14 is to contribute to the well-being of the regional community before, during, and after a public emergency by disseminating accurate, consistent, timely, and easy-to-understand information as well as coordinating communication among affected entities. Specific objectives are to:

Coordinate regional information and message development with government officials and all relevant organizations through the Regional Incident Communication and Coordination System (RICCS).

Assess and convey the nature of a regional incident or regional emergency to the public in a form that is factually accurate as soon as possible.

Provide critical regional information to the media and general public concerning the region's response to the emergency.

Provide critical information concerning public emergency support assistance, including shelter information, mobility and transportation issues, recovery assistance, and local, state, and federal assistance availability.

Provide accurate authoritative regional information to minimize rumors and false information.

## **II. Policies**

- A.** R-ESF #14 will not usurp or override the policies of any federal agency, state government, or local government or jurisdiction.
- B.** Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG) will facilitate coordination among member organizations to ensure that the R-ESF #14 planning and procedures are maintained and in concert with the stated missions and objectives of the Regional Emergency Coordination Plan (RECP).
- C.** COG will facilitate coordination among member organizations before, during, and after a potential or actual regional emergency to foster effective communications and message development.
- D.** EEIs will be reported through the RICCS as required by RECP policy.
- E.** R-ESF #14 will provide a liaison to R-ESF #5, as needed.
- F.** EEIs will be gathered from RICCS and reported to the local jurisdictions and other affected entities as required by RECP policy.
- G.** R-ESF #14 policy directs the RICCS PIO to proactively interact with the news media to provide critical regional information.

### III. Situation

#### A. Regional Emergency Condition

1. The period immediately following a public emergency is critical in setting up the appropriate mechanism necessary to respond to the emergency public information and news requirements generated.
2. After a regional incident or regional emergency, local, state, and federal assistance may be available and a need will exist to inform the public on the types of assistance being offered.
3. Different levels of regional incidents and regional emergencies may require different types of coordination and communication. Three regional emergency condition levels are outlined below:

#### **Regional Incident or Regional Emergency Condition (Worst-case Scenario)**

- In a worst-case regional incident or regional emergency, significant disruptions will be experienced in many essential services on a regional basis, including transportation, communications, power and water systems and public health and safety support systems. Normal means of communications in the affected area may be destroyed or severely disrupted; therefore, only limited and incomplete information may be expected from the area until communications can be restored. Regional communications may also be severely disrupted such that the normal conferencing system is not operational.
- In the event of such a regional incident or regional emergency, the functioning of R-ESF #14 may need to be convened through the use of alternate means of communication (i.e., radio phones, secure phones; or other system defined through R-ESF #2). The RICCS PIO, working in coordination with the appropriate R-ESF #2 contact, will ensure the issuance of said radios, phones, or other communications equipment.
- In the event of such a regional incident or regional emergency, R-ESF # 14 managers/officials might also need the assistance of the managers/officials of R-ESF #12, Energy Annex or emergency power support from R-ESF #3.

**Disruptive Regional Incident or Regional Emergency Condition**

- A disruptive regional incident or regional emergency condition is a multi-jurisdictional event that is not necessarily life threatening to the general public.
- Communications are functional.
- Mobility, public safety, and health may be affected.
- Early release of employees may occur.

**Regional Incident (Threat Condition)**

- A regional incident (threat condition) is a regional incident that threatens the National Capital Region.
- Local and regional officials may not be in charge of deciding when and what information is released.
- Timing and release of information may vary according to the specific nature of the threat.
- Premature release of information may be limited to mitigate threat.

**B. Planning Assumptions**

1. R-ESF #14 will be coordinated closely with any affected jurisdictions and facilitated as required by COG.
2. R-ESF #14 will be coordinated with all affected elements of the region including CAOs to ensure that information disseminated is accurate, timely, and consistent in keeping with the theme “common message, many voices.”
3. There will be a frontline Incident PIO response by the jurisdiction at the scene. R-ESF #14 information will focus on regional impacts generally away from the event; in depth analysis and expert opinions; and media monitoring ability.
4. For regional incidents or regional emergencies, one of two scenarios may govern the functioning of R-ESF #14:

When there is a regional incident or regional emergency at a site within one (or several) jurisdictions, an Incident PIO from that jurisdiction will be the Lead PIO for the incident, and will be responsible for gathering and disseminating information to the media and all other relevant parties. Under this scenario, the RICCS PIO will work to support the Incident PIO as required by providing regional information generally not directly related to what is happening at the site to the media and other relevant parties.

When the regional incident or regional emergency affects the entire region, the RICCS PIO will work with the CAOs, elected officials from the jurisdictions and other subject-matter experts to disseminate information to the media and other relevant parties. Under this scenario, the RICCS PIO will be the lead PIO for the event/incident.

5. Additional coordination and communication with state and federal entities will be required if state or federal response elements are utilized before, during, and after a regional incident or regional emergency.
6. Up-to-date and pre-programmed resource databases maintained by COG will be available to provide established contacts, relationships, and rosters of regional government officials, media, and appropriate community groups and organizations
7. The RICCS PIO will communicate regional impacts (e.g., transportation, mobility, etc.) arising from the regional emergency to affected entities.
8. In the event of a regional threat, some information may be tightly controlled if it is in the interest of law enforcement authorities in order to contain or mitigate the threat. All parties should be aware of the need to protect such information when necessary to the success of the operation.

## **IV. Concept of Coordination**

### **A. General**

1. R-ESF #14 will provide support to authorized parties including the CAO(s) from the jurisdiction directly affected by the incident, other jurisdictional CAOs, officials/managers of other R-ESFs, or regional experts in functional area R-ESFs.

2. The supporting agencies that comprise R-ESF #14 will coordinate and execute their respective media/community relations authorities and program responsibilities during the regional emergency.
3. A primary function of R-ESF #14 is coordination of information among local jurisdictions.
4. R-ESF #14 will establish a capability to receive, collect, coordinate, analyze, synthesize, and disseminate information concerning regional emergency issues through the RICCS in a timely manner.
5. Requests for information regarding emergency regional response issues will be referred through the RICCS to the PIO of the responding jurisdiction.

## **B. Organization**

1. In situations where an incident or regional emergency occurs within one (or several) jurisdictions, the Lead PIO for the incident/emergency will be the affected jurisdiction's PIO. In this situation, the RICCS PIO will support the incident PIO.
2. In situations where an incident is not limited to one (or several) jurisdictions, the RICCS PIO will be the lead PIO for the event/incident and will coordinate with the CAOs, elected officials and other subject matter experts to disseminate information.
3. The RICCS PIO will be initially staffed by the COG Office of Public Affairs, but for major and long-duration regional incidents/emergencies the RICCS PIO function will be carried out by a crisis communication PIO team under contract to and coordinated by COG. This PIO team must be familiar with the region and have all relative contact information and equipment necessary to respond to the event.

The RICCS PIO will be responsible for regional news media management, including dispensing accurate information and background material and arranging for expert interviews and monitoring media reporting of the incident.

The RICCS PIO also will be responsible for dispensing accurate, timely regional information to employers, schools, and universities and community organizations.

4. The RICCS PIO shall be included in any notification and conference calls. The RICCS PIO shall be responsible for working with regional officials to develop a common message and as requested, delivering that

message in a timely manner to the media. Message development will most likely take place during a conference call organized through the RICCS that includes decision makers as well as appropriate PIOs.

### **C. Notification**

Upon notification by COG or any participating R-ESF #14 organization, agency, or jurisdiction of a potential or actual regional incident or regional emergency requiring communications support, RICCS, as requested, will notify the CAOs and R-ESF #14 regional supporting agencies of the incident. If PIOs of any organization are made aware of a potential or actual regional incident or regional emergency through any source, they will notify R-ESF #14 members through RICCS.

### **D. Coordination**

#### **1. Initial Actions**

Before, during, and after a regional incident or regional emergency, the RICCS PIO will be responsible for coordinating with the region's CAOs and PIOs to deliver accurate news information to the media and to develop an appropriate message, analysis, and background material in a timely manner to accompany the news. This will include notification of the media regarding the event, and notification that the region is working together. The RICCS PIO will supplement and complement the incident jurisdiction(s) PIO(s) by providing regional information and regional analysis.

Before, during, or after a regional incident or regional emergency, as requested, the RICCS PIO will be responsible for participating in any conference calls with the region's CAOs, PIOs, other R-ESF clusters, or subject-matter experts.

The CAOs from each jurisdiction will provide information about the region's emergency response efforts and work with elected officials to develop a unified message.

Based on the nature and the extent of the situation, COG or any participating R-ESF #14 organization, agency, or jurisdiction may request a message development conference call to be convened through RICCS to discuss the incident.

The RICCS PIO will notify applicable parties of a message development conference call, facilitate the preparation of a

regional message in the course of the call, and provide the regional message to all appropriate parties.

The RICCS PIO is responsible for providing talking points on regional information/messages for the jurisdictions' Chief Executive Officers and CAOs.

The RICCS PIO is responsible for providing overviews, regional information coordination, information on regional issues (i.e., transportation, health, etc.), coordination of PIO mutual aid, media tracking, background analysis, and analysis of regional effects. Information dissemination regarding non-regional issues is the responsibility of local jurisdictions.

The RICCS PIO is responsible for conducting additional in-depth analysis to complement the message from the local jurisdictions. The RICCS PIO is also responsible for finding experts and information as well as providing interview access to appropriate regional officials and experts.

The RICCS PIO, as requested, shall also provide a media monitoring capability for the region (e.g., contracting for transcripts of radio and TV, collecting copies of print media).

During an emergency, the RICCS PIO will be responsible for coordinating with the region's CAOs to advise and deliver accurate information to schools, employers, universities, and other community organizations. This may include writing and distributing press releases.

The RICCS PIO will be responsible for establishing and directing a regional information operation for employers, community organizations, schools, and universities.

## **2. Continuing Actions**

Additional message development conference calls may be scheduled by the conference call participants or may be requested by COG or any participating R-ESF #14 organization, agency, or jurisdiction as dictated by the ongoing incident.

The RICCS PIO will be responsible for providing news briefings on regional issues as needed.

The RICCS PIO will be responsible for providing information on an on-going basis to employers, schools, universities, and community organizations as well as for receiving input and providing outreach to impacted communities.

The RICCS PIO is responsible for maintaining contact and information exchange with region-wide umbrella organizations as well as with chambers of commerce and other applicable organizations.

### **3. Stand Down**

The CAOs and other decision makers will determine when there is no further need for the continued function of R-ESF #14 and the RICCS PIO.

### **4. After-action Critique**

Within two weeks of stand-down of the regional incident or regional emergency, information for an after-action critique will be gathered by the RICCS Lead PIO and the critique will be discussed at the next regularly scheduled COG Communication Work Group meeting and at the next regularly scheduled COG PIOs Committee meeting.

## **V. Responsibilities**

### **A. R-ESF #14 Participating and Supporting Agencies**

Agencies participating in a regional response will contribute regional EEIs to the RICCS as required by the incident.

### **B. Essential Elements of Information**

1. One of the primary purposes of the RECP is to facilitate the exchange of information among the signatory agencies during emergency situations. R-ESF #5—Information and Planning is responsible for the exchange, analysis, reporting, and dissemination of regional information. R-ESF #5 contains detailed information about the process of information exchange and describes regional EEIs that have been determined as the minimum essential information categories to satisfy coordination needs among the R-ESFs and through the RICCS.
2. From the perspective of R-ESF #14—Media Relations and Communication Outreach, the agencies are responsible for providing the following regional essential elements of information concerning regional

public emergencies involving regional media relations and communications outreach functions:

- Media on scene;
- Status of press releases;
- Information on evacuation, sheltering and food supply;
- What jurisdictions are involved;
- Location of the JIC; who is the lead jurisdiction;
- What information is being passed to the public; how is it being passed;
- Detailed information on the incident;
- Status of hazards involved;
- Status of communications network;
- Communication and coordination efforts being used by the involved jurisdictions;
- Status of media monitoring efforts;
- Status of key personnel;
- Major issues/activities of R-ESFs;
- Resource shortfalls;
- Overall priorities for response;
- Status of upcoming events;
- Social, economic, and political impacts;
- Status of R-ESF activation;
- Historical and demographic information;
- Status (statistics) on recovery programs (human services, infrastructure, Small Business Administration);
- Status and analysis of initial assessments (needs assessments and damage assessments, including preliminary damage assessments);
- Status of efforts under federal emergency operations plans;
- School closures
- Citizen assistance requests; and
- Logistical problems.

## VI. Preparedness Cycle

The Preparedness Cycle is a means of ensuring a high level of readiness for the RECP through continuous improvement in the plans and procedures. The cycle begins with sound planning practices, followed by training of personnel who will be engaged in executing those plans. When personnel have been trained, plans and procedures are tested through exercises or simulations designed to check planning assumptions against a range of scenarios. The performance of the respective organizations is evaluated as a means of refining the plans and the cycle repeats.

**A. Planning**

The COG Communications Work Group supported by the COG PIO Committee is responsible for coordinating planning under R-ESF #14, including review and recommending revisions of R-ESF #14. All participating media relations and community outreach agencies will contribute to the planning of R-ESF #14.

Planning will include a comprehensive assessment of current capabilities in the media relations and community outreach sector and identification of unfunded regional communication emergency response and coordination needs.

Planning will also include design of training programs and exercises by the COG Communications Work Group and COG PIO Committee.

Planning will also include development of a scope of work and contractor selection through COG for the on-call crisis communication PIO team that would serve as the RICCS PIO in major and long duration emergencies.

**B. Training**

Training for this R-ESF shall be conducted in concert with training for jurisdictional emergency operations personnel as well as with training that includes members of other R-ESFs or clusters that address communication and coordination.

Training for jurisdictional PIOs, COG public affairs staff, and the Crisis Communication PIO Team is essential and will be provided on a semi-annual basis.

**C. Exercises**

In order for the RECP to be effective, a series of communications simulations/exercises are conducted on a regularly scheduled basis. The exercise series includes tabletop exercises, functional communications and coordination drills, and field exercises facilitated by COG and supported by other organizations. These exercises will provide opportunities for all PIOs who may be requested to help fill the RICCS PIO role.

**D. Evaluation**

In order to ensure continuous improvement in the media relations and communications outreach function and in the RECP, the plans, policies, and procedures that support operational proficiency are evaluated through real-world experience and exercises.

**E. Corrective Action**

Lessons learned from exercises and real world experiences will be captured in a corrective action system and the issues tracked to ensure that they are resolved and incorporated into plan revisions as appropriate.

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