

SERT PUBLIC INFORMATION SECTION

December 2021

A. PURPOSE

This appendix describes the Public Information Section (also known as the Joint Information System (JIS)) of the State Emergency Response Team (SERT) during activation.

B. MISSION

The Public Information Section (or JIS) is responsible for communicating through print, electronic and social media during SERT activation. This section maintains message templates as necessary and prepares others on an as-needed basis. The JIS insures all necessary emergency information is widely available, accessible and available in multiple languages.

C. ORGANIZATION

The Communications Director reports directly to the Secretary of Public Safety and works directly with the SERT Leader during SERT activation. The Communications Office is organized to rapidly disseminate emergency information and to provide the SERT a public relations arm as described in Tab A. The Emergency Management Public Information Officer coordinates with the NCDPS Communications Office and the Governor's Press Office.

D. TABS

1. SERT Public Information Section

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. PURPOSE

The purpose of this appendix is to provide guidance and procedures to carry out the public information function to support preparation, response and recovery efforts surrounding disasters.

B. SCOPE

This appendix applies all hazards that threaten North Carolina.

II. SITUATION AND ASSUMPTIONS

A. SITUATION

After the occurrence of a disaster, it can be expected that normal means of communications in the affected areas will either be disrupted or incapacitated. Limited and incomplete information may be expected from the disaster area. Normal means of disseminating messages and information to the public may be severely affected or cease to exist, and demand for information concerning the disaster could be overwhelming.

B. ASSUMPTIONS

1. The demand for public information in the disaster area may exceed the capability of the local government. Additional support may be requested from the state. Evacuees being hosted outside the regular media market for their communities will need information regarding impact and re-entry. The State Emergency Response Team (SERT) has primary responsibility for collecting and disseminating this information.
2. Information originally received from the disaster area may be incomplete, vague, erroneous, and/or difficult to confirm.
3. Media communications facilities may suffer extensive destruction and/or loss of power may severely disrupt the normal information flow.

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III. ORGANIZATION AND ASSIGNMENT OF RESPONSIBILITIES

A. LEAD STATE AGENCY

1. NC DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY (NCDPS)

NORTH CAROLINA EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT (NCEM)

- a. Provide the following types of information during emergencies/disasters: location, type, extent of damage, and casualties; state agency response actions; assistance available to disaster victims
- b. Coordinate state emergency public information efforts
- c. Provide a public information representative to field emergency response team operations
- d. Provide news conferences, news releases and social media messages as warranted and in a timely manner
- e. Coordinate consumer protection/information matters with the North Carolina Departments of Justice and Insurance
- f. Coordinate public health messages with the NC Departments of Health and Human Services and Agriculture and Consumer Services
- g. Coordinate with the Federal Public Information Officer (PIO) during a presidentially declared emergency or disaster
- h. Use the Emergency Alert System (EAS) and Wireless Emergency Alerts (WEA) as necessary and appropriate to disseminate emergency information to the public

COMMUNICATIONS OFFICE

- a. Coordinate with public information officers of business and industry involved in the response/recovery efforts
- b. Use the media to disseminate public information as necessary
- c. Coordinate with other agencies to ensure accurate and current information is released
- d. Serve in a public information support role to state agencies in disaster in which their agency is the lead agency for response

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- e. Develop, maintain, and conduct a program for dissemination to the media and the public, information relating to specific disasters and recommended protective actions
- f. Coordinate with Donations Management on release of information concerning needed volunteer services and goods

B. SUPPORTING STATE AGENCIES

1. OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

GOVERNOR'S PRESS OFFICE

- a. Provide public information regarding emergency actions taken

2. STATE GOVERNMENT PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICES

- a. Provide public information regarding emergency actions taken
- b. Coordinate public information activities with the SERT and use the Joint Information System prior to release to ensure consistency of information/instructions to the public
- c. Staff the State EOC as appropriate for the situation

IV. CONCEPT OF OPERATIONS

A. GENERAL

The NC Department of Public Safety Communications Office will serve as lead agency for coordination of public information activities. When response to a disaster situation is confined to one or two departments, the communications offices of those departments will be in demand from reporters and news organizations. The Department of Public Safety will support those agencies as needed and will assist in coordination of emergency public information.

B. NOTIFICATION

The NCEM Duty Officer will notify the Emergency Management PIO and the Department's Communications Duty Officer that an emergency has occurred or that such potential exists. According to the severity and nature of the situation, public information support agencies will also be notified.

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C. RESPONSE ACTIONS

1. INITIAL

- a. Distribute messages out via traditional and social media as warranted.
- b. Staff EOC as needed.
- c. Conduct initial press briefing.

2. CONTINUING

- a. Provide trained public information personnel to support local response and recovery efforts.
- b. Provide updates to news media on disaster situation and actions the state is taking regarding the situation.
- c. Share accurate information with the NC 211 as necessary.
- d. Coordinate with SERT sections to ensure accurate and current information is released to the public.
- e. Monitor trends and rumors within the NC 211; take action to correct rumors and erroneous information.

D. RECOVERY ACTIONS

1. INITIAL

- a. Coordinate with Donations Management to determine what volunteer goods and services are most needed in the disaster area.
- b. Provide coverage for the Joint Field Office (JFO) and/or the Joint Federal/State Information Center (JIC), as necessary.

2. CONTINUING

- a. Continue to coordinate with local governments and state agencies on recovery efforts.
- b. Coordinate with state and local agencies and, using an outreach program, provide emergency information to individuals, families,

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business and industry directly or indirectly affected by the disaster. Information should include news about safety of structures, food, location of medical aid and shelters, etc.

V. DIRECTION, CONTROL AND COORDINATION

1. LOCAL

Local governments designate a public information officer to coordinate emergency public information during disasters and to carry out public education programs during pre-disaster periods. During disasters, the County EOC serves as a central coordinating center for public information. Local governments will develop procedures for carrying out the public information function. When the demand for public information exceeds the capability of the local government, additional support may be requested from the state.

2. STATE

The State EOC will serve as the central coordinating facility for receiving and disseminating public information. Communications officers (also referred to as PIOs) from lead and support agencies will locate in the State EOC's JIC as required to facilitate the flow of public information. The SERT Public Information Section will coordinate with other sections since the protective actions taken during disasters involve their resources.

3. FEDERAL

After a Federally declared disaster, a State/Federal JIC will be opened to provide response and recovery information to individuals, families, business and industry directly or indirectly affected by the disaster. The Department of Public Safety Communications Office will coordinate with NCEM and FEMA to ensure there is adequate PIO representation in the Joint Field Office to help coordinate public information needs during recovery.