

Richland County Emergency Operations Plan

ESF 15: EMERGENCY PUBLIC INFORMATION

Primary Agency: Richland County EMA

Supporting Agencies: Richland County Dispatch Center
Richland County Sheriff's Office
Jurisdiction Fire, EMS, and Law Enforcement Agencies

1. PURPOSE

The purpose of this ESF is to describe the dissemination of information to the public during emergencies. This includes warning and notification prior to an incident, \ post-incident updates, and distribution of crisis information during response and recovery. It also outlines information sharing between government and non-government organizations and outlines a process for information flows during disasters and large-scale emergencies.

2. SITUATION AND ASSUMPTIONS

a. Situation

- i. Emergencies and disasters that pose a danger to the public require warnings and incident updates to be shared with the public and affected communities.
- ii. These incidents also require internal notification within the emergency response agencies and jurisdictions so that a safe response can be implemented.
- iii. Individuals, responders, and officials are expected to maintain general situational awareness of weather and other conditions that may cause emergencies/disasters in Richland County. Each person is individually responsible for heeding warnings in a reasonable and wise manner.
- iv. Warnings and notifications will be disseminated to the public via mass media, social media, emergency alert systems, and other systems utilized by the county or individual jurisdictions for emergencies.
- v. Redundant notification methods are critical to ensure the quick and efficient notification of as many people as possible.

- vi. Richland County does not have a countywide emergency notification system. The county uses WENS (Wireless Emergency Notification System) on a limited basis. Most public notification occurs through local media, social media and outdoor warning sirens.
- vii. Individual jurisdictions may have a local emergency notification system in place to provide emergency information to residents who have signed up to receive this information.
- viii. Richland County has 42 outdoor warning sirens in key locations throughout the county. Each siren is owned, operated, and maintained by the jurisdiction in which it is located. Siren activation is performed by the Richland County dispatch center.
- ix. The purpose of outdoor warning sirens is to notify people who are outside to seek shelter and additional information about the situation. They are used primarily for tornado warnings but can be used to warn the public of other life-threatening events, such as non-tornado high-wind events or hazardous materials incidents requiring evacuation or shelter-in-place.
- x. Outdoor warning sirens are designed to be audible for an outdoor range of approximately one square mile, depending on wind conditions.
- xi. All available means will be used to disseminate warnings and notifications to the public.
- xii. Regular telephone and radio systems will be utilized to notify public officials, EOC staff, and emergency personnel so long as these systems are operational.
- xiii. Many public buildings, such as schools, nursing homes, institutions, and places of public assembly, utilize weather alert radios. The EMA encourages the use of weather radios through its public education efforts.
- xiv. Individuals are encouraged to utilize or follow multiple warning systems to ensure receipt of emergency information. Systems could include, but are not limited to, NOAA weather radios, social media, cellular phones and appropriate applications, landlines, television service through cable or satellite services, etc.

- xv. Public officials maintain situational awareness of hazards and impending threats to their jurisdiction and should actively participate in watches, standbys, and alerts.

b. Assumptions

- i. Not all warning methods will reach all individuals; therefore, multiple methods should be employed to reach the greatest number of individuals with any critical information.
- ii. Some warnings will be received but ignored or not acted upon in a timely fashion by those who receive them.
- iii. Outdoor warning devices will be audible primarily to those who are **out-of-doors** and within approximately a one-mile radius of the warning device.
- iv. Weather conditions, such as storm noise and wind, may diminish the effectiveness of sound transmission by the outdoor warning sirens. Sirens may also be inoperable or fail due to mechanical issues.
- v. Persons who are indoors or inside vehicles may not hear outdoor warning devices due to sound isolation, other cabin/house noise, or other interference with the outdoor device signal.
- vi. Limitations in wireless service areas, landline and Internet service interruptions, and other potential communications system failures can make the delivery of emergency warnings difficult or impossible.
- vii. Social media may be an effective mechanism to disseminate warnings but there is little opportunity to track if messages are received.
- viii. Social media warnings can be shared very quickly; therefore, all posted messages should include the date, time, and location of warning to ensure accuracy as the information is shared.
- ix. While print media is not generally effective for warnings, newspapers and radio stations have the ability to post warnings on their websites and social media pages, providing more immediate public access.
- x. Weather radios transmit consistent information from the official National Weather Service (NWS) personnel and are accurate and timely notification systems.

- xi. Door-to-door notification may occur when evacuation is ordered and rapid compliance is necessary.

3. CONCEPT OF OPERATIONS

a. General Overview

- i. All agencies with responsibility for public safety, welfare, critical infrastructure, or key services should maintain situational awareness of current conditions and potential incidents.
- ii. Agencies and/or officials who should always maintain reasonable situational awareness includes, but is not limited to:
 - 1. Richland County EMA
 - 2. Richland County Commissioners
 - 3. Richland County Sheriff's Office
 - 4. County and jurisdiction utility and infrastructure departments
 - 5. Municipal mayors and administrators
 - 6. First responders, including fire departments, EMS services, and law enforcement agencies
 - 7. Disaster volunteer organizations, such as American Red Cross, ARES, CERT, and MRC
 - 8. Richland Public Health Commissioner
 - 9. Hospital Administrators and key personnel
 - 10. Utility company representatives
- iii. The general public will be notified of major emergencies in the following process:
 - 1. Activation of outdoor warning devices
 - 2. Activation of the EAS within State of Ohio guidelines
 - 3. Local news broadcasts and social and print media

4. Weather alert radios
 5. Door-to-door notification by volunteers and/or first responders
 6. Mobile public address systems may be employed in neighborhood-to-neighborhood notifications.
- iv. Warning and notifications for hearing impaired or non-English speaking persons can be accomplished by the following means:
 1. Door-to-door or mobile public address notification by volunteers and/or first responders.
 2. Special foreign language broadcast in conjunction with standard pre-scripted text over the Emergency Alert System
 3. Pre-scripted text appealing to local officials and area residents to assist in the notification of the hearing impaired.
 - v. A Public Information Officer (PIO) will be designated by the Incident Commander to oversee the distribution of public information.

b. Relationship Between Levels of Government

- i. Warning and notification is a joint effort between dispatch, law enforcement, emergency management, and other first responders.
- ii. The Dispatch Center and/or Sheriff's Office will receive warnings regarding severe weather, technological threats, and other emergencies affecting the county.
- iii. First responders will be dispatched to incidents through the county's dispatch system.
- iv. The EMA will notify the appropriate jurisdiction officials and agencies.
- v. In large-scale incidents or when state resource support is anticipated, , the EMA will notify the Ohio EMA of a local incident.

c. Phases of Emergency Management

- i. Preparedness

1. Warning and notification activities should be incorporated into training and exercises. All response agencies and government entities should participate in these activities to ensure proper dissemination of critical information during a disaster.
2. Electronic and capital equipment necessary for the dissemination of warnings and notifications should be selected based upon functionality, maintained properly, and used effectively.

ii. Response

1. All available equipment, software, and communications systems capabilities should be utilized to issues critical warning information.
2. A Public Information Officer (PIO) should be designated to coordinate messaging and ensure that communication with the public occurs through traditional media, social media, and other available mechanisms.
3. Communication between response agencies, the EOC, and other involved parties should be prioritized.

iii. Recovery

1. Communication should be prioritized during incident recovery as it was during response.

iv. Mitigation

1. New communication tools, social media platforms, and other opportunities to improve the delivery of emergency warnings should be explored to reduce the time it takes to issue warnings, increase the number of persons who receive a warning, and improve the communication process.

4. DIRECTION AND CONTROL

- a. The Dispatch Center and Sheriff's Office will receive and relay all information regarding an emergency or disaster to the EMA; the agencies will work together to ensure appropriate and timely distribution of information to first responders and the public.

- b. The EMA is the primary agency that will oversee the distribution of information across public and internal channels. The Sheriff's Office will be the agency assigned with distribution of information, but the EMA (as coordinator of the EOC) will be responsible for keeping an overview and status on the dissemination of information.
- c. The PIO will work with the EMA to ensure that all information releases and media messages are consistent and accurate and that all information outlets have been advised of the proper information for distribution.

5. ORGANIZATION AND ASSIGNMENT OF RESPONSIBILITY

- a. Richland County EMA
 - i. Monitor severe weather situations, warnings, and alerts through the National Weather Service and other appropriate agencies.
 - ii. Provide timely warning information to the public through identified public information channels.
 - iii. Communicate warning information to jurisdictions and response agencies throughout the county.
- b. Richland County Dispatch Center
 - i. Activate any appropriate outdoor warning devices as authorized.
 - ii. Notify the EMA of weather warnings and siren activation.
 - iii. Notify appropriate first response agencies, including law enforcement, fire departments, EMS, and others.
- c. Richland County Sheriff's Office
 - i. Coordinate with dispatch, EMA, and other law enforcement agencies to communicate warnings to the public.
- d. Public Information Officer
 - i. Coordinate press releases and public information to ensure accuracy and consistency in messaging.

- ii. Communicate with the media through press conferences, news releases, and other appropriate means to provide timely situation updates and critical information to affected communities.

6. ADMINISTRATION AND LOGISTICS

- a. This ESF should be reviewed regularly and following any significant incident. Recommended changes should be submitted to the EMA for consideration.
- b. Richland County’s outdoor warning sirens require ongoing regular and ongoing maintenance. Maintenance and repair is the responsibility of the jurisdiction that owns the device.
- c. The county’s outdoor warning siren system can be modified at any time through the addition or elimination of devices. This may occur for a variety of reasons, such as funding availability for the purchase and installation of new sirens, the cost to repair and maintain the devices, and/or a jurisdictions’ ability to maintain their siren.

7. RESOURCE REQUIREMENTS FOR ESF

- a. As technology changes, the methods for issuing warnings to the public will evolve. Warning and notification activities should be included in regular training, drills, and exercises to ensure this activity is executed effectively and efficiently.

8. ADDENDA

There are no addenda for this ESF.

9. AUTHENTICATION

Date of Adoption

Richland County EMA Director