

ANNEX 15 to Florence County EOP  
ESF 15  
External Affairs

PRIMARY: Florence County Emergency Management

SECONDARY: Public Information Officers from other Florence County Offices  
Florence County Risk Manager  
Florence County Parks and Recreation Director

I. Introduction

During an emergency or disaster, the County Public Information Officer(s) (PIO) will be the official spokesperson for the county. This is necessary to ensure that the county speaks with one clear and unified voice during emergency situations.

The primary purpose of the PIO will be to provide information to the general public, local business and industry and other governmental agencies, regarding the disaster, how it impacts them and what steps they can take to protect themselves and their property. This information includes warning citizens of impending danger, the status of active disasters, pertinent information regarding damage to their communities and recovery assistance available.

II. Concept of Operations

A. Pre-disaster Operations and Training:

1. Florence County does not have a single full-time PIO. During non-emergency situations several individuals are authorized to fill this role for their respective county departments. The EM Director or his designee fills the PIO role within Emergency Management during normal day-to-day operations and during limited emergencies not involving activation of the EOC.
2. To ensure trained individuals are available to fill the duties of PIO during an emergency, the four county employees who have been assigned this additional responsibility have attended the FEMA Basic Public Information Officer Course (G-290). These individuals are also included in county level training exercises in their PIO function.

## B. Disaster Operations:

1. During EOC activation the PIO will normally operate from the Emergency Management Director's administrative office, located at the EOC. This work area will allow the PIO access to EOC activities while still affording some privacy for coordination with the media. The PIO will work closely with the EM Director or EOC Manager to ensure they stay abreast of the current disaster situation and on-going operations. Computer, printer, copier, phone, fax and basic office supplies are pre-positioned for the use of the PIO at the EOC.
2. The PIO will be responsible for establishing a media staging/work area in the bay of the EMD Annex at 1290 Justice Way, Effingham, SC. This location will allow easy access for the media to the EOC as well as providing parking and a climate controlled work area with public facilities for media use.
3. The PIO will be responsible for escorting media members in the EOC and for arranging interviews with EOC staff. The media will not be allowed in the EOC during briefings but may be allowed in the EOC during operations if, in the opinion of the EM Director or EOC Manager, their presence will not interfere with ongoing operations.
4. During large scale or long lasting events effecting multiple jurisdictions or agencies, a Joint Information Center (JIC) will be established by the PIO. This JIC will be located in the upstairs class room of the EMD Annex. This location provides work space as well as internet and telephone access for the various departmental PIOs.
5. The county PIO will disseminate timely written and verbal information to the citizens of Florence County. The PIO will utilize all available media sources, to include radio, television, newspaper, Internet, ReachSC and any other feasible source. Additionally, all Press Releases developed by the PIO will be posted on the county's website as well as WebEOC. Before release of any information, the PIO will verify it correctness through the EOC Manager or appropriate ESF staff. To prevent spread of rumors, the PIO will also verify information or questions from the public with the EOC Manager or ESF staff.
6. Another method of communication to the general public open to the PIO is the use of the Emergency Alerting System (EAS). EAS will be used based on the direction and approval of the EM Director or EOC Manager. The PIO will prepare the message/release and then SCEMD (803) 737-8500 will be contacted. They, in turn, will transmit the message to the radio/TV/NWS station offices for broadcast.

7. As with all emergency operations, Life Safety is first priority. Therefore, press releases or messages which deal with life safety issues will always receive the highest priority and will be transmitted with all possible speed.
8. The PIO will take all appropriate actions to ensure emergency information is communicated in a manner that allows those with special needs to get the information. To accomplish this, every effort will be made to obtain a Spanish interpreter and a sign language interpreter during emergency operations. The PIO also has access to language interpreters through “Language Line”, a commercial interpreter service. In the event the PIO needs to communicate with hearing impaired groups, TDD’s are available in the 911 center and EAS messages/written press releases or information posted on the county website can be used.
9. Based on the nature of the disaster, the PIO may operate from the Mobile Command and Communications vehicle or from an Incident Command Post (ICP) established elsewhere within the county. Regardless of the PIO’s physical location, their primary duties and responsibilities remain the same.
10. The County PIO will not attempt to speak on behalf of non-county agencies but rather will refer inquires to the appropriate agency. When a Joint Information Center (JIC) is established the PIO will be prepared to participate. The PIO will be prepared to coordinate with the following to ensure accurate and timely information is provided to the public:
  - a. Local Municipality PIO’s
  - b. State and Federal Agency PIO’s
  - c. Volunteer Organization PIO’s
  - d. Other Emergency Services PIO’s

### III. Specific Responsibilities

The EM Director, the Natural hazards Coordinator or the Technological hazards Coordinator will serve as the PIO during day to day operations or during limited activations of the EOC. The Director of Parks and Recreation and the Risk Manager will serve as the county Public Information Officers (PIO) during major disaster events or full activation of the EOC.

The PIO will be supplemented with additional administrative staff where possible. This additional staff will be drawn from the Florence County Administrative staff and the Human Resources Department.

IV. State Interface

The PIO is authorized to coordinate directly with the State PIO at the SEOC in Columbia or with the PIO of any state, municipal or federal agency to obtain complete and accurate information.