

Annex B – Communications

PURPOSE

The purpose of this annex is to outline communications responsibilities, capabilities and procedures to be utilized in the event of an emergency or disaster in the Houston County jurisdiction. This annex also describes the methods for communications between on-scene command, the 911 Communications Center, and the Emergency Operations Center.

Interoperability describes a multi-disciplinary system of equipment, training and education for public safety communications. Interoperable communications allows for local, state, federal, private and public agencies to communicate and share information during times of emergency, through systems and coordination in the 911 Communications Center.

The overall responsible party for implementing and amending this annex is the Sheriff's Office.

STANDARD OPERATING GUIDELINES

Any communications method will have a secondary and tertiary route in case of primary method failure.

SITUATION AND ASSUMPTIONS

SITUATION

- The Emergency Operations Center must be capable of providing rapid and reliable means of communications to support emergency operations for all emergency situations.
- The 911 Communications Center is the primary Public Safety Answering Point (PSAP) for the county and cities within the county. Calls for services are received by the 911 Communications Center, prioritized and then assigned to public safety agencies.
- Fire, Law Enforcement and EMS communications are integrated with the 911 Communications Center and the Emergency Operations Center.
- All emergency services interface through radio channels or leased phone lines in the 911 Communications Center.
- The loss of some or all telephone services will reduce or eliminate the effectiveness of the 911 Communications Center and Emergency Operations Center public information lines.
- Emergency communications are accomplished through established partnerships with government agencies, non-government partners and local businesses.
- Communication methods include public safety radios, cell phones, landline telephones, emails, fax machines, pagers, and text messaging.

ASSUMPTIONS

- A natural disaster may disrupt service to all or a major portion of both the telephone and radio systems.

- A technological disaster may disrupt a local exchange in the telephone system.
- Incidents involving radiation or chemical hazards may require evacuation of significant numbers of surrounding populations. Such evacuations may require extensive coordination of intra-state and intra-county communications and may exceed normal radio communications capabilities.
- Traditional methods of communications may be unavailable (i.e. phone lines overloaded).
- Existing radio communications capabilities from departments throughout the county may not be compatible but with the assistance of the 911 communications equipment can be patched together without undue delay.
- In the event of a major loss of communications, a mobile communications vehicle may be available to support emergency operations.

CONCEPT OF OPERATIONS

^[15]GENERAL

Houston County and its townships and municipalities have adopted the National Incident Management System (NIMS) to manage all emergencies and disasters regardless of the size or complexity of the incident. On-scene operations are managed in accordance with the Incident Command System (ICS) and are under the direction of the Incident Commander. An Incident Commander will most likely come from the department that has jurisdictional responsibility for the incident. Most often this person will be from a fire, law enforcement or public works department. The primary method for communication amongst emergency responders will be public safety radios and cell phones. Back-up methods include landline telephones and point to point communications with public safety radios.

The county dispatch center will receive initial emergency calls. Dispatchers gather information from the callers and take appropriate action to notify emergency responders and other response organizations. The dispatch center is operated 24 hours a day, 365 days a year and is supported by an automatic generator to maintain continuity of operations. The generator has the capability to support uninterrupted services of electricity, ventilation, security and sanitation with a fuel supply for up to 7 days, and is tested on a regular basis. In case of power and generator failure, an alternative would be to transfer 911 services to Fillmore County. With some modifications and programming changes, the same system used by Houston County dispatchers would be available to use in Fillmore County.

Public safety personnel and other responders maintain communications with the dispatch center throughout the duration of the event to communicate arrival and departure information, to request additional resources, to activate mutual aid agreements, to alert emergency management, and more. This communication link is critical in keeping the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) apprised of an on-scene situation. In addition to

information that is conveyed through the dispatch center, responder representatives will be located in the EOC to be a direct link to the departments on the scene. This communication will likely occur through public safety radios and/or telephone.

The primary method for communications in the EOC will be telephone, public safety radio, and email. Secondary forms of communication include word of mouth through messengers. Communications between the EOC and all outside activities will be by telephone, public safety radios, or email. Fax machines are also available in the justice center, where the EOC is housed. If all of these methods or communications fail, messengers/runners may be utilized.

Ensuring Interoperable Communications

All intra-county radio users are equipped and trained in the use of the ARMER 800 MHz radio system. This includes law enforcement, fire, EMS, and public works departments. Various shared talk groups and standardized regional and incident command layouts are programmed into all entity radios. Local radio layouts, although not necessarily identical, were programmed with consistency in mind.

The dispatch center is equipped with necessary local, regional, and statewide talk groups. Additionally, the center's staff is trained in the patching of 800 MHz resources upon request. The limited ability to patch VHF radio systems to 800 MHz radio system is in place.

Dissemination of security sensitive information during response and recovery operations will be done in accordance with policies and procedures established by local law enforcement, fire departments and EMS providers throughout the County/City. Some methods for sharing secure information include encryption of email and radio talk groups as well as discussion that occur face to face whilst in private meetings. The determination for what is considered security sensitive information will be deemed appropriately by the public safety officials at the time of the event.

The Emergency Operations Plan has been designed based on the NIMS model utilizing the Incident Command System. Communication is part of the Logistics Section, therefore the Communications Unit Leader will report directly to the Logistics Section Chief. The order of succession for the Communications Unit Leader will be established by the Sheriff as required. The organization for emergency communication is identical to that which is used by law enforcement, fire departments, EMS, and support organizations during normal daily operations and during emergencies.

ORGANIZATION AND ASSIGNMENT OF RESPONSIBILITIES

LINES OF SUCCESSION

1. Lines of Succession for the County Board and Emergency Management Director are outlined in the Basic Plan.

2. Lines of Succession for each department and agency director shall be done in accordance with operating guidelines and delegations of authority within each department.

[10] EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT DIRECTOR

The Emergency Management Director will be responsible to notify Government Officials of any disaster or need to activate the EOC, as well as the need to send out emergency alerts and warnings.

SHERIFF'S OFFICE

The Houston County Sheriff's Office coordinates county-wide public safety communications through 911 and public safety radios and supervises the overall operations of the dispatch center. The dispatch center makes contact and establishes a link with adjacent jurisdictions, as necessary. Emergency communications support is provided as requested. Normal day-to-day dispatching is administered by each responsible department in accordance with established procedures and agreements with the Sheriff's Office. The Sheriff's Office is responsible for coordinating communications amongst responding agencies in support of response and recovery.

DISPATCH CENTER

The Houston County dispatch center is made up approximately 16 dispatchers who work various shifts, including weekends and holidays. The center dispatches for 5 area police departments, 7 fire/rescue departments and 3 ambulance services. Dispatchers enter calls for all agencies that they serve, and thus can check for previous hazards or prior calls from the location, and can monitor the officers' location and status through their system. The radio control screen allows instant access to the deputies on duty, the police, fire, and ambulance services and Public Works Departments.

CITY FIRE DEPARTMENTS

The Houston County Fire Departments are made up of 7 volunteer departments throughout the county. The fire departments respond to calls for service including fire suppression, emergency medical response, fire prevention, fire investigation, fire inspection, technical rescue and auto extrication. Emergency fire requests are received via 911 through the dispatch center. The center then pages the appropriate fire department to respond. All Fire Departments operate on 800 MHz ARMER system radios.

CITY POLICE DEPARTMENTS

Houston County has 5 municipal police departments that are dispatched through the 911 Communications Center. The police departments respond to calls for service including criminal and non-criminal offenses, traffic issues, and medical emergencies. The police departments have the interoperable abilities, within its current portable and mobile radio programming, to utilize local, regional and statewide talk groups.

ADMINISTRATION AND LOGISTICS

- Records will be maintained on the use of all equipment, whether owned, leased, rented or borrowed. These records/contracts will be used as a basis for possible recovery of emergency operations expenses from a responsible party or for potential reimbursement from the State or Federal Government. All records/contracts generated for communications should be provided to the Finance and Administration Section for cost recovery and reimbursement documentation.
- Each department, agency or service of government will provide for the maintenance of records during an emergency. These records include work hours, equipment hours, supplies and materials consumed, injuries to personnel, and damage to public facilities and equipment. All records generated during an emergency will be collected and maintained in an orderly manner so a record of actions taken is preserved for use in determining response costs, settling claims and updating emergency plans and procedures.

PLAN DEVELOPMENT AND MAINTENANCE

Post Incident Review

- Following activation of the EOC or after use of this plan, the Emergency Management Director will coordinate a review of this annex to identify needed improvements, procedure changes, personnel and facility changes, or resource needs.

Training and Exercises

- Personnel identified in the Emergency Operations Plan and those who staff the Emergency Operations Center will receive National Incident Management System (NIMS) and Incident Command System (ICS) training. Although some personnel may receive more advanced training, everyone will receive IS-100 and IS-700. Personnel who staff the EOC shall also receive appropriate training on their role in the EOC and on the operation of the facility. This training should be arranged by the Emergency Management Director.
- Houston County follows the Emergency Management Performance Grant (EMPG) exercise requirements to exercise and evaluate the Emergency Operations Plan.

AUTHORITY AND REFERENCES