WILSON COUNTY EMERGENCY OPERATIONS PLAN
PUBLIC INFORMATION
(ESF-5)

I. PURPOSE

This section describes the process for staffing, operating and maintaining a public information system in the event of an emergency.

II. SITUATION AND ASSUMPTIONS

A. Situation

1. The broadcast and print media will be relied upon to assist in the dissemination of public information to the general public. The County has no control over when or how the broadcast and print media will disseminate information. The County also utilizes a third party vendor product (Code Red) to disseminate certain emergency information. This system is capable of sending voice messages and text messages. While some phone numbers are available to the County through the telephone system, for the system to be totally effective, citizens need to register through the County website to provide cell phone numbers and request text messaging. Citizens with hearing disabilities need to register for text messaging if desired. The County does not utilize sirens for public warning.

2. The Public Information Officer and Emergency Management Director have the capability to utilize the Emergency Alert System (EAS) to deliver information to the public.

3. Wilson County may receive extensive out of county media coverage during emergency/disaster situations.

4. Scanner radios are used extensively by the residents of the county. This provides another option in relaying information to the public.

5. PIOs are appointed in many departments within County Government and the City of Wilson as well as other jurisdictions. These PIOs work together during major events through the Joint Information System concept in order to present a consolidated message throughout our organizations. PIOs attend the LEPC meetings regularly and therefore share routine information as well.

B. Assumptions

1. The County Public Information Officer (PIO) will be designated by the County Manager.

2. Demands for information may be heavy; therefore, sufficient numbers of trained staff will be provided to respond to questions from the public.

3. Special interests groups in the county may disagree with official public information.

4. The public may accept rumors, hearsay, and half-truths as valid information which

may cause fear and confusion.

5. Local print and broadcast media will cooperate in printing and broadcasting detailed disaster related instructions to the public.

6. Emergencies and disasters, which impact the county or its municipalities, may be of interest to media sources beyond the county and state.

III. CONCEPT OF OPERATION

A. General

1. Public information for law enforcement emergencies will be handled by the Sheriff or chief law enforcement officer with assistance from the County PIO as necessary.

2. Ongoing public education programs will be conducted to increase public awareness in the following:

   a. Potential hazards of the county
   b. Family preparedness
   c. Shelter locations
   d. Flood prone areas
   f. Necessary action to be taken by the public
   g. Emergency Management function

3. The County Manager or Emergency Management Coordinator must authorize the use of the Emergency Broadcast System.

4. The National Weather Service will issue weather bulletins as necessary directly to the Wilson County Emergency Communications Center, and to the media for public release.

5. During emergency/disaster situations, Policy/Administration Group decisions and general information advisories are prepared on a timely basis and released to the media.

6. Action will be taken to correct identified errors in information released by the media, or rumors about the emergency situation.

7. Hard copy news releases are disseminated to the media and appropriate county and/or municipal officials. The Division of Emergency Management, Central Branch Office will be faxed news releases as appropriate.

8. Wilson County will practice a progressive approach for the dissemination of information to isolated and non-English speaking populations during and following emergency events.

9. The magnitude of the disaster may require innovative means of communications to inform the public. For example: aircraft banners, balloons and billboards.

10. Content of all news releases will be cleared through the PIO before released to the media and public.

11. A Joint Information Center will be established when events cross jurisdictional boundaries or when numerous agencies are involved.

(27 March 2012)