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. Typically, the small towns do not have a designated PIO. At their request, Wilson County will offer assistance if needed.

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.

7. PIOs have in their possession, pre-scripted releases for various incidents.

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 through the designated PIO.

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 provided 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 Incident Commander and 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. The Wilson County JIC designated facility is the Lida Blalock Building at the Wilson County Health Department.

12. In the event of a major incident that impacts a large portion of Wilson County, the County PIO or deignee and PIO's from other jurisdictions or agencies will work together to disseminate information to the media and the public. **If needed, the Wilson County PIO will request PIO assistance through Wilson County EM. At this time, a request for assistance will be entered into NC SPARTA.**

13. It is not necessary for the PIO's to meet face to face if communications are such that the PIOs can talk freely either by telephone conference call or video.

14. For the purpose of joint press priefings, the JIC facility will be utilized.

15. Wilson County PIO or designee will maintain contact with the PIO for the NC Division of Emergency Management. Information will be shared between the County and the State in order to provide as much information as is possible.

16. Copies of all media releases will be maintained for future review. Copies of media releases will be forwarded to the Wilson County Board of Commissioners.

17. Wilson County Emergency Management will provide logistical support to the JIC/JIS.

IV. PIO General Responsibilities

Agencies have different policies and procedures relative to the handling of public information. The following are the major responsibilities of the Public Information Officer that would generally apply on any incident:
a. Review Common ICS Responsibilities
b. Determine from the Incident Commander if there are any limits on information release.
c. Develop material for use in media briefings.
d. Obtain Incident Commander's approval of media releases.
e. Coordinate with Joint Information Center (JIC) if established.
f. Inform media and conduct media briefings.
g. Arrange for tours and other interviews or briefings that may be required.
h. Obtain media information that may be useful to incident planning.
i. Maintain current information summaries and/or displays on the incident and provide information on status of incident to assigned personnel.
j. Assign Assistant Public Information Officers as appropriate.
k. Maintain Unit/Activity Log (ICS Form 214).