

THE PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICER (PIO)

The City has a responsibility for providing the public with accurate, timely, and consistent information in an emergency. Informing the public is a special priority during emergency incidents, and the public expects timely information about the emergency.

The objectives of Emergency Public Information are to:

- rapidly provide the general public with information about the emergency and instructions about what they should do.
- provide the media with accurate, timely information about the extent of the emergency and response efforts.

To meet these objectives, public information officers (PIOs) at all levels must work together and with media representatives to disseminate information and instructions to the public when emergencies occur. The PIO team should:

- provide a PIO planning/work area in or near the EOC.
- coordinate with the Incident Command Post staff to establish a Media Photo Site for visual access near the scene of the incident.
- establish a Media Information Center for briefing the news media.
- establish a rumor control function to respond to public and media inquiries.
- coordinate with the Liaison Officer to handle VIP tours.

The **primary role** of the PIO is to disseminate emergency instructions and critical information through the media to the public.

A **secondary function** is to provide the public (through the media) with accurate and complete information regarding incident cause, size, status, resources committed and potential short or long-term impacts, if known. For large incidents or incidents involving numerous response agencies, PIOs from all responding agencies should combine to form a public information team under the direction of the designated PIO in the EOC.

PIO TEAMS

PIO Teams consist of representatives from all departments who will support the Public Information function. All involved departments will name individuals who can speak and work as a representative of the City and the individual departments. These departments' representatives will work together under the general direction of the PIO function coordinator so that all information released is through coordinated effort.

EMERGENCY NOTIFICATION

Emergency notification instructions and advisories are primarily the City's responsibility. During the initial emergency phase, the PIO will assist in alerting the public to hazards and for providing emergency instructions regarding protective actions to be taken to avoid injury and protecting property. These public notifications should be made as soon as possible through the broadcast media to provide adequate time for response.

Notifications should include local and national wire services. To notify news media of a breaking story, give the following information:

- Your name
- City of Santa Monica
- Type of incident
- Safety information
- Location of incident (include Thomas Brothers map coordinates).
- Any additional information for the news media (command post location, equipment on scene, best access route, etc.).

The PIOs will release emergency public information locally and provide status information to PIOs at higher levels of government. This information should be coordinated with all agencies involved in the incident.

EMERGENCY PHASE

During this phase the public information system is mobilized to provide public information of a pending hazard or to respond to media and public inquiries.

The PIO is an essential part of the field level and EOC Command Staff. The PIO function should be established as soon as possible to ensure prompt access to all current emergency response and health or safety information available. On-scene PIOs will coordinate with the PIO in the EOC.

Rapid dissemination of information is especially critical in a breaking event. The information should advise the public of the potential hazards and the nature of the hazard, area involved, evacuations and traffic control.

Rumor Control

Government is responsible for providing information and instructions to the public along with establishing an effective rumor control system. It is important to establish Rumor Control to respond to direct public and media inquiry.

MEDIA INFORMATION

Media Information Center

Media accommodation begins with access to the scene through a Media Information Center. It is important to remember that the media is an important element of emergency response as they can provide critical information to the Incident Commander/Emergency Operations Director and staff as well as the public.

A Media Information Center should be established to provide warning or precautionary information and to release information:

- On general safety instructions to the public via the media.

- Relating to the response activities on scene, medical, shelter, road/street closures and damage assessment.
- On the status of the incident, deaths (**when confirmed by the Coroner**), injuries, displaced persons, damages, hospital status, school status and major problems.

The Media Information Center should be clearly marked if located within police lines. It should be staffed by qualified PIOs and open to all authorized news media representatives. The Media Information Center should be closed to the general public. Appropriate government officials and incident specialists may be brought into the Media Information Center area for interviews.

When working with the media it is important to provide:

- Location of media center(s)
- Best access routes to media center
- Location of media access photo sites
- Times of news briefings
- Airspace restrictions
- Street closures/detours
- Shelter and hospital addresses
- Hazardous materials dangers
- Language assistance for non-English speaking journalists
- Scheduled media tours of incident area (coordinate with the Liaison Officer)
- Weather information

Media Identification

Provisions for press passes should be determined before an incident occurs. Generally, the Police Department issues press passes to representatives from legitimate news gathering agencies. Provisions for a system of temporary press passes should be addressed to cover the occasion when legitimate journalists arrive on the scene of a major incident.

As a general guideline, any person employed by a news gathering agency, be it newspaper, wire service, television or radio station, or as a free lance journalist or photojournalist, is authorized access to disaster areas under Penal Code section 409.5 (d) or PC 409.6(d). As a general rule, media representatives should not be admitted to National Defense Areas such as the crash site of a military aircraft (66 Ops. Cal. Atty. Gen. 497 (1983).

Other means of identification are Media Vehicle Placards and Press Photographer license plates (California vehicle Code Section 5008). The Department of Motor Vehicles, Special Plate Section states in part:

"Any person who is regularly employed or engaged as a bona fide newspaper, newsreel, or television photographer or cameraman may apply for press photographers plates. No more than one set of the special plates will be issued

to a press photographer. Photojournalists must derive more than 50% of their personal income as a press photographer from a bona-fide news organization."

These plates can be identified by the letters PP inside a triangle shaped shield, followed by a number. These vehicle identification plates serve only to identify the vehicle as the property of a media representative and all persons inside the vehicle should be properly identified.

News Conferences and Briefings

The Media Information Center should be able to accommodate all media representatives during news conference briefings. State policy allows all media representatives equal access to information developed for release. Physical access to the media center and site could be controlled or restricted. If access is controlled or restricted, public safety personnel at perimeter/barriers must be instructed in these procedures. For access within police and fire lines, media representatives must have valid "authorized" media identification issued by public safety agency or authorization on company letterhead (67 Ops.Cal.Atty.Gen.535 (1984)).

Media briefings and press conferences should be conducted on a regular or "as needed" basis. In preparing for briefings and press conferences, PIOs shall:

- arrange for an official spokesperson.
- announce briefings times to all media.
- arrange media tours, if such action will not hinder response efforts. (Coordinate with the Liaison Officer.)
- conduct tours for media pool representatives as needed.

PIOs should ensure that all information available for release is clear, concise, confirmed and approved by appropriate authority before release to the media or public. PIOs should not release unconfirmed information or speculate. Information, which is not confidential, would not hamper an investigation or jeopardize the rights and safety of an individual can and should be released.

Media Pools

The media should be allowed reasonable access. If restrictions or limitations are unavoidable, a "pool" system may be used to avoid congestion. Journalists on the scene should be permitted to select representatives from each medium (radio, television, newspaper, wire service, magazine, video and still photographers). They should also consider selecting representatives from each level of coverage (local, regional, national and international). These are then escorted into the area. These representatives will then share all information, photographs and video/audio tape with other accredited journalists. Only journalists present when the pool is activated should be allowed access to pool material. A sign-up sheet may be used to record participants.

When access by the media must be denied or severely restricted, a valid explanation must be provided. The media pool is seen as a restriction placed on the media and coverage of the news. Media pools should be considered only as a last resort. Media representatives must be reasonably accommodated at disaster scenes.

Journalists selected as pool members must be willing and able to meet deadlines and share video, audio or still coverage, in a timely manner to all entitled to material generated by the media pool. Journalists not assigned to the media pool must obey

lawful orders of public safety officers. Once the media pool is formed, only authorized pool members may have access to the immediate scene while access is limited.

Media Access Photo Sites (MAPS)

Media Access Photo Sites (MAPS) should be established for photojournalists to provide visual access. MAPS are specific locations designated for use by still and video media to provide visual access to emergency, crime, and hazardous materials scenes. The MAPS should be identified and established as a priority by the PIO or knowledgeable representative of the Incident Commander.

Criteria considered in identifying locations for Media Access Photo Sites:

- The site should be as close as possible to the incident yet not interfere with the operation of public safety officers or compromise the safety of media representative.
- The location should be chosen to give the best visual access to all areas of interest associated with the incident.
- The need to locate video trucks and support equipment as close as possible for technical reasons should be considered.

Journalists will have access to the media photo site; however all media briefings and interviews should be conducted at the Media Information Center near the Command Post or EOC.

In the event that the incident falls under the jurisdiction of the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB), the media photo site should be activated immediately by the PIO Function. The Police Department will act as the investigator's agent when restricting access. They will decide on access. Officers are urged to treat the area as a crime scene, even though the incident may not have been the result of an obvious criminal act. Media photo sites should be placed outside the immediate crime scene area(s).

POST-EMERGENCY PHASE

Recovery

Information will continue to be released after termination of the emergency. This will include information on clean-up, possible health effects, traffic reports, restoration of essential services, extent of damage and available assistance programs available.

It is the responsibility of the PIO to:

- advise the public of recovery efforts
- provide for public meetings to address public concerns.
- continue monitoring public attitudes and revise public information strategies accordingly.
- reduce tension by issuing news releases on a regular basis.
- record and evaluate actions taken during incident for after action report.
- consider contacting the media for their input into the after action report.
- ensure that the PIO has business cards with phone numbers to give to media.

The following information should be released to the public when providing EMERGENCY public information.

Lifesaving/Health Preservation Instructions

- What to do (and why)
- What **not** to do (and why)
- Information (for parents) on status and actions of schools (if in session)
- Hazardous/contaminated/congested areas to avoid
- Curfews
- Road, bridge, freeway overpass, dam conditions, and alternate routes to take.
- Evacuation:
 - ◆ Routes.
 - ◆ Instructions (including what to do if vehicle breaks down).
 - ◆ Arrangements for persons without transportation.
 - ◆ Location of mass care/medical/
 - ◆ Coroner facilities, food, safe water. Status of hospitals.
- First aid information
- Fire fighting instructions
- Emergency telephone number (otherwise request people not to use telephone). Stress to out-of-area media that people should **NOT** telephone into the area. Lines must be kept open for emergency calls
- Instructions/precautions about utility use, sanitation, how to turn off utilities
- Essential services available: hospitals, grocery stores, banks, pharmacies, etc.
- Weather hazards/health risks (if appropriate)

Emergency Status Information

- Before release, clear all information with the Emergency Operations Deputy Director and the Emergency Operations Director
- Verify all information before release
- Provide all hotline numbers
- Description of the emergency situation, including:
 - ◆ Number of deaths and injuries
 - ◆ Property damage to city and businesses and dollar value
 - ◆ Persons displaced
 - ◆ Magnitude of earthquake, number of fires, etc.
- Description of government and private response efforts (mass care, medical, search and rescue, emergency repair, debris clearance, fire/flood fighting, etc.)
- Any of the priority 1 information in summary form on a "nice to know" rather than "vital to know and act upon" basis
- Status of Local Proclamation, Governor's Proclamation and Presidential Declaration
- Where people should report/call to volunteer

- How people in other areas can obtain information about relatives/friends in the disaster area (coordinate with Red Cross on release of this information). How disaster victims can locate family members

Other Useful Information

Usually this type of information will be released in the Recovery Period because of lack of time and other priorities during other phases.

- State/Federal assistance available.
- Disaster Application Center opening dates/times.
- Historical events of this nature.
- Charts/photographs/statistics from past events.
- Human interest stories
- Acts of heroism
- Historical value of property damaged/destroyed
- Prominence of those killed/injured

MEDIA RELATIONS Dos and Don'ts

DO	DON'T
Prepare	Lie
Assume you're being recorded	Fake it
Respect their deadlines	Go "off the record"
Know the law regarding media	Say "no comment"
Speak officially-no opinions	Use industry slang or terminology
Give the whole story	Speculate
Treat them all equally	Make flippant remarks
Highlight your priorities	Tell one news agency what another is doing
Say "I don't know"	Wear sunglasses on camera
Be there for them-return calls	Fill the "pregnant pause"
Prepare a fact sheet of frequently asked questions	Put down your detractors
Suggest interesting story ideas	Argue with the press
Offer tours or support information	Try to say everything at once
Think "sound bite" or quote	Answer hypotheticals
Listen to the question	Say "Ah"
Practice	Respond to emotional appeals with emotion
Anticipate questions	Send a news release unless it's newsworthy
Correct their mistakes	Break the connection
Remember you are the expert	

Speak only for your agency or level of government.

- Arrange for meetings between the media and incident (field) personnel.
- Make sure telephones, coffee, etc., are available for media representatives if possible.
- Try to stay with your prepared statement.
- Stay cool; don't let questions unnerve you.
- Be direct and **only** comment on what you know - **DO NOT SPECULATE!**
- Have information release policy pre-set with EOC Director.
- Try to make the media your friend-they can either help or hinder your operation.

