



Montana Emergency Support Function #15 – Public Information

Primary Agency:

Montana Disaster and Emergency Services



March 2026

Maintained by Department of Military Affairs
Disaster and Emergency Services Division

*This Annex is considered operational and serves as a guide for rendering assistance whenever the **Montana Emergency Response Framework (MERF)** is activated. It supersedes all previous editions*

Record of Changes

All changes to this plan annex are to be dated on the master copy kept by the Montana Disaster & Emergency Services (DES).

Date Posted	Change	Recommending Agency/Individual

Table of Contents

Section I: Agencies 2

Section II: Purpose & Scope 2

Purpose: 2

Scope: 2

Section III: Assumptions & Relationships 3

Assumptions 3

Relationships 3

Section IV: Core Capabilities 4

Section V: Operational Functions 7

Section I: Agencies

Coordinating Agency:

Montana Disaster & Emergency Services

Primary Agency:

Montana Disaster & Emergency Services

Support Agencies:

All state agencies that may require public affairs support or whose public affairs assets may be employed during an incident.

Section II: Purpose & Scope

Purpose:

Emergency Support Function (ESF) #15 – Public Information support provides accurate, coordinated, timely, and accessible information to affected audiences, including governments, media, the private sector, and the local populace, including children; those with disabilities and others with access and functional needs, and individuals with limited English proficiency.

Scope:

ESF #15 encompasses all State departments and agencies that may require incident communications and public information support or whose Public Information assets may be employed during incidents requiring a coordinated State response. ESF #15 coordinates State actions to provide the required public information support to local, tribal, state, and federal incident response entities. ESF #15 integrates the components of Public Affairs, Legislative Affairs, Intergovernmental Affairs (local, tribal, and state coordination), the private sector, and community relations under the coordinating auspices of public information.

Another component, the Joint Information Center (JIC), ensures the coordinated release of information under ESF #15. The Planning and Products component of public information develops all external and internal communications strategies and products for the ESF #15 organization. Personnel who work under the auspices of public information must be familiar with the provisions of ESF #15 in the event that the ESF is activated. Non-State public information elements are fully integrated into ESF #15. During an incident, local, tribal, state, and federal authorities share responsibility for communicating information regarding the incident to the public. These actions are a critical component of incident management and must be fully integrated with all other operational actions to ensure the following objectives are met:

- Delivery of incident preparedness, health, response, and recovery instructions to those directly affected by the incident.
- Dissemination of incident information to the public, including children; those with disabilities and other access and functional needs; and individuals with limited English proficiency populations.

The ESF #15 structure provides a supporting mechanism to develop, coordinate, and deliver messages. State department and agency communicators develop, coordinate, and deliver information and instructions to the public related to:

- State assistance to the incident-affected area.
- State departmental/agency response.

- Statewide preparations, protective measures, and impacts on non-affected areas.

Section III: Assumptions & Relationships

Assumptions

For the purpose of designing responses in an all-hazard environment, this annex outlines the following assumptions:

- Planning for public information incorporates local, tribal, state, and federal government responsibilities for providing timely public information.
- A disaster may occur with little or no warning and may escalate more rapidly than the local jurisdiction and local public information organizations can manage and may request assistance from other counties through the Statewide Mutual Aid Agreement and will use available resources and mutual aid before requesting state assistance.
- If county and tribal governments are unable to provide timely public information to those affected by emergencies and disasters, state resources will be requested to provide vital information to affected populations.
- When state resources and capabilities are exhausted, additional resources will be requested from FEMA through the Stafford Act and through the Emergency Management Assistance Compact (EMAC).

Relationships

This document does not relieve tasked agencies with the responsibility for emergency planning. The following section outlines the relationships between state agencies and local, tribal, private, and non-governmental organization partners in supporting ESF #15 response and recovery activities:

Local & Tribal Governments

Local and tribal authorities retain the primary responsibility for communicating health and safety instructions for their population. Nothing in this annex limits the authority of these authorities to release information regarding an incident under their jurisdiction, particularly if it involves immediate health and safety issues. In the unlikely event that local and tribal governments are unable to perform these responsibilities, the State Government may provide vital operational health and safety information to the affected population. Nothing in this document should be construed as diminishing or usurping those responsibilities.

Local and tribal mutual aid and assistance networks facilitate the sharing of resources to support public information activities. Local and tribal authorities are responsible for requesting state support through the jurisdiction's emergency management agencies when incident exceeds local capabilities.

Responsibility for situation assessment and determination of resource needs are ascertained primarily through the local and tribal incident management system. Shortages resources are adjudicated at the lowest jurisdictional level.

Private Sector/Non-Governmental Organizations

The private sector is a component of Public Information. Coordinated communication and collaboration with the private sector supports effective incident response by integrating private sector capabilities and information into response operations. Information must be coordinated across various levels of

government to identify needs, convey resources available for business recovery, and facilitate collaborative support for economic recovery. Information must be disseminated about response and other important information to the private sector through public outreach and education methods, such as media campaigns, workshops, roundtables, trainings, etc.

State Government

State authorities retain the primary responsibility for communicating health and safety instructions for the population of Montana. Nothing in this annex limits the authority of the state authorities to release information regarding an incident under their jurisdiction, particularly if it involves immediate health and safety issues. In the unlikely event that state government is unable to perform this responsibility, the Federal Government may provide vital operational health and safety information to the affected population. Nothing in this document should be construed as diminishing or usurping those responsibilities.

During an emergency, the State Emergency Coordination Center (SECC) and the Governor’s Office may determine the lead agency for the Joint Information Center (JIC) or Joint Information System (JIS) and notify key partners. State departments and agencies are responsible, within their statutory authorities, for providing assistance to local jurisdictions when local capabilities are overwhelmed by a disaster. The SECC serves as the principal point for coordinating state, local, tribal, and federal resources as in the delivery of emergency assistance to affected jurisdiction(s).

The SECC will coordinate with the primary agency and support agencies in the use of state resources to support ESF #15 response activities. State resources will supplement, not supplant, local resources. When activated to respond to an incident, the primary agency and support agencies for ESF #15 develop work priorities in cooperation with local and tribal governments and in coordination with the SECC.

If the Governor has declared an emergency, resources may be requested through the Emergency Management Assistance Compact (EMAC), the nation’s state-to-state mutual aid system that is processed through the SECC.

Section IV: Core Capabilities

The following table list the core capabilities and their key activities that the coordinating, primary, and supporting agencies collectively support. Though not listed in the table, all ESFs, including ESF #15, support the core capabilities of Planning, Operational Coordination, and Public Information and Warning.

<u>CORE CAPABILITIES</u>	Key Activities – The SECC coordinates with the primary agency and supporting agencies to coordinate resources in support and response for the following key activities during actual or potential incidents:
Public Information and Warning	<p>Public Information</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides accurate, coordinated, and timely information to affected audiences during incidents requiring a coordinated State response. • Provides communications support and advice to the leaders during an incident. • Conducts communications planning. <p>Public Affairs</p>

- Coordinates messages with local, tribal, state, and federal governments from a Joint Information Center (JIC).
- Gathers information on the incident.
- Provides incident-related information through the media and other sources in accessible formats and multiple languages to individuals, households, businesses, and industries directly or indirectly affected by the incident, including those with disabilities and others with access and functional needs.
- Monitors the news coverage to ensure that accurate information is disseminated.
- Disseminates incident information to new media (i.e., official websites, social networking platforms) to ensure wide delivery of life-saving information.
- Maximizes the use of video and digital imagery to communicate during incidents.
- Handles appropriate special projects, such as news conferences and press operations, for incident area tours by government officials and dignitaries.
- Provides basic services, such as communications and supplies, to assist the news media in disseminating information to the public.
- Oversees media relations.
- Ensures effective communication of incident information to individuals with disabilities and others with access and functional needs through the use of appropriate auxiliary aids and services, such as sign language and other interpreters; captioning of audio and visual materials; and accessible website communications.

Legislative Affairs

- Prepares an initial legislative affairs action plan to support staff with incident-specific guidance and objectives.
- Establishes contact with legislative offices representing affected areas to provide information on the incident.
- Coordinates with legislative affairs staff from all State agencies involved in the response to ensure consistency and transparency in communicating with members of Legislature.
- Organizes legislative briefings.
- Arranges for incident site visits for members of Legislature and their staffs.
- Responds to legislative inquiries.
- Assists in the development of written materials for presentations and making legislative notifications.

Intergovernmental Affairs

- Promotes Federal interaction and implements information sharing with local and tribal governments.
- Informs local and tribal elected and appointed officials on response efforts and recovery programs.
- Disseminates information with the assistance of state municipal leagues, county associations, and tribal governments.

- Promotes State interaction with tribal governments on all aspects of incident response operations.
- Ensures inclusion of tribes in all aspects of incidents requiring a coordinated State response that affect tribes and incident response operations.

Joint Information Center (JIC)

- Serves as a central point for coordination of incident information, public affairs activities, and media access to information regarding the latest developments.
 - **Incident JIC:** Is the physical location where all public affairs professionals involved in the response and recovery work together to provide critical emergency information, media response, and public affairs functions.
 - **Virtual JIC:** Is the technological means (i.e., secure or non-secure) that link all participants when geographical restrictions, incident management requirements, and other limitations preclude physical attendance by public affairs leadership at a central location.
 - **Satellite JIC:** Is a forward-deployed component of an incident JIC.
 - **Area JIC:** Are multiple JICs that may be used to support the area command Unified Coordination structure and whenever multiple JICs are operating in support of the same or related incidents and jurisdictions.

Plans and Products

- Educates the public in the aftermath of an incident requiring a coordinated State response through news advisories, press releases, prepared materials, fliers, and talking points.
- Develops new media products for dissemination, such as blog posts, messages for social media, update messages, video, and digital imagery.

Private Sector

- Provides strategic counsel and guidance to response leadership in actual or potential incidents.
- Conducts outreach and education.
- Promotes operational integration with the impacted private sector entity to support local economic response and recovery.
- Supports situational awareness by engaging the private sector in information sharing efforts.

Section V: Operational Functions

The following table lists the operational functions that both the primary agency and supporting agencies most directly support for ESF # 15 (Public Information Support):

<u>PRIMARY AGENCY</u>	Operational Functions – Montana Disaster and Emergency Services (DES) serves as the primary agency. The operational functions for the primary agency may include the following:
Montana Department of Military Affairs	<p>Army and Air National Guard <i>Upon approval by the Governor:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides public affairs support for JIC or JIS by providing available military Public Affairs Officers (PAO). <p>Disaster and Emergency Services Division</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supports the development of a comprehensive JIS that supports common voice messaging and comprehensive information sharing. • Establishes the JIC, or monitor JIC activities, and facilitate communication between the Governor’s Office and JIC. • Coordinates with support agencies to deploy personnel to assign a JIC Manager and fill positions in JICs, as necessary, based on qualifications and expertise. • Maintains a Public Affairs Team (PAT) list to support JIC or JIS staffing. • Provides guidance to county and tribal emergency managers regarding matters related to public information. • Assists in the information and news release approval process. • Develops and maintains the JIC Standard Operating Procedures. • Coordinates the release of disaster-related information with other local, tribal, and state agencies. • Coordinates contracting, acquisitions, and deployments of public affairs personnel, equipment, and supplies in response to requests for State assistance, as appropriate. • Coordinates National Guard assistance, when requested and upon approval by the Governor. • Coordinates EMAC, Federal, and International offers of public affairs support. • Coordinates and/or provides situational awareness regarding public information. • Provides Governor’s Office with updates on disaster situations.
Office of the Governor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides guidance and technical assistance to agencies on the dissemination of information. • Coordinates press events involving the Governor. • Responds to questions concerning the Governor's responses to the disaster/emergency situation and expected activities.
<u>SUPPORTING AGENCIES</u>	Operational Functions – The operational functions for the supporting agencies may include the following:
All Supporting Agencies	<i>Note: Support Agencies consist of state agencies with public affairs staff, public information officers, and subject matter expertise. Depending on the nature of the incident, support agencies may be requested by the</i>

Governor's Office or the SECC to support the JIC. Supporting the JIC include, but are not limited to:

- Supports public information as a result of increased statewide public awareness or concern.
- When requested upon by the Governor's Office, report to the JIC and support staffing plans.
- Shares information with federal, tribal, state and local partners.
- Serves as subject matter experts as needed.
- Responds to media inquiries.
- Prepares and maintain electronic copies of public information documents and a log of public information activities.
- Plans and prepare announcements, interviews, question-and-answer sessions, video footage and other services for news media, broadcast news media and internet news providers.
- Monitors national, regional, and local news broadcasts to assess the accuracy of news reports. If inaccuracies occur, notify JIC manager and agency decision-makers in the SECC immediately, and take appropriate measures to provide corrected information to the news media.
- Develops supplemental information, such as newspaper inserts and backgrounders, that provide detailed information about the state's efforts to protect the public, or any other facts or advice the public may find useful.
- Completes all other duties assigned by the Governor's Office and/or JIC manager.