ESF 2: Communications

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- Montana Disaster & Emergency Services (DES)
- Montana Department of Transportation (MDT)
- Montana Highway Patrol (MHP)
- Montana National Guard
- Civil Air Patrol (CAP)
- Helena Interagency Dispatch Center (HIDC)

1.1 Purpose

Emergency Support Function (ESF) #2: Communications was developed to identify and define emergency communications operations and responsibilities in response to natural disasters, and other emergencies. ESF-2 is intended to support, not supplant existing Communications resources and systems.

1.2 Scope

This ESF applies to the communication assets of all County organizations including radio, County E-911, voice and data links, telephone and cellular systems, National Warning System, Emergency Alert System (EAS), and amateur radio. *Public Alert and Warning* is discussed in ESF 15: Public Information.

No guarantee of a perfect response system is expressed or implied by this ESF. Lewis & Clark County can only endeavor to make reasonable efforts to respond based on the situation, information and resources available at the time of the emergency or disaster.

1.3 ESF Activation & Plan Maintenance

ESF-2 may be activated independently or in conjunction with other ESFs, depending on the needs of the situation. The ESF-2 Coordinating and Primary Agencies will be responsible for review and revision of this annex.

1.4 Policies

❖ The ESF-2 team should provide support to the SSD/911 Dispatch Center as needed. It should not supplant nor duplicate SSD functions.

❖ In order to maintain continuous direction and control during emergency situations, the SSD Supervisor can preempt the use of any radio system net located in the EOC.

❖ Communications transmission priorities are as follows:
  1. Warning
  2. Protective actions
  3. Evacuation progress
  4. Decontamination requirements
  5. Shelter population (number of vacancies)
  6. Staffing and supply requirements
  7. Routine operations and public information

❖ All communications to the field from the EOC or the 911 Center, should support the Incident Command System and should be directed through the Incident Commander, or if established, the designated on-scene Communications Officer.

❖ During a multi-agency emergency response, the various code systems used for brevity should be discontinued. "Clear text" should be used to ensure comprehension during transmission, particularly between units from different agencies.

❖ Communications-support requirements which cannot be met at the local level should be forwarded to the State DES for assistance. If needed, federal assistance may be requested by the Governor.

❖ Tests of local warning systems should be conducted periodically to familiarize government and the public with their use.

2.0 Situation & Assumptions

2.1 Situation

❖ Fire/Rescue, Sheriff's Office, Police, and EMS communications are integrated with the 911 Emergency Dispatch Center located at the Rocky Mountain Emergency Services Training Center (RMESTC) at the Helena Regional Airport. Generators can provide backup power to the building if needed for essential operations. The Montana Highway Patrol Dispatch Center at Fort Harrison has been designated as an alternate 911 Center.

❖ All emergency services interface through radio channels or cell or landlines phones in the 911 Center, EOC, or Incident Command Post, depending on the situation.

❖ The 911 Center is the primary Public Safety Answering Point (PSAP) for the county and the cities of Helena and East Helena. Emergency calls for service are received by the 911 Center and dispatched to the appropriate public safety agencies.

❖ The EOC has the capability of radio communication with other agencies with amateur radio systems that may help support the emergency communications needs of the EOC and local government in times of disaster.

❖ The Lewis & Clark County CCRC & ARES, comprised of radio operators licensed by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) for noncommercial (amateur) communications, have voluntarily registered their services and formed an organized pool of trained communications specialists to assist County emergency management by providing emergency and disaster communications as needed and able.

❖ Equipment and supplies are usually provided from current stocks, or, if necessary, from commercial sources using local availability. ESF-2 does not stockpile supplies.

❖ During response operations, acquisition of these resources should be supported by preexisting memorandums of understanding (MOUs), memorandums of agreement (MOAs), interagency agreements (IAAs), or through the execution of mission assignments between MTDES and other support agencies.

❖ Notification of a threatening situation may also come from the National Weather Service, via NOAA Weather Radio or the media, the amateur communications community, or the public.

2.2 Assumptions

❖ Local jurisdictions will require accurate and timely information on which to base their decisions and focus their response actions.

❖ Routine day-to-day modes of communication will continue to be utilized to the degree that they survive the disaster.

❖ There are identified frequencies that will be used for primary direction and control.

❖ Normal forms of communications may be severely interrupted during the early phases of an emergency or disaster.

❖ The loss of some or all telephone service will reduce or eliminate the effectiveness of the 911 Dispatch Center and EOC public information lines as well as the majority of the City/County departments, which are all on the same phone system.

❖ The management and logistics of communications support is highly situational and is dependent upon flexibility and adaptability.

❖ Significant incidents may require evacuation of significant numbers of affected populations. Such evacuations may require extensive coordination of inter- and intra-county communications and may exceed normal radio communication capabilities.

❖ In the event of an emergency or disaster that damages the county digital radio system, a backup analog system may be utilized.

❖ The local amateur radio operators also have the ability to set up field communications to support or augment public safety operations, as appropriate. One use of this amateur radio system may be for providing communications between the EOC and Red Cross shelters.

❖ At a time when the need for real time electronically processed information is greatest, the capability to produce it may be seriously restricted or nonexistent due to widespread damage to communications and power systems facilities.

❖   If electronic emergency information systems are not available, paper logs may be used to record events, communications & messages, damage assessments, situation reports, resources utilized, man-hours expended, etc.

3.0 Concept of Operations

3.1 General

❖   Communications in the field will normally be established by radio. Each department or agency having a radio system should designate personnel to operate their system and maintain communications with the County EOC.

❖   Communications with the state and federal government may be through landline telephone links, cellular telephones and/or radio contact.

❖   The City/County SSD and IT departments provide information management support to county government departments and offices in general, and maintains the county's wide-area network (WAN).

❖   Event logs and communications traffic records are vital for documenting emergency actions for possible post emergency investigation or after-action reports.

❖   Records documenting the number of people involved in communication activities, whether paid or volunteer are needed for possible reimbursement under Presidential disaster declarations.

❖   Any lease, rental or mutual aid agreements related to the augmentation of communications equipment should be kept.   If a serious event disrupts communications, the EOC should be activated.

❖   Representatives from Primary and Support agencies would cooperatively work out a response/recovery plan for the event causing the communications disruptions.

❖   In times of emergency, CCRC/ARES volunteers may provide an additional local or state-wide communications network from their individual base and /or mobile stations. This local capability provides an extra backup communication system at the EOC if required.

❖   During localized emergency situations, a mobile ICP may be utilized to establish communications from agencies involved at the scene. In more extreme circumstances, the mobile ICP may also be used to link field units with the decision makers stationed at the EOC.

3.2 Notifications

❖   The DES Coordinator should notify the ESF-2 Primary Agency of EOC activations and request that representatives report to the EOC to coordinate ESF-1 activities.

❖   Depending on the location of the disaster and the area affected, the primary dispatch center should rapidly assess the need for communications support and identify, acquire and deploy resources to support critical emergency operations.

❖ Support personnel should be contacted by available means regarding instructions and reporting locations. Those persons who are to report to the EOC should do so as they receive information regarding an emergency or disaster situation.

❖ As additional EOC staffing needs become apparent, other support and partnering agency personnel may be asked to report to the EOC to assist resource support activities. Depending on the nature and location of the emergency, state and federal representatives may also become critical members of the ESF-2 team.

3.3 Preparedness

❖ Develop plans, procedures/guidelines, and protocols for communications in accordance with the National Incident Management System (NIMS), State and local ordinances, and existing agreements.

❖ Ensure alternate or backup communications systems are available.

❖ Coordinate common communications procedures/guidelines.

❖ Develop and test emergency procedures/guidelines.

❖ Develop written mutual aid agreements as needed to ensure regional coordination.

❖ Develop and/or review procedures/guidelines for the crisis augmentation of resources.

❖ Review departmental Standard Operating Procedures/Guidelines (SOPs/SOGs) and maintain personnel call up lists.

❖ Develop and conduct training to improve all-hazard incident management capability for response communications.

❖ Develop exercises/drills of sufficient intensity to challenge management and operations and to test the knowledge, skills, and abilities of individuals and organizations for response communications.

❖ Participate in Emergency Management training and exercises.

❖ Develop and maintain a communications resource inventory.

3.4 Response

❖ Implement incident communications interoperability plans and protocols.

❖ Communicate incident response information.

❖ Use established common response communications language (i.e., plain English) to ensure information dissemination is timely, clear, acknowledged, and understood by all receivers.

❖ Request external resources using the Emergency Management Assistance Compact (EMAC) and other mutual aid/assistance processes (inter- and intra-State).

❖ Ensure that all critical communications networks are functioning.

❖ Establish and maintain response communications systems onsite.

❖ Maintain existing equipment and follow established procedures/guidelines for communicating with organization personnel performing field operations.

❖ Implement procedures/guidelines to inspect and protect communications equipment.

❖ Ensure redundant communications circuits/channels are available for use.

❖ Make arrangements to ensure emergency communications equipment can be repaired on a 24-hour basis.

❖ Establish and ensure radio connectivity between the ICP and the EOC. Keep the EOC informed of field operations as able.

3.5 Recovery

❖ Phase down operations, as appropriate.

❖ Continue to perform tasks necessary to expedite restoration and recovery operations.

❖ Clean, repair, and perform maintenance on all equipment before returning to normal operations or storage.

❖ Coordinate and conduct a post-disaster situation analysis to review and determine the effectiveness of the pre-established tasks, responsibilities, reporting procedures/guidelines and formats to document any crucial lessons-learned and to make necessary changes in this ESF Annex to improve future operations.

3.6 Mitigation

❖ Test all communications and warning equipment to ensure workability of the equipment.

❖ Develop and maintain back-up systems, including back-up power ability.

❖ Attempt to construct / place new equipment away from possible hazards.

❖ Ensure methods are in place to protect communications equipment, including cyber and telecommunications resources.

4.0 Organization & Responsibilities

4.1 Organization

Support Services Division (SSD)

❖ The Support Services Division is comprised of law enforcement and 911 dispatchers, and the law enforcement records division. SSD is a joint operation between the City of Helena and Lewis and Clark County. The Helena Police Department is contracted to provide the service.

❖ The SSD 911 Dispatch Center is a central communications center for county agencies, local jurisdictions, and the public. It provides 911 and non-emergency information for all law enforcement, fire and emergency services. The SSD Director is the designated Communications Officer for the entire community of Lewis & Clark County. This

individual is responsible for the administration of and operations for emergency communications in the event of an emergency or disaster for 911 calls, and dispatching Emergency Medical Services, Fire Services and Law Enforcement. Should a disaster occur, primary public-safety dispatch and communications should be operated from the 911 Dispatch Center. Radios, telephones, cellular phones, facsimiles and pagers may be used as alternate means of providing communications. The 911 Dispatch Center is staffed 24 hours a day.

Emergency Operations Center (EOC)

❖ The EOC should be organized and managed using the ICS. As such, communications support falls under the Logistics Section.

❖ The ESF-2 team members are critical members of the EOC Team and should work within the EOC structure. ESF-2 Agency Reps in the EOC should be organized under the ICS Logistics Section as either a stand-alone "Team" or as part of a functional Group depending upon the needs of the incident.

4.2 Responsibilities

ESF Coordinator

❖ Preparing, revising, and implementing current communications plans in accordance with county, state and federal criteria.

❖ Manages the 911 Dispatch Center - a 24/7, two way radio communications center from which communications personnel can effectively operate.

❖ Coordinating with local amateur radio operators, who may establish a secondary communications network to support communications needs between shelters, American Red Cross operations and others, as appropriate.

❖ Periodically testing the communications system by test and exercises.

❖ Works with support agencies to establish and review departmental roles and responsibilities for preparedness, and for providing support during the response and recovery phases of an emergency or disaster.

❖ Coordinating meetings, plans, exercises, training, and other activities with the private sector.

Primary Agency

❖ Maintaining an inventory of existing radio frequencies and other communications resources available for local emergencies.

❖ Maintaining liaison with other agencies to ensure upgraded communications capabilities are compatible with jurisdiction-wide communications systems.

❖ Provide communications necessary for the city and county governments to communicate to all governmental entities as well as higher levels of government.

❖ Software programming support to any radio subscriber authorized access to the County radio system.

❖ Support mutual aid communications to adjacent counties.

❖ Coordinate and maintain the operation of the communication systems as needed to fulfill communications capabilities within the county.

❖ Assist in identifying personnel and resources to support this Annex.

❖ Work with support agencies to keep this Annex up-to-date.

Support Agencies

❖ Develop applicable standard operating procedures, guidelines and/or checklists detailing the accomplishment of their assigned functions.

❖ Maintain a communications link with the County EOC and provide ongoing status reports as requested.

❖ When requested, deploy a representative to the EOC to assist with communications activities.

❖ Maintain updated resource inventories of supplies, equipment, and personnel resources, including possible sources of augmentation or replacement.

❖ Document all costs and expenses associated with response and recovery activities taking care to clearly segregate disaster related work in the event that reimbursement becomes available from the state and federal government.

❖ Maintain up-to-date rosters for notifying personnel and 24-hour EOC staffing capabilities.

❖ Perform other emergency tasks as assigned.

❖ Work with the ESF Coordinator to keep this Annex up-to-date.

5.0 Authorities and References

5.1 Authorities

❖ *See Section 5.1 of Basic Plan.*

5.2 References

❖ *See Section 5.2 of Basic Plan.*

❖ **Lewis & Clark County Montana EOP. May 2011:** ESF-2 – Communications

❖ **National Response Framework. January 2008:** ESF-2 – Communications

❖ **Core Capabilities List. October 2015:** Operational Communications

6.0 Attachments

Attachment 1: Acronyms

Acronym	Meaning
ARC	American Red Cross
ARES	Amateur Radio Emergency Services
AREP	Agency Representative
CAP	Civil Air Patrol
CBO	Community Based Organization
CCRC	Capitol City Radio Club
DES	Disaster And Emergency Services
EAS	Emergency Alert System
EMAC	Emergency Management Assistance Compact
EMS	Emergency Medical Services
EOC	Emergency Operations Center
EOP	Emergency Operations Plan
ESF	Emergency Support Function
FCC	Federal Communications Commission
HIDC	Helena Interagency Dispatch Center
HSPD	Homeland Security Presidential Directive
IAA	Inter-Agency Agreement
ICP	Incident Command Post
ICS	Incident Command System
IT	Information Technology
JIC	Joint Information Center
LCCO	Lewis & Clark County
LEPC	Local Emergency Planning Committee
MDT	Montana Department of Transportation
MHP	Montana Highway Patrol
MOA	Memorandum of Agreement
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NIMS	National Incident Management System
NOAA	National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration
NRF	National Response Framework
NWS	National Weather Service
PIO	Public Information Officer
PSAP	Public Safety Answering Point
SOG	Standard Operating Guideline
SOP	Standard Operating Procedure
SSD	Support Services Division
TCL	Target Capabilities List
USC	United States Code
WAN	Wide Area Network

Attachment 2: Definitions

None Identified

Attachment 3: Radio System Failure Strategies

The following alternate communication strategies have been developed in the event there is a failure of the primary public safety radio system, such as following a major earthquake or flood:

* Use Zone 3 color channels that are assigned to you agency. These are analog and should work.
    * County and City Public - **GOLD**
    * Fire – **RED**
    * Law Enforcement – **SILVER**
    * EMS – **GRAY**

  These channels are for command and control only, Operations will use the other color channels, (SCARLET, WHITE, CRIMSON, etc.)

* **GREEN** is also available but has not been assigned.

* **BROWN** will be used for damage assessment and intelligence reporting in the immediate response. This will be limited to life safety situations (casualties, fatalities); impassable roads and bridges; fires; collapsed buildings; and gas line breaks/fires.

* The EOC will check in on **BROWN** as soon as it is activated and able.

* Rural Fire will assign a person to monitor **BROWN** and record the assessments.

* An hourly review of the situation will be provided on **BROWN** by the Rural Fire AREP.

* Amateur radio operators should report to the EOC, hospital or the nearest fire stations for backup communications.