



## **ESF #15 External Affairs**

Rev. Final

Date: March 2020

### **ESF Coordinating Agency:**

NYS Division of Homeland Security and  
Emergency Services (DHSES) / Public  
Information Office

### **DPC Agency Memembers:**

Executive Chamber / Office of Communications  
Communication Staff of Activated DPC Members  
Intergovernmental Staff of Activated DPC Members

### **Non-DPC Agency Member:**

National Weather Service (NWS)

---

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

An Emergency Support Function (ESF) provides a planning structure for coordinating response activities during a disaster or emergency. Each ESF groups together functions needed for emergency response. ESF #15 serves as the writer, coordinator, and distributor of all public information related to the incident including emergency public information. The goal for ESF #15 is to provide accurate and well-timed information to the public and media. ESF #15 works closely with federal, state, local, and non-governmental partners to ensure its outreach is effective.

---

## **SECTION I: General Considerations and Planning Guidelines**

### **Introduction**

ESF #15 coordinates Federal, State, local, and non-governmental partners to release public information related to an emergency or disaster. Public information related to an incident typically relates to preparedness, emergency response, and recovery activities. This information should be released in a coordinated manner to help maintain public safety, reduce property and infrastructure damage, and aid in recovery efforts.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this annex is to provide a framework for agencies to collect, analyze, and release public information related to an incident in a coordinated manner with federal, state, local, and non-governmental partners.

The State Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan (CEMP) has been structured into three distinct, but interconnected volumes. These are:

- Volume 1: All-Hazard Mitigation Plan
- Volume 2: Response and Short-Term Recovery
- Volume 3: Long-Term Recovery Plan

## **Critical Capability**

ESF #15 supports the following Critical Capabilities in New York State: Public Information and Warning

The purpose of the CEMP is to identify the State’s overarching policies, authorities and response organizational structure that will be implemented in an emergency or disaster situation that warrants a State response. The CEMP serves as the foundational framework for the State’s response levels, and serves as the operational basis of which other ESF’s, functional, and hazard-specific annexes are built upon. These ESF’s and annexes address a broad range of capabilities in response to the State’s highest-rated hazards.

## Scope

This ESF annex applies to any incident that requires the coordination of public information for multiple agencies or partners when the State Emergency Operations Center (State EOC) activates. Once ESF #15 is activated, ESF #15 is the primary source of public information related to the emergency. ESF #15 works with all activated ESFs, state agencies, and non-governmental partners. If local governments continue to release public information, then ESF #15 coordinates with local governments on any released public information.

## Linkage to other State Plans

ESF #15 is linked to the Radiological Emergency Preparedness (REP) Plan and the Emergency Public Information Annex.

ESF #15 uses some of the following communications methods to release information:

- Press releases
- Social media posts (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Periscope, Flickr, YouTube, etc.)
- Media briefings (on-site and off-site)
- Press releases and social media posts translated into the primary language of each affected community
- Emergency Alerts and/or Wireless Emergency Alerts issued through the Public Alert and Warning System (IPAWS)
- Public notice or information issued through [nyalert.gov](http://nyalert.gov) or any other state public notice system
- Prepared material (flyers, fact sheets, brochures, etc.)
- Public service announcements
- Briefing packages for media briefings

## Situation

A disaster situation can cause damage to infrastructure and property which may lead to disruptions to public safety and utility service. If utilities, such as electrical and telecommunication providers, experience widespread outages, providing public information through phone, internet, and television outlets may be challenging. At the same time, an increase in public interest in regards to an incident, emergency response, or outage restoration efforts could overwhelm public information staff. During this situation, a coordinated public information strategy is used to address these challenges and improve emergency response and public safety. Public information primarily consists of press releases, social media posts, and briefings related to the emergency, emergency response, and recovery.

## Planning Assumptions

Emergencies create great public interest and intense demand from the media for information. Providing accurate information based on confirmed reports is the appropriate response to that interest. The scope of vetted and un-vetted information received by ESF #15 during an emergency is likely to exceed resources of a state agency or local government. ESF #15 only releases vetted information and does not release information that is unconfirmed, speculative, or part of a law enforcement investigation.

ESF 15 operates under the following planning assumption:

1. The DHSES Public Information Office coordinates activated partners with the Executive Chamber's Office of Communications to manage ESF #15 and release public information related to the incident.
2. Media interest during an incident could rapidly escalate and possibly overwhelm the communication staff of a single agency.
3. Assistance from communication or intergovernmental staff of Federal, State, and non-governmental partners may be requested.
4. Partners may include:
  - a. DHSES for use of the Public Alert and Warning System (IPAWS) to send an emergency alert or wireless emergency alert,
  - b. the NY Alert public notice system (maintained by ITS) to provide public notice or information,
  - c. Transportation agencies and authorities to issue alerts through variable message boards and other public notice means,
  - d. the Division of State Police to vet sensitive law enforcement information,
  - e. the Public Service Commission to inform the public of utility outages,
  - f. the National Weather Service to publicize weather information and threats from natural hazards,
  - g. the American Red Cross to publicize the status of any open shelters, and
  - h. any other support member as needed.
5. All public information released by ESF #15 will be made available in the primary language or languages spoken by the affected community.

## **Concept of Operations**

### **A. General**

1. An incident occurs in the State that warrants activation of the State EOC.
2. ESFs and agencies begin to report to the State EOC. The State Office of Emergency Management (State OEM) and DHSES determine which agencies are needed for the activation. If warranted, this ESF is activated.
3. Once activated, ESF #15 assumes responsibility for public information, DHSES Public Information Office (ESF #15 Coordinating Agency) coordinates with ESF #15 Support Members, and ESF #15 becomes the central source for providing information to the public and media.
4. Releases of information are coordinated with and may occur through the Executive Chamber's Office of Communications.
5. If warranted, ESF #15 may deploy a public information officer to support field operations such as a regional operations center, an established area command, or to support a State incident management team.
6. If a Joint Information Center (JIC) is created in response to the incident, ESF #15 manages the JIC.
7. When an incident begins to subside, ESF #15 may reduce its activity and release staff. As recovery begins, ESF #15 members may resume day to day operations and may support any established Joint Field Offices or recovery efforts. ESF #15 members will continue to coordinate public information efforts with the Executive Chamber's Office of Communications.

## **Authority**

1. New York State Executive Law, Article 2-B
2. NIMS Executive Order 26.1 of 2006

## **Annex Maintenance, Distribution, and Revision Process**

The NYS OEM Planning Section has the responsibility for the development, review, and maintenance of all multi-agency response plans under the New York State CEMP. As required under New York State Executive Law Article 2-B, each ESF annex shall undergo an annual review and update on or before February 15th of each year and be posted online (if applicable) no later than March 31st of each year.

During the annual review by the Planning Section for its material, this plan is examined for both content and format. For updates that do not impact operational mechanisms or processes, the appropriate edits are initiated within the Planning Section and do not warrant external involvement. Plan updates will also be conducted based upon experiences and lessons learned from exercises or real-world events, or through administrative changes in government. Planning Section updates and/or edits affecting operational capabilities, responsibilities, or otherwise impacting operations will engage stakeholders in a variety of ways, such as verbally, by document review, meetings, webinars, or any combination thereof. Final drafts will be socialized to all appropriate agencies/personnel upon completion.

## **SECTION II: Preparedness**

---

### **Mitigation**

Volume 1 of the State Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan is the State Multi-Hazard Mitigation Plan. Pursuant to the requirements of 44 CFR 201.4, the State Multi-Hazard Mitigation Plan is required to focus on natural hazards that are likely to cause a substantial impact on the State. Mitigation planning efforts for technological and human-caused hazards are also recognized and are being implemented throughout the State as well. New York State participates in Federal, State and local mitigation programs and identifies ongoing mitigation opportunities. The State takes maximum advantage of available Federal funding to implement mitigation measures at the State and local levels. Throughout the past several years, a substantial amount of funding has been invested in mitigating the impacts of various disasters in all parts of the State. Volume 1 addresses the overall State hazard mitigation planning process, risk assessment, strategy development, and plan maintenance. The State Multi-Hazard Mitigation Plan was Federally approved by DHS/FEMA in 2018.

### **Risk Assessment**

The State's THIRA is completed annually. The process involves the identification of scenarios that will most stress the State's capabilities and an assessment of those capabilities. Those capabilities are mapped to the core capabilities in each of these ESF Annexes created under the State Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan. Further, New York State has developed additional programs and methodologies to better understand risk at the local level. This includes a County Emergency Preparedness Assessment (CEPA), which the State has conducted in each of the 57 counties of New York, and New York City. CEPA provides great insight as to the State's risk profile from a local-level perspective.

### **Training, Exercising, and Testing**

ESF #15 staff members have a variety of training and exercise opportunities. Trainings and exercises include:

- Emergency management public information courses offered by FEMA's Emergency Management Institute,

- Joint Information System (JIS) / Joint Information Center (JIC) Planning for Tribal, State and Local PIOs training course (G0291), and,
- Various federal and state exercises that require testing public information capabilities, such as annual radiological exercises.

The State of New York sponsors and conducts a variety of training to improve knowledge and response capability. This includes varying levels of training in the Incident Command System and the Professional Development Series (PDS) curriculum. The State also participates in a wide variety of specialized training, including training to meet Federal program and grant requirements, such as the Emergency Management Performance Grant (EMPG). Further, many State agencies identify training requirements within their own organization to meet the needs of the agency for that specific discipline.

The State of New York has incorporated the Homeland Security Exercise and Evaluation Program (HSEEP) into its emergency management program. HSEEP consists of both doctrine and policy for designing, developing, conducting, and evaluating exercises. The State has instituted HSEEP into a host of exercise activities, including those that involve tests and activations of the State EOC. Further, some exercises are often linked to a specific grant requirement, while others are conducted as part of ongoing or existing programs, such as those for the Radiological Emergency Preparedness Program.

The State also utilizes an exercise component as part of the planning process to test the effectiveness of an emergency management plan. These exercises vary in scope, and cross several state-level plans or annexes. As a point of reference, the planning process that resulted in the creation of all of the State’s ESF annexes included an exercise component.

**Capability Assessment**

As part of the THIRA process, the State was required to assess its capabilities under Presidential Policy Directive (PPD-8). In doing so, the state assessed its Critical Capabilities using the construct outlined in the county emergency preparedness assessment (CEPA) program. The assessment provided the State with information regarding statewide capability trends and potential gaps that can then be planned for and addressed. Those capabilities have been mapped or linked to each one of the ESF annexes under Volume 2 of the State CEMP.

**SECTION III: Response**

---

**Alert and Notification**

The State Watch Center (SWC) serves as the focal point for receiving or providing notification of incidents in the State. In response to an incident that warrants an increase in State response posture, the SWC will be used to notify agencies that the State EOC is activating.

**Activation**

State OEM will assess the potential needs and demands of the incident, and then determine the level of activation necessary to effectively manage the response to the incident. The capabilities that are needed to support that activation are also identified, and agencies are notified to staff the State EOC using the ESF construct.

**NYS EOC  
Activation Levels**

- Steady State
- Level 4 – Enhanced Monitoring
- Level 3 – Partial Activation
- Level 2 – Full Activation
- Level 1 – Full State/Federal Response

Flexibility will be key in activating this ESF. Not all incidents are the same, and not all activations of this ESF will require the full list of agencies to support the demands of the incident. Therefore, the representation of agencies

that will be necessary to support the ESF may vary from incident to incident. The State CEMP identifies four activation levels of the State EOC. This ESF will activate to one of those levels as conditions warrant, with the coordinating agency serving as the ESF lead/coordinator. These are:

Level 4 Enhanced Monitoring: A small, isolated or a potential event that has some indicators that warrant extra attention, enhanced monitoring, or external communication.

- NYS OEM staff only.
- Agencies may be asked individually to support any remote operations or reporting from their home agency.

Level 3 Partial Activation: An incident or event requiring a partial activation of the State EOC with agency/ESF lead activation.

- The ESF leadership is activated on as-needed basis.
- Additional agencies will be determined at the time of the event.

Level 2 Full Activation: An incident requiring full activation of the State EOC with ESF activation.

- The ESF leadership is activated on as-needed basis.
- Additional agencies will be determined at the time of the event.
- ESF agencies will work in coordination with the coordinating agency to operate and report under the ESF.

Level 1 Full State/Federal Response: An incident requiring full activation of the State EOC with ESF activation, and Federal ESF integration and coordination.

- ESF leadership is activated.
- Most, if not all, member agencies will be activated.
- ESF agencies will work in coordination with the coordinating agency to operate and report under the ESF.
- The activities of the ESF will be integrated with those of their Federal ESF counterparts.

## **Direction and Control**

The State endorses the development of one response organizational structure that will include all responding agencies. State agencies and ESFs will be organized under the framework of the National Incident Management System (NIMS) Incident Command System as required by Executive Order 26.1 of 2006 and HSPD-5. As such, a variety of direction and control components may be utilized to manage and coordinate the State's resources in an efficient and effective manner and to provide interoperability between the local, and Federal response organizations.

The organizational structure of the State's ESFs is inherently different than the Federal construct under the NRF. With the exception of ESF #5 (Planning), ESF #7 (Logistics), and ESF #15 (External Affairs) the State ESFs will be situated organizationally in the Operations Section, and report directly to the Operation Section Chief (OSC), or Branch Chiefs if established. ESF #5 is assumed by the Planning Section in the State EOC; ESF #7 is assumed by the Logistics Section in the State EOC; ESF #15 (External Affairs) is situated in the Command Element.

This ESF is assigned under the command element. The ESF leader is the primary contact person with leadership, and the member agencies of the ESF. ESF #15 will provide incident management support and coordination under the primary/lead ESF agency. The coordinating ESF agency will ensure the activities of the ESF are consistent with this Annex, and that agencies are operating in unison to achieve the common goal or mission of the ESF.

## Assignment of Responsibilities

ESF 15 is directed and controlled by the Executive Chamber or Command Staff during an activation. ESF 15:

- shall be responsible for all public information related to an incident;
- shall staff and manage any activated joint information center (JIC);
- may request communication staff from activated partners staff any activated JIC; and,
- may request intergovernmental staff to coordinate the exchange of information and serve as a liaison with federal/state/local government or officials.

Each activated ESF 15 member:

- shall maintain its own authority to manage its public information obligations but shall coordinate such public information obligations with ESF #15;
- may be required to provide communication or intergovernmental staff to support ESF 15; and,
- shall make all reasonable efforts to comply with requests from the DHSES Public Information Office or Executive Chamber Office of Communications in a timely manner.

In the event an incident impacts one or more of the following critical infrastructure sectors, the listed sector-specific agency or agencies may assume an enhanced role in ESF #15. These critical infrastructure sectors are defined by the Federal government as providing vital assets, systems, and networks to the United States. An enhanced role in ESF #15 may require an agency to assign a staff member to a joint information center, provide background or technical information, or provide enhanced information sharing. The DHSES Public Information Office or Executive Chamber Office of Communications may assign an enhanced role to any agency at any point before or during an incident.

### National Weather Service

- The National Weather Service's enhanced role may also involve providing additional public notice through its public warning system.

## Integration of Federal ESFs

The Federal Government organizes its response resources and capabilities under an ESF construct. Similar to New York State's ESF construct, Federal ESFs are multi-agency operational components that serve as the primary means for coordinating Federal resources and capabilities into New York State. The Federal ESFs bring together a wealth of capabilities of Federal departments and agencies and other national-level assets. In doing so, they are organized to provide the operating structure for building, sustaining, and delivering Federal response core capabilities in support of the State's Critical Capabilities. Integration and coordination is key to leveraging the resources of each Federal ESF. As such, New York State ESF #15 will serve at the primary integration point for Federal ESF #15. The table below summarizes Federal ESF #15 and indicates the response core capabilities that the ESF most directly supports. Detailed response capabilities and activities are listed in each Federal ESF Annex.

Key Response Core Capability: Public Information and Warning

Coordinates the release of accurate, coordinated, timely, and accessible public information to affected audiences, including the government, media, NGOs, and the private sector. Works closely with state and local officials to ensure outreach to the whole community. Functions include, but are not limited to:

- Public affairs and the Joint Information Center
- Intergovernmental (local, state, tribal, and territorial) affairs
- Congressional affairs
- Private sector outreach
- All-Hazards Emergency Response Operations Tribal

## SECTION IV: Recovery

---

### Short-Term Recovery

There is no clear delineation of when disaster response activities transition into short-term recovery activities. As with all disaster and emergency-related activities, any transition to a new phase will be dependent upon the needs of the response and the identified needs of the individuals/communities affected. In general, disaster response addresses the immediate aftermath and life safety issues of a disaster or emergency, while short-term recovery activities begin as the need for immediate life-saving activities diminishes. At times, these phases will often overlap with one another.

### Demobilization

Demobilization of agencies and ESFs from the State EOC will occur based upon operational needs, and will be jointly determined by OEM and ESF leadership. Based upon the needs of the operation, ESFs may begin to demobilize during the response/short-term recovery phase. However, it should be noted that agencies may be subject to a rapid recall for re-activation of the ESF if needed based upon operational needs.

### Transition to Long Term Recovery

As the urgency of a response lessens, and communities begin to focus their efforts on implementing recovery programs, the State's focus will also shift to the long-term recovery needs of the affected areas. In Presidential Disaster Declarations, this will likely include the activation of a Federally-established Joint Field Office (JFO). JFOs are established, operated and maintained by DHS/FEMA, and will include the temporary recovery organization structure put in place to support recovery. To properly ensure effective integration of State and Federal recovery activities, the State will organize in a similar structure to the Federal structure contained within the National Disaster Recovery Framework.

### Implement Recovery Support Functions (RSFs)

As emergency response operations subside, federal and state government transition from ESFs to Recovery Support Functions (RSFs). At this point, most State agencies transition from an ESF role to an assigned RSF role.

In most cases, ESF #15's public information duties will not transition into any RSF. Instead, each ESF #15 member resumes its day to day public information duties. Day to day operations include providing public information support if the member agency has an RSF role. At any time during recovery, if directed by the Executive Chamber or Command Staff, participating ESF #15 members may be asked to provide additional public information support to aid the recovery effort.