



United States Department of the Interior

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY
Washington, D.C. 20240

Memorandum

To: Bureau/Office Heads
Solicitor
Inspector General

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From: Lisa Branum
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Subject: Emergency Management Policy Bulletin 2016-1: Crisis Communications

1. PURPOSE

This Emergency Management Policy Bulletin (EMPB) sets forth policy regarding the inclusion of crisis communications strategies in emergency preparedness plans and response operations.

2. BACKGROUND

Effective communications and messaging during and after a crisis (i.e., emergencies/disasters) is critical. As demonstrated during recent crises, there continues to be a need to enhance the Department of the Interior's (DOI's) capabilities and coordination for the development and distribution of crisis and emergency risk communications. DOI must be able to respond promptly, accurately, and confidently during a crisis in the hours and days that follow to provide information to its employees, visitors, volunteers, and various stakeholders.

3. POLICY

DOI shall build and maintain a crisis communications capability to provide strategic direction, establish and enhance long-term crisis communication relationships internally and externally and develop a DOI Crisis Communications community of practice.

3.1 Planning

DOI shall develop a Departmental Crisis Communication Plan and operational support tools to include Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), job action aides and templates for strategic incident communications such as talking points, fact sheets and media reports.

Bureaus and offices shall incorporate crisis communications concepts and messaging templates into planning materials such as SOPs, operational plans and Continuity of Operations (COOP) plans. Bureaus specifically shall ensure that a communications professional is rostered as a member of the Bureau COOP Team if not already on the Secretary's COOP Team.

3.2 Training

Training in crisis communications already exists in many formats to include online self-study content such as through the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA's) Emergency Management Institute (EMI), as well as in person, using facilitators such as those from the US Coast Guard and/or the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Bureaus and offices shall support training on crisis communications for professionals engaged in speaking to the public, digital communications, and employee messaging. Professionals in the fields of communications, emergency management, public health, law enforcement, wildland fire, natural hazards and others, as applicable, should be targeted for crisis communications training.

Ongoing training in crisis communications shall dovetail with National Incident Management System (NIMS) and Incident Command System (ICS) training requirements. As such, crisis communications training will prepare communicators to support roles within NIMS and ICS structures. The *DOI Incident Positions Qualification Guide* (IPQG) establishes minimum standards for incident personnel responding to disasters, including Public Information Officers. In addition, bureaus should consider requiring all Public Affairs Officers obtain, at a minimum, ICS 100, 200 and 300 course certification and complete the Independent Study (IS)-29 (Public Information Officer Awareness) course available via FEMA's EMI.

3.3 Operations

During emergency situations, DOI shall take a purposeful approach to crisis communications and strive to get the right information to the right people at the right time to make the right decisions. To enable this, communications professionals shall be engaged with Emergency Coordinators at the onset as partners in DOI response operations both in the field and at the Department. Those trained in crisis communications shall collaborate and coordinate with the bureau and/or office Emergency Coordinator and serve as a technical expert for all-hazards incidents affecting Interior facilities, operations, activities, employees, stakeholders and publics served.

4. IMPLEMENTATION

4.1 DOI Crisis Communications Sub-Committee

In order to coordinate crisis communications efforts across the Department, and per Departmental Manual 900 Chapter 1.8.C, this policy establishes a standing DOI Crisis Communications Sub-Committee of the DOI Emergency Management Council (EMC). This Sub-Committee shall be tasked with working to enhance the Department's collaboration and coordination between bureaus, the Office of Emergency Management (OEM) and the Office of

Communications (OCO), as well as between emergency managers, communicators, and technical experts related to crisis communications. The Sub-Committee shall work to identify crisis communications training opportunities available to DOI responders and will work to build the Department's capacity for staffing crisis communications positions in support of all-hazard emergency incidents.

The Sub-Committee shall meet regularly to discuss work products and activities; however, during an emergency situation, the Sub-Committee may convene to collaborate and coordinate crisis communications activities across the Department relative to the incident.

4.2 Membership

The DOI Crisis Communications Sub-Committee will be led by OEM and OCO and consist of interested emergency managers, communicators, and information technology (IT) professionals (such as those who specialize in digital media and/or those with expertise in accessing technology in remote areas) from bureaus and offices across the Department. Subject matter experts in law enforcement, public health, wildlife health and others will augment the Sub-Committee to provide expertise in relevant topic areas on an ad hoc basis and may be added to the Sub-Committee during emergency incidents.

5. RESPONSIBILITIES

5.1 Assistant Secretary, Policy, Management and Budget (AS-PMB)

The AS-PMB is responsible for appointing a PMB member as a representative to the Sub-Committee to lead crisis communications efforts related to PMB employees.

5.2 Heads of Offices

Individual heads of offices are responsible for ensuring crisis communications is a component of all-hazards emergency planning and exercised as a component of a comprehensive emergency management program. Aside from the specific office requirements listed in this section, other office directors may appoint representatives to the Sub-Committee.

- **Director, Office of Communications (OCO).** OCO is responsible for co-leading the DOI Crisis Communications Sub-Committee of the EMC with OEM. OCO, in coordination with OEM, shall appoint a chair of the Crisis Communications Sub-Committee to actively manage Sub-Committee activities. The Director of Digital Strategy in OCO will represent or appoint a representative to the Sub-Committee to lead digital crisis communications. OCO is responsible for providing timely, accurate, and consistent information to internal and external audiences prior to, during, and following a crisis. In coordination with the DOI Crisis Communications Sub-Committee, OCO shall develop the DOI Crisis Communications Plan and establish DOI Crisis Communications Communities of Practice.
- **Director, Office of Emergency Management (OEM).** OEM is responsible for co-leading the DOI Crisis Communications Sub-Committee of the EMC with OCO. OEM, in coordination with OCO, shall appoint a chair of the Crisis Communications Sub-Committee to actively manage Sub-Committee activities.

- **Director, Office of the Chief Information Officer (OCIO)**. OCIO is responsible for providing the technological tools and capabilities to enable timely, accurate, and consistent information to internal and external audiences prior to, during, and following a crisis. OCIO is also responsible for appointing a representative to the DOI Crisis Communications Sub-Committee of the EMC with skills and knowledge in the digital media environment.
- **Director, Office of Law Enforcement and Security (OLES)**. OLES is responsible for appointing a representative to the DOI Crisis Communications Sub-Committee of the EMC.
- **Director, Office of Environmental Policy and Compliance (OEPC)**. OEPC is responsible for appointing a representative to the DOI Crisis Communications Sub-Committee of the EMC.

5.3 Heads of Bureaus

Bureau directors are responsible for ensuring crisis communications is a component of all-hazards emergency planning, response operations, and exercised as a component of a comprehensive emergency management program. In addition, as part of a bureau's COOP program, bureaus shall roster a communications professional as a member of the Bureau COOP Team if not already on the Secretary's COOP Team. The rostered communications professional should be at an appropriate level and type to ensure communications between the bureau leadership, staff, and partners can be accomplished during crisis situations. Bureau directors must appoint members from the following teams to represent the bureau as needed on the DOI Crisis Communications Sub-Committee of the EMC: (1) Press/Public Affairs, (2) Digital Strategy and (3) Information Technology.