



**Self Assessment for State and Local Government Coordination  
of Emergency Public Information**

**2006**

## **Media Security and Reliability Council (MSRC)**

### **Self Assessment for State and Local Government Coordination of Emergency Public Information**

There is a growing need for government leadership to coordinate national, state and local public warning systems and for a continuing process for a national coordinated effort to provide accurate and timely emergency communication and warnings in a standardized, actionable format.

In addition, it is essential to continue establishing public/private partnerships on a local basis across the nation, and drive appropriate "National" policies and Best Practices into widespread adoption. The performance of our emergency public communications, warning systems and processes must be tested, monitored and continually improved on an ongoing basis to ensure their effectiveness in serving their communities and protecting the public.

There is a requisite obligation for continued efforts to meet the communications challenges of reaching a diverse audience that includes non-English speaking, visually impaired, hearing impaired and other people with special needs, tailored by and for each local community.

Finally there is a need to ensure that public/private partnerships and Best Practices remain consistent with maintaining healthy and competitive news coverage and our First Amendment rights.

Public risk communications planning in any community is determined by:

- The hazards and risk of events occurring;
- The impact an event may have on the community;
- Public attitude toward those hazards and events;
- The effectiveness of its prevention and public education activities;
- The effectiveness of the community's mitigation strategies;
- The time available to respond to an event.

Previous MSRC recommendations for improving the overall efficiency and effectiveness of a local jurisdiction's emergency public communications efforts were crafted to:

- Reflect a balance of all of the appropriate emergency planning elements;
- Help local jurisdictions to make adjustments to existing services to improve effectiveness;
- Serve as a tool for developing local / regional coordinating committees;
- Provide State and local jurisdictions with new ways of thinking about emergency public communications.

**Background:** On December 27, 2003, Homeland Security Presidential Directive-8 (HSPD-8) was issued. HSPD-8 tasked the Secretary of Homeland Security, in coordination with the heads of other appropriate Federal departments and agencies and in the consultation with State and local governments, to strengthen the preparedness of the United States to prevent and respond to threatened or actual domestic terrorist attacks, major disasters and other emergencies using an “all hazards” approach.

1. The Department of Homeland Security has a mandate to assist States and local jurisdictions to fulfill these responsibilities by providing information which will enable local jurisdictions to make informed choices based on an objective analysis.
  - As a result, a Capabilities-Based Planning (CBP) approach has been designed to help the nation define, build and assess preparedness from acts of terrorism, natural disasters and other emergencies based on planning scenarios developed by the Homeland Security Council. The Universal Task List (UTL) defines tasks that must be performed to prevent, protect, respond to or recover from incidents of national significance as specified in various planning scenarios.
  - Additionally, a Target Capabilities List (TCL) identifies capabilities, consisting of properly planned, organized, equipped, trained, and exercised personnel, needed to perform the tasks; provides a mechanism to establish regional groups to scale requirements based upon differences in population density, critical infrastructure, and other risk factors; and provides the means to measure progress in achieving and sustaining the target levels of capability for the National Preparedness Goal.
2. The National Fire Protection Association Standard (NFPA 1600) for “Disaster / Emergency Management and Business Continuity Programs” establishes a common set of criteria for disaster management, emergency management, and business continuity programs. This standard provides those with the responsibility for disaster and emergency management and business continuity programs the criteria to assess current programs or to develop, implement, and maintain a program to mitigate, prepare for, respond to, and recover from disasters and emergencies. This standard applies to both public and private sector programs.
3. The FCC sponsored Media Security and Reliability Council has published recommendations and industry best practice for government and broadcasters to assure the flow of emergency public information before, during and after a crisis or disaster.

Based on the fundamental assumptions in these standards of care, it is incumbent on State and local jurisdictions to establish a basic public / private partnership plan under their jurisdiction which includes public communication and education with respect to local and regional crisis response and certain components of disaster management.

## **MSRC Self Assessment for State and Local Coordination**

All disasters are local. State and local jurisdictions need tools to help make informed choices about the provision of emergency public communications utilizing an objective approach. The MSRC Local Coordination Working group, therefore, developed a self assessment tool for State and Local jurisdictions so that they will have the means to make objective choices about communicating public protective action strategies and implement changes with confidence.

The key principles used to develop the MSRC self assessments are as follows:

- There should be opportunities for appropriate local stakeholder involvement and consultation at various stages of development. Regional emergency public communications plans, developed in consultation with local public safety officials, broadcasters and a variety of community stakeholders, will be a key vehicle for fulfilling the role of supporting local jurisdictions. This process should continue on an ongoing basis to ensure the plans change and evolve to reflect trends, changing circumstances and new technology. To be useful, the plans must remain current, be tested, and must have the support and acceptance of local jurisdictions and their constituents.
- State and Local governments are directly accountable to their constituents. In turn, local jurisdictions are accountable to their State government. Local jurisdictions are responsible for arranging for the continuity of public communications and information services as they determine may be necessary. Since broadcast media companies own, operate and maintain the vast majority of the infrastructure for mass communications, this kind of planning is best accomplished by establishing public / private partnerships to form local coordinating committees following nationally established recommendations and best practices described in previous MSRC reports.
- Federal entities play a key role in the development of national standards, recommendations for their use and for facilitating and monitoring their application. However, to be useful and effective, day-to-day management of local plans should be State and local government responsibility.
- Local needs and circumstances vary widely across jurisdictions. There are many ways in which individual needs and circumstances can be addressed. Local jurisdictions require flexibility to employ different strategies to achieve similar objectives. Therefore, the measures required to address these needs and conditions will also vary.
- Regional and Local committees will determine the extent to which their needs and circumstances will be addressed. Some may choose to address specific risks more comprehensively than others.
- The primary role of the States is to provide leadership, resources and support to regional and local jurisdictions in the exercise of this responsibility, and to ensure public safety is not compromised by a lack of such planning.

- Local governments and responders will have to rely on current technology and existing local media channels including radio, television, the Internet, sirens, personal communications devices, community infrastructure and word-of-mouth to relay warning information and instructions about protective actions before, during and after a crisis or disaster.
- Mass media (TV, radio, cable system operators, television and radio satellite broadcasters who own, operate and maintain the communications infrastructure) play a critical role in emergency communications given their ability to rapidly and simultaneously reach large and diverse groups of people.

State and local jurisdictions can use this self assessment in a variety of ways:

- Knowledgeable local officials can ask the questions, gather the necessary responses and conduct appropriate analysis internally.
- The results of the assessment could be used as a catalyst to establish local coordination committees or to evaluate current local emergency public communication programs.
- Local steering committees can formulate agenda items for State, regional and local communications strategy meetings and plans;
- Government officials could commission independent reviews of emergency public communications capabilities and activities and use the assessment to monitor or guide a consultant's activities and evaluate its conclusions.

For more information about public warning, emergency public information and the process of organizing to plan for the continuity of information during a crisis see the Council's web page at : [www.mediasecurity.org](http://www.mediasecurity.org)

## MSRC Checklists for Local Coordination of Emergency Public Communications

QUESTIONS		Yes	N	Unsure	N/A	EXPLANATION TO SUPPORT FINDINGS / OBJECTIVES
<b>Local Government Planning</b>						
1	Is there clarity between government and broadcast media about local government responsibilities for warning and informing the public during a crisis?					
2	How is the broadcast media being incorporated into the emergency planning process? Have key leaders been identified?					
3	Do your emergency planning efforts include key representatives of the private sector (who own and operate the communications infrastructure) in the development of plans supporting the continuity of public communications?					
4	Are collaborative agreements in place with the broadcast media to ensure the continuity of emergency public communications in a crisis?					
5	Do state or local mutual assistance compacts address the emergency public communications issue?					
6	Are Local communications plans incorporated into more comprehensive local and regional emergency planning to insure continuity as incidents escalate?					
7	Where differences in approach between jurisdictions exist, are these highlighted in local public information planning?					
8	Do your emergency planning efforts include key representatives of vulnerable individuals and local diverse communities including those who are hard of hearing, who have poor sight/ and / or do not speak English?					
9	Are strategic emergency communications processes reviewed and adapted to changing capabilities and conditions?					
10	Is there a process in place to ensure the continuity of state and local government emergency public communications plans?					
11	Are plans reviewed and adapted to sustain new capabilities and ensure long-term success?					
12	Do you have public / private sector agreements in place to ensure effective public communication partnerships between state and local governments and regional / local broadcasters?					
13	Have broadcast communications resources such as EAS, been identified for potential government use through appropriate agreements and contracts?					
14	Are specific goals identified and measures of performance applied to objectively test, assess and manage existing public communications efforts and track new initiatives in statewide plans?					
15	Have alternative strategies for public communications for state and local government operations been identified?					

## MSRC Checklists for Local Coordination of Emergency Public Communications

QUESTIONS		Yes	N	Unsure	N/A	EXPLANATION TO SUPPORT FINDINGS / OBJECTIVES
<b>Critical Communications Infrastructure</b>						
16	Have local officials been briefed on the operations and reliability issues relating to local communications infrastructure?					
17	Have critical public communications assets and support infrastructures (cyber, physical) been identified?					
18	Do you know who owns them and who is responsible for their operation?					
19	Is there a comprehensive media infrastructure inventory in the jurisdiction plan to identify resources to keep emergency public information flowing during a crisis?					
20	Have steps been taken to define the scope of state and local critical communications infrastructure and determine its reliability?					
21	Are there broadcast media relocation sites and plans in place should the primary broadcast location become uninhabitable or rendered useless in an event?					
22	Are contingency plans in place to ensure broadcasters reliability / continuity, and have they been recently tested?					
23	Is there a mutual aid agreement among broadcasters where outlets share / consolidate resources & infrastructure to keep public information flowing ?					
24	Are there multi-region communications infrastructures, single points of failure and interdependencies?					
25	Do regionally located communications and media infrastructures and infrastructure services have the capacity to impact adjacent regions?					
26	Have these infrastructures been identified to all potentially affected regions and Federal Government agencies?					
27	Have critical communications support services (e.g., critical infrastructure and associated personnel) been identified?					
28	Are State and local governments and broadcast media partnering with critical private sector industries and infrastructures to help ensure the protection and survivability of the communications system?					
29	Is there a process to review and provide recommendations to corporate security officials for enhancing security and access at critical infrastructure sites?					

# MSRC Checklists for Local Coordination of Emergency Public Communications

QUESTIONS		Yes	N	Unsure	N/A	EXPLANATION TO SUPPORT FINDINGS / OBJECTIVES
<b>Broadcast Media Alert and Warning Process</b>						
30	Does the state / local jurisdiction have a working EAS plan?					
31	Does the local alert and warning plan include the use of the Common Alerting Protocol (CAP)?					
32	Does the locality have multi-channel warning capability through the internet?					
33	Do contingency plans for warning exist in case of breakdown in the primary method?					
34	Do you have a program for testing your own and/or joint arrangements for warning and informing those who may be affected by emergencies?					
35	Do you engage local disability advocacy groups in the preparedness and warning process?					
36	Do you maintain a special needs registry within your emergency alerting process?					
37	Do your alert and warning plans provide for citizens with special needs?					
38	Is there a TV media plan for text message crawl and closed captioning conflicts?					
39	Are TTY / TDD instructions provided for broadcast on TV and radio?					
40	Is there a rapid means to communicate critical information (regarding communicable diseases for example) from appropriate agencies (federal, state and local) to the media?					
41	Do you have a means to communicate emergency information in other languages if there is a significant number of non-English speaking individuals in the area affected?					
42	Is there a comprehensive public health plan that addresses, federal, state and local communications resources?					

## MSRC Checklists for Local Coordination of Emergency Public Communications

QUESTIONS		Yes	N	Unsure	N/A	EXPLANATION TO SUPPORT FINDINGS / OBJECTIVES
<b>Public Emergency Communications Plans: Does your plan include....?</b>						
43	Procedures for media access, first response, incident information?					
44	Team staff and support responsibilities? Functional Checklists for each assigned position?					
45	Media Notification system?					
46	Spokesperson designations and back-ups? Are there pre-qualified individuals who work within the NIMS structure?					
47	Key message guidelines? Media tips?					
48	Pre-qualification and JIC procedures for media reps?					
49	Media Monitoring? A media hotline or electronic process in place for rumor control?					
50	Provision for Web based technology? Dark Website & other Web sites procedures?					
51	Dedicated logistics, maintenance & security					
52	Post 9/11 review of concerns regarding sensitive information?					
53	National Incident Management System training and education for media and media reps?					
54	Regular crisis communications testing, training and simulations?					
<b>Public Awareness</b>						
55	Do you have a strategy for raising and reinforcing public and business awareness of the potential for emergencies?					
56	Does the strategy include suggesting preventative action that individuals can take?					
57	Do persons with disabilities have a dedicated contact in your community for information about emergency plans for their protection in a disaster?					
58	Do you customize awareness, preparedness, alert and warning messages for specific groups of people? Is this process coordinated with local media and broadcast groups?					
59	Are public emergency information web sites "accessible" for those with disabilities?					
60	Is information from any risk assessment available to inform local businesses and individuals developing their own plans?					
61	Do you monitor the effectiveness your education / awareness raising activity?					
62	Do you regularly poll or survey public perceptions of your public education, emergency communications plans and programs?					

## MSRC Checklists for Local Coordination of Emergency Public Communications

	QUESTIONS	Yes	N	Unsure	N/A	EXPLANATION TO SUPPORT FINDINGS / OBJECTIVES
	<b>Media Relationships</b>					
63	Do you have an ongoing relationship with your local broadcast media outlets?					
64	Is the local media being consulted and included in public information planning?					
65	Do you have a media plan/ formal arrangements for use in emergencies that have been discussed with all emergency service providers?					
66	Has a collaborative process been established to validate media credentials to avoid theft, counterfeiting, opportunists and misrepresentation?					
67	Are there plans in place to coordinate security & perimeters for media venues ( press conferences, reporting locations, etc.) to prevent a second strike opportunity from a live broadcast?					
68	Are press / communications officers clear about their roles in any emergency?					
69	Are there agreements between state and local jurisdictions regarding who has the lead for various categories of public information?					
70	Does the state's or local emergency public information plan integrate the public information resources of all state and local agencies?					
71	Is there a process to integrate / coordinate local / national media outlets and local government media plans and information ?					
72	Is there a government sponsored Joint Information Center plan to ensure that local citizens receive consistent information and advice from you and your agencies?					
73	Does the emergency public information plan include pre-scripted messages designed for rapid dissemination through the media to inform, reassure, and protect the public?					
74	Could you scale up your media plan to cope with a major / critical incident?					
75	Is there a media sheltering and evacuation plan in place should the need arise?					

## MSRC Checklists for Local Coordination of Emergency Public Communications

QUESTIONS		Yes	N	Unsure	N/A	EXPLANATION TO SUPPORT FINDINGS / OBJECTIVES
<b>Joint Information Center (JIC)</b>						
76	Is your Joint Information Center (JIC) co-located with your Emergency Operations Center?					
77	Is your JIC a dedicated facility? Is there an alternative/backup location?					
78	Is backup power available at your JIC?					
79	Does your JIC support more than one jurisdiction?					
80	Are there accommodations for State and local communications officials?					
81	Do you have activation protocols for your JIC? Is there an evacuation / relocation plan ?					
82	Do you consider your JIC communications technology "state of the art"?					
83	Do you intend to make changes to your communications technology?					
84	Have these changes been approved and budgeted?					
85	Do you provide resources for the media at your JIC? (e.g. for satellite trucks, etc.)					
86	Do you manage "rumor control" or monitor the "Web" at your JIC?					
87	Are JIC procedures incorporated into EOC procedures?					
88	Are PIOs or representatives of the media included in drill, exercise and scenario development?					
89	Do you conduct regular tabletop exercise for communications personnel?					
90	Does the media participate in those exercises?					
91	Do you provide training for the media?					
92	Do your spokespersons and media contacts receive non-emergency information on a daily basis that may be questioned during an emergency?					
93	Is there required training for all personnel who operate and support the JIC?					
94	Does the media support development of emergency public information materials?					
95	Do you post press releases to the Web in addition to hard copies?					
96	Do you reach out to the public for feedback on emergency management and public information issues?					

## MSRC Checklists for Local Coordination of Emergency Public Communications

QUESTIONS		Yes	N	Unsure	N/A	EXPLANATION TO SUPPORT FINDINGS / OBJECTIVES
<b>Training, Testing and Evaluation</b>						
97	Is the media invited to participate in NIMS training and exercises?					
98	Is there specific emergency communications and public information training available for elected and appointed officials?					
99	Have you considered and if necessary taken action on issues or improvements identified through tests or exercises?					
100	Are there arrangements to ensure those involved in incidents (public, staff and volunteers) could find out about post-incident support?					
101	Do you have tested methods for keeping your staff informed in an emergency?					
102	Are " <i>lessons-learned</i> " integrated into new performance standards?					
103	Will Field Exercises and Tabletop Exercises be a component of the evaluation methodology?					
104	Have state level documents been refined to reflect the changing response requirements of terror related incidents?					
105	Have minimum terrorism training, exercise, and evaluation standards been established for state and local agencies?					
106	Is there a joint training program for responding to acts of terrorism that involve appropriate representatives from the media?					
107	Do you engage the media in "marketing" preparedness strategies to the public?					
<b>Funding Public Alert and Warning Programs</b>						
108	Are local emergency public communications needs identified, developed, prioritized, and presented to State authorities?					
109	Does your State work with local governments to identify and support local priority needs?					
110	Is the State ensuring local emergency public communications priorities are met?					
111	Are federal funds used to meet emergency public information communications needs of local jurisdictions?					