

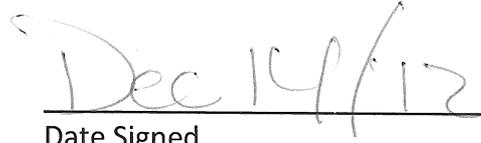
Province of British Columbia

Public Information Annex

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Date Signed

Record of Amendments

Date	Amendment	Page #

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Purpose

The purpose of the Public Information Annex is to describe the structure, role, responsibilities, and procedures for public communications and communications between emergency management stakeholders in British Columbia in the event of a major emergency.

Scope

Details on communications networks such as the Internet, radios and radio frequencies, cellular phone systems, and television are out of scope. As well, systems designed specifically for public alerting such as the National Public Alerting Strategy (NPAS) and the Provincial Emergency Notification System (PENS) are also out of scope.

Authority

The *BC Emergency Program Act* and its regulations sets out the broad responsibilities for emergency management within the province. According to the Act the minister may “conduct public information programs relating to emergency preparedness.” While the local authority is “at all times responsible for the direction and control of the local authority’s emergency response,” the Province must “assist local authorities with response to or recovery from emergencies or disasters that are of such magnitude that the local authorities are incapable of effectively responding or recovering from them.” As well, the provincial government responds to emergencies and disasters through the implementation of emergency plans and procedures developed by government corporations. The development and implementation of these plans and procedures, including the provision of Provincial government emergency information services, must be coordinated.

Provincial Emergency Management Structure

All actions of the communications sector during an emergency or outbreak will be undertaken within the framework of the integrated provincial response model, according to the BC Emergency Response Management System (BCERMS). In this respect, Government Communications and Public Engagement (GCPE) will provide staff to the Provincial Emergency Coordination Centre, Provincial Regional Emergency Coordination Centres and local Emergency Operations Centres to provide communications expertise and input as required and when requested.

Engaging Government Communications

The provincial government is available to respond to calls through the Emergency Coordination Centre in Victoria which is staffed 24/7.

The provincial emergency management structure is activated when a BC community or any significant infrastructure is threatened by an emergency or disaster that may overwhelm a local authority's ability to respond.

GCPE will increase support and resource levels to the provincial regional emergency operation centres and the provincial emergency coordination centre to support local governments' emergency operations as required.

Overview: Government Communications and Public Engagement

Government Communications and Public Engagement ensures that information about government programs and services is accessible to British Columbians. It also has the responsibility for leading and coordinating communications with internal and external stakeholders.

Government Communications and Public Engagement provides the following services:

- coordinating cross-government initiatives,
- communications research,
- strategic communications planning and advice,
- issues management,
- media relations and media monitoring,
- event planning and event management,
- writing and editorial services,
- graphic design,
- advertising and marketing,
- online communications services and management of web content,
- distributing news releases and backgrounders, and
- technical support to the Press Theatre in the Legislature.

GCPE is staffed by employees with experience and education in government and/or corporate communications.

Communications employees provide a variety of communications services and expertise. They work closely with other provincial, federal and municipal government representatives, media, industries, associations, interest groups, and the general public.

GCPE Emergency Support System

GCPE monitors local emergencies and considers offering communications assistance based on the following factors:

- a request for help from the local authority,
- the level of media interest and involvement,
- health and safety issues, and
- the scope of evacuation orders.

GCPE may assist the local authority from its Victoria offices, preparing media releases, bulletins and advisories, or other written material. In the case of a larger emergency, GCPE will send public information officers to assist the local authority or work out of the Provincial Emergency Coordination Centre, Provincial Regional Emergency Coordination Centres or Local Emergency Operations Centres.

Public information officers are also used on virtual deployment for social media tasks.

Roles and Responsibilities of Public Information Officers

Once deployed to provide communications support during an emergency, a public information officer will:

- Receive a briefing from the emergency operations centre Director;
- Send out a media advisory to announce that the Information Unit is open and how it can be reached, including contact phone numbers, the website address, and the toll-free information line;
- Ensure that the Information Unit is immediately set up and equipped with the resources it needs to function effectively and efficiently;
- Ensure the toll-free line is operational, and that it immediately receives all verified and approved public information;
- Assess the current state of media relations and public attitudes and perceptions.
- Open lines of communication with the local authorities to ensure a good working relationship, efficient information sharing, and to assess regional and local communications capabilities and needs;
- Establish contact with other responding agencies;
- Establish and verify all media lists and other public information distribution lists.
- Establish contact lists such as important local officials, as required;
- Establish administrative support for the tracking and filing of media monitoring, information bulletins, media advisories, and all distribution and contact lists;
- Define the scope of the media scan;
- Advise the Premier's Office, if appropriate, on the advisability and timing of the Premier or Cabinet Ministers touring the affected area;
- Assess longer-term staffing needs, and augment or decrease staff as required; and

- Identify and correct any impediments to the accurate, complete, timely, and consistent flow of information.

Tools for Disseminating Public Information

GCPE employs a variety of ways to communicate and provide information in multiple formats to accommodate diverse needs:

- **Media:** News release, information bulletin, press conference, site visits, interviews, media contact point,
- **Citizen Engagement:** Public meetings, telephone townhalls, on-site events, and
- **Online Communications:** GCPE actively uses online tools such as government websites, and social media tools (Twitter, Facebook, YouTube) to disseminate information and to foster two way communication between the public and government. This ensures the public can get up-to-date, reliable information about the events happening in their communities and allows government to get immediate feedback about local events.

Agency Coordination and Preparedness

GCPE executive participate on the Central Coordination Group, advising on all communications issues and providing a link to the Premier's Office.

Communication between the government and the public and communication between governmental agencies is fundamental to effective emergency management.