



Disaster Awareness and Preparedness Strategy

2012

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ACRONYMS

EMA	Emergency Management Agency
PIO	Public Information Officer
EOC	Emergency Operations Center
LEOP	Local Emergency Operations Plan
GEMA	Georgia Emergency Management Agency
JIC	Joint Information Center
NRF	National Response Framework
SWAW	Severe Weather Awareness Week
ESF	Emergency Support Function

DEFINITIONS

Public Education: The process of making the public aware of its risks and preparing citizens for hazards in advance of a disaster and as a long-term strategic effort. Public Education must occur prior to an event. When a disaster strikes, it should not be the first time that the public is hearing emergency preparedness information.

Public Information: The delivery of messages to the public in anticipation of and during an incident. Public information is incident specific and includes the development and release of real-time messages as approved by Command Staff.

Introduction

The need for clear, concise information about potential and impending disasters is vital to protecting public safety and welfare. Banks County is vulnerable to both natural and man-made hazards. It is therefore essential that the community is aware of the hazards they face and have the skills and resources to manage emergencies when they occur.

In order to raise the level of disaster awareness of citizens in Banks County, the Banks Emergency Management Agency Disaster Awareness and Preparedness Strategy has been developed.

The primary objective of this plan is to create an informed public that knows the steps that should be taken to prevent and respond to a wide range of emergency incidents. These steps are to protect life, property, and the environment, and to promptly notify the emergency services through Banks County E-911 when an emergency occurs.

In an effort to improve public safety and to minimize the loss of life and property during periods of emergency, effective public education and communication campaigns have already begun in Banks County (i.e. Health / Safety Fairs & Festivals, Readiness Articles and Community Emergency Response Teams aka CERT) and these activities must be ongoing. They will provide clear objectives and incorporate techniques to motivate the public to act before an emergency.

In a major emergency or disaster, there may be large numbers of media representatives seeking information about the situation and about response efforts. Banks County will fully cooperate with the media and procedures have been developed to ensure imperative information is disseminated to the public through the media in a timely, thorough, correct and approved manner by utilizing an appointed Public Information Officer (PIO) that gains Incident Command approval prior to the release of any information.

Purpose

This Appendix to the Local Emergency Operations Plan (LEOP) establishes policies and procedures relating to public awareness and education programs in order to increase citizen's knowledge and enable safe attitudes and behaviors. Public education works to change people's opinions about a hazard and to motivate them to take actions to reduce risk.

This Appendix has been prepared to be consistent with the Georgia Emergency Management Agency's (GEMA) Emergency Operations Plan (EOP) and the National Response Framework (NRF) for emergencies and disasters.

The intent of this document is to provide a program using existing communication facilities and news media outlets to inform the public before, during and after an emergency or disaster whether it is natural, man-made, or terrorist-related.

This strategy aims to increase awareness about emergency response.

The public information program will serve as a guide to properly plan and prioritize disaster awareness programs in order to fully utilize limited resources.

Scope

This Appendix identifies the key policies, concepts of operations, roles, responsibilities and capabilities of public information before, during and after an emergency or disaster.

Banks County EMA can provide informational materials and resources to keep the public informed on a variety of Emergency Preparedness topics ranging from hurricanes, severe storm and flood preparedness, tornado preparedness, self-sufficiency immediately after a disaster, pandemic flu preparedness, fire prevention and safety, injury prevention, hazardous materials awareness, and more.

In addition, during specific emergency situations, Banks County EMA provides additional information to be made available to the public (an example of this is the recorded hot line / special announcement line 706-677-6810 which has been used in the past for weather information / closings etc.).

Authorities

Banks County EMA is mandated by the State of Georgia to operate under the purview of the Banks County Commission and is directly responsible for emergency operations to include warning services and necessary actions incidental to the preparations for an emergency.

During routine operations, Banks County EMA has the responsibility to provide residents and businesses, which are potentially affected by these hazards with information about what they can do to prepare for, respond to, and recover from an emergency.

Banks County EMA has developed and exercised a variety of tools and systems to assist with notifying and disseminating information to the public to include using NOAA All-Hazard Weather Radios in public facilities (with encouragement for citizens to purchase these for their homes) and placing Outdoor Warning Sirens at both the recreational areas provided by the County and at the Banks Crossing area. In addition, we regularly release emergency information utilizing the public safety radios, media outlets, phone systems, paging systems, email systems and through the Banks County Website (www.co.banks.ga.us).

If the scope of the disaster is large enough, Banks County EMA can use the Banks County Public Information Officer (PIO) after clearance from Incident Command.

Assumptions

The public needs timely and accurate information regarding disasters before, during, and after disasters.

Effective public education and communication campaigns seek clear objectives and incorporate techniques used to disseminate public information.

Many disasters can occur rapidly, hampering the ability of response organizations and local government to provide comprehensive information to everyone impacted at the onset. For this reason, there is a need for public education to prepare people for action in future warnings.

Messages on TV and radio are effective; however, there must be an information stream of multiple communications through diverse media such as the use of County website, hotlines etc.

There is also a need disseminate information in multiple languages.

The demand for information will be overwhelming if the scope of the disaster is of large scale; there will undoubtedly be a need for a coordinated response from the Board of Commissioners, EOC, PIO and Incident Command.

Implementation

Banks County EMA reaches the public through a number of methods. These include programs that are targeted to specific audiences such as school children, seniors or the disabled, church or civic groups, neighborhood groups and programs that are directed to the general public through campaigns, publications, and teaching resources. Radio, television, newspapers, community public educators, Banks County EMA staff and volunteers all play a vital role in providing public awareness/information messages of Banks County EMA to the public.

Banks County EMA will rely a variety of media to aid in dissemination of public information including the local media, Banks County Government website (www.co.banks.ga.us), email alerts, fliers, speaking engagements and email among others.

Emergency Preparedness Education will be conducted annually by Banks County EMA. Fact sheets, flyers and other materials needed for delivery of various programs will be used.

Special consideration will be given to National and State Observances of events such as Severe Weather Awareness Week in February and National Preparedness Month in September. Other topics will be implemented based upon specific threats or seasons such as Hurricane Season from June through November, Tornado Season in the spring and Holiday Safety in December.

Concept of Operation

Public Education Planning and Implementation is an ongoing process. Before a disaster threatens/strikes Banks County, residents need to be made aware of the hazards they could be faced with. The message should clearly explain three critical issues: the potential losses, the chances that the losses will take place, and how to minimize the losses.

Preparedness includes measures taken before an incident to prepare for or mitigate the effects. Actions in preparedness include:

1. Identify hazards which are specific to our area. The Banks County Hazard Mitigation Plan identifies hazards that are most likely to affect Banks County. This plan is posted on the Banks County Government Website (www.co.banks.ga.us). Many of these are weather related such as thunderstorms and tornados. These hazards as well as current events will be used in planning and implementing the public awareness campaign.
2. Identify target audiences, vulnerable populations and stakeholders to address in the development of key messages. Key messages must be communicated to target audiences in a way that they understand, and inspire them to take action. Target audiences include, but are not limited to: Senior Citizens Center, Civic Groups, Neighborhood Groups, Business Organizations, Community Groups, Churches, Schools, and any individuals with special considerations (such as nursing homes, disabled citizens, non-English speakers and those with vision, hearing and cognitive impairments).
3. Messages and educational materials will be obtained or developed based upon the identified messages, the audience and the method of delivery.
4. A variety of techniques shall be used to deliver messages to the community. These include:
 - Local media: newspaper articles, radio/television programs
 - Speaking engagements: civic organizations, school events, etc
 - Special events: local festivals, career day at schools
 - Contests: essay contest for elementary school children
 - Educational materials: pamphlets, flyers
 - Online content: website articles
5. Having an ongoing, positive relationship with local media is vital to an effective education and awareness campaign. Banks County EMA has already established this relationship with each of the local media. Regular press releases and media notices are provided as part of the agency's Public Relations activities.

Concept of Operation / Continued

Response processes mitigate the effects of unexpected problems and allow for the orderly release of information. Response activities for disaster communications with the public include:

1. Rapid mobilization of the PIO to work with Command Staff to prepare, gain message approval and deliver messages to the public focusing on:
 - a. Emergency status information
 - b. Lifesaving/health preservation instructions and emergency status information
 - c. Information in response to public or media inquiry
 - d. Information to resolve any conflicting information or to dispel rumors
2. Depending on scale of disaster, the appointed PIO will disseminate messages through local media, the County Website and the County Hotline. If the event is smaller in nature or specialty information is needed, the message may be delivered directly from the Command Staff in conjunction with the PIO.
3. In situations when the EOC is activated, the Banks County appointed PIO, and volunteers will be activated as needed. Whether full or partially activated, the PIO will be notified of the situation that dictated the need for EOC activation in order to prepare him or her for the possibility of having to complete a media release.
4. When deemed appropriate, the EMA will activate a Joint Information Center (JIC) near the EOC allowing the PIO to collaborate with the media to deliver a unified public message.
5. Prepare media releases, key messages and talking points.
6. If deemed necessary, the Banks County website homepage will contain an incident specific page containing pertinent information about the current emergency/disaster.

Recovery is the ultimate goal and communications and public information efforts are sustained up to and through recovery and as long as necessary to continually reassure, inform and respond to public information needs. Recovery messages will include delivering messages to the public focusing on:

1. Disaster assistance and recovery assistance.
2. Donations management assistance from external groups.
3. If an evacuation is ordered, public information on re-entry and response efforts will be distributed to media, as well as through various Banks County EMA communication tools.

Mitigation through Information / Exercise and Training will remain ongoing. Banks County EMA will continually monitor the effectiveness of the Public Information strategy by noting the level of community preparedness, the behavior of residents as they respond to an incident as well as the number of individuals reached through training and various communication tools.

Responsibilities (as they pertain to this plan)

EMA / E-911 Director:

The EMA / E-911 Director or person appointed by the EMA / E-911 Director serves as the primary advisor to the County Commissioners and to the County Clerk and the EMA / E-911 Director will make these notifications as required and as deemed necessary.

The EMA / E-911 Director or person appointed by the EMA / E-911 Director serves as the liaison and advisor to and from Incident Command Staff (the Sheriff, Fire / EMS Chief, Police Chiefs, Directors etc).

The EMA / E-911 Director or person appointed by the EMA / E-911 Director also has sole authority and responsibility (as directed in the LEOP) to issue and/or make requests through GEMA as requested by Incident Command Staff and as approved by the Commission Chairman.

The EMA / E-911 Director or person appointed by the EMA / E-911 Director with aid from the PIO, EMA / E-911 Clerk, 911 Staff and Volunteers is responsible for the organization and distribution of public education information before, during and after disasters or emergencies that affect Banks County.

During times of crisis the EMA / E-911 Director or person appointed by the EMA / E-911 Director may serve as the primary subject matter expert regarding the County's LEOP and emergency management plan.

The EMA / E-911 Director or person appointed by the EMA / E-911 Director will continually evaluate the capabilities required to accomplish the goals established in the annual outline for Emergency Preparedness Education.

Clerk:

The EMA / E-911 Clerk or person appointed by the EMA / E-911 Director provides the lead supervisory role in 911 operations and/or EOC activation efforts. The determination of assignment is made on a case by case basis and as needed; this assignment is given only by the EMA / E-911 Director upon his or her determination of area of need.

The EMA / E-911 Clerk or person appointed by the EMA / E-911 Director with aid from the EMA / E-911 Director, PIO, 911 Staff and Volunteers is responsible for the organization and distribution of public education information before, during and after disasters or emergencies that affect Banks County.

Responsibilities (as they pertain to this plan / continued)

PIO:

The PIO develops and/or participates in relevant ESF related planning, training and exercises.

If a disaster warrants the full activation of the EOC and/or a JIC, the Banks County PIO will assume the role of Lead PIO and is the only person speaking to the press unless otherwise directed by Incident Command Staff. (In some instances, the Sheriff may choose to speak directly to the press if the matter is law enforcement sensitive.)

At times in which there is not a full activation of the EOC and/or a JIC, the Banks County PIO may only be advised of a situation and Incident Command Staff may handle any briefings needed with the EMA / E-911 Director relaying information as needed to elected officials.

EMA Volunteers:

Banks County EMA Volunteers (CERT, Amateur Radio and EOC Volunteers etc) may be used to help support public information and education efforts to ensure effective preparedness, management, communications, and operations.

Banks County EMA Volunteers will be used to help with preparedness efforts, attending festivals and expos as well as reaching out to their communities to identify hazards.

If the EOC is activated, Banks County EMA Volunteers will serve as Phone Operators, Data Entry Operators, Runners, Amateur Radio Operators (if licensed) or any other need that may be identified by the EMA / E-911 Director.

Plan Management and Maintenance

Banks County EMA is the executive agent for management and maintenance of this plan as with other emergency operations plans maintained by EMA.

Working toward continuous improvement, Banks County EMA is responsible for an annual review and update of the LEOP to include related annexes which will include a review of this plan. And, a complete revision of the LEOP will take place every four years (or more frequently if the County Commission or GEMA deems necessary).

Any review and update will consider lessons learned and best practices identified during exercises and responses to actual events, and incorporate new information technologies.

Any changes will be communicated to the Commissioners, PIO, EMA / E-911 Clerk, EMA Volunteers and any others directly affected or with a need to know.

Distribution

Banks County EMA will distribute this plan to all agencies directly related to the plan.

Other organizations will be provided copies upon request.

Banks County EMA will distribute revised this and other LEOP Annex documents for the purpose of interagency review and concurrence as needed or requested.

ANNEX A

Annual Outline for Focus of Educational Activities

This outline will be reviewed annually by Banks County Emergency Management Agency personnel and/or volunteers.

The outline will encompass a variety of subjects and methods of delivery for appropriate educational and informational messages.

The annual outline is only a guide and can be updated and amended as needed.

January

Winter Weather

- Target Audience: Entire Banks County population
- Winter weather safety press release
- Safety tips issued on the County Government website

February

Severe Weather Awareness Week (SWAW)

- Target Audience: Entire Banks County population
- SWAW press release issued to media about severe weather awareness
- Safety tips displayed at County Annex each day of the week focusing on severe thunderstorms, flooding, tornadoes, supply kits, and lightening
- PSA created to run in the local paper and County website
- Banks County EMA will promote Statewide Tornado Drill with all County facilities and schools.
- Banks County EMA will encourage the school system to hold coloring and essay and various contests for students about severe weather preparedness.

March – June

Volunteer Opportunities

- Target Audience: Entire Banks County population
- Press release issued to media highlighting volunteer opportunities
- Opportunities placed on County website
- Organizations to include: The Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) and Banks County Amateur Radio opportunities

Heat / Lightening / Storm Awareness

- Target Audience: Entire Banks County population
- Press releases issued to the media about topics
- Literature regarding heat safety at Banks County website
- PSAs placed with local media

September - November

National Preparedness Month - September

- Target Audience: Entire Banks County population
- Press release issued to media about National Preparedness Month
- National Preparedness Month information placed on website

Home Depot Safety Day / Fall Festivals

- Target Audience: Entire Banks County population
- Preparedness handouts, discussions and demonstrations presented at festivals

Halloween Safety

- Target Audience: Entire Banks County population
- Press release issued to media about Halloween Safety
- Halloween Safety information placed on website

Storm Safety

- Target Audience: Entire Banks County population
- Press release issued to media about Storm Safety
- Storm Safety information placed on agency social media sites and website
- Preparedness discussions presented to County Employees and various groups

December

Heater / Fire Safety

- Target Audience: Entire Banks County population
- Press release issued to media about safely heating homes.
- Fire Safety information placed on website
- Preparedness discussions presented to Senior Citizen Center

Holiday Safety

- Target Audience: Entire Banks County population
- Holiday Safety information placed on website

Specialty Information As Needed

Safety Information on Specialty Topics As Needed

- Target Audience: Entire Banks County population
- Press releases.
- County website releases.
- Speaking engagements as needed.

END OF DOCUMENT