

# ESTABLISHING AND OPERATING DISASTER INFORMATION CENTERS

## REQUIREMENTS FOR A DISASTER INFORMATION CENTER

When a disaster strikes the impacted citizens and others will have an immediate and crucial needs for accurate and timely information. This is best facilitated under the authority of Emergency Management and utilizing the Incident Command Structure for continuity and effectiveness. The ICS structure can designate a Public Information Officer (PIO) with support. Incident Command (IC) briefings will channel details to the information center and the center will share regular public issues with the incident command team. If complex enough the commander will establish a Joint Information Center (JIC) which will have information processing broken into several duty stations.

Once an information center is deemed needed, it has some requirements to be effective, including:

- It must be in a location safe from current and future disaster incident impacts.

- It must have space for numerous stations and simultaneous meetings.
- It must have reliable power and multiple phone lines as well as internet access.
- It must be a site which is known, easy to access by the public, but has access control for security. Parking space will be required.
- It should have suitable sanitation facilities for a number of people and the possibility for food service and establishing a sleeping area if needed.
- It should be on ground level for deliveries.
- Have suitable office equipment.
- Within the incident command operational plan both assignments for this and the next operational period should be determined.
- Phone lines and stations should be assigned and then shared with the public. It should be separate from, but accessible to Incident Command (IC).

## EFFECTIVE INFORMATION TRANSFERS

To facilitate good information transfer, staff on the phones need to have a prepared script to share with the public, report forms to feed incoming information to incident command and a list of available resources for the public. Staff should understand when updates to information will be provided each day. Phone logs will be crucial in documenting two-way information traffic.

Information centers can provide great assistance to resolving community issues, reducing disaster-related stress and connecting victims with resource assistance. The details from the public that can help responses must always be fed upstream.



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Fire info center

It is often advisable to provide a space away from the operation desks (securely) where incident command and public officials can interact with each other and the media. **ALL OFFICIAL INFORMATION WILL BE PROVIDED IN SCRIPTS OR RELEASED BY THE PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICER.**

## INFORMATION CENTER FUNCTIONS

In addition to providing scripted updates on the disaster incident, the Disaster information Center (DIC) can establish desks and provide information on healthcare, food access, financial help, mental health, pet sheltering, transportation, shelters, supplies and many other resources.

For the response structure, the DIC can track donations, order and document supplies, track resource orders, monitor social media and reports, document and print reports for the branches of the incident command team. Most of these are support functions for the logistics and planning branches.

## ONE SOURCE FOR COMMUNITIES

Information centers provide a reliable, convenient source point for communities under extreme duress. Incident command can communicate needs with the impacted population while getting input without interrupting response.

Care should be taken to put the appropriate person at each information center workstation and monitor their performance and stress level. All staff should get breaks and lunches since the subject matter can become overwhelming on an emotional level.

## EXTENSION AND INFORMATION CENTERS

University Extension systems often have facilities that work well as information centers without blocking school buildings, civic centers, and churches which are often used as shelters and feeding sites. Extension offices usually also meet the requirements mentioned earlier.

Extension staff and volunteers have a trusted connection with communities, deep insights into resources, have experience managing complex functions and managing the release of information, managing orders and managing donations. In addition, Extension programs have a large number of screened volunteers who are adept at working in teams under direction. More information on setting up disaster centers is available from the Extension Disaster Education Network at [www.extensiondisaster.net](http://www.extensiondisaster.net).



### MP-145.3 Establishing and operating disaster information centers

April 2021

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*This material supported by a USDA NIFA Special Needs Grant Project WYON2016-07528 and the direct collaboration of University of Wyoming Extension, Colorado State University Extension, and Montana State University Extension.*

*Issued in furtherance of extension work, acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Kelly Crane, director, University of Wyoming Extension, University of Wyoming, Laramie, Wyoming 82071.*

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