

California State Oil Spill Contingency Plan Public Information Officer Section and Joint Information Center

During an oil spill response in California, public information activities will be carried out by representatives of the Unified Command (U.S. Coast Guard, California Department of Fish and Game, and the responsible party) in coordination with other federal, state, and local organizations (including tribes). Depending upon the size of the incident, the lead Public Information Officer (PIO) and the Joint Information Center (JIC) manager may serve on site or conduct activities from the office or another remote location in a virtual JIC, as directed by the Unified Command. The PIO team will coordinate with additional agency PIOs via phone, e-mail, in person or other method to provide early notification and coordination as needed for timely review of draft news releases and other materials, and collaboration to determine other information needs.

Initial Information Officer – Support before JIC established

When an incident occurs, the California media and public demand and expect information to be distributed immediately. With the expansion and availability of social media, communication regarding an incident must begin at initial response. Impressions formed in the first few hours of a response shape public perception of the response. When the California Department of Fish and Game's Office of Spill Prevention and Response (DFG-OSPR), the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) or the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) first learns about a spill, the respective Information Officers should quickly contact one another to share information in an effort to release a joint media statement. The goal should be to get this first release issued within 30 minutes of the initial notification and no longer than two hours after notification is received. The first Tweet may go out sooner in the form of "Agency XX responding to reports of spill at _____."

Until a Joint Information Center is established, a lead agency's information office will communicate with the media and other key audiences either remotely or on-site (including other state and local PIOs). This "Initial" Information Officer carries out activities with or without assistance in support of responders deployed to the field. The time needed to travel to the command post and have basic JIC operations in place will affect decisions about how, by whom, and for how long these communications will occur. For example, issuing the initial news release within 30 to 120 minutes of notification may require that facts be provided over the phone or electronically to an agency Information Officer operating from the office or a remote location.

The Initial Information Officer is concerned with who to communicate with (both media and public) and how to communicate. For the State of California, DFG-OSPR designates an information officer for its Emergency Operations Center to serve this role until the deployed PIO arrives on-scene and the JIC is established. This off-site information officer provides support until no longer needed as directed by the Lead IO and JIC or by the UC.

Public Information Officer activity within first 24 hours of arrival at scene

Tasks to perform to initiate media response and establish the JIC:

- Sign in at ICP and receive necessary identification or clearance if operating on-scene
- Make contact with the Incident Commander and Unified Command
- Share latest information immediately with other lead agencies – call if they are not present
- Obtain objectives for the response
- Establish a dedicated phone line, e-mail address and Website, if possible, for inquiries from the media
- Gather basic facts about the incident - who, what, when, where, and how
- Make contact with leads for appropriate branches and units for incident information
- Prepare news release and information released and secure UC approval (If significant changes are made, the release must be re-approved by the Incident Commander or Unified Command). After initial release use fact sheets for updates
- Distribute initial news release to media, affected agencies, and other audiences within 30 minutes whenever possible, but no later than two hours (if this has not already been accomplished by the Initial Information Officer who provides support)
- Inform UC regarding social media policy (Appendix A - Sample)
- Draft fact sheets and Web-based information;
- Begin securing photographs, video footage or other information relevant to the incident for posting
- Contact other local agency communicators for assistance/information about their community
- Respond to media calls and other requests for information
- Conduct media interviews
- Begin to develop a media plan
 - Setting schedule and place for updates, briefings, news conference, etc.
 - Coordinate with the Planning Section to ensure information captured in meeting schedule (include UC briefing/prep times)
 - Include social media policy, key messages, ICS 201, ICS 207 for JIC, and ICS 209
- Initiate case book creation (log of callers, time of calls, questions and responses, copies each press release or factsheet distributed, log of clips, media plan, unit log, media plan and components, and other documents as appropriate)
- Initiate unit log ICS 214

KEY NOTE: In order to build trust with the public and among agencies responding to the incident, every press release should include a “unified command (UC) statement” and joint messages. This UC statement should include, by name, all the primary participating agencies responding to the spill incident. In addition, press releases should include information about where the public can report oiled wildlife, a third party claim number if an when one is established, and additional resources (web site, social media sites, etc.).

Joint Information Center

A Joint Information Center (JIC) forms under Unified Command to effectively manage communication resources and public messages when multiple organizations are involved in incident response. A JIC is responsible for media relations and public information during incident response. The following protocols and procedures guide JIC activities.

A JIC expands and contracts as the incident size and complexity dictates. If more than one information officer is on-scene, form a JIC. Ideally, a JIC should be located in or near the incident command post and staffed by personnel from the participating organizations with media and crisis communications experience, and appropriate ICS and spill response training. If the JIC is located in the command post, it is imperative any media representatives present be given an adequate work space and access to printers, a fax machine and either WiFi or a hotspot. Satellite JICs may be needed for response to major incidents involving large geographic areas. A JIC can also function “virtually” through strong and close communication between incident participants which may be how the JIC functions as demobilization happens and media interest wanes but updates on the situation must still occur.

Primary JIC objectives

- Gather, package, and distribute accurate information and data in a timely manner
- Maintain public interfaces (Website, social media, etc. as determined necessary)
- Inform the public, primarily through the news media, dedicated Website and social media
- Monitor media and social network coverage and responses to incident
- Analyze public perception and community expectations
- Evaluate communication and adjust strategies to meet media, public and community needs
- Advise UC and make recommendations regarding communication with media, public and constituent groups

JIC tasks

- Establish a JIC manager
- Ensure timely release of accurate information to media and other audiences
- Establish and maintain the official incident Website (Cal Spill Watch is a primary, but others may be necessary)
- Review, for approval or revisions, any public information developed in response to the incident by other agencies
- Capture digital images in video and photos for use by response organizations and media
- Develop, recommend, and execute public information products, plans, and strategies
- Coordinate closely with incident Liaison Officer
- Monitor and measure media content and public perception of the incident, report to lead IO for UC
- Prepare appropriate response personnel for news conferences and interviews
- Identify and correct rumors and misinformation
- Evaluate response communications when the JIC is deactivated
- Organize all JIC materials for distribution to the Documentation Unit each day

- Create and maintain casebook

JIC set-up

CRITICAL NEEDS:

- A phone – if land lines are initially scarce, consider using a dedicated land line to take incoming calls from media and use cell phones to call out
- A computer with necessary software, printer, and internet capability
- Electronic distribution ability for news releases (can be handled by the JIC or by an office of a participating agency)
- Printer/Scanner/Fax

JIC space should:

- Be located in or as near the command post as possible
- Be large enough to accommodate the anticipated number of JIC personnel
- Be in close proximity to the Liaison Officer for close coordination
- Have adequate numbers of tables, chairs, and AC outlets or power strips approved within fire codes
- Accommodate a phone bank with dedicated lines and computers connected to the Internet
- Provide quick access to printers, copier, fax, and e-mail

JIC Deactivation

The Unified Command, with advice of lead PIO, determines when to deactivate the JIC. When deactivating a JIC:

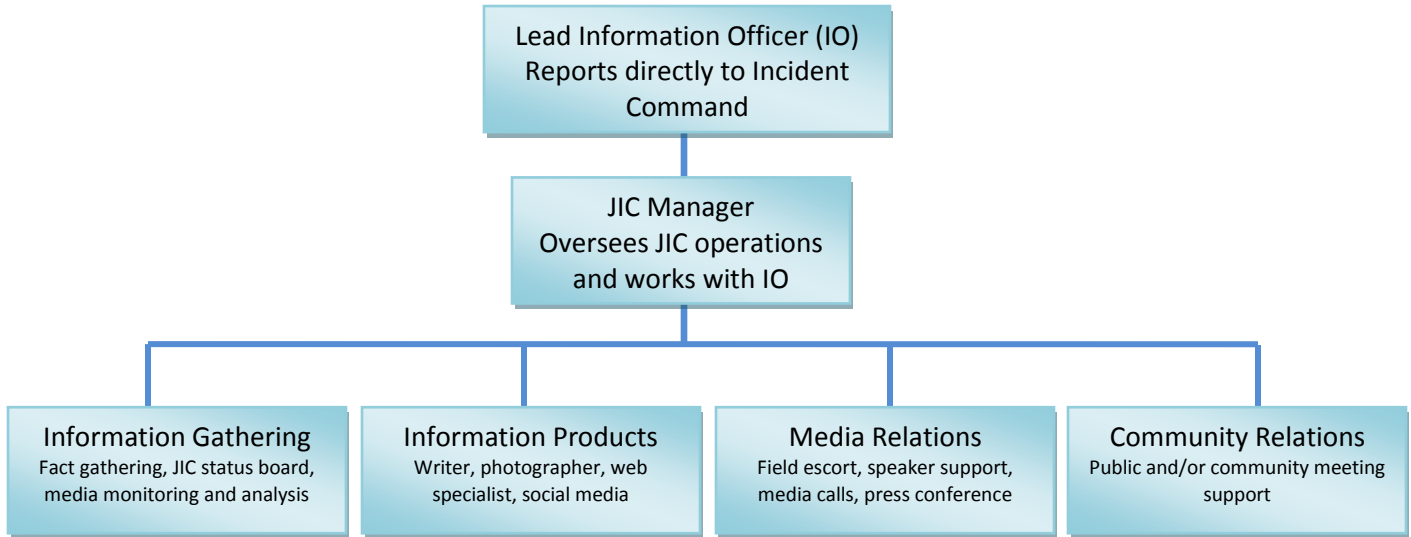
- Determine if JIC demobilization is just physical from ICP site with standing up of a virtual JIC or if complete demobilization with no further media activity expected
 - Notify community and local officials about closing and provide regional contact information
 - Notify media and agency communication managers about closing and provide contact information for follow-up calls (contacts for virtual JIC as appropriate)
 - Prepare comprehensive deactivation news release for lead-agency headquarters approval and distribution
 - Provide casebooks to communication managers whose organizations will assume responsibility for ongoing information
 - Complete after-action report and participate in evaluation discussions
 - Return equipment and supplies
 - Update list of equipment and supplies
 - Inventory and replenish “go-kits”

Documentation

Most information (with the exception of information about active enforcement, investigations and security sensitive matters) collected, generated, or distributed during incident response may become part of the public record. All response personnel should adhere to these public

trust responsibilities and ensure that copies of all documents are maintained and submitted daily to the Documentation Unit. For the JIC this includes all media releases and factsheets, media plan and updates, copy of any press kits, etc.

JIC Organization, Positions, and Responsibilities



JIC Organization

A JIC is a flexible organization that can expand or contract, depending on the incident and number of available personnel. Staff within the JIC may be assigned to fill different roles from day to day, depending on priorities. While no two JICs are structured exactly the same, they should generally operate with key functional units filled by one or more personnel.

**An incident may require a significant community relations effort. In these cases, a separate Community Relations Unit should be formed.*

Incident Information Sources

The Situation Unit within the Planning Section generates and coordinates nearly all incident information. JIC personnel should review the job descriptions found in the Field Operations Guide for the Resource Unit Leader, Situation Unit Leader, and Environmental Unit Leader and be familiar with the information these groups can provide the JIC. A schedule must be established for information updates from these groups each day that conforms as close as possible to the Planning Cycle established by the Planning Section Chief. Determine what visual materials or displays will be needed for a press conference. The different units within Planning can produce maps. Additional materials can be ordered through Logistics Section and members of the PIO may have the skills and resources to produce additional items (photos, graphics, etc.).

Examples of displays include:

- Base Maps – used in the field by field observers; these depict where the oil is, from a ground perspective, and where workers are
- Over Flight Maps – used during over flights and depict where oil and equipment actually are located
- Situation Maps – depict where the oil is located
- Natural Resources at Risk and Protection Strategy Maps – show where natural, cultural, and economic resources at risk are located and activities being done to protect them

(refer to the Area Contingency Plan);

- Trajectory Maps – depict where the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) think the oil move go over time
- Beach Closure map
- Road Maps – depict road closures
- Digital photographs and/or video

Information Officer (IO)

The Regional Response Team IX prefers that in the case of oil spills, the responsible party not fill the lead IO position, regardless of whether the spiller is private industry or another government agency. However, the UC holds the discretion to fill the position with whomever they choose and the lead IO should be the individual with the most experience in oil spill response, versed in Incident Command System, preferably certified as a Type III or above responder for PIO, and experienced in public affairs, public speaking, crisis communication, media relations, and principles of JIC management. When selecting the lead, the UC should consider credibility with the media and public, as well as previous experience in drills or spills, familiarity with California spill response, plan tools and. The JIC team can also make a recommendation to the UC based upon initial discussions amongst themselves.

The IO reports to the Incident Commander or Unified Command. The IO will:

- Coordinate with the JIC manager on JIC operations
- Collaborate with other PIO personnel to fill key positions based on skill level and previous training
- Participate in Unified Command meetings and provide advice for handling issues
- Relay critical issues, requests and information to the JIC from the UC
- Collaborate with the JIC in the development of public information plans, goals, and strategies for the specific operational periods
- Review analysis provided by JIC on public perceptions and make necessary strategic adjustments
- Provide direction for handling controversial and sensitive issues
- Moderate news conferences and assist with public meetings. *(It is suggested that the task of news conference moderator be assigned to someone other than the spiller, if the spiller is filling the IO position)*
- Facilitate media briefings
- Prepare Unified Command for news conferences along with appropriate agency PIOs if requested by UC (note: *in a Unified Command, the lead PIO for that agency may wish to brief his/her incident commander on specific topics – this need must be accommodated*)
- Establish daily schedules for news conferences, briefings, tours and public meetings. These should be closely coordinated with the Operational Planning Cycle. This ensures that the Information Officer has the latest information available
- Obtain approval from Unified Command to disseminate public information products
- Seek general approval from Unified Command to post simple, factual updates to the Incident Website without UC review

- Request UC permission to Tweet and post to Facebook facts, images and information from already approved materials
- Facilitate resolution of disputes among JIC personnel or organizations involved with public information

JIC Manager

When a JIC manager is required he / she is appointed by and reports to the Information Officer to supervise and coordinate activities of the Information Gathering, Information Products and Media Relations Units. The position should be filled by an experience in oil spill response, versed in Incident Command System, preferably certified as a Type III or above responder for PIO, and experienced in public affairs, public speaking, crisis communication, media relations, and principles of JIC management. Necessary skills include managing people and projects, writing, editing, proofreading, and community and public outreach skills.

- Notifies agency communication managers when the JIC has been activated
- Ensuring adequate space, equipment, and available personnel
- Coordinates closely with Lead IO on JIC needs, issues, and document approval
- Briefs JIC personnel at the beginning of each shift
- Sets staff work hours and daily JIC operations schedule
- Coordinates JIC position assignments, work and deadlines with JIC team
- Reviews and revises public information materials developed by government agencies prior to submission to Information Officer and the UC; and prior to Web-posting or distribution
- Develop plans for media tours and assist the Liaison Officer with VIP tours and visits
- Monitor traditional, electronic and social media, correct misinformation and identify trends and issues
- Coordinate exchange of information among other sections and participating agencies
- Establishes internal communication procedures
- Ensures approved materials are distributed internally and externally
- Requests Information Technology (IT) support from the Logistics Unit to install and provide expertise in computers and telephone equipment or programs (*JIC IT support typically is most needed in the first days of incident response and for ongoing periodic troubleshooting*) Completes daily unit log
- Ensures 214 completed, all staff sign in/out
- Ensures copy of all 213RR maintained in casebook

Unified Command Approves News Releases and Other Materials

Unified Command must approve all news releases prior to distribution. The Unified Command should review draft releases for factual accuracy – while avoiding getting bogged down in copy-editing. (*Note: after the initial press release on the incident is distributed, consider using fact sheets for updates on numbers and press releases for significant issues and UC announcements.*)

The IO is responsible for ensuring that Unified Command review and approval occurs quickly. If approval is delayed because of disagreement about factual statements, the IO should

employ two tactics:

- Re-word statements to satisfy Unified Command
- Delete disputed statement(s) and try to resolve any issues before the next news cycle

Besides press releases Unified Command also must approve other public information developed by individual agencies responding to an incident. Review and approval must occur prior to publication, Web posting, or distribution. The IO or delegate will help facilitate this process. Whenever possible, review is completed as soon as practical, but no more than within two hours. The IO may negotiate with Unified Command whether products created out of already approved materials (Tweets from distributed press releases or Facebook posts from approved factsheets) can be posted without review. (Refer to social media policy appendix) Photographs and videos should also be reviewed. Developing a media plan with key messages and strategic products can help with the approval process as materials stay on target with UC communication goals.

Coordination of Public Information among Other Agencies

Coordination of public information by other agencies is required when the IO or JIC Manager notifies agency communication managers that a JIC has been activated. Coordination also occurs when public information specialists operate from their agency offices to form a “virtual JIC.” Especially in the case of a virtual JIC, the IO should ensure that news releases list points of contact from all organizations participating in the JIC. This coordination loop helps avoid surprises and aids Unified Command to speak with a consistent voice. The Information Officer, on behalf of the Unified Command, may be called upon to resolve disagreements that may arise.

Coordination with the Liaison Officer

The JIC manager should maintain contact with the Liaison Officer to ensure that messages, issues and concerns from local agencies and their constituents are addressed through the products and messages delivered by the JIC. The Lead IO must coordinate with the Liaison Officer especially for visits by local, state and federal VIPs. Any and all community meetings should be closely coordinated with the Liaison Officer as well. The Lead IO and JIC manager should ensure Liaison is aware of upcoming press conferences, and the Liaison Officer should alert the JIC when local and state representatives are holding press conferences or meetings relative to the response.

Resources

PQS Books: <http://www.dfg.ca.gov/ospr/Train/pgs.aspx>

Job Aids: <http://www.dfg.ca.gov/ospr/Train/job-aids.asp>

Checklists: <http://www.dfg.ca.gov/ospr/Train/checklists.asp>

Social Media Policy for Unified Command

Purpose: Incident Command staff authorized to engage constituents through social media on behalf of the UC.

Social media plays a significant role in giving the general public the ability to communicate its perceptions of an agency and its actions. Social media also allows for two-way communication, which permits unprecedented access by the public to decision makers, but also the opportunity for decision makers to directly interact with the public.

Background: According to an American Red Cross study, social media is quickly becoming the primary form of information sharing in the modern internet world. The study showed:

- 3 of 4 surveyed participated in social media, most through Facebook
- 1 in 6 use social media every day
- 50% would sign up for email, text, tweets for emergency information
- 86 percent would use Facebook to post about their status in an emergency
- Additional facts about the current social media environment:
- 350 million access Facebook from mobile devices
- 50 % of the 350 million access it daily
- 19 million Californians use Facebook
- 37% comment on, contribute to or share news
- 43% are likely to vote

For the purpose of the policy, **Social media** is defined as: any forums, blogs, wikis, websites or emergency social communication technologies including but not limited to Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, Google Buzz, LinkedIn, Technorati etc.

Best work practices will incorporate the following:

- Before initiating use of social media, a risk versus benefit discussion will occur with the UC and ensure protocols/approvals are established through the Lead IO.

Authorized Users:

- Only individuals authorized by the UC via the JIC will operate as official representatives on social media sites associated with the UC directly. Only authorized representatives will operate on their own social media sites consistent with their agencies individual policies.
- During an emergency response, the UC can designate an additional individuals as a representatives should it be necessary.
- Authorized users will be trained in posting and maintenance of the social media.
- Authorized users will provide their name, title and contact information when posting or exchanging information on Social Medium forums where official identification is not immediately available.

Messages and postings

Standard operations will include:

- Emergency response texts, blogs, tweets and other social media postings will come from the Unified Command (UC) as either excerpts from news releases, fact sheets or frequently asked questions, or as specific statements approved by the UC.
- Upon receiving direction from the UC, the Lead IO will coordinate with JIC management to direct resources according to the level of need of the response whether on-scene or off-site, and will provide the approved materials from which to work (when additional staff are needed to monitor social media but not needed at the command post – virtual JIC)
- Prompt response to questions and comments during normal work hours
- Professional, honest, accurate and respectful comments when answering questions or engaging in discussion
- Approved updates, comments and materials
- Direction to additional resources
- Photos that portray the Incident Command team members at work demonstrating the core values including teamwork, excellence, integrity, respect and empowerment and the goal and mission of the UC.
- Where available, provide a comments policy on what is appropriate for the page

Prohibited social media activities

Staff working on social media will avoid:

- Posting any content in violation of UC policy or code of conduct
- Posting any confidential, proprietary, personal, confidential, or otherwise inappropriate material (such as information gathered as part of an investigation)
- Violating copyright law which is posting material which no explicit permission has been provided or is not the property of the UC or one of the agencies involved in the response
- Posting of materials to unofficial sites without approval first (may be identified in Media Communications Plans for UC to address local, previously unknown resources during a spill)
- Posting of materials related to or part of legal or litigated matters without express approval of the Legal Officer (secured in writing).
- Identifying personnel, suppliers, associates etc. by name unless specific to a quote with the proper approval (ie the FOSC says....).

No employee, authorized or unauthorized, use official social media sites to:

- Mix professional and personal information
- Engage in negative discussions about Unified Command operations
- Participate in illegal activities under local, state, federal or international law
- Abuse the authority as a state representative for personal gain
- Post unsolicited emails or junk emails
- Speak on behalf of the UC without express authorization (being granted permission to speak for one's agency does not automatically grant permission to speak for the UC)
- Speak on behalf of the UC without express authorization

- Post any content that is obscene, defamatory, profane, hateful or otherwise inappropriate in accordance with the codes of conduct and laws governing workplace behavior.