Annex 7: Crisis and Emergency Risk Communications (CERC)

Updated: May 2018

I. **Purpose:** The purpose of the Tuolumne County Health Department Risk Communication Plan is to establish the framework for providing important public health guidance and information on protective measures to the public and to partnering agencies in response to an emergency or crisis event. Crisis and risk communications is a critical component of response activities. Appropriate and timely communication of credible information by the Tuolumne County Public Health Department, in collaboration with its partners and stakeholders, will help calm public fears and promote appropriate health-related actions during a public health crisis.

II. **Assumptions:** In the case of an actual or suspected event, it will be readily apparent that Public Health officials should act swiftly to educate or calm the public and/or to correct misinformation and rumors. At other times, there may be tension between the public's right to know about potential, but unverified health risks and the need to avoid undue alarm. Each situation should be governed by its own unique characteristics. Public health and safety is paramount. In all situations, the Public Information Officer (PIO) should work with OES, Public Health leadership and other county officials to ensure that each decision to release information or refrain from releasing information is governed by the overriding concern for public safety.

III. **Activation:** This Risk Communication Plan will be activated any time a Health Department Operations Center (DOC) or Tuolumne County Emergency Operations Center (EOC) is activated or any other time as requested by the Public Health Officer. During an exercise or actual event, the type of risk communication response will be dependent on the level of the event and whether or not an EOC/DOC has been activated. Levels of event are as follows:

- **Pre-Event:** Planning stage and ongoing daily risk communication activities by Public Health staff. This includes disseminating public health updates and guidelines, preparing materials and messages for anticipated event, responding to media inquiries, and conducting other public education and community outreach activities.
- **Unusual Event:** Public Health staff is responding to report(s) of disease outbreaks, natural disasters, terrorism/bioterrorism or other public health event.
- **Emergency/Confirmed Event:** Public Health staff is responding to report(s) or determination of a probable or confirmed event, based on further evaluation of the event.
- **Post-Event/Recovery:** Public Health staff is responding to decreasing scope and/or severity of the event as determined by epidemiologic and other indicators, as activities gradually return to baseline.

IV. **Public Information Officer (PIO)**

A. The PIO is responsible for developing and releasing information about the incident to the news media, to incident personnel, and to other appropriate agencies and organizations, upon the approval of the Health Officer. Any information relating to issues of public health must receive approval of the Health Officer or his/her designee prior to dissemination.

B. During the pre-event phase, unusual event phase and small-scale emergency DOC activations, the MHOAC, Health Officer, or other Public Health staff may serve as the Public Information Officer (PIO).

C. In more widespread, threatening, or other situations, an activation of the county Emergency Operations Center (EOC) may be required. When the EOC is activated, the EOC's Public Information Officer will lead risk communication activities in consultation with others as needed, such as the Health Officer. The Public Health PIO will work in cooperation with the EOC and in support of the communications activities directed by the EOC's PIO, as well as collaborating with the designated PIO of other community agencies that may be involved in the event.

    a. During these types of events, when multiple response and support agencies/departments are involved, it may be determined by the PIO in consultation with command staff, to activate the **Joint Information System/Joint Information Center (JIC).** All agency/department representatives coordinate and communicate within their own agency, but also with each other within the JIC to ensure that information that is being released to the public is accurate and coordinated. Health Care and Safety Coalition partners will be included in the JIC as appropriate. The JIC is usually located at a site other than the Incident Command Center to allow command staff to focus on event response, and providing a point of contact for media at the JIC.

V. **Social Media**

A. The rapid growth of social media use by other local, state, and federal government entities is evidence that social media is a valid and effective way to communicate, both between county agencies, and with the public and community.
Refer to the Tuolumne County Public Health Department Social Media Policy.

VI. **Messaging**

A. When no messaging direction from CDPH or CDC has been provided, Message Templates (found in HEPReP Resource Documents) have been developed for assistance in preparing messages, and the following will be considered:

1. The audience will be defined-
   - Relationship to event
   - Demographics (age, language, education, culture)
   - Level of panic/outrage

2. The purpose of the message will be clarified-
   - Provide facts/update
   - Rally to action
   - Clarify event status
   - Address rumors
   - Satisfy media requests

3. Methods of delivery will be considered-
   - Print
   - Website
   - Spokesperson (TV or in-person appearance)
   - Radio
   - Social Media
   - Public Information Notification Systems and Hotlines
   - Other
4. Consider populations with Access and Functional Needs
   - Media outlets which may differ from mainstream media (none known at this time)
   - Alerting community based organizations working directly with citizens
   - Flyers that may need to be printed in other languages or braille for posting
   - Providing interpretation and/or video captioning
   - Assisted listening technology for press conferences, interpretation services, other assistive devices, etc.

Information Verification and Release Procedures

When EOC is not activated: The designated Public Health Information Officer (PIO) will release all information after consultation with appropriate subject matter experts. Final approval before any release must be given by the Health Officer or Health Officer's Designee. All media releases must be coordinated with other county and community agencies, to ensure consistency of the messages released. The County Office of Emergency Services may be alerted to the situation and provided with policy guidance as needed. <u>The PIO should not release any information or distribute anything to the media without the approval of the Health Officer or Health Officer's Designee.</u>

When the EOC is activated: Procedures are according to those described in the Tuolumne County Emergency Operations Plan. The EOC PIO is responsible for all public information efforts and information releases to the public, but may collaborate with the Health Officer and/or the Public Health PIO. In a public health emergency, any medical or public health related releases need to be reviewed by the Health Officer or Health Officer's Designee for content approval. Also in this situation, the EOC Incident Commander could choose to delegate final approval authority to the Health Officer and/or the Public Health PIO. <u>Anyone serving as the Public Health PIO when the EOC is activated should not release any information or distribute anything to the media without direction/approval of the EOC PIO or EOC Incident Commander.</u>

Tuolumne County Health Emergency Preparedness Plan (HEPReP)

Table 1: Roles and responsibilities

Role	Responsibility
Public Information Officer (PIO)	1. During pre-event activities and when a Public Health DOC is activated, the PIO is responsible for developing and releasing information about the incident to the news media, to incident personnel, and to other appropriate agencies and organizations, upon approval of the Health Officer. 2. Ensure that all information releases have been coordinated with all agencies involved in a response. 3. When an EOC is activated or at any other time indicated, collaborate with the County OES PIO on development and release of messages. 4. Coordinate with the EOC/DOC to ensure adequate communications and accommodations are made for citizens with access and functional needs.
Health Officer	1. Approve all information related to public health issues. 2. Designate the Public Health PIO or other Health Department staff to collaborate with the County OES PIO when an EOC is activated or any other time indicated. 3. Enforce and observe orders and ordinances of the Tuolumne County Board of Supervisors or the Sonora City Council under Health and Safety Code §101470, CDPH Orders, and state statutes and regulations relating to public health.
County OES PIO	1. When an EOC is activated, responsible for coordinating with the Public Health PIO in the development and releasing of information about an incident to the news media, to incident personnel, and to other appropriate agencies and organizations, upon the approval of the Incident Commander.