

# Joint Information Center *How-to Guide*

## **What to do first?**

If you have not already, you need to establish which community partners need to be involved in a local county Joint Information Center (JIC). Every agency involved in the response to the emergency situation should participate in the JIC. These agencies will likely include: local emergency management, law enforcement, fire, Emergency Medical Services, hospital and school systems. Depending on the situation, more agencies may need to be involved.

## **How do I get partners involved?**

Establish relationships with your partners. Have meetings to discuss the need for a local county JIC, if one is not already established in your community. Communicate with partners during non-emergency events. This will allow you to nurture those relationships. Eventually, plan a tabletop exercise that tests the communication within your community. This will show partners the importance of having a JIC in place. Test the JIC during a real event.

## **Where should the JIC be located?**

In many rural communities, finding a location that is conducive to a JIC is difficult. However, remember that in most instances, JIC members will likely be communicating virtually, rather than face-to-face. Most rural agencies do not have a full-time public information officer (PIO) in place. Therefore, determining how the JIC members will communicate is vital to it functioning properly. Consider radios, faxes, email, a JIC website, etc. as means of communicating with the JIC partners. Because a JIC will not be manned by all agencies at all times, smaller venues may be considered. However, the JIC facility should:

- Be located close to the best sources of information, such as an Incident Command Post or Emergency Operations Center, without compromising safety and security;
- Provide parking for media vehicles (including satellite trucks), with signs directing media where to go; and
- Contain the necessary equipment needed during an event, such as: computer(s), fax machine(s), phone(s), LCD projector and screen, copiers and printers, etc. It's best to have agreements in place prior to opening the JIC with agencies to help provide this equipment. It does not need to remain in the JIC facility while there is no event happening.

## **Who is in charge of the JIC?**

Usually the PIO with the lead agency responding to the event is in charge of the JIC. This PIO reports to the Incident Commander of the event. Because there may not be a PIO available to take the lead from the agency in charge (this do to the rural nature of the county), another PIO from an agency that either is not involved in the current event or has a lesser role may be asked to step in and be the lead PIO. This should be agreed upon by all members of the JIC. Remember, in most, if not all cases, PIOs have a responsibility to report to their agency supervisor. It is important to develop a JIC protocol for disseminating information to one another and to the public, so that the JIC representative will not be asked to circumvent his/her supervisor's authority during an event.