

Critical Incident Checklist

The **"COOK"** Book
Guide to Managing
Critical Incidents



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Emergency Public Information (EPI)

Date	Disp. Time	Arrival Time	Location
Basic Facts (What Happened?)			
Who?			
What?			
When?			
Where?			
How?			
Why? (Likely Cannot Answer)			
Safety Impacts		Traffic Impacts	
HazMat (Types, Effects, Uses)		Areas Affected	
Protective Actions (Safety Mitigation)		Shelters	
Special Needs Populations (Languages, Disabilities, Braille)			
Injuries/Deaths			

NIMS/ICS Structure

Under Homeland Security Presidential Directive (HSPD) -5, the National Incident Management System (NIMS) and National Response Framework (NRF) utilizes the Incident Command System (ICS) to enable effective and efficient incident management by integrating facilities, equipment, personnel, procedures and communications operating within a common organizational structure.

- The Incident Commander (IC) is responsible for the overall management of the incident.
- The need for a Unified Command (UC) occurs when an incident affects the statutory responsibility of more than one agency or jurisdiction.
- Command Staff (CS) positions may be established to assign/delegate responsibility for command activities that the IC cannot perform due to the complexity of the incident or other situational demands.
- The Public Information Officer (PIO) is responsible for communicating with the public, media, and/or coordinating with other agencies, as necessary, with incident-related information requirements. The PIO is also responsible for developing and releasing information about the incident to the news media, incident personnel, and other appropriate agencies and organizations. Depending on the size or complexity of the incident, a lead PIO should be assigned for each incident and may have assistants, as necessary, including support PIOs representing other responding agencies or jurisdictions. The PIO is a direct report to the IC.

EPI Phases

1. Initial Response Phase
2. Intermediate Briefing Phase
3. Extended Media Phase
4. One and Done Phase
5. Recovery and Demobilization Phase

PIO Assignments

1. Lead PIO
2. Assistant PIO
3. Information Gathering PIO
4. Media Staging & Media Monitoring PIO
5. Social Media PIO

JIS Planning

The Joint Information System (JIS) integrates incident/event information and public affairs into a cohesive organization designed to provide consistent, coordinated, accurate, accessible, timely, and complete information during crisis or incident operations.

Public Information Needs During an Incident

- **Timely and accurate facts** - What happened? What is the impact? What is being done?
- **Magnitude** - How big is the risk area? Am I affected?
- **Immediacy** - How soon will the public be affected? How soon will people need to do something about it?
- **Duration** - How long will it last? When people go home? When will things be normal?
- **Management of the emergency** - Who is in charge? Can they manage the event? Can the problems be corrected?
- **Emergency mitigation** - Demobilize and direct people back home. Restore order.

JIC Planning

The Joint Information Center (JIC) is a central location that facilitates operation of the JIS. It is the location where personnel with public information responsibilities perform critical emergency information functions and crisis communications.

PRIORITY - Early in the incident, the health and safety impact on community members should be of primary concern. Later, the focus can shift on the actions that are being taken to manage and rectify the situation. Facts should be release as they are confirmed.

EPI Checklist

- Incident/Event/Disaster Occurs - Make administrative notifications and summon team members.
- Grab Emergency Go Kit - Supplies, contact lists, computer/tablet/phone/radio, camera, chargers.
- Determine response type - Directly to scene? Split team up? Hospital? Off-site response based upon hazard.
- Arrival - Media commander determines assignments of media team - Host "Circle Assignment Meeting."
- Media Staging Area - Appropriate location, notify Dispatch Services, notify media (avoid Tweeting location).
- Lead PIO/Assistant PIO/Information Gathering PIO respond to Command Post and meet with I.C. to obtain situational report (SITREP). Try and meet with Criminal Investigation Supervisor/Detectives if applicable.
- Incident Commander in coordination with Criminal Investigation Supervisor if any limits on public information.
- Begin preparing basic fact set and sequencing - use notes as needed.
- In terms of police-involved critical incidents, coordinate with personnel to review all relevant video (body-worn cameras, dash cameras, surveillance videos, witness videos (that may be present on social platforms).
- Verify and confirm all purported facts from supervisory personnel and I.C.

NEVER MAKE/DISSEMINATE A STATEMENT PRIOR TO REVIEWING RELEVANT VIDEO SOURCES

- Assess gravity of situation - Do you need a JIS/JIC? Solicit help from peer agencies? Outside organizations?
- Identify key stakeholders - Social service organizations? Civic organizations? NAACP/LULAC/Asian.
- Make notification to boss after gaining understanding on what is going on to discuss proposed EPI response.

- Conduct preliminary social media scan (Social Media PIO).
- Media Staging & Monitoring PIO should provide intel on media temperature to Lead PIO.
- Information Gathering PIO begins to run down the intel side on parties involved/locations/history/CAD data.

IMPLEMENT A COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

- Basic Fact Set Template (Basic, preliminary facts should be released as soon as possible).
- Consider having Social Media PIO live streaming or recording your sound to publish to community. Also create tweets to reinforce key messages and sound bites that are important during preliminary briefing.
 - Timeline - At TIME, our department responded to a TYPE OF CALL at LOCATION.
 - Describe what happened. Who players are? How it happened?
 - Identify three key messages.
 1. Dedication to resolving, mitigating or investigating the incident (bringing those responsible to justice).
 2. Commitment to quick resolution of incident and restoring order to the community.
 3. Provision of resources that provide healing, comfort and empowerment.
 - What has already been done to control the situation? Is there remaining danger? Has the affected area been secured? Are there shelter in place orders? Evacuations? How can public stay informed? Website? Hotline? Community meetings? Public health concerns?
 - Traffic-related information - Street closures? ETA for opening roadways? Schools impacted? Students who walk neighborhoods? Lock downs?
 - What action, if any, should the public take? Telephone number for tips? Reviewing consumer surveillance systems? Ring doorbells? Crime Stoppers? Rewards?
 - Answer questions and announce next briefing time if you know you will have additional information.

Rehearse sound prior to walking up to media. Assume cameras may be live and start promptly. Anticipate questions. No comment is not an answer. Reassure the reporter you will find the information and get back to them. It's okay to acknowledge that you know the information/answer, however, it would be inappropriate to share that information at this time in order to protect the integrity of the investigation. Also, don't answer hypothetical questions (It would be inappropriate to speculate on that)

- After initial briefing, prepare News Release (Remember to obtain I.C. approval).
- For next briefing(s), consider strategy on speakers (PIO or Agency Head) and locations (Field or Police Facility).
- Continue to receive updated and vetted information from investigative personnel to build out communications
- For longer-term incidents, consider providing snacks/drinks for reporters (Long-term parking for media).
- Rotate personnel as needed and watch for signs of fatigue/document media scene with photos.
- Consider a dark website (pre-made, non-visible website activated in crisis or emergency).
- Prepare for final Press Conference event (See next page).
- Recover equipment and demobilize.
- Debrief personnel and allow for constructive critique of operation.
- Participate in after-action reports.

ONE & DONE FINAL PRESS CONFERENCE

- Prepare for finality with the goal of getting out of the news cycle.
- Plan to release all relevant digital media (body-worn, dash cameras, surveillance) and coordinate with legal division to ensure required redactions are completed.
- Plan to release warrant affidavits (arrest and search) and other publicly releasable documents dependent on your state laws.
- Determine if the final presser will need to be scripted, bulleted talking points, or on the cuff. (Script works well when high levels of controversy may be present).
- If you mention outside agencies (school districts, private venues), coordinate a notification to their PIOs.
- With serious misconduct or deadly force incidents, coordinate a notification to District Attorney's Office.
- Set up a mult-box to control the number of mics present that may detract from image.
- Determine speaker(s). Try to have only one speaker at podium at time versus a slew of representatives behind the primary speaker due to potential imaging issues with distractions.
- Rehearse presser and strategy. Will video be played during presser? Anticipate potential questions.
- Allow media access to the press event space to set-up.
- Silence phones, remove smart watch, and start on time when possible.
- Record the presser and consider live streaming. Reinforce soundbites/key messages with social media.
- Have an exit strategy (having a team member in the room that can raise their hand works well).
- Establish a media monitoring plan to address inconsistencies or errors in coverage.
- Keep an eye on department social media platforms and respond to questions as needed.

OFFICER-INVOLVED FORCE ENCOUNTERS ADDENDUM

- Employees receive information first prior to public release from PIO (Email, computer messages, etc...).
- Notify key public officials and community leaders about the incident promptly.
- Determine any potential adverse information that could be deemed controversial later and have a plan to deal with it.
- Withhold decedent's identity until Medical Examiner identifies person and family notifications are made.
- When preparing a news release, police-involved shootings should never be referred to as a homicide.
- Strive for quick release of relevant portions of the digital media evidence (body-worn cameras) within 24-72 hours if possible and after coordination with City Attorney's Office and legal division.
- Offer decedent's family first right of refusal to watch video prior to public dissemination.
- Notify involved officers prior to any large press event and intent to release digital media as a courtesy.
- Have a plan in place on how to deal with officer's identity and release of employee photographs (We typically hold officer's identities/photos through the duration of the investigation contingent upon outcry).
- Be assertive and fast while still ensuring accurate facts are released to the public.
- Challenge high reach social media users that spread misinformation related to force incidents.

LINE OF DUTY DEATH/EMPLOYEE SERIOUS INJURY ADDENDUM

- In addition to the above addendum on force encounters, withhold any confirmation on level of injury or death until immediate family has been briefed and Police Chief has authorized dissemination.
- Withhold officer's identity for 24 hours if possible (Begin pulling employee photo and file).
- Have secondary PIO manage hospital where officer or employee was taken.
- In the event of an officer funeral or memorial service, consider using a pool camera to feed video.
- Coordination of requests to speak to the involved and grieving family should be done through chaplain.
- Release of family status and personal information is typically confidential by law.
- Be careful about divulging information on background related to the ongoing criminal investigation. The focus should be on the officer and their positive legacy.

STRATEGIES TO DEAL WITH ADVERSE NEWS CYCLES

- Remember that bad news has a limited shelf life. This too shall pass and executives need to understand that the involved-agency will be more sensitive to the adverse story typically as compared to other police agencies and the surrounding public.
- Coordinate bad news "dumps" with other law enforcement agencies. Have a good relationship with neighboring agencies and your PIO peers to simultaneously release information if possible.
- Work news cycles to your advantage. Try and avoid early morning and early weekdays when you have adverse news. Late in the evening and end of the week are better options when dealing with negative stories.
- Don't go silent in the midst of controversy on your social media platforms. Anticipate that negative comments will come in, however, stay in the saddle and continue posting your regular content.
- Have a police "piggy-bank" ready with some positive organizational stories that can be pushed immediately following an adverse news cycle. While this requires good timing and strategy, look for ways to change the conversation piece back to the value the police organization provides to the community.
- Don't let haters detract from your message. Some people will always take a negative view on the profession while exploiting adverse news cycles for the agency. It's expected and will run its course.
- Turn ratings off on Facebook where folks can review your police department. In many high profile incidents, there is an organized effort across the country to infiltrate the ratings with negative reviews. Most of these people do not even reside in your community.
- Allow comments on your social media posts. Don't censor speech and allow folks to vent to a degree and re-direct the conversation back to your key messaging.
- When phone calls, emails and messages pour in on social media, have a plan on how and who you will respond to. Develop some canned messaging that refers people back to the official position statement of the incident.
- Cooler heads always prevail when it comes to dealing with trolls. Don't engage with them and move on.
- When dealing with Freedom of Information Act requests or open records requests, coordinate timing with legal division to ensure that a release does not unnecessarily generate another unexpected news cycle. Follow the law, however, have a plan in place that is strategic in nature to time the release of records that support the overall media plan.
- Even though your brand may take an initial dip, you will recover. Look for positive stories of compassion and kindness that resonate with the public.
- Focus on your local reporters first and take care of them before you manage requests with regional or national media. The locals will help you recover faster and you will be dealing with them on a regular basis.
- Have relationships in place with reporters, venues, and outside agency PIOs before a crisis occurs. Host tabletops and ensure everyone knows their role beforehand.
- No comment is a comment. If you can't answer a question, just explain why you can't.
- Project authenticity and genuineness to the community. Maintain credibility.

COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY CONSIDERATIONS

- Who, what, when, where, and how (avoid why unless you know)?
- Avoid offering opinions.
- Off the record can be dangerous (depends on your trust and relationship with reporter in conjunction with your policy).
- Speed of the response, who is involved, resources that are dealing with situation.
- Status of emergency, advice to the public, safety of the community.
- Protection and preservation of the environment/situation, restoring order to community.

OPENING STATEMENT EXAMPLES

- I want to share with you information pertaining to this accident/incident.
- My goal is to keep you informed with the latest, confirmed information regarding this incident.
- As a resident of this community... as a member of this department...
- I know that you are interested in.... and I pledge to do everything I can to keep you informed.
- We are all interested in the health and safety of our community, our residents, our First Responders, our workers, our city...
- Looking at this situation from your perspective, I also feel....
- I have worked in this community for XX years and love this city. I am also interested in...
- I have been in contact with (incident commander, fire department, public health) attempting to get the most up-to-date information about what happened.
- As a member of this noble profession, I am interested in the safety and well-being of our families and neighbors.
- I am here to share with you the knowledge and confidence I have in our police department to protect our community and citizens.
- I agree that..... is important.
- If I were in your shoes and reading/hearing/seeing the things that are happening, I would be asking the same questions.
- If it is important to you, then it is an important question to me as well.
- The issue(s) you raise is/are the top of my list of priorities.
- I also care about... My first priority is... I have asked myself the very same question.
- I know that the community wants answers and we are going to work to the best of our ability to get all of the facts and provide a timeline on what happened.
- In critical incidents, we have to be very methodical in our investigation and collect the facts to determine what happened.
- In our agency, there are two separate but concurrent investigations that occur when an officer utilizes deadly force. A criminal investigation with findings forwarded to the District Attorney's Office for presentation to a Grand Jury and an administrative investigation which looks at the procedures and protocols that occurred to ensure they are in compliance with our expectations and policies as a police department.
- Our goal is to establish a timeline of facts with the exact sequencing of what occurred to better understand what happened.

ANTICIPATED QUESTIONS

- What are the names of casualties? Relationship between victim(s) and suspect(s)?
- Prior history at location? Suspect profile and experience?
- What are the conditions of the injured and where were they transported?
- How large an area is being evacuated? Schools affected? Where are shelter in place orders? Who will care for them? What evacuation routes?
- Where do persons without transportation go for help in leaving the danger area? Who will provide help?
- What is the extent of property damage? Is there further danger to the community? Witnesses?

PRESS CONFERENCE TEMPLATE

TIPS ON WORKING WITH MEDIA

- Use the interview as an opportunity to deliver a key message (Try to identify 3).
- Use a question as an opportunity to weave in what you want the public to know.
- Be aware of what reporters already know and who they may have already interviewed.
- Remember, if you are not talking, someone else may be speaking and controlling narrative.
- Prepare by developing responses to potential questions.
- Make sure the reporter gets your name and title right by spelling it.
- Don't ask to review the article or broadcast before it is published or aired (certain exceptions).
- Relax and project authenticity during interview. Develop a rapport with media.
- Answer questions in a conversational tone and at your own pace. Control the tempo.
- Be aware of hot mics and assume that cameras are always recording.
- When walking up to a bank of cameras, assume you will be taken live and start promptly.
- Be concise and brief and think in terms of soundbites. Use uniforms to your advantage depending on the nature of the incident.
- Talk from the public's point of view.
- Avoid police jargon and acronyms. Don't mention things that may be agency specific lingo. Be careful with statistics also.
- Don't speak disparagingly of anyone, assign blame or pass the buck, regardless of how a reporter may frame a question.
- Don't answer hypothetical questions - you will never win. Avoid speculating by rephrasing the question. Don't give personal opinions.

PRESS CONFERENCE SET-UP

- Advertise through formal advisory/release and allow media time to receive it and attend.
- Set the stage - consider appropriate backdrops, live feeds, truck antennas, and proximity to incident. Prepare media briefing sheets (prior releases and relevant information) to assist reporters. Do not walk up to the press event until you are ready to start your conference (even if some camera crews are not ready due to some stations may already be broadcasting live).
- Introduce yourself, provide time frame and explain ground rules.
- Good morning/afternoon/evening... My name is (spell it) and I am the TITLE. With me are ____.
- Please hold your questions until after the briefing. Background information is available on the back table. If you have a cell phone, please silence it. Thank you.
- I only have ___ minutes available right now. Let me share with you what information has been confirmed as we know it right now and then I will take a few questions.
- Provide opening statement (Consider maps/photos). If you are interrupted, you can respond, "Please hold your questions. My statement should answer most of your questions."
- Provide basic facts, timeline and sequencing.
- Integrate your top 3 key messages that can summarize the situation for residents and media (in about 20 seconds).
- Explain format for questions. I have about ___ minutes left for some questions...
- Countdown the last two questions. I only have time for two more questions... One last question...
- Announce when you will return (if you know). I need to leave now so I can update the situation. The next media briefing will be tentatively scheduled at TIME. In the meantime, my assistant ___ will remain here to write down any additional questions or special requests you may have.

PIO TEAM ROLES DURING CRITICAL INCIDENTS

These roles can be formal in nature or can be delegated down to non-PIO team members to assist depending on the magnitude of the incident.

□ **LEAD PIO**

- Direct report to the Incident Commander and responsible for representing the agency at critical incidents.
- Provides overall communication strategy and policy direction.
- Provides strategic guidance on messaging protocols and tools to achieve desired outcome.
- Recommends and develops strategy for messages, briefings and releases.
- Obtains approval from Incident Commander before public messaging occurs.
- Conducts regular news conferences and briefings.
- Serves as primary point of contact for the media on scene.

□ **Assistant PIO**

- Attends briefings with Incident Commander as directed by the Lead PIO.
- Assists with note taking and evaluation of scene optics.
- Prepare corporate messaging to workforce (emails, computer messages, elected officials messaging).
- Prepares written news release.
- Assists with duties as assigned by the Lead PIO.
- Helps Lead PIO prepare for formal in-person briefings by rehearsing sound and anticipating questions.
- Remains on scene at media staging area after briefings to collect additional questions.

□ **Information Gathering PIO**

- Assists Lead PIO at situational briefings to gather incident details and case facts.
- Conducts strategic audit of current information in public sphere (both social media and traditional media)
- Pulls location history information, suspect profile(s) and officer data sheet.
- Fills out ICS 214 Activity Log.

□ **Media Staging & Media Monitoring PIO**

- Establishes appropriate media staging area and coordinates intel to Assistant PIO on media activities.
- Corrals media personnel into staging area if possible (remember media can go anywhere general public has access to).
- Listens to witness accounts that are provide to the media and updates Assistant PIO.
- Keeps media log of organizations and reporters at scene.
- Provide questions from media including any deadlines or other request to Assistant PIO.
- Set up backdrops, mics, and lighting for press conference.
- Analyzes TV Eyes or monitoring service to ensure accurate reporting.

□ **Social Media PIO**

- Conduct pre-scan of social media to determine level of scrutiny and public information surrounding the incident.
- Responsible for social media posts as approved by the Lead PIO and Incident Commander.
- Film and record pressers for publishing on social media platforms.
- Look for social media related to involved persons (including suspects) and screen capture and coordinate relevant information to investigative personnel.

THIS CHECKLIST IS INTENDED TO SERVE AS A GUIDE ONLY. FOLLOW YOUR SPECIFIC DEPARTMENT POLICIES.