

Strategic Emergency Management Guideline 2



Emergency Communications



An Roinn Cosanta
Department of Defence

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Emergency Communications

Introduction

1. This *Strategic Emergency Management Guideline 2 - Emergency Communications* provides guidance that addresses:
 - a) Effective communications within departments and agencies, in order to facilitate each stage of the emergency management cycle.
 - b) Communications with the public and responders, across the full spectrum of media, and
 - c) Development of Communication Strategies and Plans by Lead Government Departments (LGDs) to include communications with key stakeholders, responders and the public.
2. The focus is on the strategic and national level, providing guidance for Government departments and agencies, particularly for the LGDs responsible for the dissemination of information and advice during an emergency incident and the following recovery period.
3. As with all parts of the SEM National Structures and Framework, it is intended to ensure that Ireland continues to operate to a level of international best practice in emergency management and communication.
4. International research and practice shows that an effective communications strategy and planning is essential for the legitimacy and effectiveness of actions at each stage of the emergency management cycle.
5. Building and protecting public trust in emergency planning is an essential part of enabling effective emergency communications.
6. Further guidance for a systematic preparation for emergency communications is outlined in the Checklist at Annex A, with a Draft Emergency Communications Plan Template outlined at Annex C.

Objective

7. The objective of all emergency communications is to protect the public and responders, by ensuring that the necessary information is available to facilitate timely and informed decision making, and that the public and responders are given relevant, timely, concise, complete and accurate information and advice regarding imminent and ongoing emergencies.

Core Principles

8. Plan:

Each department and agency should have a Communications Strategy and Plan focusing on the requirements of each phase of emergency management. The Communications Plan should include pre-prepared key messages and details of the lead spokespersons.

9. Share open, timely and accurate information:

Systems should be put in place to ensure that timely and accurate information is available for each LGD, the Principal Response Agencies (PRAs) and all support departments and agencies in order to facilitate responses to an emergency incident.

10. Use multiple channels to communicate:

LGDs and support departments and agencies should employ the full spectrum of media available to communicate with the public, recognising that each segment of the public will use different forms of media to inform themselves.

11. Engage with the public:

Effective communication should be a two-way process, which may often be challenging during an emergency, but should provide channels for public feedback and should use this to assist in informing official actions and should allow for public concerns and misinformation to be addressed.

Role of the Government Information Service (GIS)

12. The GIS will work closely with the LGD responsible on the preparation and delivery of communications on all emergency management issues.

13. **Training and exercises:** The GIS will advise and assist in the setting up of necessary training courses to prepare officials and experts to deal with the media aspects of emergency management.

14. **Media Aspects of Plans:** Along with the OEP, the GIS will advise and assist departments and agencies with the media management aspects of their emergency plans.

15. **During an Emergency:** The GIS will work closely with the OEP in supporting LGDs in dealing with the media during meetings of a National Emergency Coordination Group (NECG). This should include the marshalling of the necessary information, the preparation of the necessary messages, advice as to the use of various media and practical preparation for spokespersons preparing to deal with the media.

16. This will include the convening of a parallel Emergency Communications Group for each meeting of the NECG by the Chair.

17. The Emergency Communications Group and GIS will assign staff to manage the accreditation, marshalling and management of the media in the NECC for Press Conferences and interviews when the NECG is meeting.

Communications during preparation, response and recovery phases

Communications Strategy

18. Each LGD should produce a Communications Strategy, outlining how it should communicate both operationally and with the public during the phases of emergency management. The strategy should consider the use of Internet Websites and Social Media as well as traditional TV and Radio broadcast, print and other digital media. Strategies should consider the use of coordinated public information campaigns as tools to educate and inform the public and enhance resilience in the face of emergencies. Figure 1 illustrates some of the communications related requirements during certain phases of emergency management.

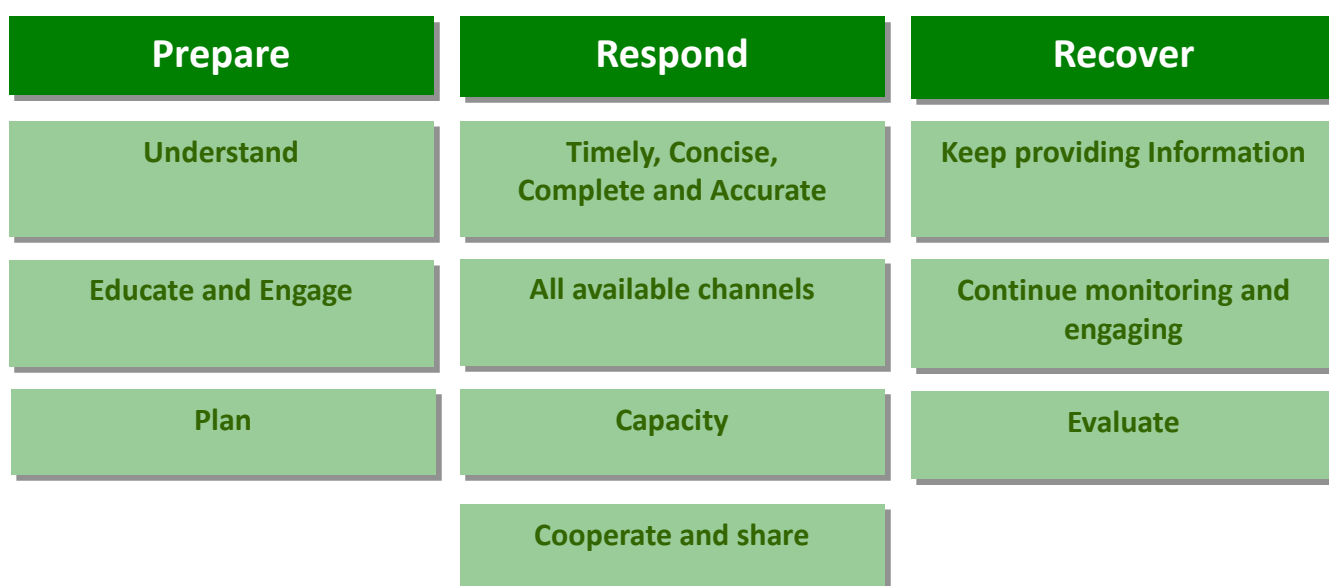


Figure 1: Communications requirements during certain phases of emergency management.

19. The Communications Strategy should be implemented in a generic departmental/agency Communications Plan, along with the provisions in emergency specific plans of the LGDs.

20. The Communications Strategy should deal with the possibility that the LGD will have to service/chair meetings of the NECG, which will entail both managing and participating in the NECG Emergency Communications Group.

Emergency Communications Planning

21. Each emergency is unique and, therefore will have different communications challenges. Communications planning should be a central part of all departmental/agency emergency planning and preparations, and there should be a specific communications section in each emergency plan. For identified risks, *Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)* documents and model messages should be prepared and exercised.

22. During the planning phase, each LGD should consider, in relation to each of the areas for which it has responsibility, the requirements to educate and engage with the public in order to mitigate the effects of an emergency incident should it actually occur.

23. Each departmental/agency plan should contain relevant communications plans specifically tailored to each risk.

The Communications Plan

24. Apart from the communications element of risk specific plans, a LGD should have a generic Emergency Communications Plan (see Annex C - Draft Emergency Communications Plan Template) to enable the LGD to deliver timely, concise, complete and accurate information and advice and to communicate effectively during any emergency.

25. It is particularly important to be able to deal with a fast moving emergency, which may require flexibility based upon pre-prepared plans and strategies.

26. Communications Plans should be:

- a) aligned with the different stages of the emergency management cycle
- b) coordinated with the plans of support departments and other relevant agencies
- c) included in the practical arrangements to enable a timely and efficient response
- d) accepted and understood across the organisation and should be approved by the Management Board of the LGD
- e) regularly exercised, tested, reviewed and updated on an ongoing basis.

27. Key individuals should be identified and trained to implement the plan. Each LGD should establish a Communications Team and trained personnel to act as spokespersons.

28. Departments and agencies need to consider the requirements for an emergency media centre centrally based or at the site of an emergency incident.

29. Departments and agencies will need to plan for a media response at both the Local and National levels and should note that there are very clear and different roles for communications staff at the Local and National levels.

30. Effective communication planning should:

- a) be included in all departmental/agency preparations for emergencies, including significant exercises.
- b) be included in all departmental/agency contingency plans, and.
- c) be compliant with the Lead Government Department principle and its application.

31. Lists of names, phone numbers and other contact details should be maintained separately and annexed to plans, rather than incorporated into the main body of these documents. This will facilitate ongoing updates necessitated by retirements, changes of function etc.

32. The Communications Plan of each LGD (*as identified in Annex A of the Strategic Emergency Management- National Structures and Framework document*) must be robust enough to deal comprehensively with all elements of queries/inquiries which may be made during the response to and recovery from an emergency incident.

Communications during the Response

33. During an emergency with a national level dimension, the LGD along with the other support departments, their agencies and the NECG, if it is activated, must be in a position to:

- a. Collect and collate as much relevant information and data as possible.
- b. Coordinate all public information and media actions with:
 - (1) The GIS;
 - (2) Local Agencies, such as An Garda Síochána, the HSE and Local Authorities, who are responding to the emergency at the local/regional level;
 - (3) other Government Departments and Agencies at the national level; and
 - (4) international levels, including the EU, where appropriate
- c. Share information with the public and the media using all appropriate channels
- d. Monitor media output (including social media) and public reactions.
- e. Adjust messages and address misinformation as required.

Operational Communications and Information flows

34. The purpose of all operational communications is to transmit factual information both horizontally (to own organisation) and vertically (to higher authority and organisations further down the chain). Factual information is vital to inform decision making at all levels, and it is important to provide 'situational awareness' reports (SitReps) to authorities who may have a role, but are not directly involved in the operational management of emergency incidents.

Characteristics of effective operational communication

35. The following are perceived as the essential characteristics of effective communications:

- a. **Timely:** provided while the information is sufficiently current to inform any decisions which must be taken.
- b. **Concise:** contains the necessary information succinctly without unnecessary detail and in language that is easily understood.
- c. **Complete:** contains all of the necessary information.
- d. **Accurate:** information must be accurate and is only to be transmitted when verified. Estimates are to be clearly marked as such.

Information Management

36. Information management needs to be appropriately addressed and linked at each level of an emergency, as illustrated in the Information Flow Process in Figure 2.

The MEM Framework's Information Management Systems¹ is another useful guide and may be adapted and used by departments and agencies not directly involved with the MEM Framework.

¹ Appendix 10 of the MEM Framework Appendices Document available at www.mem.ie

Emergency Management Situation Report (SitRep)

37. The Emergency Management Situation Report (SitRep), as outlined in Annex B, is a template document designed to facilitate the provision of the necessary information from a Local Coordination Group upwards to the next

appropriate level. The SitRep should be transmitted by the most available means and should be inputted into the departmental/agency information systems at the earliest opportunity, and thereafter transmitted by email. Other SitRep or reporting mechanisms already in use are equally valuable for informing the LGD responsible for information dissemination.

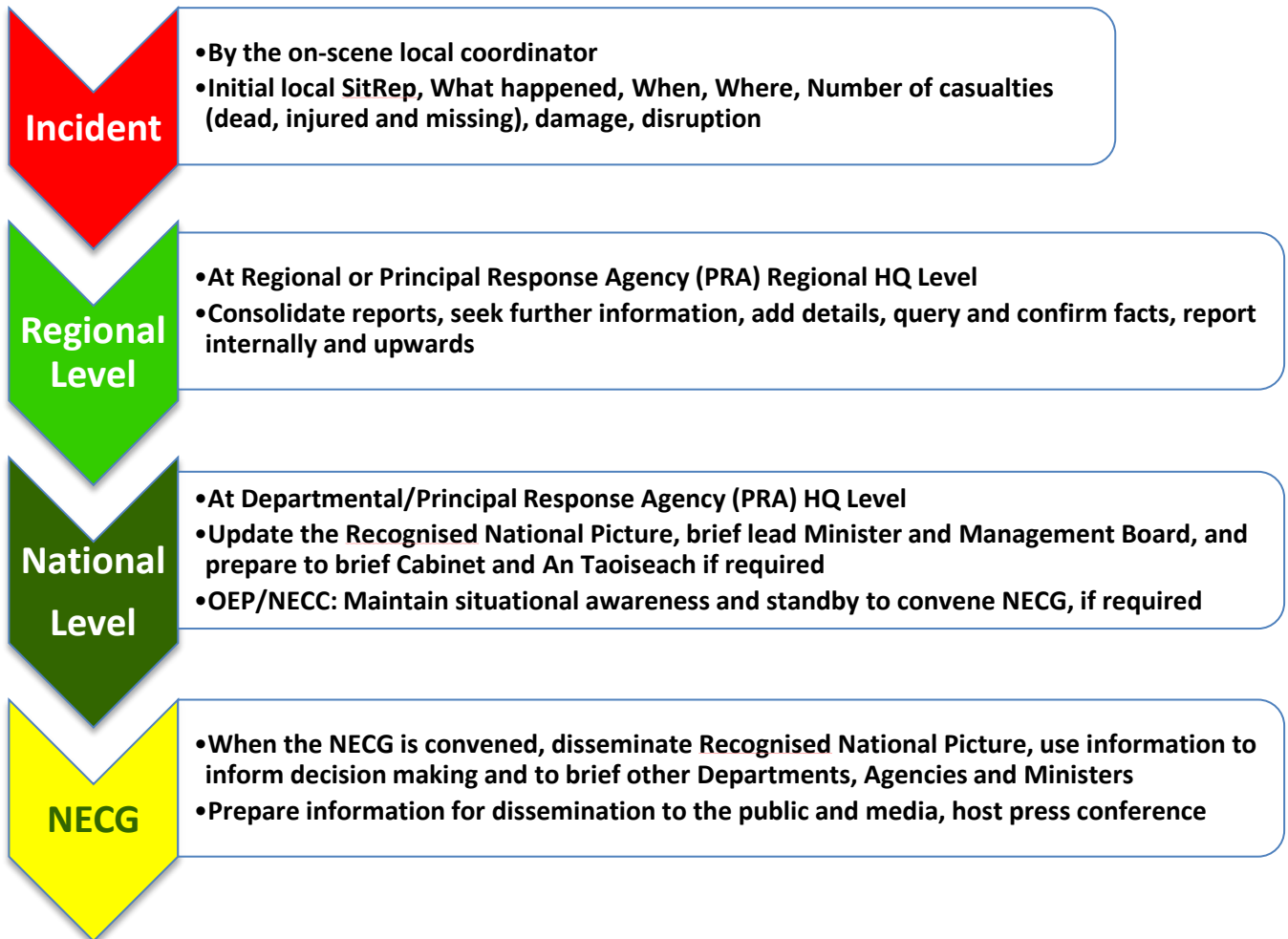


Figure 2: The Information Flow Process

Consolidation of SitReps

38. The SitReps, when consolidated, should assist in the preparation of the LGD's post-emergency report to Government, and should also assist in briefing the NECG, if convened.

Supports available for Departments

39. As Chair of the NECG, the Lead Government Department will convene an Emergency Communications Group to assist in managing the public and media responses.

40. This Subgroup should leverage the expertise available from the GIS and should draw upon available supports from other departments and agencies.

41. The GIS has important roles in helping departments and agencies, particularly LGDs, to plan for and deal with emergencies as outlined in sections 12-17,

42. LGDs, with the support of GIS and the OEP, should provide for regular training of officials and exercising of their Communications Plans to deal with public communications and media aspects of emergency management.

Further Material

43. The OEP, through the GTF, should develop further protocols and plans including actioning principles, training supports and checklists. These will be annexed to this SEM Guideline document as they are developed.

44. The SEM Guidelines, once endorsed by the GTF, should become a "living" document, which will continue inform Communications Strategies and Plans and will evolve over time, particularly from lessons learned after emergency incidents and exercises.

Annex A: Systemic Preparation for Emergency Communications - Check List

Assumption: Departments and relevant agencies should have nominated personnel to fill key roles or multiple roles. These personnel (and their alternates) should be trained and regularly exercised in their roles and responsibilities.

Appendix 1 to Annex A - Pre-planning Check List:

1. **How is the department/agency notified of emergencies?**
2. **Who decides to activate Emergency Plan/Procedures, including the Communications Plan?**
3. **How is that decision communicated to key personnel internally and externally (24/7)?**
4. **Where do key personnel assemble and meet (or how do they video/audio conference)?**
5. **What initial holding statements, press statements and public advice are issued prior to an NECC meeting and how are these cleared (*Communications Plans should address this.*)?**
6. **How is information collected internally and from key external agencies/organisations, i.e., who and where are the critical contact points?**
7. **How are decisions communicated, both internally and externally?**
8. **Can the departmental/agency internal communications and information systems deal with the extra load associated with an emergency?**
9. **How are departmental/agency staff involved in an emergency incident, and those not directly involved, kept informed as the situation evolves and develops?**
10. **How is the Information Management process organised and managed (by whom and where?) – this includes interacting with the Information Management process at the National Emergency Coordination Group meeting in the National Emergency Coordination Centre?**
11. **Who leads on Communications and Media Management and how are extra resources, if required, identified and provided to him/her during emergencies (particularly outside of normal working hours)?**
12. **How is Communications and Media Management integrated with the emergency management process?**
13. **What are the main processes and procedures within Communications and Media Management? In terms of:**
 - a) **Participation in the departmental/agency Emergency Management Team (or, at a minimum, liaison with the Chair)**
 - b) **Liaison with communications functions in key external agencies/organisations, other departments and the GIS**
 - c) **Identification of key target audiences and the most appropriate media in each case**
 - d) **Preparation of Government, Ministerial and departmental press statements**
 - e) **Approval of such press statements**
 - f) **Nomination of key spokesperson(s)**
 - g) **Organisation of Government, Ministerial or departmental press conferences**
 - h) **Media Monitoring (including Social Media)**

Appendix 1 to Annex A - Pre-planning Check List (continued):

When the department is the LGD:

14. Consider what supports will be required by the Chair of the NECG, in consultation with the OEP and GIS, both internally and from other departments/agencies.
15. Consider how the LGD should lead the Information Management process at the NECG (in consultation with the OEP and the GIS).
16. Consider when a parallel Emergency Communications Group should be convened by the Chair of the NECG.
17. How will liaison be maintained between the department and its representatives at the NECG (consider full use of the IT interconnections between departments and the NECC).
18. How will information be provided by others to the Chair of the NECG and how will this be managed and disseminated further.
19. Ensure that these requirements are documented in the LGD's Communications Plan and agreed with both internal and external stakeholders. (MOUs/SLAs may be required).

When the department is not the LGD:

20. Consider how the department is to interact with the Information Management and Communications and Media management process at the NECG and more specifically with the LGD and any Communications Group established by the LGD during an emergency.
21. Ensure that these requirements are documented in the support department/agency's Communications Plan and agreed with both internal and external stakeholders, particularly the LGD. (MOUs/SLAs may be required)

Appendix 2 to Annex A - Communications Check List for a LGD:

1. The communications related activities of the Lead Government Department (LGD) during an emergency should be developed and documented at the planning stages in the LGDs Communication Strategy and Plan and should include:
 - a. Securing appropriate levels of suitable and experienced staff to work with the Communications Team:
 - (1) establishing staff rosters in order to keep the Communications Team operating
 - (2) establishing pooling arrangements (where necessary)
 - b. Ensuring that suitable templates for initial and follow-up statements are agreed and available, particularly for the early stages of an emergency incident.
 - c. Ensuring that clear public advice is being issued at an early stage, even if only a holding position pending the meeting of an NECG.
 - d. Public information and advice should be addressed in an appropriate manner to non-nationals, visitors/tourists and the vulnerable.
 - e. Compiling relevant briefing material; preparing initial and ongoing briefs for media and other stakeholders;
 - f. Preparing specific briefings for An Taoiseach, Government and Ministers and senior officials, particularly for those appearing front-of-house;
 - g. Liaising closely with the lead Minister and Government on briefings for the Oireachtas and related committees;
 - h. Updating the departments website and Social Media accounts;
 - i. Liaising closely with support departments, the OEP and GIS;
 - j. Raising public awareness and conducting public awareness campaigns;
2. Working in close coordination with, and under the advice of the GIS in relation to:
 - a. Media Monitoring (including Social Media)
 - b. Arranging accreditation for media as required
 - c. Setting up an incident media centre, if appropriate and dependant on the scale of an emergency
 - d. Arranging and managing press conferences
3. Dealing with the media, particularly international media
 - a. Coordinating the communications messages and briefings and ensuring the consistency and accuracy of the messages given to the media and the public
 - b. Identifying and confirming the availability of the front-of-house spokesperson(s) available from the Communications Plan; and
 - c. Collating and managing requests for interviews with experts, responders, ministers, etc.

Annex B: Emergency Management Situation Report – SitRep

Emergency Management Situation Report

General Report

STATUS: GREEN SitRep Number:

Department/Agency Name: Other:

Date:

Emergency Category: Ongoing May Occur Ending Description:

General Situation:

Meteorological Situation:

Actions Taken to Date:

Reports From Specific Locations

Location 1:

Situation (Loc 1):

Prognosis/Forecast (Loc 1):

Prognosis/Forecast (Loc 2):

Location 3:

Situation (Loc 3)::

Prognosis/Forecast (Loc 3):

General Summary and Prognosis

General Summary:

Please Address Queries To:

Point of Contact: Details:

Distribution

Distribution List:

Annex C: Draft Emergency Communications Plan Template

The principles underpinning communications surrounding any national level emergency are timely, concise, complete and accurate information and advice, and to communicate effectively during any emergency.

Key factor: Reassuring the public and the avoidance of any unnecessary concern and misinformation.

This **Emergency Communication Plan** is effective in advance of a National Emergency Coordination Group (NECG) being convened and should be reviewed during any national level emergency by the Lead Government Department (LGD) responsible.

Core Contact Personnel – To be determined by the LGD Roles and Responsibilities:

Name	Role/Title	email	mobile
Lead Government Department Chair/Deputy Chair Core Personnel	<i>List to be determined in advance by the LGD and kept up-to-date, particularly during high risk periods.</i>		
National Emergency Coordination Group	Chair:		
National Emergency Coordination Group	Deputy Chair:		
Key Front of House Spokesperson(s)	1. 2. 3.		
Government Information Service (GIS)	<i>To be determined in advance by the GIS and kept up-to-date, particularly during high risk periods.</i>		
	Government Press Secretary, DOT		
	GIS, DOT		
Duty Officer	GIS, DOT	government.press.office@taoiseach.gov.ie	087 2531675 (voice only)
LGD & Support Agencies Press and Information Officers (Including Managers for Web and Social Media)	<i>To be determined in advance by the LGD and kept up-to-date, particularly during high risk periods.</i>		

Possible National level Emergency Scenarios:

These are determined by each LGD based on their Lead Roles and Responsibilities as outlined in **Annex A** of the **Strategic Emergency Management: National Structures and Framework** document.

- 1) Each of the Lead Roles and Responsibilities to be listed separately.
- 2) There may be a need for a separate **Emergency Communications Plan** for each scenario, as responsibilities within LGDs may vary from one scenario to another. (*e.g. Cyber Threats versus Oil Disruption are dealt with by two separate Divisions within the one Department.*).

The core contact personnel must be listed and must be kept up-to-date. While it is likely that initial notice of a national level emergency would come to one or more of the members of the group above – information can potentially come from any source. The core contact personnel **must be informed, without delay, when such a national level emergency takes place.** This will have to be done by the LGD in parallel with convening a National Emergency Coordination Group (NECG) through the Office of Emergency Planning (OEP).

The core contact group, the LGD or the NECG must sign off on all statements regarding such emergency situations prior to publication. This may have to be done in advance of the NECG being convened by the LGD, particularly if a fast onset emergency incident is developing. In such circumstances the LGD will have to exercise its discretion in consultation with senior management and Ministers and GIS.

Once a decision has been taken by the LGD to convene a meeting of the NECG, it will be convened at the earliest possible time in the National Emergency Coordination Centre (NECC), Agriculture Hse., Kildare Street, D 2, in accordance with the *SEM 1 - Guidelines on the National Emergency Coordination Group*. The notice for convening the NECG meeting will be sent by the Office of Emergency Planning via email and SMS text message. In parallel, an Emergency Communications Group may be notified to meet at very short notice along with the NECG in the NECC.

Departments/Agencies must ensure that everybody under their remit pass whatever information comes to them through the proper channels. **Information flows with the public and/or the media must be agreed and sanctioned by National Emergency Coordination Group or directly through the core contact personnel listed above or by the Lead Minister/Department responsible.**

The LGD will, ultimately, be responsible for managing any public communications, information dissemination and messaging.

ALL Statements must be cleared by the Lead Government Department (LGD) and GIS. Pre-prepared “Holding Statements” or “Initial Statements” should be prepared well in advance and the mechanisms for delivery agreed with the LGD and GIS. Ministers and An Taoiseach should be immediately informed of any such statements being issued and briefed as soon as possible thereafter, if required.

Department/Agencies should have draft initial statements prepared in advance setting out a clear explanation of the facts – what has happened or is expected to happen, who is responsible for leading the response and what the next possible stages will be. Statements should include reassurance with regard to the responses being undertaken and should represent a whole of Government approach.

Designated expert spokespersons are required to inform and reassure:

It is highly likely that public communications will, in the main, reside within the lead Government Department's responsibility and those with the primary communications support roles.

However, all Government departments/agencies with potential involvement should be fully informed and capable of providing the media/public and Government with briefings and information within their specific remits. This will require statements, messages and briefings to be prepared in advance and regularly rehearsed for use during a serious major emergency that requires a National level response.

Lead Press and Information Officers:

Each department/agency should have designated lead Press and Information Officers assigned to this role, particularly during identified risk periods, such as the onset of winter or warnings of severe weather. Suitable deputies must also be in place if the principal officer responsible is unavailable. These officers will be the first point of contact for dealing with public and media queries and for convening of the associated Emergency Communications Group in conjunction with the convening of a National Emergency Coordination Group meeting. This person or their deputy must be available to take calls or attend meetings (as necessary) out of hours and at weekends and should be appropriately trained and exercised in this role.

National Broadcasting Protocol:

The National Broadcasting Protocol addresses the requirements for the LGD to initiate and issue a national level emergency broadcast under the specific terms of Sections 61 and 122 of the Broadcasting Act 2009. This is a separate and confidential protocol and is only envisaged to be needed or used in the most extreme of circumstances. However, LGDs will need to be familiar with the provisions of the Broadcasting Act and their responsibilities if and when there may be a need to issue such a serious broadcast. Again, LGDs should consider examining possible scenarios that would need to be addressed and were possible have template National Broadcast messages prepared in advance to be issued if such a decision is ever warranted.

Social Media:

In addition to traditional broadcasting (Radio/TV) and print media, additional emphasis needs to be considered when monitoring and servicing the internet, particularly on Twitter, Facebook and other social media platforms, as well as monitoring domestic and international reaction to national level emergencies occurring in Ireland. The publication of statements over social media will also have to be carefully managed and must follow agreed procedures based upon such Communication Plans. However, the demands for immediate and constant information over social media and the need to correct misinformation can be challenging and may put severe strains upon LGD's. Appropriate assistance should, therefore, be sought at an early stage to manage and support these activities, particularly during the response phase. This will itself require a specific social media strategy within such Communications Plans

Review:

The GTF Subgroup on Communications should regularly review and address other issues that may need to be included in this Emergency Communications Plan template. LGDs responsible will have to sign off on each scenario template at a senior level within each department/agency and with the GIS. Emergency Communication Plans should be regularly reviewed by each LGDs and exercised to ensure it is correct, up-to-date and fit for purpose and more particularly that the personnel involved in implementing it are well trained and up-to-date with regard to its implementation during a National level emergency and are fully aware of their roles and responsibilities.

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