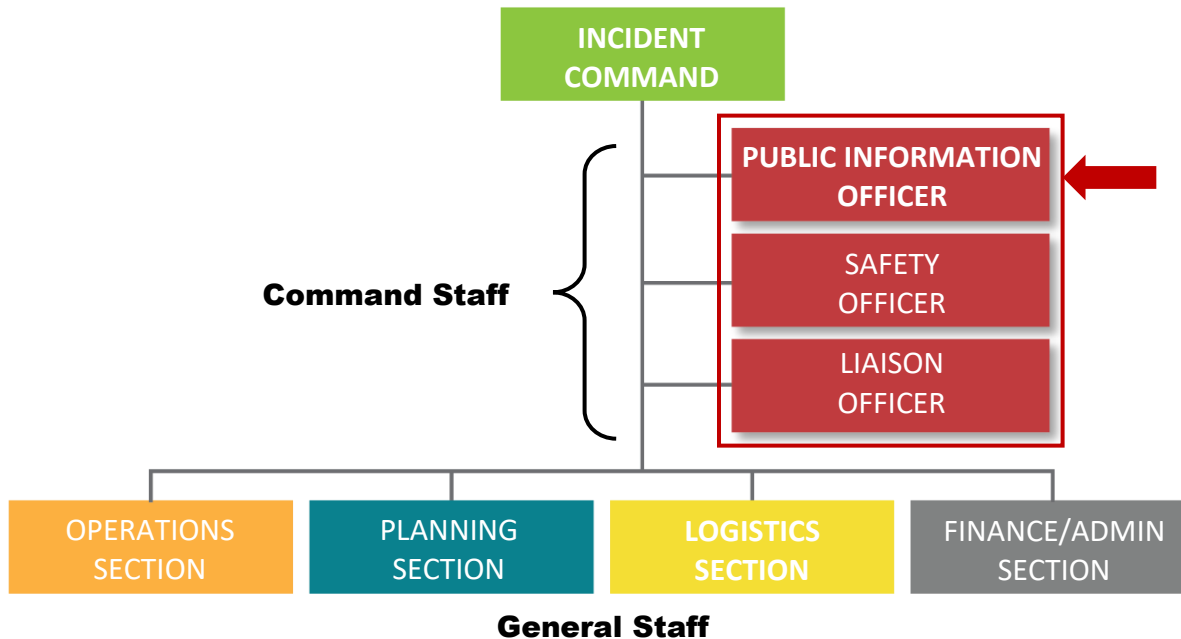


TOPIC 5: PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICER



The Public Information Officer (PIO) is a member of the Command Staff within the Incident Command System (ICS) or Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) structure. The PIO gathers information from members of the Command and General Staff to develop current, comprehensive information on what the current situation is, the cause and scale of the incident, actions the company is taking to manage the incident, and other information of general importance to both internal and external audiences.

The PIO is responsible for communicating information to the public, media, other agencies, and stakeholders to provide incident-related information and updates based on changes in incident status. This is done through the development and distribution of media releases to outlets such as TV, radio, newspaper, and social media platforms. The PIO is typically responsible for monitoring media (mainstream, social media), and employing measures to correct misinformation.

As a part of the process of developing and distributing a media release, the PIO must get approval from the Incident Commander, and then works with the Liaison Officer to communicate with regulatory agencies prior to releasing the messaging. This ensures consistency in the messaging being released by both the permit holder and the regulatory authority. The PIO also communicates any information gathered about potential adverse impacts (e.g. political, social, or economic) to Command Staff that could affect operations.

Once assigned, the PIO should review their checklist and associated ICS Forms, and consider if they wish to assign an assistant to support the operations.

Use Your Checklists – Whether fulfilling one role or multiple roles, personnel must remember to use all applicable checklists. Keep in mind, not all tasks on a checklist may need to be completed. Let the pace and needs of the incident determine the required tasks. In many cases, checklists are divided into phases of the incident, such as: **Initial Response, Ongoing Response, and Demobilization.** Remember, you only need to address the checklist items according to the current stage of the incident. To make a comparison, airline pilots refer to their take-off checklist first before they look at one for the landing process.

Incident Action Plan (IAP) - As the Planning Section develops the IAP shortly after an incident occurs, input from the Operations Section, the Incident Commander and Safety Officer are integral to create an effective blueprint for the response and management of the incident. A sample IAP may contain the following objectives (see the Planning Section Chief Toolbox Guide for further information on IAP development):

1. Responder Safety
2. Public Protection
3. Control and Containment
4. Environment

The Public Information Officer may not have a role in developing the IAP; however, the information gathered through review of external media sources (regarding impacts unknown to responding personnel) may be critical for mitigation and contingency planning.

Briefing Meetings – Status briefing meetings should occur at regular intervals (as scheduled by the Planning Section in conjunction with the Incident Commander) and provide information the PIO can use (once approved) in providing updates to the public and key stakeholders. For complex incidents, especially when the public has been directly impacted, approval for a media release may also require legal or executive review unless the release is needed to support short-term public safety needs. These procedures should be identified as part of the emergency response planning process prior to any incident.

Briefing meetings are also an opportunity for the PIO to address questions that have come to the responder team from media, as the answers may require feedback from multiple Section Chiefs.

Demobilization – Once a stand-down has been confirmed with the regulatory agency (BC Oil and Gas Commission), demobilization can begin. For incidents that have become newsworthy, it is important the PIO ensure the public is aware of the conclusion of the incident, and note outstanding concerns in the public interest, such as impacts on roads, or heavy traffic due to clean-up efforts.

Forms – ICS forms are an integral part of proper documentation processes. All personnel assigned roles should be familiar with the forms applicable to them. Documentation is vital during an incident as evidence of the processes and decisions made while responding to an incident, and can be legally admissible in a court of law.

Examples of Forms used by the Public Information Officer:

General Message (ICS 213)

Unit Log (Time and Event Log) (ICS 214)

Demobilization Check-Out (ICS 221)

Copies of all approved media releases – including any social media mentions or response.