



YARMOUTH COUNTY REGIONAL
EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT
ORGANIZATION
(REMO)

COMMUNICATION OPERATIONS PLAN

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YARMOUTH COUNTY REGIONAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT ORGANIZATION (REMO)

COMMUNICATION OPERATIONS PLAN (Updated May 2021)

SECTION 1 – INTRODUCTION

GENERAL

It is important that the Municipalities of Argyle and Yarmouth and the Town of Yarmouth provide an effective communications network during day-to-day and emergency/disaster operations. Whether through procurement of communication equipment or training the employees to use communication equipment, communication is important to the safety and security of the Town of Yarmouth and County. This plan provides guidance for effective communications operations and identifies procedures to follow during an emergency.

EMERGENCY PLAN MANAGEMENT AND UPDATES

The Yarmouth County Regional Emergency Management Organization (REMO) will be responsible for updates and maintenance of this plan.

INCIDENT COMMAND SYSTEM

During a disaster or emergency, this plan will be implemented in accordance with the Incident Command System (ICS).

Personnel assigned to the different sections of ICS will follow checklists/SOPS established by the Emergency Coordination Director or his/her designate.

SECTION 2 – PLAN OVERVIEW

CONCEPT OF OPERATIONS

This plan or the applicable portions of this plan will be implemented as directed by the Emergency Coordination Centre Manager, Fire Chief, RCMP or EHS as appropriate. This plan will be used as a general guide for the day-to-day procurement, maintenance, and training of the communication network. Additionally, this plan will provide guidelines for communication with the public and media during emergency/disaster operations. Specific guidelines, or SOPs, will be established by jurisdictional agencies within the County and Town of Yarmouth.

INTEROPERABILITY

REMO will maintain equipment to ensure interoperability of communications within all appropriate agencies. Other agencies, public or private, will coordinate their acquisition of equipment through their primary lead for access/interoperability.

Equipment installed in the ECC and within other emergency agencies will be capable of providing interoperability. The Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) required for operating equipment and training will be established and maintained by the owning/operating agencies. Testing of the equipment will be checked on a weekly basis, rechecked before notice of an event and repaired or replaced as required. Coordination with other agencies will be done through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) or through a communication plan such as this one. All plans developed by the ECC, or another agency/jurisdiction will incorporate ICS into the plan.

COORDINATION OF EQUIPMENT

All communication equipment will be inventoried and provided to the ECC as needed/requested for operational needs. When feasible, jurisdictions/agencies within the county will coordinate equipment purchases and training to ensure interoperability and operational readiness.

During emergency/disaster operations, cellular phones may be used for emergency communications. Trunk Mobile Radios (TMR) and Satellite phones available in the County may be distributed during disaster/emergency operations as necessary to best secure effective communications. This should be organized through the REMO Coordinator and/or Deputy REMO Coordinator.

MAINTENANCE AND INSPECTION OF EQUIPMENT

Jurisdictions/agencies within the Yarmouth and Town of Yarmouth will ensure all emergency communications equipment under their control is properly inspected and periodically maintained to ensure operational readiness.

SAFETY AND SECURITY

Each jurisdictional agency will be responsible for the safe and proper use of communication equipment. During training, exercises and emergency/disaster operations, heightened safety and security procedures should be followed by all personnel. Security and safety procedures will also be implemented for all command posts and other operational sites.

Security as it relates to this document will include:

1. Physical security of communication equipment
2. Frequency restrictions
3. Appropriate levels of control of communications

EMERGENCY NOTIFICATION

The Canada wide Emergency Alert System (EAS) is in place to provide emergency notification to the citizens of the County and Town of Yarmouth. The system has operational protocols and authorized personnel are trained in the proper activation of this system.

Yarmouth County REMO has implemented its own notification system called ALERTABLE. Alertable is community alerting software to be used by REMO and other emergency agencies to notify and inform the public of emergency and non-emergency events. This system also has operational protocols and only authorized personnel are trained in the proper use of this system. The public can choose to receive alerts on their TV, radio, smartphone, computer, home smart speakers and more.

PUBLIC INFORMATION

The Public Information Officer (PIO) will be activated as soon as practical during a potential threat or actual event. The PIO will coordinate with media for news releases.

When the ECC is activated, the ECC manager will have scheduled briefings for ECC staff and other emergency personnel to review emergency activities and the potential for sharing information to the public. New releases will be agreed upon and established for the ECC.

SECTION 3 - PROTOCOLS FOR PUBLIC INFORMATION DISSEMINATION

It is the process for REMO, in the event of an emergency, that early messaging to residents of Yarmouth County be done in the following manner:

BEFORE:

1. Whether the emergency event is impending or immediate, the REMC and/or designate will gather as much data on the upcoming event as possible to make appropriate decisions that will affect the residents of Yarmouth County. The REMC and/or his designate will forward this information to the three CAOs, assistant REMCs and members of the Planning Committee which includes other response agencies.
2. The REMC and/or is designate will participate in all Webinars provided through NS EMO relating to the emergency event.
3. The REMC and/or his designate will forward information on any Webinars provided by NS EMO to the following groups who may wish to participate:
 - The three CAOs
 - Wardens/Mayor and Councils
 - Municipal staff
 - REMO Planning Committee
 - Public Information Officer (PIO)
4. The appropriate information gathered through Webinars or other sources will be summarized and forwarded to the public by the PIO through the following outlets:
 - REMO Website
 - REMO Notification System
 - Municipal and Town Websites
 - Facebook and other social media
 - Radio and TV, if appropriate
5. The general public will also be advised on how emergency information will be disseminated if the normal means of communications are not available:
 - Wellness checks by emergency agencies
 - Provided at comfort centres or evacuation centres
6. The general public will be asked by emergency officials (both provincial and local) to restrict travel during an emergency situation and be prepared to remain in their homes according to 72 hours preparedness plans that enable them to be self-sufficient during power/utility outages.

Information relating to emergency services and resources will also be transmitted to the public via the above noted outlets before, during and after the event.

7. The REMC and/or his designate will take appropriate action to open the RECC as required. The REMC and/or his designate will coordinate the management of information until the ECC is operational. The REMC and/or his designate will communicate to appropriate municipal personnel and emergency providers that the ECC is operational.

DURING:

During the emergency event, it will be the process of REMO to do the following:

1. The REMC and/or his designate, through the PIO will continue to update the public on the events as they occur through those designated outlets.
2. The REMC and/or his designate will continue to advise those groups, (REMO Planning Committee, CAOs, Wardens/Mayor and Councils, Municipal staff of the events as they occur.
3. The general public will also be advised on how emergency information will be disseminated if the normal means of communications are not available:
 - Wellness checks by emergency agencies
 - Provided at comfort centres or evacuation centres
4. The REMC and/or his designate through the PIO will advise the public of any and all comfort centres and/or shelters opened to meet the needs of residents.
5. The REMC and/or his designate will advised NS EMO of any comfort centres and/or shelters opened in Yarmouth County.

AFTER:

After the emergency event, it will be the process of REMO to do the following:

1. The REMC and/his designate through the ECC and other emergency services, will coordinate the safe return of residents if there has been an evacuation and communications will occur through the established emergency public messaging structure.
2. If there has been any damage to regional infrastructure and or other public property, REMO shall provide the public with information on local resources and/or Provincial financial aid through the established emergency public messaging structure.
3. Provide a detailed report of the event through the normal pre-event messaging structure to CAOs, Wardens/Mayor and Councils as well as to EMO NS.

SECTION 4 - COMPLETE BREAKDOWN OF BOTH LANDLINES AND CELL COVERAGE

BACKGROUND

On August 4, 2017, there was a complete breakdown of both landlines and cell coverage over a wide area of Eastern Canada due to two main communication links being accidentally cut. This resulted in both 911 and 1 (800) systems not functioning, therefore a communication failure.

ASSUMPTIONS

1. In the event of such a communication failure, there will be a Canada wide alert on Alert Ready to notify all emergency responders of the communications breakdown as well as the general public.
2. Yarmouth REMO will open it's ECC
3. The Yarmouth Radio Club will commence to monitor its radio system and provide assistance wherever possible through its communication network.
4. All Emergency responders will also be alerted through their own notification systems of the communication breakdown.
5. Digby Dispatch will make a call out to all fire departments in Yarmouth County to man their fire departments for the duration of the outage.
6. REMO will post a public service announcement through the PIO to Radio stations on the scope of the problem and directions to the public on how to contact first response agencies.
7. REMO will advise the public to attend their fire department to either make a report or request the First Response Agency needed. The Fire Departments will in turn, through Trunk Mobile Radio, contact the needed First Response Agency (Police, Fire, EHS).
8. Yarmouth County REMO also has 2 Satellite radios allowing REMO staff to pass critical information to the Province.
9. If the communication breakdown is long lasting, REMO will request the aid of local Ground Search and Rescue teams as well as fire department volunteers to make wellness checks of residents in the County, especially those who are known to be the most vulnerable.