

# 1 Preparing for an Emergency Assignment

## A Rewarding and Challenging Opportunity

Emergency relief work can be very rewarding. It provides an opportunity to have a profound and positive impact on the lives of those who may be in their greatest time of need. However, the work can also be very challenging and stressful. During an assignment, you may experience chaotic environments, long hours, rapidly changing information and directives, work and sleeping quarters that are less than ideal. You may also be exposed to unfamiliar and graphic sights, smells and sounds of destruction. Many volunteers will be providing services to survivors who are overwhelmed, this can take an emotional toll. For all these reasons and more, the decision whether to go on an emergency assignment should be carefully considered. Is this the right time for you and your loved ones? Remember, there will always be other opportunities to help.

## General Preparedness

When your assistance is requested as an emergency service worker for Multnomah County, you will want to be ready. This section (in addition to your Position Specific Job Aid and Training) will help you be prepared, confident, and ready to respond.

Prior to any response, an emergency service worker should always:

- Perform a [Self-Awareness Check-in](#) **page 2**.
- Create and maintain a family plan ([FEMA Planning ahead](#)<sup>2</sup> and/or [EQ Primers](#)<sup>3</sup>) and remember your pets (Multnomah County [Animal Services Disaster Preparedness](#)<sup>4</sup>)
- Sit down with family and loved ones and review the [“For the Families of Emergency Service Workers”](#) section starting on **page 7**.
- [Obtain incident-specific information](#), see **page 3**. Monitor weather, lean forward, review the [Links for Situational Status](#) document<sup>5</sup> and visit the sites that correspond with the incident.
- Maintain operational readiness create a [Emergency Readiness Kit](#), **page 4**, [Car kit](#) **page 5**
- For county employees: Ensure your Workday information is updated regularly and includes your work *and personal* cell number.
- Review the [EOC Competency Levels](#) for guidance on minimum training requirements.
- Attend training as set forth by your position’s training requirements and personal training goals. Keep your training file up to date. For tips on how to accomplish this, contact [Robert.quinn@multco.us](mailto:Robert.quinn@multco.us)
- Assist in the creation and maintenance of a resource list with contact information (consider inclusion of stakeholders and partners) for your function/position.

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<sup>1</sup> Portions of the content of the Preparing for an Emergency Assignment section are directly from our local Red Cross Chapter.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.ready.gov/plan>

<sup>3</sup> <https://multco.us/global/earthquake-primers-11-languages>

<sup>4</sup> <https://multcopets.org/disaster-preparedness>

<sup>5</sup> [https://docs.google.com/document/d/1wDGeK1\\_wc61aCnMoKppGgKNBrBAHa2J1iWhNisr1njs/edit](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1wDGeK1_wc61aCnMoKppGgKNBrBAHa2J1iWhNisr1njs/edit)

## Self-Awareness Check-In:

- Consider your own health, personal and/or family issues, and timing.
- Make an honest assessment/decision about whether you are in a place physically and mentally to help in this particular emergency situation and at this particular time.
- Check in with yourself, ask:
  - How is my energy level?
  - How is my stress level? Am I feeling well rested and healthy?
  - Do I have a personal connection to this incident that may bring up painful memories?
  - What is going on with my family, am I needed at home?
  - What is going on with work?
  - Have I read the job assignment (ICS 204) or Job Aid or am I familiar enough with the role that I am confident I have the skillset to fulfill this position?
  - What makes me feel like I could perform these duties?
  - What makes me feel like I would be unable to perform the duties?
  - Have I taken a trauma informed care, or Emotional/Psychological First Aid class?
- What conversations will you have with your family about your emergency assignment?
- How will you manage:
  - Child care
  - Pet care
  - Family health care and transportation
  - Overnight assignments
- How might this affect your day job?
- Work with your boss. *Every emergency assignment requires supervisor approval.* Figure out in advance how your supervisor wants to handle possible middle of the night, weekend requests. Go through the [Managers and Supervisors Acknowledgement Form](#) at least annually.

## Readiness Checklist

- Gather information about conditions at the emergency operation, so you can bring appropriate clothing and supplies.
- Make sure your supply of personal medications is sufficient to last several days beyond the expected length of your assignment, so that an unexpected delay in your return would be covered.
- Obtain approval from your supervisor
- Arrange for the care of dependent family members and pets.
- Complete all the necessary assignment paperwork.
- Follow directions provided by the Planning Section of the EOC.
- Provide your family with a contact phone number, so they will be able to access support and emergency communication services while you are on assignment.

# Obtaining Incident Information

If you are assigned to the EOC, we will do our best to provide you with all of the information below. You are always encouraged to lean forward and seek out incident information in advance/preparation for possible emergency assignment, consider using the [Links for Situational Status](#). If you assigned elsewhere, make sure you get the answers to these questions:

- What is the background regarding the event/incident (*size/scope, hazards, recommended personal protective equipment and protective action recommendations, etc.*)? Is there an IAP that you can review prior to starting?
- What is the date, time, and address/place of departure, and mode of transportation to the incident?
- What is the estimated date and time of your expected arrival?
- Where is your reporting location (*address*)
- Who are you reporting to? What is their title, name, and cell phone number?
- If your family is unable to get a hold of you, who is the appropriate incident contact?
- What is your anticipated incident assignment? Obtain an ICS 204 (Job Assignment).
- What is the anticipated duration of your assignment? Emergency Readiness Kits should be prepared with contents beyond anticipated duration of your assignment, including medications
- What equipment will you need? What equipment will be provided? Ask if there are any job specific supplies or specialty equipment/items that may be needed. Will they be supplied? Replaced if damaged, lost, or stolen?
- What training, skills, certifications, or qualifications are required or recommended? What training, if any, will you be provided?
- Is there a resource request number, incident number, cost and/or funding code you need?
- Who needs to be notified that you have arrived safely (*at home, at work, on scene*)?
- Are logistical needs covered or are you on your own? Our recommendation is to come with a robust personal emergency readiness kit, regardless of the answer to the questions below.
  - Sanitation: Are restrooms on site and close by, or is this an austere environment, with restrooms far away from where you will be located? Are there shower facilities? Are hygiene supplies provided?
  - Sleeping Arrangements: On your own? Tent, hotel, floor of an office or meeting room? Are bedding supplies provided? Our recommendation is to pack earplugs and bug spray, just in case.
  - Food and Water: Make sure you have enough snacks and water in your personal kit to take care of yourself for at least a day.
  - Transportation: How am I going to get to the assignment location? How will I get around once I arrive?
- What are the possible environments in which you will be working (*indoor, outdoor*)

# Emergency Readiness Kit

Each emergency readiness kit will vary depending on the individual. The items included in this list are not requirements, but recommendations. Use the checklist below to identify what items you have, and what items you may need for your kit:

## General

- Put everything into plastic or dry bags.
- Mark gear with personally identifiable information.
- Pack for additional days.

## **Do**

- Keep all valuables with you
- Stay packed as much as you can
- Put gear back into vehicle in a.m. and Secure the vehicle at all times

## **Don't**

- Unpack gear at night
- Assume you are staying in the same place
- Leave anything behind that you want to keep

## Identification

- Government issued
- Employer issued
- Business cards

## Clothing

- A change of clothing, even if your assignment is just for a few hours.
- Include identifying clothing (organization logo present),
- Reflective gear,
- Sturdy boots, comfortable shoes, and traction devices for shoes
- Comfortable work clothes (to include funeral appropriate clothing if applicable)

*Consider the incident and associated hazards, the hours you will be working, the weather, and your assignment's likely environment(s). Be prepared to work outside*

- Rain and/or sun gear
- Umbrella,
- Hat with brim,
- Waterproof jacket,
- Sun screen
- Water: Your own supply of drinking water is important. This is true regardless of the duration of your assignment.
- Food/Snacks - Salty and sweet
- Flashlight/headlamp
- Extra batteries

### Toiletries/Hygiene and personal items

- Tissues
- Toilet paper
- Hand sanitizer
- Toothpaste/Toothbrush
- Chapstick
- Soap
- Towel
- Feminine products
- Glasses, contacts with associated supplies
- Medications

### Professional equipment and supplies

- Map of destination
- Notebook
- Clipboard
- Pens/pencils
- Cell phone and laptop (and chargers)
- Work expense card
- Personal & professional contact lists

### Self-care items

- Ear plugs, sleeping mask
- Music
- Bug spray
- Pillow and blanket

Please add additional items to you checklist specific to your needs/wants:

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### **CAR KIT CONTENT SUGGESTIONS**

- Water and Food
- Road maps
- Blanket/sleeping bag(s)
- Tools: jack, lug wrench, shovel, multitool, etc
- Extra warm & Waterproof clothes.
- First aid kit (including prescription medications)
- Matches or lighter
- Battery jumper cables
- Ice scraper and snow brush
- Extra washer fluid
- Chains or traction tires
- High Visibility Equipment
- A small tarp or even a piece of cardboard will really help.
- A full fuel tank
- Kid items
- Pet items
- Emergency blanket (the silver variety can be placed on the roof of your car and is easily seen from above)

# Taking Care of Yourself, So You Can Take Care of Others

## Before/During/After Shift Assignment:

- ❑ *Basics:* Sleep, healthy food, lots of water, breaks, try to limit shifts to no more than 14 hours, breath, laugh.
- ❑ *Support:* Organize your support for before/during/after with clear expectations of what you may need – remember this may or may not include human support.
- ❑ *Check In:* Screen yourself (or have someone else screen you) for what you'd be looking for in a distressed survivor. If you meet the criteria, tap yourself out. Review the [Self Awareness](#) Section of the Preparing for an Emergency Assignment document.

## After Your Assignment:

- ❑ Check in and peer support immediately following your shift or assignment.
- ❑ Remember that many of the things you learn and hear while on emergency assignment are confidential and not to be shared with others. This can cause stress.
- ❑ Take time to get back to your “typical” life routine and address responsibilities that may have been neglected.
- ❑ Reflect on what your experience means to you – personally and professionally.
- ❑ Notice signs of stress – remember this is expected and will look like trauma that you've seen in others. Keep an eye out for: unrelenting fatigue, cynicism, dissatisfaction with routine work, easily evoked emotions, difficulties with colleagues and supervisors.
- ❑ Consider ways that you can integrate your emergency services experience into your professional or personal life in a positive way.
- ❑ Ask for help.
- ❑ Return to the familiar: your body and mind will guide you towards what you need/what's worked in the past. Follow without judging yourself. Avoid behaviors you are aware are unhealthy, such as excessive substance use.

# For the Families of Emergency Service Workers

## Thank You

Multnomah County thanks you for contributing to your family member's ability to serve in an emergency operation. Your understanding and support provide the foundation that helps our Emergency Service Workers accomplish the great work that they do. This document represents our effort to help support both you and your loved one before, during and after their assignment.

### **Assignment to the Emergency Operation**

When emergency service volunteers are first recruited, we provide them with as much information as possible about their potential assignment(s). However, some (or even many) of the specifics will be incomplete. In the beginning stages of any emergency operation there are still many unknowns, such as the exact location where your loved one will be needed, living accommodations within the affected area, and whether phone service has been restored. However, should an emergency arise at home, in smaller incidents, the Multnomah County Emergency Management (MCEM) staff will likely have the ability to contact the operation, and arrange to get in touch with your loved one. If needed, staff can also make arrangements for your loved one to return home.

Your loved one will face both unique and challenging circumstances while on assignment. Emergency workers are usually asked to prepare to respond on very short notice. Their accommodations may be rustic. During their assignment they may stay in one place, or may be reassigned once or many times to multiple locations. Days are often long and hard, as workers address all sorts of emergency situations. They may experience frequent exposure to scenes of destruction, as well as to the strong emotions of survivors. They will most likely be working at a very fast pace, helping the emergency operation provide the most assistance to the largest number of people in the least amount of time. In addition to these and many other challenges, most emergency workers find tremendous satisfaction in helping meet the needs of communities affected by the emergency.

### **Building Resilience**

People have resilience. We all have ways to help ourselves "bounce back" after challenging times - even in the face of an emergency. For volunteers and loved ones, staying in touch can serve as one way of coping with the stress of emergency service. Doing so provides the Emergency Service Worker volunteer with a means of continued connection with family and home life, can help reduce stress, and can also reassure loved ones that the Emergency Service Worker is safe. Even though at times it may be hard for the worker to call home, knowing that back home someone is supporting them and their efforts can be very comforting.

The sacrifices you make to support your loved one's emergency assignment may mean some stress for you, as well. Connecting with your friends and loved ones can help provide you with the support you need. Getting everything done at home while your loved one is on assignment may be difficult. Consider what you might be able to let go for a while so you do not become overwhelmed. Take time to do things that you know help *you* to feel rested and calm. Remind yourself that your family is making an invaluable contribution to helping the emergency operation in your own way.

### **Returning Home**

The return home can be filled with many different or even conflicting feelings for workers and their family. By sharing this information with you, we hope to help make the family reunion joyful and successful.

When emergency workers return home they are usually tired, and may continue to think about the operation. Though they are safely at home, they may still feel a need to reassure themselves about the safety of their environment. Emergency workers often feel unsettled because they feel that they couldn't get everything done at the operation. Emergency experience can also temporarily overshadow everyday events at home and make them seem less important. Therefore at first, your family member may seem preoccupied and less in touch with what is happening at home. Even when they have served in a location that is not far from home, they may need a little time to readjust to life as usual. This will typically change within a week or two as life returns to normal. If you are concerned about your loved one,

Even though you and others may wish to hear all about what happened on the emergency assignment, your family member may or may not want to talk about it or the emotions involved. Many different feelings may be present: being proud, frustrated, angry, sad, tearful or happy; or maybe even saying they feel "nothing." These normal short-term reactions to an emergency experience may take a little time to sort themselves out. Everyone proceeds through this differently. Keep in mind that your family member will probably not be able to pick up all the typical family and work responsibilities until after they have taken some time to rest and readjust. Some "quiet time" may be needed so your family member can reflect on the events, and put the experience in perspective in their life. Your expressions of support and love can help them work through this important process.

# Tips For Family Members

It can be challenging for families to deal with the impacts of a family member's emergency assignment. Working significantly longer hours, or being gone for days at a time can increase the amount of work the remaining family member(s) must take on. It truly takes a team effort from the whole family to carry the weight of an emergency assignment. The recommendations below can help create a healthy and supportive environment for everyone.

Changes in routine that emergency assignments create can be stressful for every member of the family, even our pets. Developing a supportive network of friends and family, and connecting with them can help you cope with your loved one's role.

Sometimes it is difficult to ask for help with the little things around the house, but they can add up when your loved one is responding to an emergency. We often find that those who care about us, want to help in some way, and just need a little guidance on how to do so. Human beings are often very comforted when they are able to help, so asking for a little support, can actually provide comfort to those you are reaching out to as well.

This supportive network can help build your capacity to be supportive of your loved one when they return. Having a loved one away means you will have taken on extra work. When they return, picking up where they left off may be just the thing they need. However, sometimes they will need time to reintegrate. Even though you realize they were making a huge difference, and helping a lot of people, during the time it takes for them to transition, they may be a bit inwardly focused. Doing what you can to demonstrate your appreciation for their contributions to our larger community can help strengthen the bond you share. Be gentle with your loved one, and yourself.

## For Further Assistance

Thank you for contributing your vital support to Multnomah County's emergency response readiness. MCEM is here to support both emergency workers and their family members, who together make emergency response possible. Please contact MCEM if you require assistance while your family member is on assignment, or if you think your family member would benefit from receiving support following their return. MCEM is here to help you and your family successfully navigate emergency response in a safe and healthy way. To find the contact information for everyone in our department, please visit our website at <https://multco.us/em>.

Thank you for helping us help others!