5. DATA AND INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

This chapter is largely based on the UNDAC Field Handbook, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, United Nations Disaster Assessment And Coordination, United Nations, 4th Edition (printed 2006).

5.1. Introduction

One of the main tasks of the EU Assessment Team is to collect, collate, analyze, and disseminate information regarding the emergency. Already here we have to distinguish between the terms "data" and "information." Data are simple numbers or other characters. In contrast information is "useful data." Data become information when different data are combined and become useful, meaningful, relevant and timely to particular people at particular times and places, for particular purposes.

The information handled by the EU Assessment Team should contain:

- General information on the humanitarian effects of the emergency
- Resource needs and their availability
- Response activities
- Achievements of these activities
- Constraints of these activities
- Gaps of response activities
- Duplications of response activities
- Unmet needs

Each of the above information has to be sufficiently described in quality, quantity, location, time and reliability. The level of sufficiency or better said level of accuracy has to be defined by the team. One level of accuracy for all information should be preferred. Nevertheless for different types of information this level may differ but this should be defined by the team. This definition of the level of accuracy will make the later handling and analysis of the information for the team much easier.

The EU Assessment Team's information management responsibilities may include all or some of the following types of activities:

- Serve as the focal point for all information on humanitarian activities
- Develop and maintain a relationship with other data sources such as the Local Emergency Management Authority (LEMA), the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), national and international GOs and NGOs especially from Europe and military liaison officers if present
- Classify information on its credibility and reliability
- Establish rapid and effective reporting networks, install and maintain electronic communication systems, and facilitate internal communication systems
- Compile and maintain an up-to-date picture of the humanitarian situation by geographic area or specialised sector
- Facilitate the flow of information from and to field offices

- Provide real-time monitoring and plotting of humanitarian incidents
- Collect, collate, analyse and disseminate information regarding the plans, operations, stockpiles, information needs, and ongoing resource needs of assistance providers
- Establish and maintain an ongoing information system/data base on the emergency to serve as the institutional memory
- Prepare and submit periodic reports as decided in the plan of action
- Provide information to the media and news agencies, monitor media reports, organise and convene press conferences in agreement with the MIC and the LEMA
- Provide briefings for senior level staff, visiting VIPs, and donor missions
- Arrange to handover established information management systems to incoming EU Coordination Team members and EU modules or EU intervention teams or other responsible bodies

5.2. Reporting

5.2.1. Policy

Reporting is one of the most important functions of an EU Assessment Team. Reports have to be clear, concise, accurate and professional. All reporting by an EU Assessment Team should be addressed to the LEMA in the capital of the affected country and to the MIC. If an EU Delegation is present they should receive a copy of the report. All reporting has to be cleared with the Team Leader.
For contacts outside the above channel of reporting, it has to be stated that all information delivery has to be cleared with the LEMA and the MIC. Reports should, as far as possible, be written in English. The schedule of reporting is set by the team leader onsite regarding team's activities. Recommended time for sending the report is between 18:00 and 20:00 local time each time. This enables the team to analyse the information collected during the day and prepare the report. For fast evolving emergency situations two reports per day should be considered one in between 08:00 and 10:00 local time and the second in between 18:00 and 20:00 local time. In this case the morning report should be seen as intermediate and the evening as main report.
Important findings especially regarding safety and security of the team and other European actors have to be reported immediately!

5.2.2. Reporting system

The EU Assessment Team reports are to be sent to the LEMA and the MIC by email as pdf-file (alternatively as word-document).
There will be occasions when the need for updated information is so acute in a fast moving emergency that the MIC or the LEMA may directly request verbal or written reports from the team.

The team compiles an assessment report from the information that the team has gathered from sources such as national authorities, UN agencies, the EU intervention teams, governmental organisations (GOs), non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and others. This assessment report is then sent to the LEMA and the MIC. The MIC uses it, together with other available information, to form the MIC Daily and/or the MIC Message which provides information required by the European Civil Protection community.
The EU Assessment Team's reports may be forwarded to the headquarters of the organisations participating in the European Community Mechanism. It may also be posted on the EU public information website on civil protection:
http://ec.europa.eu/environment/civil/index.htm
and/or the Virtual OSOCC (On-Site Operations and Coordination Centre):
http://ocha.unog.ch/virtualosocc/VOLogin.aspx

5.2.3. EU Assessment Team Report

Send the first EU Assessment Team report as early as possible upon arrival at the emergency site and send subsequent reports at least daily with whatever information is available at the time. Do not delay a report because certain information is lacking, send it next time. Recommended time for sending the report is between 18:00 and 20:00 local time. Remember, an EU Assessment Team's report is processed information and carries considerable credibility. It should be informative, authoritative and timely - especially in the current age of instant media access to emergency sites.
Either provide a complete list of unmet needs in each report or specifically state which items remain unchanged from the previous report while providing new information for other items. Indicate if needs can be met locally or may require international assistance.

When writing the report, imagine yourself at the receiving end and try to write what you would want to know, as well as how you would want it to be presented. Be explicit and precise and double check figures. Remember to quote the source of the information when presenting facts and figures. Try to anticipate a potential donor's likely question and answer them in the report. Do not repeat information that has already been sent and if there is no new information under a specific heading, state this clearly.
Avoid vague and ambiguous words and phrases. A statement such as "5,000 people are affected" does not give any indication on, e.g., how they are affected, to what degree, what is already being done, and how many people there are in the area altogether. "5,000 houses damaged" conveys little information. The "damage" may be minimal, partial or total. Use the guidelines given in the chapter "7. Damage types".
When reporting damage or assessed needs, specify the source of the information. Take care to check the final text before sending and ask another person to re-check it.

For writing reports consider the following tips:

- Follow the format
- Report regularly and often
- Add photos and tables
- Don't repeat

- Highlight changes
- Present facts – not speculation
- Quote the source
- Be concise
- Be objective
- Avoid jargon
- **K.I.S.S. – Keep It Short and Simple**

5.2.4. Format of EU Assessment Team's Report

The format of the EU Assessment Team's report given below should be followed by using the parts that are relevant for the specific mission. The report should consist of all the items mentioned below. If there is no information on one or more of the items then state it explicitly, i.e., "Nothing to report".
Keep in mind that this standard format (template see annex) is a recommended guideline and that the format one uses could vary due to unique aspects of the emergency. Due to this, the MIC might distribute an adjusted format adapted to special reporting needs of the particular emergency.

The header of the report has to define who sent the report and how he/she could be contacted and for what date and time the report content is valid. The reports should be serially numbered.

1. Situation
- Area affected (attach maps if possible)
- Impact
- Anticipated evolution / secondary threats, short and mid-term developments
- Security situation

2. Response of the affected country
- Organisation: responsible national and local authorities / emergency decision making structure
- Administrative measures
- Operations
- Constraints

3. EU and international response
- Resources arriving on site / mobilised
- Activities of Member States' teams
- Coordination structures
- Constraints

4. Requirements / needs

- Priority response needs (give as much details as possible: quantity, quality, size, location, time, need for personnel and/or means and/or tools etc.)
- Delivery: distribution system and logistics including point of entry and specific contact details

5. Logistics

- Existing infrastructure for incoming international assistance
- Reinforcement needs of existing infrastructure for handling incoming international assistance

6. Media contacts

- List of media contacts including journalist's name or the newspaper, magazine, or radio/TV station he/she represents and the main topic during this contact

7. Contacts

8. Other information

- Other issues of interest not applicable in the above-mentioned headings
- It is typical to attach spreadsheets that show relief providers and their assistance

Remember that the EU Assessment Team's report is read in many places where information inputs from numerous other sources are available. Unfortunately, this could lead to an information overload for some recipients. This possibility makes the first heading "Summary" extremely important as this might be the only information that is remembered or read.

5.3. Data and information processing

5.3.1. General

Data and information management by the EU Assessment Team includes the following steps:

1. Data gathering
2. Reliability and credibility of data sources
3. Collection and structuring of the data
4. Transformation into information
5. Evaluation/analysis of the information
6. Dissemination of the information

It is important to distinguish between the terms "data" and "information." Data are simple numbers or other characters. In contrast information is "useful data." Data are transformed to information by combining different data thus becomes useful, meaningful, relevant and timely to particular people at particular times and places, for particular purposes.

5.3.2. Data gathering

Data is gathered either by interviews or own observations. Interviews should be done with key informants in the government, private voluntary organizations, NGOs, international organisations and from particular groups of affected people and their leaders. Useful key informants include:

- At capital level:
  - National authorities
    - Fire service
    - Civil Defence/Civil Protection
    - Health service
    - Police
    - Army
  - Geographical institutes
  - Department of meteorology/hydrology, etc.
  - EU Delegation (if in-country)
  - Embassies of EU Member States
  - UNDAC
  - UN agencies
  - IFRC/ICRC
  - National NGOs
  - International GOs and NGOs
  - International relief teams/organisations
- At district/local level:
  - District/local authorities
  - Local leaders/village elders
  - Police
  - Army
  - Fire service
  - Rescue services
  - National NGOs
  - International GOs and NGOs
  - Civil Defence/Civil Protection
  - IFRC/ICRC
  - International relief teams/organisations
  - Religious leaders
  - EU Assessment/Coordination Team's national staff
  - Health facilities
  - Evacuation centres
  - Birth/death registration office

Persons representing official organisations or authorities should always be preferred as source compared to private persons.

5.3.3. Reliability and credibility of data sources

There is a need for appreciating the reliability of the source of data and the credibility of the data collected. The consistent application of the following tried-and-tested system might help you. It was developed by the military, is widely used by armed forces and law-enforcement agencies around the world, and other humanitarian responders, e.g., IFRC FACT (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies - Field Assessment and Coordination Team) and UNDAC (United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination). EU Assessment Team members should use this system as a tool when processing information. The system identifies the reliability of the source providing the data and then, separately, the credibility of the data being provided. By consistently applying this approach, team members may evaluate the significance of reports received with some degree of confidence.

Reliability of source	Credibility of data
A. Completely reliable	1. Confirmed by other sources
B. Usually reliable	2. Probably true
C. Fairly reliable	3. Possibly true
D. Not usually reliable	4. Doubtful
E. Unreliable	5. Improbable
F. Reliability cannot be judged	6. Truth cannot be judged

The ratings given in the above table are defined as described below:

Reliability of source:

Rating	Description
A	**Completely reliable** refers to a tried and tested source which may be depended upon with confidence. These are extremely rare and should be kept for special occasions.
B	**Usually reliable** refers to a source which has been successful in the past but for which there is still some element of doubt in a particular case. This should be used for sources of known integrity such as EU and UN agencies, military entities, some major NGOs, etc.
C	**Fairly reliable** refers to a source which has occasionally been used in the past and upon which some degree of confidence may be based. Some press sources and NGOs could fit in here.
D	**Not usually reliable** refers to a source which has been used in the past but has proved more often than not to be unreliable. Some press sources and NGOs could fit in here.
E	**Unreliable** refers to a source which has been used in the past and has been proven unworthy of any confidence.
F	**Reliability cannot be judged** refers to a source which has not been used in the past.

Credibility of data:

Rating	Description
1	**Confirmed** by other sources is applicable when a source different than the originally reporting one confirms the data independently of the first source.
2	**Probably true** indicates confirmation of essential parts of reported data by another source. Aerial imagery is included in this category.
3	**Possibly true** means that investigation of a reported fact or action has revealed no further data, however the data is compatible with previous actions or background data available.
4	**Doubtful** is applicable to an item of data if it tends to conflict with previously reported data.
5	**Improbable** is applicable if an item of data contradicts previously reported data.
6	**Truth cannot be judged** is applicable if any freshly reported item of data cannot be compared with data from any other source. It is used when 1-5 cannot be applied. It is preferred to use a rating of 6 rather than an inaccurate 1-5 rating.

The rating is not a progressive degree of accuracy. It only helps to formalize the credibility of data received. Therefore it is not foolproof. The letters and numerals are independent of each other and give an overall evaluation of the data. For example, a source known to be unreliable (E) might provide accurate data which is confirmed by other sources and therefore given the rating of E1. Additionally, a report evaluated as F6 maybe totally accurate and should not be routinely disregarded.

Often it is very useful to accompany interviews by own observations to compare given data and own observations. In some cases own observations might even be the only way to gather data. To collect data by own observations is usually more time consuming than to do an interview which is already a certain collection of data by the informant himself or his subordinated bodies. Keep in mind that data given by informants may be different from the real situation as the informant may try to influence the team's findings to gain his own benefit.
Basis for these observations are peoples senses, mainly eyes and ears. The transfer from one interview location to the next as well as the location itself should be used to observe the surroundings. Observation simply means go there and have a closer look. This could be done by passing selected areas by terrestrial or aerial vehicle and interpolate the findings in the following steps for larger areas. For certain objects (e.g. a dam) each of the objects have to be visited. Documentation could be easily done by taking photos if not forbidden. These photos may contain data which has not been recognised on-site. At least notes should be taken.

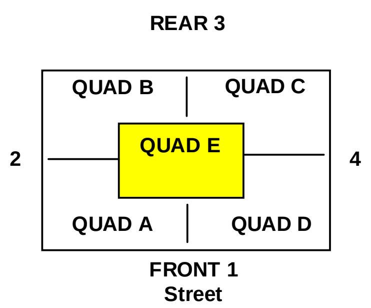
5.3.4. Collection and structuring of the data

The collection strategy must be established from the beginning of the mission to ensure that neither data or information is lost. Team members will be gathering data on wide ranges of different topics, some for which a member of the team might be the focal point

but many other areas where the focal point responsibility resides with other team members.
Thus all data should be filed in a structured order to simplify retrieval, comparison and analysis. One should try to file data in both electronic and paper form. If possible, one should use only one computer for filing or use an internal network such as Microsoft Groove for enabling all team members to work on the same file. Always ensure a backup is made. Computers may break down under field conditions use easily. Thus be always prepared to continue with a paper-based fall-back solution including a non-electronic data back-up.
This process should be initiated from day one, as it will be very difficult to fill in missing data pieces further into the mission when the data set rapidly increases in size.
The filing structure and directory structure for electronic filing has to be the same for the entire team to facilitate handling and especially search for files. This structure best follows the outline of the reports thus:

- Situation
- Response of the affected country
- EU and international response
- Requirements / needs
- Logistics
- Media contacts
- Contacts
- Other information

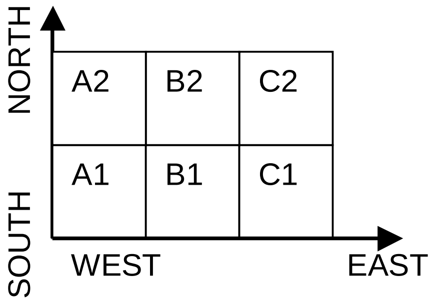
Furthermore it is important to define a reference system for localising these data to places. For buildings or small scale emergency areas the system established by INSARAG (International Search and Rescue Advisory Group) should be used, please see the diagram on the left.



This system distinguishes very clearly places outside the building by numbers orientated clockwise beginning with the street side and quadrants inside the building labelled by letters orientated again clockwise beginning at the left quadrant at the street side and reserving quadrant E for inner constructions such as stairways or elevator.
The levels of the building are labelled in this system as shown on the right.

Floor 2
Floor 1
Ground Floor = grade level = Street level
Basement -1
Basement -2

If the area of interest is of larger extent this system is not suitable any more for the whole area. In this case it is recommended to use a network of roads, rails and water bodies if present to clearly separate sectors. These sectors could then be also identified on aerial or satellite images. It is best to label these sectors in an orthogonal system using letters for the east-west orientation and numbers for the north-south orientation as shown below.



5.3.5. Transformation into information

One of the most important steps in data and information processing is to transform the collected data into information. Data are simple numbers or other characters which are not useful without being combined with other data. This transformation into information can be described by giving data use, meaning, relevancy, location and time. This is done by combining data in a logical way. This transformation is only true to particular people at particular times and places, for particular purposes. On the other hand this means for somebody who does not need this data it stays data never mind how it is processed unless data which is of interest for this person is integrated into this process.
The following example may help to see how this transformation of data into information works:
“It will rain” is only data.
“It will rain, starting at 18:00 in the catchment area of the dam in the valley” is already information useful for farmers in this area or the dam operators. The level of detail could be further enhanced adding e.g. the forecasted precipitation rate or the water level at the dam and at which water level the maximum capacity of the dam will be reached. Based on this the user of the information is able to plan how to react if necessary.

5.3.6. Evaluation/analysis of the information

Thorough analysis of the information collected is a critical step in the information management process. The EU Assessment Team should be careful to record and report the factual information as objectively as possible. In performing the analysis, the information has to be linked to the country-specific situation such as emergency history, traditional coping mechanisms, etc. and possible future developments. The team should try to detect and recognize trends and indicators of problems. This analysis should lead to the development of recommendations. These recommendations may contain:

- Advice on actions to be taken for continuing or strengthening the assessment for gaining a clearer situation and needs analysis.

- Advice on actions to be taken using response capabilities and capacities already acting on site. This could be a re-assignment e.g. changing the tasks or displacement to areas of higher priority.
- Advice on response capabilities and capacities which should be requested by LEMA. This could be either a request for assistance by the EU Community Mechanism or a general request for international assistance.
- Advice on how to coordinate the present and further requested international assistance thus advising LEMA to request for an EU Coordination Team.

5.3.7. Dissemination of the information

If the analysis results in the recommendation to warn the population about a danger this warning has to be given by LEMA. Only if there is an immediate and direct danger to people the EU Assessment Team members are allowed and have to warn the people in this danger to prevent a worsening of the situation. This warning has to be immediately been reported to LEMA and the MIC.

In addition to the regular EU Assessment Team's Report, the team should exchange available information to the humanitarian community on-site in a timely, structured and appropriate manner as agreed with the LEMA and the MIC following the considerations of chapter 4.6. Plan of Action. This dissemination could be done through meetings, through the On-Site Operations and Coordination Centre (OSOCC), and through the Virtual OSOCC. Efficient information exchange should have a positive effect on the team's assessment efforts.
The Virtual OSOCC is an internet platform provided by UN OCHA for exchanging disaster information continuously and simultaneously by actors from any place in the world. The information is stored in a database on the internet and facilitates the access of topics of particular interest. Users may provide comments on existing information in real-time and, thereby, discuss issues of concern with other users. The Virtual OSOCC provides an effective tool to facilitate the information exchange between responding governments and organisations throughout an emergency response operation.

5.3.8. Presentation and documentation of information

The EU Assessment team is not tasked to set up and operate an On-Site Operation and Coordination Centre (OSOCC). This is a task of the EU Coordination Team. Nevertheless the EU Assessment Team should cooperate with an OSOCC if established on-site. If there is no OSOCC set up the team should consider the procedures below for internal documentation and presentation of information within the team and the team's office:
The EU Assessment Team must be able to present available information in a clear and easily understandable manner to all counterparts. Information organised and visually accessible and displayed will inspire confidence in the team and save the EU Assessment Team and/or EU Coordination Team members' time in answering the same questions again and again. Confidence that useful information will be easily gained will make the team an attractive partner to cooperate and give information to the team.

5. INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

To collect and present information it is suggested that the following tools are used:

Log book

The team should maintain a log book into which all activities and events are logged. This should be a simple log with the columns "Serial Number", "Time", "Location", "Activity/Event", "Action Taken" and "Initials" on it. Anyone should log his activities and events it into the book. It should contain the following activities and events:

- Telephone and radio messages received or sent
- Reports received or sent
- Meetings
- Interviews
- Departure and return of team members
- Important developments of the situation
- All safety and security issues

An accurate keeping of the log will enable team members to derive the following benefits:

- A running record of all information/actions is kept, thus enabling team members to update themselves after returning from a field survey.
- A basis for briefings and assessment reports is available at all times.
- A basis for the Final Mission Report and the lessons learnt meeting when one can go back and see what happened when, where, and with whom.

Remember to start the logbook immediately after arrival. If not, it will be difficult at a later stage to fill in missing events and recapture what took place. That could often leave the team one step behind.

Information maps

Visualised information is an excellent tool for presenting information – and also for the team to keep an overview of the operation. Display information maps which cover the area, findings and activities on one wall of the team's office. Be as detailed as needed and generalise as far as possible or meaningful. On these maps (which you should cover with plastic) mark the following information regarding locations of:

- The emergency site
- Endangered population
- Endangered infrastructure
- Response activities
- Needs
- Key LEMA organisations such as fire brigades, police stations, hospitals, communication centres, and military headquarters
- The OSOCC
- Key logistics features such as airfields and/or railway stations
- Any safety and security incidents
- Other information that can be visually displayed

Encourage partners to update information on the information map concerning their organisations. If kept updated, you will soon find that there are very few places where all the above information is displayed and this information map will become a key tool for the team's tasks. Take a digital photo of the map on a regular basis for the mission's documentation.
Maps may be provided by UNOSAT by special request through the MIC. Attention has to be paid here for the reliability of the map or satellite image as UNOSAT is provider of data from other original sources. Another source might be the UN OCHA Field Information Section (FIS) in New York for additional data that may be made available through the Geographic Information Support Team (GIST), a UN inter-agency network that focuses on electronic data collection and analysis. The GIST may assist in providing estimated affected population data and pre- and post-event satellite imagery.

Who, what, where directory

An EU Assessment Team should have an easily accessible directory with a data sheet on each organisation involved in the emergency response. The data sheet should include contact points, areas of operation, names of key personnel and assets. This has to be handed over to the EU Coordination Team if they arrive later.

Notice board

Next to the information map in the team's office, make available a blank notice board on which the team members leave notices regarding field surveys, their destination and expected time of return, coordination meetings etc. This board allows internal needs and resources of the team to be matched, besides acting as a facilitator of information flow. Take a digital photo of the notice board on a regular basis for the mission's documentation.

Coordination/information meetings

The EU Assessment Team should be present at coordination meetings held by the LEMA, the EU Coordination Team, UNDAC or the OSOCC. This is a good opportunity to gather data and share information with other emergency response actors. An updated meeting schedule should be available and displayed in the team's office. The result of these meetings will provide you with an important information base for the reports.

Copies

If somehow possible allow partners to get a copy of information maps, reports, assessment reports, contact-lists, etc. applying the information policy agreed with the MIC and LEMA following the considerations of chapter 4.6. Plan of Action. This is usually information that is filed as a basis for the information displayed in the team's office, but could be useful for several emergency response organisations. Try to have a system that allows for both electronic and paper copies.

5.4. Contact with media

5.4.1. General

Whenever there is a newsworthy situation, the media will be there. Thus, an EU Assessment Team member may be approached by the media at any time. As this is of higher probability for a member of an EU Assessment Team compared to the member of an EU intervention team the behaviour toward media as given in the "EU Handbook on assistance interventions in the frame of the Community Mechanism for Cooperation in civil protection" should be expanded as follows:

A good press can help raise awareness of the gravity of the situation. It is, therefore, important for the team to help keep the media informed but to keep in mind that this is not a priority task. But prudence is needed in any contact with media. Harsh rejection might lead to bad press, open answering of questions might lead to friction with local authorities or other teams involved in the intervention. If possible and practical, all inquirers should be directed to the press office next to the scene. **Intervention teams or experts are not authorised to speak on behalf of the Commission**.
The EU Assessment Team Leader sets the guidelines for relations with the media for his team in accordance with the MIC and LEMA. Usually, one team member (usually the Team Leader) should be appointed as focal point for contact with the media, after which media relations concerning the EU Assessment Mission as a whole should go through this person.
To avoid conflicting information, inquiries should only be answered by this person only in close co-ordination with local on scene command. Moreover, any person answering questions should restrict him/herself to the own area of responsibility and avoid any speculations about the situation elsewhere. Critical remarks about other involved parties or agencies and institutions of the host country should not be made, even not "off the record" since this information might be carried to others.

If an interview is given, be honest, open, positive, and stick to facts, avoid presenting personnel opinion or speculative prognosis. Inform the MIC about each media contact in the next report. If you had a interview which could be broadcasted by radio or television you should inform the MIC immediately.

Be aware that discrepancies may exist between the media presentation of an emergency situation and the reality.

5.4.2. Rules regarding media

Preparation

- Prepare yourself to provide media representatives with overview information on the EU Community Mechanism in the field of civil protection and the current situation.

- Know the main points of what you want to say - and what you do not want to say - before you start talking.
- Do not favour one media - all are entitled to similar treatment.
- Know with whom you are talking. Make a media log (journalist's name or the newspaper, magazine, or radio/TV station he/she represents, local address and telephone number).
- If there is an OSOCC, it may be the central media centre where journalists know where and from whom to obtain information.

Rules for dealing with journalists

- Never pick a fight with the news media - they air or print every day and you don't.
- There are no secrets. Assume what you say and do will get on the air or the printed page.
- While you can say things "off the record", that doesn't mean the media won't print it and give your attribution.
- Don't assume or speculate anything.
- Reporters may not be well informed or technically competent about your profession so explain terms to ensure they are understood.
- Keep it simple. Clarify and summarize your major points and write facts and data down to a hand out if possible.
- Use English and talk in a relaxed style that is aimed at the general public, not experts. Avoid jargon and acronyms, remember that the audience is the general public.
- Give reporters a good story to write. They may find one you don't like - and write it if you don't give them one.
- Listen for trends in the questions. Is the reporter asking leading questions? Are there obvious misconceptions? Offer to clarify or redirect.
- Treat reporters professionally, with respect, and initiate background conversations.
- Always answer their calls in a timely fashion.
- Don't lie, and make sure your information is accurate. It doesn't have to be all-encompassing as you don't have to tell a reporter your views on everything.
- Before you do an interview, decide what you can discuss and what you can't - and stick to it.
- Use humour to defuse confrontational situations.
- Choose your words carefully and well because they will likely be reported as you say them.
- If a critical or controversial story is going to be written anyway, your point of view should be in the story. Remember: silence is not always golden.
- Repetition is the essence of retention: the public will remember what they see, hear, and read repeatedly in the media.
- Once a story is out that you don't like, it is usually too late and fruitless to try to correct it.

- Use objective and authoritative sources of information to back up your statements to reporters, if you can. Don't make statements you can't back up.
- Try to anticipate questions. If you can't or you don't know the answer, get back to the reporter after you are asked such questions so you can give a considered response.
- Don't criticise the government, it's emergency response, European Community response or any emergency response actor.

Follow-up

Inform the team leader (if you are the team's media focal point) when an interview has taken place.

If a team member has been misquoted, the team leader reclaims this to the media. Once a story is out, though, it is usually too late to correct it for the public, but the media should nevertheless be informed of the mistake.