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## Lessons Learned Information Sharing

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# LESSON LEARNED

## PRIMARY DISCIPLINES

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## Multi-Agency Response Operations: Distinguishing Between Public Information Officers From Different Agencies

### SUMMARY

During multi-agency response operations, public information officers (PIOs) should consider wearing agency-specific jackets or color-coded placards so that members of the media can easily distinguish among the agencies represented.

### DESCRIPTION

In the early morning of December 22, 2004, a tanker truck carrying 8,500 gallons of gasoline overturned on Interstate-395 in Arlington, Virginia, burst into flames, and created a chemical hazard to the surrounding community. Because of the complexities of the hazardous materials (HazMat) incident, multiple agencies responded, including the Arlington County Police Department, Arlington County Fire Department, Arlington County Office of Emergency Management, Arlington County Department of Environmental Services, Virginia Department of Transportation, and Virginia State Police.

PIOs representing each responding agency formed a Communications Group to coordinate public information and set up a central briefing area near the incident scene, similar to a Joint Information Center (JIC). The central briefing area was filled with multiple PIOs from all the responding agencies, but they were indistinguishable from one another as well as from other officials in the briefing area. As a result, reporters had to ask individuals standing around the briefing area of the whereabouts of specific agency PIOs, thus slowing the pace of information dissemination.

PIOs should consider wearing agency-specific jackets or color-coded placards that clearly identify which agencies the PIOs represent. Alternatively, sections of a JIC or central briefing area could be assigned to specific agencies and identified by erecting freestanding signs. Either option enables media representatives to quickly and easily find PIOs from specific response agencies.

### CITATION

- *Tanker Fire After-Action Report*. Office of Emergency Management, Arlington County, Virginia. February 11, 2005.

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