



## **Multi-Jurisdiction Communication Management NIMS Compliant Regional Implementation**

NOTE: Other than Indianapolis, this uses fictional names to serve as a generalized example

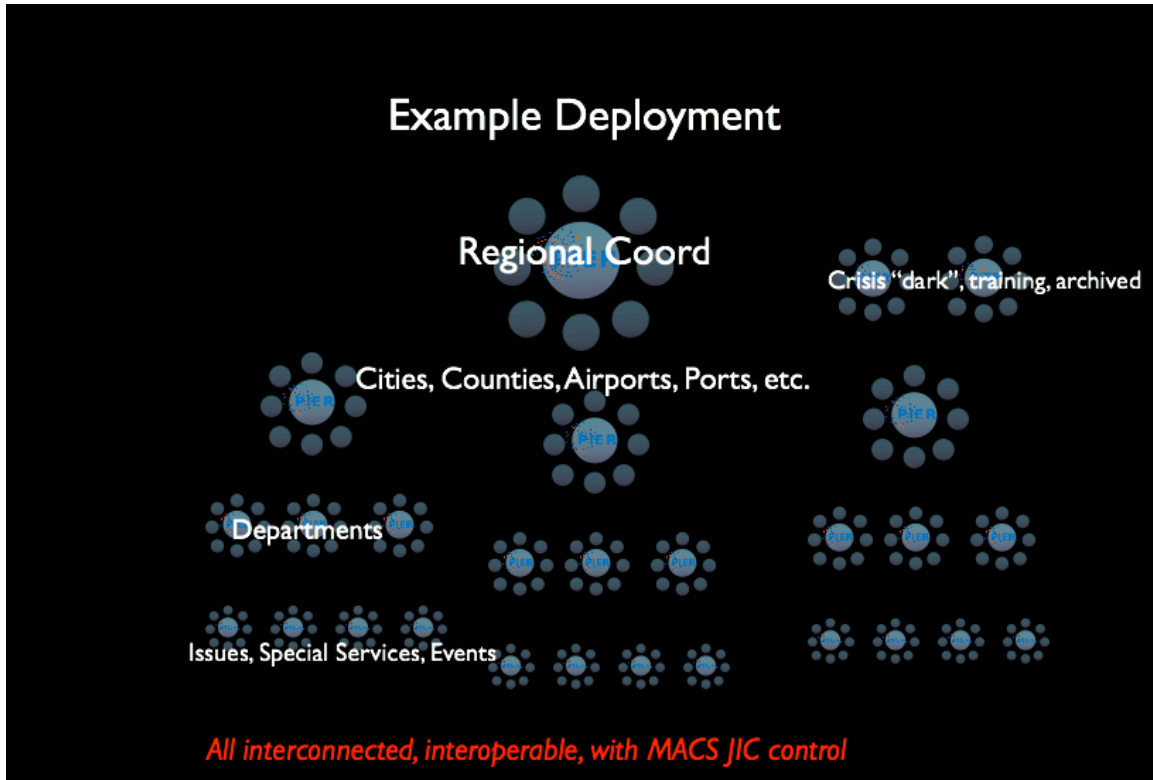
### **PIER Implementation**

All the jurisdictions within the greater Indianapolis area have set up PIER control centers for communicating internally with other emergency response team members as well as the stakeholders that are directly impacted by them.

### **Small Community PIER Use**

Some smaller communities such as Fremont have a single PIER center that is shared by all community agencies that have a role to play in public safety and convenience. The police department, fire department, public works department, parks department, and mayor's office all have several staff members who have been trained and who regularly submit items for distribution. The local media, community leaders, school officials, and members of the public who have requested email updates are regularly sent emails when activities occur that may impact them and they have become accustomed to this dependable source of information. Others in the community have been

made aware through a community letter and through the local paper about Fremont’s Public Safety Information website and they are aware that in case of an emergency situation, this site will be the primary source of information when they may be affected by a local event.



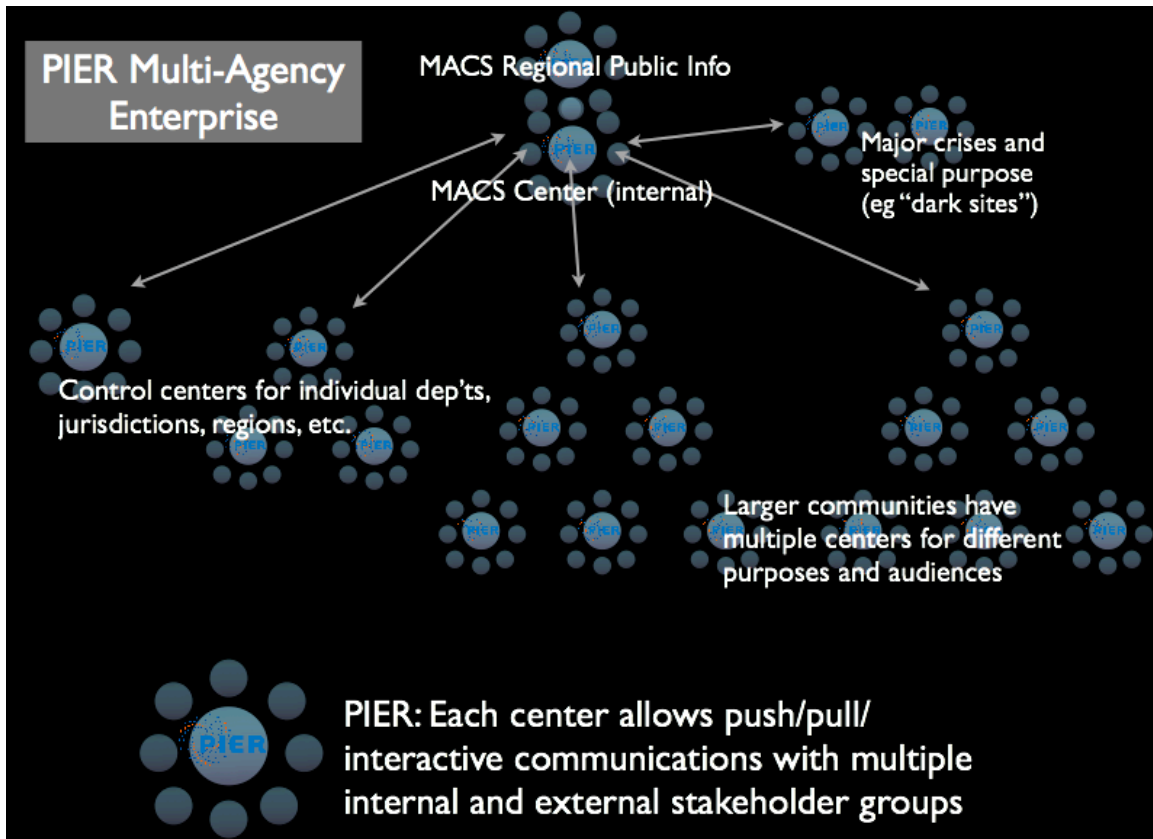
### Larger Community PIER Use

Larger communities, such as Placido, have implemented several PIER centers. That is because certain departments and agencies are managing their own stakeholder lists and need to have the ability to communicate with their stakeholders on very specific issues. For example, the public works department has implemented a PIER center to communicate about the road and utility construction projects that are continually on-going. The police and fire departments also have their own PIER centers which they use to manage the police and fire public websites (accessed through the cities central web presence) and do not wish to have road closure information on their sites unless it involves a major public safety issue. The Placido director of emergency

manager is prepared to use the Mayor's office PIER center in case of an emergency and this center, used for routine public information about city issues, will be used to direct visitors to a specific situation PIER center. She maintains six different "dark crisis" centers which are prepared in advance for specific events such as a major weather event, crime event, terrorist event, etc.

### **The MACS center**

Throughout the entire Indianapolis region, these various centers are interconnected into a "family." This allows access to the others' centers on a permission basis. The master emergency management control center is managed by the Endicott County Emergency Management Department designated as the MACS center. Since it is the role of this office to coordinate resources and public information in a regional, multi-jurisdiction event, the leaders of MACS have the permission to access the various PIER centers throughout the region. All other PIER users also have access to the MACS center, but their ability to control that center is limited by the permission level they have been granted by the MACS PIER administrator. However, the family is set up so that all information posted by any of the dozens of PIER centers set up around the region is automatically sent to the MACS PIER center. Since this is established as the region-wide emergency management and public information center, the communication manager responsible for this center serves as a regional "editor" determining what information is appropriately posted to that site and also which information should be distributed via email or other means to the contacts contained in the regional PIER center. While each local jurisdiction's center contains the contact information of the people impacted by their jurisdiction, the MACS control center has a contact list that includes all the key stakeholders with an interest in the entire region. This includes state and federal agency contacts.



## Drills and Exercises

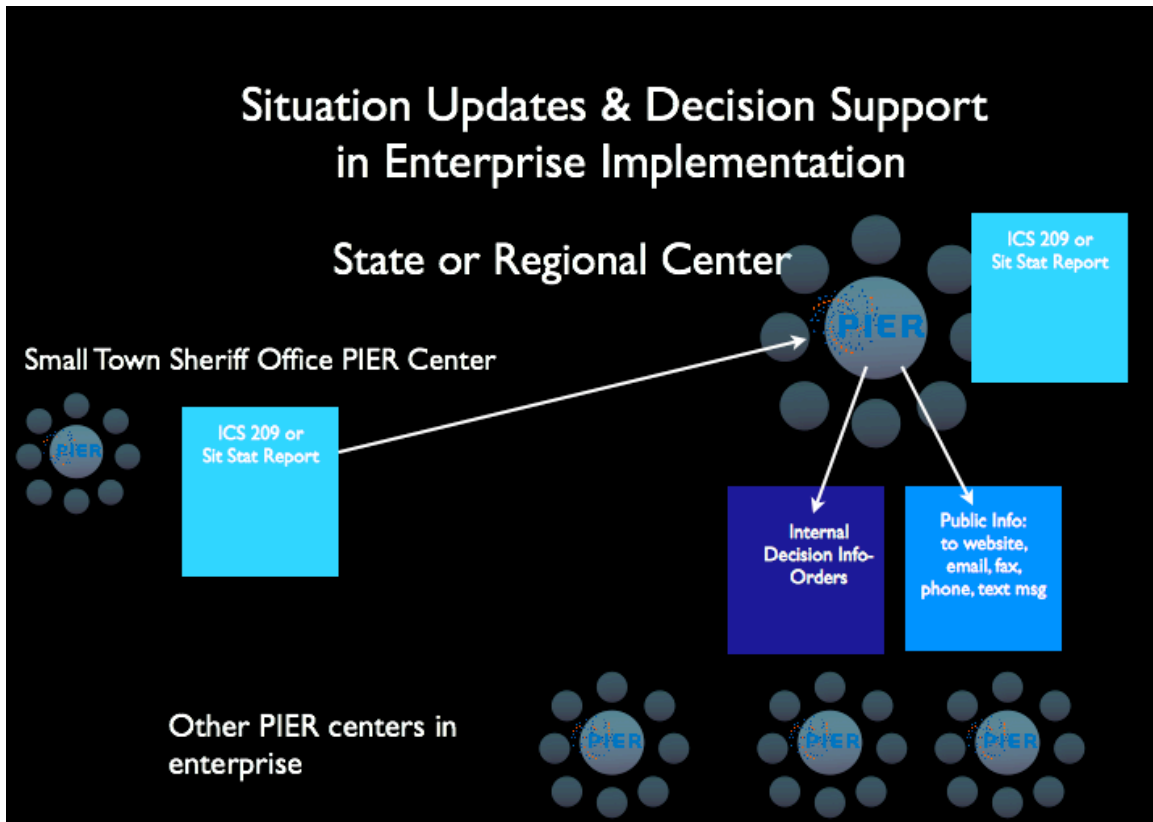
This network of PIER centers have been operating for some time and the public and media has become accustomed to a continual flow of information relevant to them from the local jurisdictions. In addition, the various PIER users part of the family participate in an annual drill anticipating an event that will affect all the jurisdictions and one where the MACS center will need to take the lead on public information. Drills are conducted on a "virtual" basis meaning that each participant plays their role from their own office or home using internet access to participate. The "drills and exercises" PIER center maintained by MACS is the information distribution point for the drill. These drills are conducted annually, allowing new employees to become accustomed to how the entire operation works and identifying areas where there are breakdowns in communication or performance.

In addition to these annual regional drills, each jurisdiction conducts at least one other drill with their team testing their ability to respond with internal and external information on a 24/7 basis.

### **The Storm Event**

At 3:00 a.m. the tornado hits the Indianapolis region. It cuts a swath from just north of the Indianapolis city limits through Galbraith, parts of Placido, and brushing McKortney. Unlike a terrorist or major crime event, this storm event provided some warning so all the responders throughout the region are on alert.

The ICS System is implemented with the MACS director serving as regional incident commander. Each jurisdiction operates its own localized ICS and information center using their primary public safety PIER centers to operate from. As has been drilled, the Incident Commander for each jurisdiction appoints a PIO to manage the communication including coordination with the MACS PIO. The PIOs designate a communication team member to participate as part of the Situation Status function of the Planning Section and to gather all information about the event and what is happening in the community. They are to fill in the pre-set ICS 209 Situation Update Report template in their PIER centers.



As has been pre-established and drilled, each of these Situation Update Reports is automatically distributed to the MACS control center whenever the individual reporter hits the "submit" button. The PIO at the MACS center reviews each of these and provides a regular report to the MACS Incident Commander of the activities and information from each of the jurisdictions. These reports are also provided to the MACS Planning Section chief who prepares the Incident Action Plans and submits to the Incident Commander. Plans are evaluated, resources allocated, and operation directives are prepared. These operational directives and resource decisions are also communicated via PIER to the control centers of the various jurisdictions and also, depending on urgency, can be communicated via text-to-voice telephone and text (SMS) messaging. Response personnel in the field can receive such instructions and information via pagers, blackberries (email), text message and phone messages. An on-going full regional report as well as the current IAP and specific directives are all published on a private, highly secure PIER center maintained by the

MACS specifically for coordinating activity among all the responders in each jurisdiction. They have received passwords to access this responder information site, but they need no other instruction as once they enter the correct password, it is simply a matter of viewing a website. They can however, submit questions, comments, concerns, or kudos via this site's interactive inquiry tool.

In addition, the MACS PIO maintains an ongoing conversation with other PIOs and response leaders via PIER's secure chat room, providing an additional channel of real time information.

Prior to the storm hitting, the MACS PIO has already launched the severe storm event PIER "dark site." It contains prepared information about evacuation or shelter-in-place instructions and how to care for pets, weather site links, etc. When this is launched, the PIO sends the instructions to each of the jurisdiction's PIOs instructing them, as has been drilled, to activate the link on their individual public centers. The Fremont PIO adds the link which directs viewers in Fremont who may be looking for information about the tornado to go to the Indianapolis Regional Public Emergency Management site. This means that all information is now controlled and coordinated, consistent with NIMS protocols, through the coordinating agency's Joint Information Center site.

But, the work of responding to media inquiries, questions from the public, other responding agencies, etc., is immense and growing rapidly. The PIO designates qualified PIOs from the various jurisdictions to participate in the JIC. Some are requested to travel to the Emergency Operation Center. But most are asked to participate from their homes or offices—wherever they have Internet access.

By aggressively pushing information on a regular basis to the reporters and key stakeholders in the pre-established contact lists in the MACS PIER center, the volume of incoming calls and emails is lowered. At the same time, the public site encourages anyone who is not getting email

updates to add themselves to the mailing list which is rapidly growing but automatically and without any diversion of resources away from the communication effort. Still, a lot of calls and emails are coming in and a growing number of reporters and stakeholders are using the inquiry form on the public site to submit questions. When calls come in directly to the JIC using the posted phone number, they are recorded on a form and passed to a PIER operator who logs them into the PIER center. This makes certain that all inquiries are tracked regardless of their source. The demands for on-camera interviews, telephone interviews, and press conferences which include the Incident Commander and staff, are managed by designated JIC staff members.

The MACS PIO reminded the jurisdiction PIOs of the importance of images and video and several were able to shoot digital images and video which were uploaded onto the MACS PIER center, selected by the JIC staff and uploaded onto the public site. Images and video of the response effort were quickly distributed via media, blog sites, and other traditional and new media outlets around the world.

As has been prepared in advance and drilled, inquiries are automatically directed by PIER to designated PIOs in the JIC. Others, that don't fit pre-determined categories, are distributed by an inquiry manager in the JIC. These go by way of emails to their computers at home or in their offices to the designated responders. They are able to respond quickly to the inquiries—typically within a few minutes. The MACS PIO designates one experienced communication professional to monitor all the inquiries and make certain the answers are accurate, they are provided promptly and appropriately and that all responders are kept aware of the most recent updates of information—which continues to flow in to the MACS PIER center in the form of updated ICS 209 Situation Update Reports. The process of converting this “raw” information into verified and approved information—approved by the Incident Commander for public release—is an on-going process with a goal of new releases available to the public every half hour.

Several inquiries coming in to the MACs Public Information center from the Placido area indicate that a rumor or incorrect information is circulating about the death of a prominent resident. The effort to reach this person is successful, verifying that the information is false, and the next release of information includes the fact that some had been misinformed. Several rumors are similarly identified through the coordinated effort and quickly validated or corrected.

### **Dealing with Power Outages**

As has been drilled, power outages were widespread during the event and in its aftermath. One community's city hall was severely damaged and their infrastructure and EOC was unusable. All response leaders and PIER users understood from the drills that this situation did not eliminate them from participating. Some contacted other PIER trained responders by cell phone and made their situation reports through those who did have power and Internet access, or they used laptop batteries with cell modems to access PIER. Photos from some of the most devastated areas were quickly made available to the media and public, featuring the outstanding work of the responders, using digital cameras uploaded to laptop computers and uploaded to PIER via cell modems.

### **Post Event Communication**

As the situation winds down, the PIO releases various JIC members back to their jurisdiction responsibilities. The various jurisdiction's public information centers link to the Joint Information Center are continued as long as the JIC continues to provide regional information but they resume direct control of the local information about impacts on the community. The JIC site is archived but preserved for debriefing and for all the valuable information and record of activity it contains. The information gained here will be used to develop the next crisis dark site—which will be much improved based on the lessons

learned. One lesson learned as part of their PIER training is that the public and stakeholders continue to have a strong interest in the event and its response for a long time after the media has gone on to another story. The regional MACS site continues to provide on-going information as well as a complete photographic record of the event, its aftermath and the excellent coordinated response. At the same time, the public information sites of the various jurisdictions provide continuing information about the event and the response specific to their own communities.

After the event is over, the MACS PIO calls an online meeting or teleconference call with all PIO participants and de-briefs the incident. The PIO reports that 3896 inquiries have been received with an average response time of 8 minutes and 12 seconds. Twenty four public information releases have been distributed during the 52 hour event which included a rolling fact sheet. They review where lapses or breakdowns had occurred and the reactions of the public and stakeholders to their communication effort. This evaluation of public response was aided by the use of the PIER survey tools which during and after the event were used to determine if they were meeting public and stakeholder expectations about communication. Overall, they gave themselves an A-.

At the next annual regional drill, they reviewed the pros and cons of this event, using the extensive reporting function of PIER to provide details about the communication effort, with the goal of next time being even better.

### **For More Information**

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