

# MS 460 Managing Overseas Emergencies

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**Responsible Offices:** Office of Global Operations (OGO); Office of Safety and Security (OSS); and Office of Health Services (OHS)

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MS 460 *Managing Overseas Emergencies Procedures*

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## 1.0 Purpose

The purpose of this Manual Section is to set forth Peace Corps policy on the roles and responsibilities of Headquarters and Posts in preparing for and responding to overseas Emergency Events that can place the health, safety, and security of Peace Corps Volunteers/Trainees (V/Ts), including Peace Corps Response Volunteers, and staff and the operation of Peace Corps programs at significant risk.

## 2.0 Authority

Peace Corps Act, 22 U.S.C. 2501, et seq.

### 3.0 Policy

The ability of the agency to respond effectively and expeditiously to a range of overseas Emergency Events is of paramount importance because such events have the potential to significantly affect the health, safety, and security of V/Ts and staff and the viability and reputation of Post operations.

The causes, severity, geographic scope, and advance warning of overseas Emergency Events vary widely. Natural and environmental disasters, political and civil unrest, terrorist acts, public health emergencies, and other Emergency Events can occur suddenly and without advance warning, or there may be indications within a specific host country that such events might occur. Therefore, preparation, planning, and response strategies vary depending on the specific threat. Staff at both Peace Corps Headquarters and Posts have responsibilities to anticipate, prepare for, and respond to Emergency Events and the risks they pose.

This Manual Section and its implementing procedures provide comprehensive guidance to Headquarters staff; define expectations, roles, and responsibilities of Headquarters and Post staff; and align with and govern guidance, resources, and training provided to Post staff. Policies regarding the agency's response to incidents involving individual V/Ts, such as sexual assaults and other crimes, are addressed in other agency policies.

### 4.0 Definitions

- (a) **Action Stages:** A five-stage system that provides structure to emergency responses by the agency comprises the following:
  - (1) **Alert:** Used when responding to an event that has the potential to impact normal operations and warrants monitoring.
  - (2) **Standfast:** Used when responding to a developing event that has the potential to escalate or limit V/T movement due to increased risk or otherwise impact Post operations.
  - (3) **Consolidation:** Used when the agency determines that some or all V/Ts must convene at a designated meeting point (*see* below for definition of "Consolidation Point") in the country of service to provide for their greater safety or to enhance logistical support.
  - (4) **Evacuation:** A partial or total withdrawal of V/Ts from a Post to another country, on a temporary or permanent basis, for operational reasons including, but not limited to, conditions, events, or circumstances with respect to which the Peace Corps determines that it cannot adequately ensure the health, safety, or security of V/Ts.
  - (5) **All-Clear:** Used when an event requiring a response has passed and the Post is able to assume regular operations.
- (b) **After-Action Review:** Facilitated analysis of the response to an Emergency Event.
- (c) **Consolidation Points:** Designated meeting points pre-determined by Post staff, which serve as a refuge and/or staging point for V/Ts when conditions at Post present risks to V/Ts and/or operations.
- (d) **Emergency Action Plan (EAP):** Detailed Post-specific plan that addresses the range of threats and sets out the components of an effective emergency management system, which include

assessment, mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery. Requirements are set forth by the Office of Safety and Security. (See MS 270 *Volunteer/Trainee Safety and Security*.)

- (e) **Emergency Event:** A potentially catastrophic situation that can affect the health, safety, and/or security of V/Ts and staff and/or disrupt Post operations.
- (f) **Mitigation:** Actions taken to decrease the vulnerability to, impact of, or probability of a threat and/or the related risks.
- (g) **Response Team:** Group of Peace Corps staff assigned to handle specific Emergency Events at Headquarters or Post.
- (h) **Staff:** Includes all categories of overseas and Headquarters employees and contractors unless otherwise indicated.
- (i) **Threat:** A person, event, or human-made or natural occurrence which may have the potential to increase the risk to, or cause damage to, people or operations. A Threat includes a range of situations, such as natural disasters, terrorism, and political unrest.

## 5.0 Roles and Responsibilities

The roles and responsibilities set forth below provide a general description of the expectations and duties of offices and staff involved in responding to overseas Emergency Events. A more detailed description of roles, responsibilities, and notification protocols is provided in the procedures that implement this Manual Section.

### 5.1 Headquarters Offices Roles and Responsibilities

- (a) **Headquarters Response Team:** A Headquarters Response Team (HQRT) is established whenever needed to address and mitigate specific Emergency Events.
  - (1) In consultation with the Office of Safety and Security (OSS), and the Office of Health Services (OHS), the relevant Regional Director (RD), shall determine if the Emergency Event warrants establishment of a HQRT.
  - (2) Led by the RD, in consultation with and participation of OSS and OHS, the HQRT meets as needed until the RD determines the HQRT is no longer required.
  - (3) The need for and scope of involvement of other Headquarters offices in the HQRT will vary according to the type and severity of the Emergency Event and the risks posed. The RD may expand the HQRT to include representatives of other offices. If requested by the RD, offices shall designate a representative to serve on or assist the HQRT.
  - (4) If an Emergency Event affects more than one Region, the AD OGO shall convene the HQRT.
- (b) **Regions:** The responsible RD coordinates the Region's support to the Post during Emergency Events, in consultation with the Regional Security Advisor and the Region's Chief of Operations. The Region's Chief Administrative Officer, Chief of Programming and Training, relevant Country Desk Officer and/or other regional staff may be involved as the situation warrants.

- (1) The team convened by the RD, referred to as the “Regional Emergency Response Leadership Team,” maintains close communication and coordination with the Post Response Team, OSS, OHS, and others as necessary.
  - (2) In coordination with OSS, and OHS as necessary, the RD ensures timely notification of Agency leadership regarding Emergency Events and responses, leads debriefing of After-Action Reviews, and documents lessons learned.
- (c) **Office of Safety and Security:** The office of Safety and Security supports and advises Regions and Posts in identifying, preparing for, and responding to Emergency Events and the risks and Threats posed by those Events; provides analysis of ongoing Threats and risks and makes recommendations for their Mitigation; issues guidance on emergency response procedures and protocols; dispatches the Peace Corps Safety and Security Officer (PCSSO), as requested or necessary, to advise Post staff and assess safety and security concerns; and conducts follow-up safety and security assessments as the situation warrants.
- (d) **Office of the Director:** The Office of the Director ensures timely notification of White House and State Department officials who are required to be notified of an Emergency Event and may designate an individual to serve as a liaison between the Office of the Director and the HQRT. Only the Director may authorize the Evacuation of V/Ts and the return to service of evacuated V/Ts. The Chief Diversity Officer within the Office of the Director identifies any unique cultural or diversity elements that should be considered in connection with the emergency response.
- (e) **Office of Global Operations:** The Office of Global Operations (OGO) supports the RD and the HQRT as necessary; supports Regions by updating and maintaining standard global guidance provided to evacuated V/Ts; and in collaboration with Region, OSS, and OHS as necessary, incorporates lessons learned into guidance for Regions and Headquarters offices. Serves as the primary point of contact for communication with the Office of the Director regarding the Emergency Event. (*See MS 125 Office of Global Operations: Organization, Mission, and Functions.*)
- (f) **Office of Health Services:** OHS advises, supports and provides direct service to V/Ts whenever the physical and/or mental health and/or well-being of V/Ts is impacted.
- (1) **Office of Medical Services:** The Office of Medical Services (OMS) advises and supports the Peace Corps Medical Officers (PCMOs) as necessary.
  - (2) **Behavioral Health and Outreach Unit:** The Behavioral Health and Outreach Unit (BHO) provides mental health services/resources and clinical care to V/Ts; training resources to staff supporting V/Ts; and consults with Region and Post staff on V/T support, as necessary.
  - (3) **Epidemiology and Surveillance Unit:** The Epidemiology and Surveillance Unit (EPI) advises and supports the Post in responding to infectious and communicable diseases.
- (g) **Office of the General Counsel:** The Office of the General Counsel (OGC) provides legal and policy advice and counsel and determines the legal and regulatory requirements of the agency.
- (h) **Office of Communications:** In coordination with the Region, the Office of Communications (Comms) issues public communications, including talking points, press releases, and agency

communication with U.S. media and the public. In consultation with the U.S. Embassy's Public Affairs Office, Comms provides guidance to Posts regarding local media inquiries.

- (i) **Office of Congressional Relations:** The Office of Congressional Relations (OCR) notifies and advises Congressional offices and committees, as necessary or appropriate and provides requested information to Members of Congress or Congressional staff.
- (j) **Office of the Chief Financial Officer:** The Office of the Chief Financial Officer (OCFO) works with the Region to ensure the availability of funds necessary for the support of emergency response efforts and provides information and support regarding V/T financial matters.
- (k) **Office of Management:** The Office of Management ensures the availability of necessary support from management sections and teams, such as required transportation and international travel support for V/Ts and staff.
- (l) **Office of the Chief Information Officer:** The Office of the Chief Information Officer (OCIO) ensures that, when possible, information and communications technology operation at the Post is prioritized to facilitate the emergency response.

## 5.2 Post Roles and Responsibilities

- (a) **Post Response Team:** The Post Response Team is established and led by the Country Director (CD) for the purpose of assessing the level of risk posed by a Threat, determining the appropriate response, and activating the Post's EAP. The Post Response Team always includes the CD and Safety and Security Manager (SSM), usually includes PCMO(s), the Director of Management and Operations (DMO), and the Director of Programming and Training (DPT) and may include other staff, as the CD determines is necessary. The sub-regional PCSSO also participates in the Post Response Team if available and/or the CD determines that the Emergency Event warrants their participation. Post staff who are not members of the Post Response Team may be involved in carrying out tasks identified by the CD or the Post Response Team.
- (b) **Country Director:** The CD leads the Post Response Team; informs staff of their roles and responsibilities; operationalizes effective preparedness and response strategies; ensures the annual review, testing, and update of the Post's EAP; and serves as the primary liaison with the U.S. Embassy and the Region. The CD may determine that the Post is off-limits to visiting V/Ts.
- (c) **Safety and Security Manager:** The SSM provides crisis response guidance and serves as the subject matter expert on the Post's EAP; serves as the primary liaison with local security resources and the sub-regional PCSSO; and serves on the Post Response Team.
- (d) **Peace Corps Medical Officers:** PCMOs coordinate preparation, training, and delivery of necessary medical and/or mental health care for V/Ts based on the Post's EAP and Medical Action Plan and OHS' Medical Technical Guidelines.
- (e) **Director of Management and Operations:** The DMO manages administrative and financial logistics in support of the Post's response, including coordination with the Region and OCFO to allocate funding for all allowable expenses.
- (f) **Director of Programming and Training:** The DPT manages V/T training and programming activities and provides other support as needed.

- (g) **Peace Corps Safety and Security Officer:** The PCSSO provides the Post with guidance on emergency management responses; serves as the primary Post liaison to OSS; and works with the CD and other relevant offices to compile the After-Action Report (*see* subsection 10.0 below). The PCSSO also serves on the Post Response Team if available and the CD determines the PCSSO's participation is warranted.
- (h) **Information Technology Specialist:** The Information Technology Specialist (ITS) oversees all Peace Corps computer operations at the Post and is the primary contact for technical support. The ITS develops, maintains, and tests the Post's IT contingency plans; provides immediate advice on disaster recovery plans; promptly reports all IT security incidents to appropriate authorities at Headquarters; and ensures physical and logistical security of the Post's IT management system.

## **6.0 Planning and Preparation**

### **6.1 Headquarters**

- (a) OSS shall develop and provide briefing materials and training on EAP requirements and the roles, responsibilities, and notification protocols set forth in this Manual Section. The briefing materials and training shall be provided to Regions and other offices identified above.
- (b) The RD shall ensure that each CD adheres to agency requirements for the development, training, review, and testing of EAPs (*see* MS 270).

### **6.2 Post**

The CD shall ensure the Post has an up-to-date EAP that adheres to the requirements issued by OSS (*see* MS 270).

## **7.0 Emergency Events and Responses**

- (a) A successful response to Emergency Events requires the ability of both Headquarters and Post staff to promptly gather and assess information, make decisions, and act effectively, often in a high-stress environment.

### **7.1 Headquarters**

- (a) In close consultation with OSS and the Region's Emergency Response Leadership Team, the RD for the relevant Region leads the agency's overseas emergency response.
- (b) In response to an overseas Emergency Event, the RD shall ensure the establishment of regular communications with the Post as the situation warrants. The RD serves as or designates a Regional Emergency Response Leadership Team member to serve as the point of contact for Region's communications with the Post.
- (c) The RD shall notify the Associate Director, OGO (AD OGO) whenever a HQRT is activated and will update the AD OGO regarding HQRT discussions and plans as warranted.
- (d) The AD OGO will inform the Director whenever a HQRT is activated and will update the Director about the Emergency Event as warranted.

- (e) The RD, in consultation and coordination with Comms, shall ensure that the Post obtains sufficient support to respond effectively to media inquiries.

## **7.2 Post**

- (a) The Post must promptly address safety issues, account for V/Ts and staff, assess damage, and message and maintain communication with V/Ts and the Region, and, as the situation warrants, the U.S. Embassy, host country government authorities, and partner agencies.
- (b) The Post must be prepared to execute emergency response plans promptly and effectively in accordance with emergency response guidance issued by OSS.

## **8.0 Action Stages**

### **8.1 Alert and Standfast**

- (a) The CD, in consultation with the SSM, has the discretion to activate the Alert and Standfast stages of the Post's EAP.
- (b) The Post must notify the Region and PCSSO whenever the Alert or Standfast stage is activated and must notify the RSO whenever the Standfast stage is activated.
- (c) Region will notify relevant Headquarters offices that a Post's Alert or Standfast stage has been activated, if the RD determines the situation warrants such notification.

### **8.2 Consolidation**

- (a) Consolidation of V/Ts is authorized by the CD.
- (b) The Post must notify the Region, PCSSO, and RSO when the Consolidation stage is activated.
- (c) Region shall notify the AD OGO whenever any V/Ts are consolidated.
- (d) Prior to consolidating all V/Ts, the CD, or their designee, should consult with the Region and PCSSO regarding ongoing Threats, Mitigation, and logistical issues such as transportation and housing.
- (e) The AD OGO shall notify the Director and Headquarters offices listed in Section 5.1 whenever all V/Ts at a Post are consolidated.

### **8.3 Evacuation**

#### **8.3.1 Authorization and Notification**

- (a) Authorization for the Evacuation of V/Ts and the return of evacuated V/Ts may only be made by the Director. The Director's authorization shall be documented in a Decision Memo, setting forth the criteria on which the decision was made.
- (b) The AD OGO shall notify Headquarters offices listed in Section 5.1 and the Office of Inspector General of the Director's decision to evacuate V/Ts and the Director's decision to return evacuated V/Ts to service.

- (c) The AD OHS shall ensure medical and mental health care of V/Ts is adequately provided during an Evacuation.
- (d) The Director's decision to return evacuated V/Ts to Post shall be made after consideration of a safety and security assessment conducted by OSS and the recommendations of the AD OSS, AD OGO, and the RD.
- (e) Once the Director makes the decision to evacuate V/Ts or return evacuated V/Ts to service:
  - (1) OCR will notify key Congressional committees as the agency deems necessary and appropriate;
  - (2) the Country Director or Regional Director will notify the Chief of Mission; and
  - (3) Region will notify the appropriate country desk of the State Department.

### **8.3.2 Volunteer/Trainee Travel**

- (a) The RD, in consultation with the Associate Director for OSS (AD OSS), and the Associate Director for OHS, determines whether the Evacuation requires V/Ts to evacuate to a third country, the home-of-record, or another location in the United States.
- (b) In exigent circumstances requiring immediate action at a Post, the RD, after consultation with the CD, OSS, and OHS, shall determine the destination of V/Ts' travel outside of the Post.
- (c) During an emergency evacuation, the Country Director may suspend issuance of a Travel Stipend in the place of Peace Corps issued tickets to evacuated V/Ts. (*See MS 218 Trainee and Volunteer Travel and Use of Transit/Regional Houses.*)
- (d) If the Evacuation results in the return of V/Ts to their home-of-record, they may be placed on administrative hold in accordance with MS 220 *Leave for Volunteers/Trainees*, or the Peace Corps may commence their early termination of service or advanced completion of service in accordance with MS 284 *Early Termination of Service* and MS 281 *Completion of Service Date Advancement and Extension of Service*, and/or may apply the provisions in MS 221 *Volunteer Allowances* pertaining to the "Evacuation Allowance."
- (e) If the Evacuation is to a third country or location in the U.S. other than the V/Ts' home-of-record, the V/Ts shall remain in that location until a decision is made to return the V/Ts to the Post or their homes-of-record. While in a third country, V/Ts may attend trainings, conduct Volunteer activities, or be placed on administrative hold.
- (f) If the decision is made to end V/Ts' service, the RD shall commence early termination of their service or advance their completion of service (*see MS 284*).

## **9.0 Volunteers**

V/Ts are required to adhere to safety and security instructions, participate in EAP training, and follow their Post's directives when the EAP is activated.



## **10.0 After-Action Reviews**

- (a) OSS will provide guidance on After-Action Reviews to Posts and Regions.
- (b) Post must conduct an After-Action Review following any EAP activation in which all V/Ts were consolidated or evacuated. The review must be documented and submitted to the PCSSO and the Region.
- (c) The Region, in coordination with OSS, and with OHS if warranted, must conduct an After-Action Review of an Evacuation. Significant lessons learned should be documented in an After-Action Report provided by the RD to the AD OGO and offices participating in the HQRT.

## **11.0 Procedures**

Implementing procedures and other attachments to MS 460 are effective when they have been approved by OGO, OSS, and OHS.

## **12.0 Effective Date**

The effective date of this Manual Section is the date of issuance.