

MS 460 Managing Overseas Emergencies Procedures

Effective Date: June 14, 2024

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

Attachments

Attachment A – Decision Points and Options

Attachment B – Criteria for Designating a Peace Corps Post as an Evacuation Site (“Receiving Post”)

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1.0 Introduction

The purpose of this document is to provide a notification and coordination framework for Peace Corps Headquarters (HQ) offices involved in the management of and response to Emergency Events overseas. This document is separate from and independent of the Emergency Action Plan (EAP) that directs and governs each Post's emergency process.

2.0 Situations Requiring Notification

2.1 It is imperative that appropriate individuals within HQ be promptly notified whenever staff, in their operational area of expertise, become aware of an overseas health, safety or security issue that may pose a threat to Peace Corps Volunteers/Trainees (V/Ts) or operations.

2.2 Whenever situations such as those listed in subsection 2.3 below occur, the listed office must promptly notify via group email: the relevant Regional Director (RD); the Associate Director, Office of Safety and Security (AD/OSS); and the Associate Director, Office of Health Services (AD/OHS).

2.3 The list of situations requiring notification is not exhaustive. Staff should initiate notification whenever, in their professional opinion, V/T safety and security or overseas operations might be at risk.

2.3.1 The relevant Region must initiate notification whenever:

- (a) A Post activates the Alert, Standfast, Consolidation, or Evacuation stage of their EAP;
- (b) A Post experiences an Emergency Event that poses a threat to V/T safety and security and/or Post operations or may garner significant public or social media attention;
- (c) Severe weather predictions may impact one or more Posts;
- (d) There is potential for unrest that could escalate and jeopardize V/T safety and security and/or Post operations (examples: protests, bilateral relations); and/or
- (e) There is potential for or actual armed conflict or terrorist activity.

2.3.2 OSS must initiate notification whenever:

- (a) Crime levels at a Post have risen to levels such that there is concern V/Ts can no longer serve safely;
- (b) Information suggests there is a specific and credible threat that may impact Peace Corps operations; or
- (c) A war or conflict in a geographic area potentially poses a threat to nearby Posts.

2.3.3 OHS must initiate notification whenever:

- (a) There are indications that a virus, disease, or exposure to environmental hazards may pose significant risks to V/Ts, staff, or Peace Corps operations;
- (b) There are concerns that Peace Corps may lose the ability to medically support V/Ts at a Post or at a regional level; or
- (c) The Agency Duty Officer receives communications concerning safety or security at a Post that poses a threat to life and limb.

2.3.4 The Office of Communications must initiate notification whenever:

- (a) There are news articles in major credible media outlets concerning the safety, security, or health of V/Ts or staff at a particular Post;
- (b) There is a notable increase in chatter on social media concerning the safety, security, or health of V/Ts; or
- (c) There is a notable increase in communications from V/Ts' families or friends or the general public concerning safety or security at a Post.

2.3.5 The Office of Congressional Relations must initiate notification whenever Congressional members request briefings regarding the safety, security, or health of V/Ts specific to an Emergency Event or threat.

3.0 Headquarters Response Team

The Headquarters Response Team (HQRT) is a team consisting of individuals from key offices who come together to analyze Emergency Events and the impact they may have on a Post and agency operations. Individual members are tasked with sharing their analysis of the event, as well as recommendations specific to their areas of expertise. Under the leadership of the RD, the HQRT may make recommendations to the Post or the Peace Corps Director as needed.

If the HQRT cannot reach consensus on a course of action, the Associate Director of the Office of Global Operations (AD/OGO) shall work with the HQRT to seek consensus. If consensus still cannot be reached, a Decision Memo outlining the varying points of view shall be presented to the Director.

3.1 Activation

3.1.1 The relevant RD, in consultation with the AD/OSS or designee and the AD/OHS or designee, shall determine if an Emergency Event warrants establishment of a HQRT. Any member of the Core HQRT may request activation of a HQRT.

3.1.2 The following are examples of events in which activation of a HQRT is advised:

- (a) Any event that may lead to the Consolidation or Evacuation of V/Ts.
- (b) A Standfast is activated and there is a strong potential safety, security, and/or health risks may escalate.

- (c) A security-related incident has significantly escalated and is garnering significant public or media attention.
- (d) A weather event or natural disaster has occurred or is expected to impact one or more Posts (example: hurricane, earthquake, flooding).
- (e) A pandemic or endemic public health event that may pose a significant threat to the health and safety of V/Ts, staff, or Post operations.
- (f) There are multiple credible news articles, public media postings, and/or inquiries concerning safety and security at a Post.

3.1.3 When it is determined that a HQRT is needed, the RD shall seek to convene a HQRT meeting within 24 hours.

3.1.4 The RD shall inform the AD/OGO whenever a HQRT is activated and keep the AD/OGO apprised of HQRT deliberations.

3.2 Composition

3.2.1 The degree to which HQ offices need to participate in HQRT meetings varies according to the severity and scope of the Emergency Event.

3.2.2 The RD, AD/OSS, AD/OHS or designees are core members of every HQRT (Core HQRT), meaning that they are involved in every HQRT meeting no matter the Emergency Event.

3.2.3 The OHS Office of Medical Services (OMS) and Behavioral Health and Outreach Unit (BHO) should attend HQRT meetings whenever the emergency is of a medical or public health nature, which could lead to Consolidation or Evacuation of V/Ts.

3.2.4 Depending on the nature and severity of the Emergency Event, the RD shall invite other offices to serve on, attend meetings, or assist the HQRT.

3.2.5 The relevant Country Director (CD) shall be notified of HQRT meetings and invited to participate as their schedule permits.

3.3 Roles and Responsibilities

3.3.1 Region

- (a) Serves as the HQ lead and primary point of contact (POC) for communication with Post(s) and within HQ.
- (b) Coordinates and leads HQRT meetings.
- (c) With input from HQRT members, provides direction and guidance to Post(s) on the overall management of the emergency response.

- (d) Invites the relevant Peace Corps Safety and Security Officer (PCSSO) to participate in conversations the Region has with the CD regarding the Emergency Event.
- (e) Provides administrative, financial, and logistical support and guidance to Post as needed.
- (f) Leads the creation of relevant Talking Points, in consultation with subject-matter experts and the Office of Communications, and, after review by OSS and OHS, and other offices as warranted, clears Talking Points for distribution.
- (g) Co-leads After-Action Reviews with OSS.

3.3.2 Office of Safety and Security

- (a) Provides analysis of ongoing threats to include recommendations to the Region and HQRT on actions and steps to mitigate threats.
- (b) Provides guidance and direction on emergency response procedures and protocols.
- (c) Conducts follow-up assessments to determine when conditions are conducive to a resumption of operations, including the potential return of V/Ts to the Post and/or their sites.
- (d) Dispatches the PCSSO to the Post if warranted.
- (e) Co-leads After-Action Reviews with the Region.

3.3.3 Office of Health Services

- (a) Behavioral Health and Outreach Unit
 - (1) Oversees well-being services and resources to V/Ts.
 - (2) Provides counseling and/or tele-coaching services to V/Ts who are Consolidated and/or placed on administrative hold following an Evacuation.
 - (3) Provides relevant training and resources to Post staff.
- (b) Office of Medical Services
 - (1) Provides analysis and guidance on the management of health-related emergencies and concerns.
 - (2) Ensures uninterrupted medical care and recommends medication supplies for V/Ts' ongoing conditions.
 - (3) Coordinates health care services for V/Ts evacuated to their home-of-record (HOR) and who remain on administrative hold.

- (4) Ensures PCMOs have sufficient support to provide health care services and conduct medical evaluation and administrative tasks when all V/Ts are being evacuated or are having their service terminated.

3.3.4 Office of Global Operations

- (a) Serves as the primary POC for communication with the Office of the Director regarding the Emergency Event.
- (b) Supports the Region in securing necessary administrative and financial support to effectively oversee an Emergency Event.
- (c) Convenes and chairs a HQRT when an Emergency Event affects more than one Region.

3.3.5 Office of Communications

- (a) Coordinates press and public information, including internal communications to Peace Corps staff.
- (b) During an overseas Emergency Event:
 - (1) Supports the Region in finalizing Talking Points.
 - (2) Distributes and/or publishes Talking Points once they are cleared by the Region.
 - (3) Coordinates media responses with the Public Affairs Officer at the U.S. Embassy.

3.3.6 Office of Congressional Relations (OCR)

- (a) Responds to Congressional inquiries.
- (b) Informs appropriate Congressional offices when V/Ts are evacuated or are returned to service.
- (c) Informs appropriate Congressional offices and committees when V/Ts are in Standfast or Consolidation status if, in consultation with appropriate agency offices, OCR determines that such proactive outreach is warranted.

4.0 Decision Points

4.1 Decision Points are events or scenarios that prompt staff to convene and decide if there is need for action. Decision Points serve as indicators of potential changes to the security environment which Post must assess. Decision Points do not immediately prompt a specific action or EAP stage. Decision Points are among the factors considered for any EAP activation.

4.2 Posts are required to develop Decision Points for threats identified in the PCSSO's five-year risk assessment and Post's annual assessments. (*See the Office of Safety and Security's Emergency Action Plan Guide.*)

4.3 During Emergency Events that lead to Consolidation or Evacuation:

- (a) At a minimum, the HQRT, in conjunction with the Post, will analyze the security, safety, health, and operational environment every fifteen (15) days to determine whether continued Consolidation, Evacuation, or returning the V/Ts to their sites is appropriate. As part of that analysis:
- (1) OSS, in close consultation with the Post, shall assess the security environment to determine whether the Emergency Event is improving, stagnating, or worsening.
 - (2) The Post will assess their ability to support consolidated V/Ts in-country or during Evacuation to another country, including an overview of staff and V/Ts' mental and emotional wellbeing.
 - (3) When V/Ts are evacuated to another Peace Corps Post, the "Receiving Post" will assess their ability to support evacuated V/Ts, including an overview of staff and evacuated V/Ts' mental and emotional wellbeing and the impact it may be having on the Receiving Post's operations.
 - (4) Region will provide an operational overview of the need for continued Consolidation or Evacuation to include actions or resources needed to address security, health, and operational challenges outlined by OSS in consultation with the Post (*see subsection 4.3(a)(1)*).
- (b) Upon completion of the assessments, the HQRT, in close consultation with the Post Response Team, will recommend continued Consolidation at Post, Evacuation to another Peace Corps Post, Evacuation to V/Ts' homes-of-record, or return V/Ts to their sites. (*See MS 460 Attachment A: Decision Points and Options.*)

5.0 Action Stages

5.1 Alert and Standfast

5.1.1 Authorization

The CD authorizes activation of the Alert or Standfast stages of the Post's EAP.

5.1.2 Notification

- (a) The CD, or designee, notifies the Region and PCSSO whenever the Alert or Standfast stage is activated.
- (b) The CD, or designee, notifies the U.S. Embassy's Regional Security Officer (RSO) when a Standfast stage is activated.

- (c) The RD notifies Core HQRT members (see 3.2.2) and determines if the situation warrants notification to other offices.

5.2 Consolidation

5.2.1 Authorization

- (a) The CD has authority to consolidate V/Ts within the host country. The Core HQRT may mandate Consolidation if conditions warrant.
- (b) Although authorization from neither the Chief of Mission (COM) nor Peace Corps HQ is required, the CD is encouraged to consult with the Core HQRT and PCSSO before implementing in-country Consolidation plans for all V/Ts.

5.2.2 Notification

- (a) The CD, or designee, notifies the Region's RD or ChOps, PCSSO, and RSO about the decision to consolidate V/Ts within the host country.
- (b) The RD, or designee, notifies OSS, OHS, and the AD/OGO whenever the CD consolidates V/Ts during Emergency Events and/or authorizes the return of V/Ts to their host communities.
- (c) Whenever all V/Ts at a Post are consolidated, the AD/OGO must notify the principals in the following Offices:
 - (1) Director;
 - (2) Office of the General Counsel (OGC);
 - (3) Office of Communications;
 - (4) Office of Congressional Relations;
 - (5) Office of the Chief Financial Officer;
 - (6) Office of Management; and
 - (7) Office of the Chief Information Officer.
- (d) Notification is not required if the Consolidation occurs solely for drills or testing purposes.

5.3 Evacuation

Either the CD through the RD or the Core HQRT may recommend the Evacuation of V/Ts.

If Evacuation to another Peace Corps Post is contemplated, the Receiving Post must meet *Criteria for Designating a Peace Corps Post as an Evacuation Site* outlined in Attachment B.

5.3.1 Authorization

- (a) The Director must authorize the Evacuation of V/Ts from a Post.
- (b) Authorization must be documented in a Decision Memo, setting forth the criteria on which the decision was made.
 - (1) The Region shall draft the Decision Memo and send it to the AD/OGO, AD/OSS, and AD/OHS for clearance.
 - (2) Once the Decision Memo is cleared by the AD/OGO, AD/OSS, and AD/OHS, the AD/OGO submits the Decision Memo to the Director.
- (c) In a sudden-onset emergency, the Director's verbal approval to the AD/OGO or RD is sufficient to initiate the Evacuation until a Decision Memo can be subsequently executed.
- (d) The CD or RD shall notify COM prior to initiation of an Evacuation; however, COM approval is not required.

5.3.2 Notification

- (a) When the Core HQRT recommends the Evacuation of V/Ts:
 - (1) The RD shall notify the CD and the AD/OGO.
 - (2) The AD/OGO shall notify the Director.
 - (3) If the Core HQRT recommends the Evacuation of V/Ts to another Peace Corps Post, the Regional Director, in consultation with the AD/OGO, shall advise both CDs and determine how best to confer with the COM for each country.
- (b) Once the Director authorizes the Evacuation of V/Ts:
 - (1) The Region shall notify the CD.
 - (2) The AD/OGO shall notify the Office of Inspector General and the offices listed in Sec. 5.2.2 (c) above.
 - (3) OSS shall notify the State Department's Operation Center.
 - (4) OCR shall notify appropriate Congressional offices.
 - (5) Region shall notify the appropriate State Department desk.
- (c) If V/Ts are evacuated to another Peace Corps Post, the RD must ensure the COM in both countries is notified of the plans and timeline.
- (d) Region notifies the Office of Communications as soon as V/Ts are safely evacuated.

6.0 Return to Service

6.1 Authorization

- (a) The Director authorizes returning evacuated V/Ts to their Post.
- (b) The Director's decision to return V/Ts to their Post shall occur after:
 - (1) OSS conducts a safety and security assessment which is favorable;
 - (2) OHS conducts a medical assessment if situationally warranted; and
 - (3) The Core HQRT recommends returning V/Ts to their Post.
- (c) Authorization must be documented in a Decision Memo, setting forth the criteria on which the decision is made.
 - (1) The Region shall draft the Decision Memo and send it to the AD/OGO and the AD/OSS for clearance.
 - (2) Once the Decision Memo is cleared by the AD/OGO and the AD/OSS, the AD/OGO submits the Decision Memo to the Director.

6.2 Notification

- (a) Once the Director authorizes the return of evacuated V/Ts to their Post:
 - (1) The Region shall notify the CD and Core HQRT members.
 - (2) The CD shall notify the COM.
 - (3) The AD/OGO shall notify the Office of the Inspector General and the offices listed in Sec. 5.2.2 (c) above.
 - (4) OCR shall notify appropriate Congressional offices.
 - (5) OSS shall notify the State Department's Operation Center.
 - (6) Region shall notify the appropriate State Department desk.

7.0 External Communications

7.1 To protect the safety and security of V/Ts and staff during a Consolidation or Evacuation, no communications outside of the HQRT (or to those staff members who have a direct role in supporting Post), should be disseminated until the Regional Director clears the Talking Points.

7.2 Once V/Ts are safely consolidated or evacuated, the Office of Communications can post Talking Points and the Region can notify other Posts.

7.3 Talking Points or any other public communication must never mention the location of Consolidation or Evacuation locations and must never include Personal Identifying Information of V/Ts, as defined in MS 294 *Confidentiality of Volunteer Information*.

7.4 When Congressional committees and offices are notified, OCR should request that the information not be shared publicly until the Regional Director clears the Talking Points.

7.5 The CD will provide guidance to V/Ts on appropriate parameters for sharing information on social media. Prior to providing such guidance, the CD must consult with the Region.

8.0 Talking Points

8.1 Region takes the lead in drafting Talking Points, in consultation with the CD, OSS, and with other subject-matter experts and OHS if the Emergency Event warrants. The template can be found in the [Talking Points Library on the Peace Corps Intranet](#).

8.2 The Region obtains clearance from OSS before submitting a final draft of Talking Points to the Director of the Office of Communications with a copy to the AD/OGO.

8.3 The Office of Communications advises on the wording of the Talking Points so that information is appropriately communicated to external audiences.

8.4 During Emergency Events, the Office of Communications must review the draft Talking Points and, as necessary, submit suggested changes to the Region within four (4) hours, no matter if it is after routine business hours. If the Office of Communications does not respond within four (4) hours, the Regional Director may proceed in clearing the Talking Points.

8.5 The Regional Director or designee clears the final Talking Points.

8.6 Once the Talking Points are cleared:

- (a) The Region shall send the cleared Talking Points to the CD, the Office of Communications, AD/OGO, AD/OSS, AD/OHS, AD/External Affairs, and the Agency Duty Officer at agencydutyofficer@peacecorps.gov.
- (b) The AD/OGO shall send the cleared Talking Points to the Director, Deputy Director, Chief of Staff, the Office of Volunteer Recruitment and Selection, and other offices such as Peace Corps Response, as appropriate.
- (c) The Office of Communications shall upload the Talking Points to the Talking Points Library, so the document is accessible to staff and publishes information on Peace Corps external website as appropriate.

9.0 Training

9.1 OSS shall develop briefing materials and in-person training to ensure all relevant Headquarters staff are aware of EAP requirements for Posts and roles, responsibilities, and notification protocols in MS 460 policy and procedures.

9.2 As part of their initial onboarding, any new Regional Director, Regional Chief of Operations, and Regional Security Advisor shall be briefed by OSS on MS 460 and other relevant safety and security protocols.

9.3 OSS shall hold an annual in-person training on MS 460 policy and procedures for offices referenced in MS 460 Procedures.

10.0 After-Action Reviews

10.1 OSS shall develop guidance for Posts and Regions on conducting After-Action Reviews.

10.2 An After-Action Review, co-led by OSS and the Region, must be conducted for an Evacuation and may be conducted for other Emergency Events as warranted. OGO, OHS, and other offices participating in the HQRT shall be invited to participate in the After-Action Review.

10.3 OSS and the Region shall collaborate on an After-Action Review report that documents significant lessons learned. The Regional Director shall provide the report to the AD/OGO, the offices that participated in the HQRT, the OGC, and Compliance and Risk Office.