

Public Information Officer (PIO) Factsheet Wildfire and All-Hazard Incidents

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the role of a Public Information Officer (PIO) on an incident?

A PIO is responsible for the formulation and release of information about the incident to the news media, local communities, incident personnel, the incident management team, other agencies and organizations. As you progress in your training and development, you may become a lead PIO on an Incident Management Team (IMT), responsible for the management of other PIOs assigned to an incident.

Who is eligible to be a PIO on an incident?

To become qualified as a PIO, you must first work as a PIO trainee. There is online, on-the-job, and classroom training documented in the interagency National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG) [Wildland Fire Qualification System Guide](#) for three levels of PIO qualifications:

Public Information Officer (PIOF);
Public Information Officer Type 2 (PIOF2); and
Public Information Officer Type 1 (PIO1).

See also the PIO qualification in Department of the Interior (DOI) Office of Emergency Management National Incident Management System [Incident Positions Qualifications Guide: All-Hazards Public Information Officer \(PIA2\)](#)

➤ *Both “qualified” and “trainee” PIOs are eligible to work on incidents.*

Am I already eligible if I am a public affairs specialist in my regular job?

While you likely already have the communication and writing skills, learning to work within the Incident Command System, especially on an interagency basis, and communicating at the pace and in the manner required during an emergency may be new to you. To be considered “qualified” through NWCG or DOI, you must take an online course(s) about the organizational structure, and complete a “taskbook,” which documents you have performed specific *duties during an emergency incident.*

Do I have to work long hours on an incident and will I get paid overtime?

Typically, you will work at least 12-hour shifts during an incident. As a government employee, you are typically paid your regular salary, plus overtime for more than 8 hours a day and on weekends. If you are retired or otherwise working as a non-federal employee, you are paid based on current administrative agreements depending upon your specific position.

Will I have to sleep in a tent and eat rations?

Housing and meals are provided by the incident; however, accommodations may vary depending upon the incident and location. If an incident command post is located in a remote area, a “camp” may be set up with government-provided tents, cots, sleeping bags, and heaters; and meals will be cooked and served at the camp.

So what do I need to work as a PIO on an incident?

- 1) Permission from your supervisor; if you are a trainee, also an initiated PIO “task book.”
 - Task books are used on incidents to document your performance of specific duties. *You do not need to have a completed task book to work on an incident.*
 - **PIOF:** <http://www.nwcg.gov/pms/taskbook/command/pms-311-07.pdf>
 - **PIO1 and 2:** <http://www.nwcg.gov/pms/taskbook/command/pms-311-06.pdf>
 - **PIA2:** http://www.training.fema.gov/emiweb/is/icsresource/assets/tb_pio.pdf
- 2) Your name added as a PIO or PIO trainee to the interagency Incident Qualification and Certification System (IQCS) database by your local agency fire or emergency management officer..
 - Data in the interagency IQCS is provided to your local interagency dispatch center. This allows you the option of being mobilized to a variety of incidents.
- 3) Username and password to manage your personal availability to be dispatched. The online tool used by dispatching centers to mobilize and track all types of incident resources is called the Resource Ordering and Status System (ROSS).
 - *To connect to ROSS, obtain a username and password for the Ness Application Portal (NAP) from the Interagency Incident Applications Helpdesk at 866-224-7677 or helpdesk@dms.nwcg.*
- 4) Indicate your availability dates and geographic range in the ROSS dispatching system.
 - Use ROSS to select specific dates you will or will not be available; and to indicate if you are willing to work on local, regional, and/or national assignments.
- 5) Obtain a signed qualification IQCS card (aka “red card”) from your agency supervisor.
 - You must present your current IQCS card at incident check-in!

For more information, see the PIO bulletin board [Information Officer’s Corner](http://www.nifc.gov/PIO_bb/pio_corner.html), including the Agency-Specific Page for FWS, at http://www.nifc.gov/PIO_bb/pio_corner.html

Adapted from BIA [Congratulations! You’ve Decided to Become a Public Information Officer. What Now?](#)