

Mass Fatality Planning

Intermediate Events

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This project seeks to develop a plan for the management of Intermediate Level Mass Fatality Incidents. These situations may include large transport accidents or structural fires that exceed the capabilities of a single parish or other government entity, but does not rise to level of a state or federal response. Local parish Coroners or emergency managers will be able to utilize the plan and data collection formats to ensure a rapid and comprehensive response to an MFI that coordinates regional resources such as those within Louisiana Regional Four.

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PURPOSE

A review of the ESF 8 requirements in the 2011 “Louisiana Sample Parish Planning Guide” from the Governor’s Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Planning states *“This ESF should include specific planning for Mass Fatalities that includes tiered response trigger points used for activating the regional Mass Fatality provisions based on numbers and /or types of fatalities that might overwhelm resources available within the jurisdiction. Planning should identify contact information for parish coroner and funeral directors located in Parish and provide for pre-designated temporary morgue sites.”* (Louisiana Governor’s Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Planning, 2011)

A mass fatality incident is defined as “any situation where more deaths occur than can be handled by local medical examiner/ coroner resources.” (State of California Governor’s Office of Emergency Services, 2007)

Mass fatality incidents are rare, but when they do occur they can quickly overwhelm the processes and procedures normally used by a Coroner or Medical Examiner’s office. This planner is designed to assist multiple jurisdictions in assembling an Mass Fatality Response Plan (MFRP) that addresses the needs of all participants when a situation arises that exceeds the internal capabilities of any single jurisdiction, yet does not breach the threshold for a state or federal level response to a catastrophic mass fatality incident such as a pandemic flu outbreak or devastation over a large region such as the flooding after Katrina.

The goal of this plan is to coordinate the response of the participating agencies within a local jurisdiction such as a single Louisiana Parish with the matching agencies in surrounding parishes as well as parish and state Emergency Management to facilitate a rapid response and effective use of resources.

While there are many effective planning tools available that are designed to guide the development of a Mass Fatality Response Plan (MFRP) for single organizations or jurisdictions, this plan is focused on integrating the resources of multiple jurisdictions and identifying key participants for an mass fatality incident involving a single parish that requires assistance under mutual aid agreements to respond to the event.

When a mass fatality incident occurs, the activities that are normally carried out by a single governmental agency such as a local Coroner’s office will need to be integrated into activities of other response agencies and augmented by resources from other jurisdictions, thus requiring a coordinated plan and inventory of capabilities and resources backed up by formal agreements between the participating agencies.

GOALS

In a mass fatality incident the agencies with a primary role in the response are the local coroner’s office and the Parish Office of Emergency Management. (U. S. Army Research Development and Engineering Command, 2005)

The primary function of the Coroner’s office remains the same even in a mass fatality incident, but the scale and scope of the incident and the number of remains to be properly identified, documented and recovered increases by orders of magnitude. Because local Coroner’s offices cannot be staffed and funded at a level that allows them to handle a mass fatality event with internal resources, mutual assistance plans and inventories of available resources at the local, regional, state and federal levels must be identified. (U. S. Army Research Development and Engineering Command, 2005)

Since the resources of each agency are not identical and standard operating procedures are not uniform, each parish will need to:

- Designate a lead agency for coordination of the response with other agencies using the Incident Command System as directed in ESF-8.
- Identify formal “trigger points” for requesting additional resources for each participating agency.
- Develop shared procedures for coordinating the activities of Death Investigators and other ancillary staff from outside the parish
- Develop and establish procedures for cost accounting and reimbursement of expenses for other agencies responding to the event
- Adopt a notification and call-up procedure for requesting assistance. In region 4, the Coroner or his delegate is expected to identify the need for additional resources and activate them per the agreements established under the MFRP.
- Enter into formal memorandums of understanding that state the level of support and response for each participating agency. *For example, if a response is closed and contained, the only need may be for additional refrigerated storage while an open response may require the use of additional investigative staff and transport vehicles. Each event is unique and therefore the scope of the response will be dictated by the level of required resources.*

CONTROL AND COORDINATION

A cornerstone in creating inter-agency agreements and commitments is the identification of the stakeholders in each region who have the authority to enter into agreements to form a mass fatality administrative team. In Louisiana, this is usually the parish Coroner or their delegates, Parish Emergency Operations Coordinator, Law Enforcement, EMS agency, Fire and Social Services.

It is often difficult to obtain participation during planning sessions from these diverse groups, and the administrative team may consist of only representatives of respective Coroner’s offices.

The planning team should secure and document the names, e-mail, phone and fax numbers for the elected and appointed officials in each area that may be required to participate in a mass fatality response. Even in a single parish, this list may be quite extensive in scope, including;

- City Mayor/ Administrator
- Office of Emergency Management
- Local Public Health Officials
- Medico-Legal authorities
- Emergency Medical Services
- Local Law Enforcement
- Local Fire Department
- Other specialties such as Critical Stress Management teams, Grief Councilors, etc...
- Hazardous Materials Response Teams
- 911 or other call centers
- Hospital Administration
- Funeral Home Directors
- Religious Support
- Social Services

If the response to the incident involves the activation of regional, state or federal incident response plans, the Coroner’s office in the affected jurisdiction is responsible for appointing a representative to the emergency operations center or incident command post.

DEFINING AREA CAPABILITIES

It is imperative that on a regional scale, resources are identified that may be needed in a multi-jurisdictional response. The resources of each parish will vary greatly and an accurate inventory will need to be created. This can include:

- Morgue space (total capacities)
- Other remains cold storage, areas such funeral homes, hospital morgues, refrigerated storage facilities; potential in-ground storage sites as well as specialized disaster resources such as field mortuaries
- Personnel
- Communications devices and frequencies
- Forensic capabilities
- Transport for personnel, equipment or remains
- Expendable supplies such as body bags, tagging, personal protective equipment decontamination supplies
- Record Keeping, identification and tracking supplies
- Family Assistance Centers
- Employee Assistance Centers and CISM support plans
- Scene security and lighting
- Secure storage facilities for belongings and equipment
- Local death industry capacity

AREA CAPABILITIES ANALYSIS

MORGUE SPACE

Agencies are urged to define the average and maximum storage capacity inside the parish boundaries whenever possible to limit transport time and increase control of remains.

The movement of remains across jurisdictions and into multiple storage sites greatly increases the level of confusion and the chance for error. Plans with this type of provision should be avoided if possible.

The central collection point when the capacity of each agency is exceeded should be capable of providing security, access and storage for remains over a long period. It may be necessary to develop a dispersed storage plan or the use of regional disaster resources in order to meet the time-lines in a rapidly developing disaster.

It may be appropriate to co-locate a refrigerated trailer in a controlled area near the site to accommodate and hold remains that have been documented if the central collection point is a significant distance from the location.

Morgue space, Iberia Parish: For disasters that typically involve less than 15 known dead in one location, the bodies will be transported to the morgue at Iberia Medical Center for processing. If the physical structure of the morgue has been compromised or impaired or there are greater than 15 fatalities, the regional MFP will be escalated to the level required and the bodies will be transported to an established regional facility and a temporary morgue will be utilized.

Region 4 has invested in a field morgue system that can be rapidly deployed (under 4 hours) with the capacity to store (31) bodies which can be activated through contact with the Region 4 EOC.

COLD STORAGE

Preservation of remains requires refrigeration, which may not be available on short notice. Many disaster plans have identified the use of refrigerated trailers to meet this need during slow developing disasters such as a hurricane or flooding, but this may not be practical in a rapidly developing incident such as a plane crash or a large structural fire. In other regions, a dedicated refrigerated trailer may be immediately available, but a routine preventative maintenance plan will need to be in place to assure proper function when needed.

Hospital morgues, funeral homes or other refrigerated storage may be available on request in each area, but should only be included in the response plan if a formal MOU has been completed. Planners should also anticipate that space in funeral homes, hospitals etc, may be committed to other plans or overwhelmed by in-

hospital deaths related to the incident.

Many plans that identified coolers in supermarkets or the use of refrigerated trailers have fallen apart the first time anyone questions their use as no business wants to see their logo included in a photo showing the storage of human remains. Plans should also establish an alternative location if the regular morgue is not available since time, location and extent are not predictable.

As a last resort, each jurisdiction should have an identified area for short-term in-ground storage when needed. These locations should follow the guidelines recommended by the world health organization to prevent water supply contamination.

PERSONNEL

Often, the only additional resources needed are infrastructure related, but if additional personnel are required, their location, duty time and activities must be integrated into the local system and tracked. Short guides directing how to report for duty, contact numbers and standard procedures are needed to support this activity.

COMMUNICATIONS

In this day and age, rapid communication has become the new normal. Cell phones, texting, e-mail and other forms of communications have become ubiquitous and have introduced an entirely new set of capabilities and challenges for responders. The use of cellular communications is not ideal since it requires all agencies to acquire and maintain a list of phone numbers or e-mail addresses that are not normally available. A reference keeping current contact information may not be practical, so procedures for collecting and disseminating current contact information at the time of need should be developed and maintained as part of the personnel system. In addition to this, there are significant concerns about confidentiality, control of social media communications and privacy that will need to be communicated to all responding agencies and personnel.

Radio frequencies should be compiled and communication center contacts identified for each agency and the MFI plan should also integrate the use of the Louisiana state 700 MHz radio system including designated talk groups at the parish and state level. The use of the 700 MHz system is under the control of the ICS commander or their communications officer under the state plan and must be coordinated through the ICS command post when activated. (Marshall, 2012)

FORENSIC CAPABILITIES

Many Parish Coroners Offices now contract out for forensic investigative services rather than maintain the expense of a pathologist, lab and other services. These regional facilities should be considered in resource capability planning.

TRANSPORT CAPABILITIES

The requirements for transporting human remains from the incident location to the designated collection point can be a potential bottleneck and should be taken into consideration early in the response. Remember that normal day-to-day operations will need to be continued in each region. Transportation of staff and resources to the scene should also be taken into account.

Consider contracting for alternative transportation resources. Ideally, the Coroner's office should identify appropriate transportation providers and preferred vehicle types in a format that can be easily utilized by parish emergency managers, incident commanders or transport officers so they can coordinate these requests during a large scale incident.

Because the needs for transporting human remains is very specialized, closed vehicles such as additional parish coroner's vans, funeral home hearses, closed trailers or other easily cleaned and decontaminated vehicles are much more desirable than open trucks or trailers.

EXPENDABLE SUPPLIES

Expendable supplies may seem insignificant but these items can quickly deplete any working inventory of a single entity.

Common items needed during investigation and recovery efforts can include:

- Personal Protective Equipment
- Worker Safety and Comfort supplies
- Identification and Tracking Supplies
- Storage Supplies for personal belongings and evidence
- Forms and tracking paperwork
- Human Remains Pouches and plastic sheeting
- Storage containers
- Biohazard boxes
- Digital photography supplies
- Decontamination supplies

These items will need to be restocked and replenished to sustain the activity for a prolonged event or continue normal day-to-day operations. Accurate tracking is also required to obtain reimbursement from state or federal sources post response.

RECORD KEEPING

A common and easily adaptable record keeping system for remains tracking and disposition is imperative. Common nomenclature should be utilized, for example the MFI should be identified by date, and then the remains should be sequentially numbered as they are collected and documented in order to maintain as accurate a record as possible.

Descriptions and direction should be addressed in the investigator reference guide. An electronic tracking system should be considered but low tech is acceptable in the event of a mass disaster and limited access to electricity. A sample tracking form is included in the appendix as attached in the DMORT log forms.

If electronic tracking is adopted, all personnel will need to be trained and supported on a regular basis. The numbering system used should be unique to the victim and associated with the remains at the time of collection. At a minimum, the data should include the sequential recovery number, date recovered, initials of the investigator and a description of where and how the remains were found. (TX. DSHS Fatality Management Planning Toolkit, 2010)

FAMILY ASSISTANCE CENTERS

Family Assistance Centers should be utilized to provide a place to isolate and protect families from media, give them up to date periodic briefings and provide them with access to counselors and clergy. These sites should be located near the incident scene if possible and allow for easy access. Schools or hotels are ideal candidates. Establishing a site for a family assistance center during pre-event planning is preferred. These sites allow for gathering of information to identify victims as well as facilitate final disposition of the remains. These facilities provide emotional support to families and serve as a conduit for necessary social services. (State of California Governor's Office of Emergency Services, 2007)

Of special note is the need to recognize situations when multiple family assistance centers at separate locations may be required. This situation may occur when there are significant differences in the populations being served such as hostage situations where it would be unwise to combine hostage family members with those of the hostage takers.

EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE AND CISM SUPPORT

As part of the recovery plan, the participants will need to identify and assure access to emotional support and stress management programs for area responders. The goal of such programs is the intervention in potentially high stress events as *“early as possible.”* The primary goal is to provide the appropriate level of intervention for each responder depending upon need. Since most mass fatality responders will function late in the event, the mitigating factors seen in the *“Honeymoon and Heroic”* phases is absent and recovery operations may require that assistance be provided that allows workers access their own social support groups and providing useful solutions that allow them to remain effective. (Kaul, 2005)

SCENE SECURITY AND LIGHTING

Scene security and lighting should be coordinated by local law enforcement and rescue personnel.

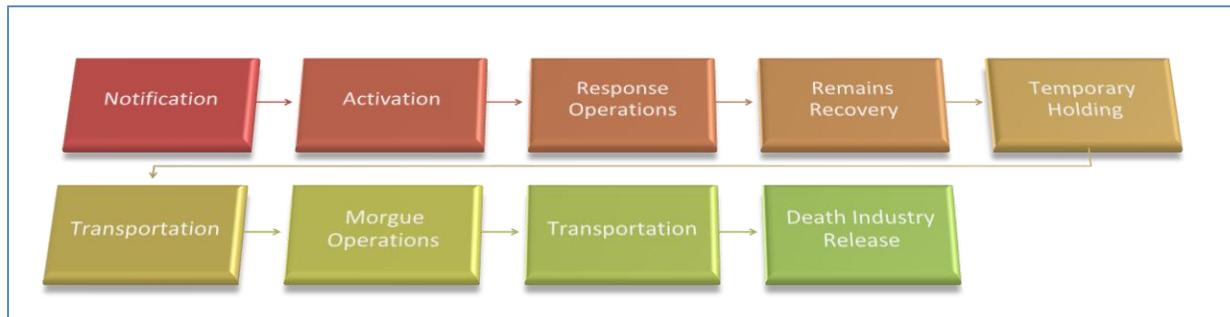
SECURE STORAGE FACILITIES FOR BELONGINGS AND EQUIPMENT

Accommodations should be made for decedent personal effects as well as supplies needed to process the event. Efforts to track and eventually release decedent personal effects should be incorporated into the process for releasing the remains.

DEATH INDUSTRY CAPACITY

Each region should establish the maximum throughput of bodies inclusive of all facilities licensed in the region. This will help establish the rate of remains discharge that can be expected at the morgue facility. Remember that normal day-to-day operations will need to be continued in each facility.

RESPONSE PLAN



NOTIFICATION

- Call is generated through 911 system
 - Determining that MFI has occurred is made through first responder's reports from the scene
- Coroner's office contacted via normal channels

ACTIVATION

INITIAL RESPONSE

- Investigator on call determines scope of response
 - Type of incident and the location
 - Suspected number of fatalities
 - Presence of chemical, radiological, explosive or bio-hazards
 - Any special instructions or needs
- "All hands" call out goes out to Coroner's office staff
 - Investigator on call delegates 1st person contacted to call out remaining staff
 - See call out list
 - 911Call Center Supervisor possesses up to date call out list
 - Where/ when/ if the Coroner's office staff will need to report
 - Coordination and assignment of tasks to additional personnel as needed
 - Regional activation is escalated as needed
 - Contact person is identified as region leader
 - For Iberia Parish events that have greater than 15 deaths will be cause for regional plan activation
 - Regional leader will contact adjoining parish contacts as needed/requested
- Parish Office of Emergency Preparedness is notified
- If the event warrants the use of an emergency operations center (EOC) the Coroner will have a designated liaison with that function. That liaison may not always be present at the EOC but will be required to remain in contact with the transportation officer or Incident commander using the agreed EOC communication system such as the Louisiana 700 MHz radio network and a pre-defined talkgroup.

- Establishment of a Family Assistance Center (FAC) as needed
 - See FAC priority Action Checklist for Startup
 - Location predetermined
 - Activate partners
 - Coordinate emergency funding and resources
 - Secure the facility
 - Coordinate with Incident Command if needed
 - Staffing and volunteers
 - Call Center as needed
 - Establish procedures
 - Coordinate family briefings

CORONER

- Will maintain responsibility and provide command supervision for the overall Coroner's operations.
- Will conduct meetings daily or as needed with team leaders and key personnel to determine the need for additional consultations.
- Responsible for approving all final identifications made of the fatalities.
- Responsible for the relay of information to the family assistance center.
- Responsible for the overall operation of remains recovery and morgue operations.
- Will oversee the autopsies and other examinations or autopsy reports to ensure uniformity.

LEAD INVESTIGATOR

- Implement mass fatality plan
- Coordinate and direct Coroner's office operations
- Provide support and direction to all personnel to ensure a smooth operation by maintaining constant communication with the Incident commander and if possible co-location at the designated command center or parish EOC.
- Will keep the Coroner informed about the status of the operation
- Will assist in the identification of the remains
- Will be responsible for the distribution of body recovery supplies
- Will coordinate the requesting of additional regional resources
- Will orient the staffing from outside parishes to their expected job duties
 - Proper procedures
 - Documentation expectations
 - DMORT forms
 - Settle any reciprocity issues
 - Assign job duties
 - Coordinate reporting process
- As needed under an escalating event the duties of the lead investigator will be delegated to maintain a reasonable span of control.

PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICER

- Responsible for the release of information to the public and news media
- Information to be released regarding victims will be pre-approved by the Coroner or his delegate.

SCENE EVALUATION

- The team consists of
 - On duty lead investigator
 - Investigators called up
 - Internal and external
- After evaluation by the lead investigator, the information will be relayed to the Coroner in order to coordinate a plan for documentation, body recovery, and transportation.

RESPONSE PROCEDURES

The appointed Lead Investigator or elected Parish Coroner will hold a preliminary meeting after the initial scene evaluation and the scope of the event has been determined. The meeting may be held at the Coroner's office or the scene. The scope and nature of the disaster will be discussed. The need for temporary morgue requests/ deployment, outside agency assistance, information management, decontamination, dental and radiologic support will be decided. Roles will be assigned if not already done.

RESPONSE ROLES

- Field team(s) personnel
- Clerical staff
- Autopsy staff
- EOC liaison
 - Provide approved information to the PIO
 - Provide two way communication with appropriate EOC representative as dictated by scope of response and Coroner as needed
- Intake coordinator
- Processing coordinator
- Initial response should be evaluated for the presence of hazardous materials
 - State Police Hazardous Materials Unit activated as needed
 - Refer to DOT Hazardous Material Resource Guide (most current version)
- Victim ID information will be obtained from families at the Family Assistance Center (FAC) using the attached VIP forms located in the Family Assistance Center Appendix
 - If FAC has not been activated information will be obtained at the Coroner's office.

RECOVERY PROCEDURES

- Recovery teams will consist of:
 - Investigators
 - Crime Scene
 - Law Enforcement
 - Photography
 - Communications

INVESTIGATOR/ TEAM LEADER

- Responsible for overall operations of field recovery team
- Establish and coordinate a search plan that provides for a deliberate overlapping search of the disaster site.
- Ensure that the perimeter is secured by coordinating with law enforcement.
- Will ensure adequate body recovery supplies
- Will ensure the accession of remains by the assignment of appropriate identification numbers
- Will ensure that the location of the body or body fragment is identified.
- Will ensure body location information is recorded
- Will ensure that personal effects found on the body remain on the body or part when removed from the disaster site.
- Will ensure that personal effects found in a grid but not near a body or body part will be noted on the event field grid map and left at the site when the body is removed. (Grid map available in appendices)

LAW ENFORCEMENT

- Responsible for security
- Detectives services
- Investigations per Standard Operating Procedure
- Reporting to District Attorney /Superiors
- Crime Scene control is coordinated with Law enforcement

PHOTOGRAPHY

- Will be coordinated between Law Enforcement, Crime scene and Coroner's personnel.

COMMUNICATIONS

- Departmental communications will follow SOP
- Interdepartmental communication will be advised at initial debriefing
- Coordinated through Parish OEP using dedicated talk channels

FAMILY ASSISTANCE CENTER (FAC)- SEE APPENDIX

- Determine threshold to activate FAC
 - Activation dependent on level of response necessary
- Establish location per MOU
- Coordinate FAC management with OEP representative
- Set up schedule for family/press information briefs
- Data collection process established
 - Coordination with Law enforcement
- Grief counseling/ social services
 - Red Cross
 - Mental Health
 - Clergy

TRACKING

- A grid system will be utilized as needed
 - Encouraged for open events with body fragments
- Photographs will be taken of body or body parts prior to moving them
- Identification in-situ if possible
 - Methods
 - If possible identification can be assessed in place
 - A water proof wrist band should be applied
 - Name and location of decedent written with black sharpie
 - Information should be transcribed on tag of disaster bag
 - Grid location
 - ID method used
 - Picture
 - License
 - Tag or flag noted with ID/location of body left in ground or painted number if ground is impenetrable.
 - If bodies are not readily identifiable, a number shall be assigned and location recorded in the field log.
 - All bodies transported from scene to collection point must be recorded.
- Bodies will be removed to a staging point at the scene for transportation to the morgue.

TRANSPORT INFRASTRUCTURE

- Resources for transportation will be utilized or requested as needed.
 - Additional vehicles will be provided under MOU with regional resources.
- Vehicles carrying fatalities should be discreet and escorted by law enforcement as needed. Ideally, these should be plain, unmarked closed vehicles such as coroner's vans, hearses, closed trailers, etc... only as a last resort in overwhelming situations should open vehicles that do not assist in maintaining privacy and dignity be utilized.

PROCESSING

- An intake coordinator will:
 - Log incoming remains
 - Triage bodies either directly to morgue operations or to a temporary storage
 - Provide completed forms/file after examination
 - Send completed forms to record management
 - Coordinate with photography services during exam
 - Coordinate with regional forensic facility for autopsy
 - Coordinate identification as needed
 - Dental
 - DNA
 - Radiologic
 - Coordinate with death industry to facilitate capacity and ability to handle remains.
- A color coding system will be used to categorize disposition of remains
 - See color coding worksheet in appendix (Standard START triage tags will suffice for this purpose. The tagging system will be implemented once the remains arrive at the collection point to avoid confusion with emergency medical services field triage systems)
 - Only those remains color coded green are to be released
 - Personal effects will be released concurrently with remains to family.

STORAGE LOCATIONS

- Short term
 - Cooling and temporary morgue stations will be used per regional resources.
 - Reefer trailers can be considered depending on the scale of the disaster.
- Long Term
 - Unclaimed or unidentified remains
 - Establish process for long term storage or cremation
 - Temporary internment
 - Embalming considerations

DOCUMENTATION

- DMORT forms will be utilized for designated events to ensure consistency when multiple jurisdictions are responding.
- Orientation to forms and processes for all additional staffing should be provided during initial meeting and as needed as more resources are called into service.

RELEASE PROCEDURES

- Identification and all examinations must be completed
- Coroner must review files and approve all releases
- Signatures of the Coroner or delegate are required on the release of body form
- Remains should be tagged green per the tracking protocol
- Coordination with Lab supervisor at Iberia Medical Center if designated as processing facility
- Coordination with death care industry will be done by mortuary staff
- Personal effects will be released concurrently with remains to family members

Demobilization

- Actions necessary to demobilize
- Assets and resources are reconstituted to pre-incident readiness
- After action report generated in conjunction with EOP and Coroner's office
 - After action debriefing to all stake holders following completion of report.
 - Lessons learned incorporated into updated MFP.

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APPENDIX

(See Project Folder, Adobe Reader Required to view PDF format. Available at www.adobe.com)

All Forms per Santa Clara County Mass Fatality Planner and used with permission.

Appendix A- DMORT Log Forms

1. Transportation Log
2. VIP/ DMORT Tracking Form
3. Chain of Custody
 - a. Clothing
 - b. Jewelry
4. Fingerprinting
5. Release of Remains
6. External Preparation/ Embalming
7. Radiology
8. Pathology
9. Anthropology
10. AFIP/ DNA Specimen
11. VIP Personal Information

Appendix B- Family Assistance Center Forms

1. FAC Priority Action Checklist for Startup
2. FAC Daily Status Update Form
3. FAC Staff Daily Registration
4. FAC Friend/ Family Registration Form
5. FAC Daily Sign In Log
6. VIP Personal Information
7. Requested Records List
8. Scripted Assistance Center Call Record and Family Contact Form
9. Crisis Call Center Intake Form
10. Release Authorization

Appendix C- Grid Paper Blank