



A Report to the Washington State
Legislature

In accordance with RCW 38.52.073

An ACT relating to providing public notices of public health, safety, and welfare in a language other than English; amending RCW 38.52.010 and 38.52.070; adding new sections to chapter 38.52 RCW; and creating new sections.

December 2021

Publication and Contact Information

This document is available on the Military Department's website at:

<https://mil.wa.gov/emergency-management-division>

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Statutory Citation/Session Law for Required Report

The Washington Military Department submits the attached report to relevant committees of the Legislature to fulfill the requirements of:

RCW 38.52.580, which states:

Beginning December 1, 2019, a state agency that provides life-safety information in an emergency or disaster must provide, to the relevant committee of the legislature, a copy of its current communication plan for notifying significant population segments of such information, including the agency's point of contact. The state agency must also submit an annual report to the relevant committees of the legislature identifying those instances of emergency or disaster in the preceding year in which life-safety information was provided and what public messaging strategies and means were used to notify citizens with limited English proficiency.

And RCW 38.52.073, which states:

(1) Beginning December 1, 2019, the Washington military department emergency management division must submit a report every five years to the relevant committees of the legislature containing the status of communication plans produced under RCW 38.52.070(3)(a).

(2) The emergency management division of the Washington military department must provide the legislature an annual report on instances of emergency or disaster in which communication of life-safety information was technologically infeasible, as reported to the department pursuant to RCW 38.52.070(4). When potential technology solutions exist, the report must include recommendations and an estimate of resources required to remedy the infeasibility. The first annual report is due December 1, 2019.

List of Contributors to Report

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Introduction

We are pleased to present this annual report and highlight efforts to enhance access to emergency notifications for those with limited English proficiency (LEP). This report emphasizes the need for language access, describes the challenges faced and makes recommendations to further enhance this service.

Data Methodology

In 2021, Washington Emergency Management Division sent two online surveys to local emergency management offices in 25 jurisdictions, as well as 20 local health jurisdictions. All survey respondents indicated they provided public messaging strategies for COVID-19. Twenty jurisdictions utilized social media sites and local radio stations for message distribution. Some counties used bulletin boards outside of stores, churches, bodegas, and healthcare facilities to distribute LEP language material. Only one jurisdiction mentioned the utilization of the employee hiring process to hire bi-lingual staff.

Some counties, like Franklin and King counties, shared best practices. These counties implemented a volunteer recruitment program to help with LEP life-safety messages within their communities. Lewis and Spokane counties incorporated graphics and symbols in LEP messaging instead of relying solely on the LEP language. Pierce County utilized bi-lingual employees to support LEP communities within COVID-19 vaccine sites (when possible).

Technology Infeasibility

The following are incidents in 2021 when LEP life-safety messaging was required at the local jurisdiction level:

- COVID-19 Pandemic
- Hare Road Fire
- Lind Fire
- Cedar Hills Fire
- Batterman fire
- Andrus Fire
- CCT Five Fires (Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation)
- Burbank Fire
- Varden Fire
- Green Ridge Fire
- Red Apple Fire
- Lyle Hill Fire
- Sherwood Fire
- Nelson Creek Fire
- Cedar Creek Fire
- Cub Creek 2 Fire
- Northrup Canyon Fire
- Twenty-five Mile Fire
- Muckamuck Fire
- Chickadee Creek Fire
- Spur Fire
- Walker Creek Fire
- Chuweah Creek Fire
- Whitmore Fire
- Pincer Creek Fire
- Schneider Springs

Challenges Encountered

The following table describes areas when life-safety information was technologically infeasible:

Technological Challenges			
Issues	Discussion	Recommendations	Cost
Ability to translate "Life-safety" messages accurately and in a timely manner	Throughout 2021, many disasters occurred during non-business hours. Since local emergency management departments do not have bi-lingual staff 24/7 to provide LEP life-safety messages, there is a delay in releasing messages in other languages. The cost for translation services during non-business hours exponentially increases, specifically if the translation services are required in less than an hour. Few contract options are available outside of normal business hours and translation services require extensive turnaround time to provide translations in a timely manner.	Establish a language bank that includes language tested volunteers, professional translators and/or bi-lingual, full-time employees (FTE) at the city, county, and state levels of government by making available funds for translation services to jurisdictions. Contract with companies such as Language Line to provide translation/interpretation support.	The translation of a standard page costs on average \$25.00, considering an average of 250 words per page, or 1,500 characters including spaces. The translator/interpreter training course can fluctuate between \$1,000.00 up to \$2,395.00 per FTE/volunteer. This cost includes the test and certification for each bi-lingual FTE and volunteer. If a FTE is in a position that requires translation and possesses the certification, the FTE can be compensated 5% of his/her current pay (Language Pay) as an incentive.
Alert and warning systems do not possess the hardware with special language-specific characters	Jurisdictions and the companies the jurisdictions use to provide alert and warning messages do not possess the hardware with special, language-specific characters, making it nearly impossible to send life-safety messages to LEP communities across many jurisdictions within the alert systems. A limitation of either 90 or 360-characters messaging capacity, depending on the alert and warning system, limits the LEP life-safety message dissemination and delivery. Other languages frequently use more characters than English when communicating.	One way to overcome the alert and warning systems as well as the limitation to number of messaging characters is to create an additional step for those LEP life-safety messages by embedding a web address into the life-safety message itself. This link will take the user to a web page that has the life-safety message in their target language. Purchase hardware with special, language-specific characters (i.e., international keyboards, multiple language keyboard, etc.).	The costs associated with hardware equipment with special characters like a computer keyboard, which has the capability to type in multiple languages can cost from \$50.00 up to \$300.00 depending on the LEP language. If a jurisdiction has multiple languages, they will need to have multiple specialized keyboards.
OFM data does not include cities and towns	The LEP population data previously provided by OFM was for the counties; however, it does not provide the same information for cities. Consequently, as the cities do not have LEP population identified, outreach and planning are difficult for the cities. RCW 38.52.070(3)(a)(ii) states that local jurisdictions are required to utilize the OFM LEP population estimates to identify languages meeting the 5% or 1,000-person threshold. OFM's forecasting division's limited English proficiency population estimates are the demographic data set for determining eligible limited English proficiency language groups.	In addition to counties, for which they already provide LEP population data, OFM should provide data that includes the LEP population in cities and towns.	OFM currently provides FTEs to assess data to determine the LEP populations for counties. The cost would include additional hours for FTEs.

<p>Difficulty reaching the LEP communities</p>	<p>Cultural events, where much of the outreach to local organizations and communities occurs, have been cancelled as the COVID-19 virus spread across the state, creating barriers to gain trust among LEP communities. This led to a lack of support for the use of messaging technology and alert notifications, which can lower the number of alert notification registrations. Consequently, fewer people may have received alert messages.</p>	<p>Provide messages and links through other agencies. For example: adding a short emergency preparedness message with a link at the bottom of the vehicle registration document as well as gas, electric, or water bills. This will increase not only awareness, but where to look for information about disasters and life-safety messages with links to LEP websites as well as how to enroll into alert and warning system within each individual's jurisdictions.</p>	<p>The costs associated with adding a short emergency preparedness message with a link at the bottom of the vehicle registration document as well as gas, electric, or water bills will depend on the agency that the jurisdictions will work with.</p>
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Conclusion

Disasters throughout the past year have reinforced the need to increase the pool of available translators and interpreters to share essential information to the LEP community. Jurisdictions have the capability to hire bi-lingual personnel and train them by utilizing the framework and the systems to implement their jurisdiction's plan. Community leaders and organizations can help encourage people to trust and sign up for alerts so they are more prepared. The use of social media in today's society to disseminate life-safety information is a necessity, as well as the use of local radio stations, podcasts, and other communication resources. As we continue to respond to events throughout the year, jurisdictions are developing and utilizing LEP plans to disseminate life-safety information to the LEP population. While there has been significant progress, there are still challenges to overcome with creating more inclusive messaging.