

communication planning for emergencies



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- Review the facets of an effective municipal emergency communications plan
- Learn the steps in establishing a plan
- Learn approaches for using social and traditional media in crisis situations
- Explore case studies of effective and ineffective emergency communications plans
- Discuss strategies for ongoing management and review of the emergency communications plan

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What would you do?

The National Weather Service has just issued a warning for a hurricane to make landfall in New Jersey within 48 hours.

- As a municipal leader, what is your first action?
- What immediate tasks do you follow up with?



Why is Emergency Communications Planning important?

- Conveys the same message to the public
- Helps people buy-in to your thoughts and plans
- Allows key leaders to be prepared for an emergency
- Helps keep the public calm

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Creating an Emergency Communications Plan (ECP)

- Identify the Planning Team
- Identify the Incident Command System (ICS)
- Establish crisis communication protocols
- Evaluate the plan

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- A stage in a sequence of events at which the trend of all future events, especially for better or for worse, is determined; turning point.
- A condition of instability or danger, as in social, economic, political, or international affairs, leading to a decisive change.
- A dramatic emotional or circumstantial upheaval in a person's life.





Crisis Examples

- Natural disasters
- Industrial accidents
- Intentional/manmade
- events
- Public health events
- Others?

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Challenges of Emergency Communications

Public Organization Needs

Reestablish public order

Clarify facts, ensure privacy where necessary

Limit reputation damage

Public/Media Needs

Stay informed

Distribute Information

Assign responsibility/blame

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- Identify key stakeholders to participate
 - e.g, Public Safety Director, Chief Information Officer, external stakeholders (hospitals, schools), technical staff
- Identify purpose, goals and outcomes for the emergency communications system
 - Establish a timeline to complete plan
- Document functional and technical requirements





- The ICS brings all involved to the incident, gives them a function and a detail; identifies the Incident Commander (IC)
 - e.g, In a fire incident, the Fire Chief would be the IC. In a hostage situation, the Police Chief would be the IC. In a disaster the OEM would be the IC.
- ICS allows for multi discipline/multi jurisdictional incidents to be handled, with various agencies filling positions in the ICS model.
- Good ICS, means a good outcome.

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Incident Command System



Handouts: ICS 201, ICS 202, ICS 207, ICS 209



- In the ICS model, the PIO answers only to the IC. There should only be 1 person giving out details of an incident, regardless of the size, and regardless of the incident.
- The PIO should always prepare the Incident Press Release, (IPR) in writing, to be disseminated to the various media outlets. There should be only one PIO.
 - If someone else is going to be giving a media briefing, they should be briefed by the PIO & IC before information is released.
- This ensures that information is given that will give the public trust in the agencies/ government handling the situations. Examples:
 - Mayor Guiliani during 9/11.
 - Mayor Nagin during Katrina
 - Governor Christie during Sandy

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Who Can be a PIO?

- Who should be a PIO?
 - Fire Chief, Police Chief, EMS Chief, OEM Coordinator
 - Any Deputy, or Assistants, or front line supervisors.
 - Mayor, Councilperson, Commissioner, Administrator
- Anyone can serve as the PIO the dog catcher can even serve as the PIO, as long as s/he is sending the right message from the IC.

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- Handout: Incident Radio Communications Form (ICS 205)
 - This is an example, but an ECP, would revolve around the Incident Commander and the PIO, who would determine the details to be released.

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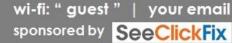
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Step Three: Creating a Framework for Crisis Communication

- 1. Reference the Incident Command System & other related existing emergency plans
- 2. Identify key decision makers
- **3.** Establish communications protocols (i.e. who may speak on behalf of the community)
- 4. Inventory communications channels and community, law enforcement, stakeholders & media contacts

5. Designate communications delivery and information repository





- Identify the key individuals within your emergency plan (i.e. Incident Command System or Public Information Annex) involved with decision making who need to be involved.
- Assemble them and clearly define roles and responsibilities

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Establish the **communications protocol** for the situation.

- Ensure there is a single point of contact (and back up) for the media, officials, and the public
- \checkmark Establish that only the official designee speaks as a representative of the municipality/organization



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More ... in Session 2!

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Designate, if necessary, a primary command center (and a back up location) and telecommunications tools for the key staff, or Incident Command Team, to make decisions and communicate

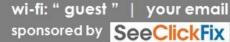
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- All plans need to be reevaluated to ensure that they are still viable and reflective of current situations
- After an emergency, time should be set aside to evaluate the ECP
 - Identify success points
 - Identify problem points
 - Consider gathering feedback
 - Revise plans and share with key stakeholders
- Handout: Reflecting On Hurricane Sandy and the November Nor'Easter: Lessons Learned





- Develop a clear written plan and protocols
 - Focus on what you tell the public
 - Clarify how you get the information to the public?
 - When you release the information
 - Why you release the information
- Remember, 'situation dictates procedure' •

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- BurtonTrent Public Affairs, LLC
- Seeger, Matthew (2006) Best Practices in Crisis Communication: An Expert Panel Process
- Rutgers Center for Government Services (2013) Reflecting On Hurricane Sandy and the November Nor'Easter: Lessons Learned
- Pierce, B. (2012) Crisis Communications Planning. Tipping Point Public Relations November 8, 2012
- FEMA Forms http://training.fema.gov/EMIWeb/is/ICSResource/icsforms. htm

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new sustainable jersey actions communications

1. **Emergency Communications Planning** (coming soon)

- Develop a standard operating procedure outlining the steps a town will take to disseminate important information during emergencies
- ✓ Utilize varied communications channels (traditional & digital media, text and email, sign boards, community posting boards & community networks)
- Create a process for citizens to register for alerts

2. Vulnerable Populations Identification for Emergencies

- Create or utilize an existing database of all vulnerable and special needs. populations within the community to receive updates during emergencies
- Keep a list of key stakeholders that can help get word out to special needs. pops
- Use of alternative communication formats for people w/ special needs
- Create a system for special needs people to register for updates.

