



# communication planning for emergencies

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# What we'll cover this morning

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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

# 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?

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- 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



# Creating an Emergency Communications Plan (ECP)

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



# What is a Crisis?

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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

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



# Challenges of Emergency Communications

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## 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





# First Step: Identify the Planning Team

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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



## Second Step: Identify the Incident Command System (ICS)

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- 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.

# Incident Command System



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



# Public Information Officer (PIO)

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- 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



# Who Can be a PIO?

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- 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.



# An Example

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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.



## Step Three: Creating a Framework for Crisis Communication

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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

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- 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





# Establish

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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
- ✓ Establish that only the official designee speaks as a representative of the municipality/organization



# Inventory

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More ... in Session 2!



# Designate

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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



## Step Four: Evaluate the Plan

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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



# Walk Away With...

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- 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'



# Session Sources & Resources

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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>



# new sustainable jersey actions

## *communications*

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### 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