

Communicating with Community

What We've Learned

EMERGENCY MANAGER:

"I expect that most citizens will follow instructions as they are given. The challenge is getting the information out."

COMMUNITY:

"I thought we would be given days to evacuate. We weren't even given hours. I didn't realize we would have no time to think."

COMMUNITY:

"I got all the information in the days before the storm, but after we lost power I had no idea what was going on for almost a week. ."

EMERGENCY MANAGER:

"We use our web site, social channels and of course all media outlets to get the information out to the public about expectations."

EMERGENCY MANAGER:

"The shelter locations are well publicized and all should be accessible for everyone, regardless of mobility."

COMMUNITY:

"I know where the shelter is, but I can't get to it because my wheelchair requires special transportation."

COMMUNITY:

"I knew where the evacuation route was, I just didn't know there would be no place to get gas. We thought they would have arranged for gas."

EMERGENCY MANAGER:

"We increased the signage on the evacuation routes since the last hurricane."

The single biggest problem with communication is the illusion that it has taken place.

-- George Bernard Shaw

A word cloud of disaster response and emergency management acronyms. The central and largest text is "WTEF". Other prominent acronyms include "MRC", "SOP", "COAD", "CERT", "FEMA", "EOC", "VOAD", "PP", "DMAT", "DEM", "BCP", "DHS", "DRT", "NGO", "PD", "ARC", "DEP", "FD", "NIMS", "EMA", "NDMS", "BEOC", "EOP", "DOH", and "IFRC". The acronyms are arranged in a circular pattern around the center, with varying font sizes and orientations.

COAD MRC PPP
SOP CERT
FEMA EOC VOAD
DMAT DEM
BCP DHS DRT NGO
PD ARC DEP FD
NIMS
EMA
NDMS
BEOC
EOP
DOH
IFRC

Lessons Learned

Lessons Learned

The flood recovery structure that was used to coordinate city efforts should be implemented immediately

Communications and information sharing between the IEO and the IDO proved to be a major challenge. Inefficiencies found in the process. This report stated that coordination problems delayed

response efforts. Some of these coordination problems were unclear communication from FEMA

regarding tasking assignments that delayed ESF teams, lack of communication regarding the

arrival of food for the Red Cross – they did not know it had arrived and were not prepared to

distribute it, and unexpected aircraft arrivals resulting in unloading and distribution delays

communication issues. The distance between the extremely poor raising valid safety issues. The western branch of the Grand Prix Fire became

2017
Hurricane
Maria

2013
Colorado
Floods

2011
Joplin
Tornado

2003
California
Wildfires

1992
Hurricane
Andrew

Gaps

- Expectations
- Common Language
- Lessons Learned

“The thing I see in most incidents, there is a lot of inaccurate info that comes out. Then policy makers – and all of us really – get hammered by it later...Because of election cycles, local elected have not likely been through these things before. We really need local advocacy for our politicians so that the citizens get the right actionable info.”

-- Lori Hodges, Director of Emergency Management
416 Wildfire Activation, Colorado
2018

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Engaging Elected in daily/operational briefings – this is where the community gets their information
- Open QnA at end of briefings that ensure everyone is on the same page with the language and messaging

“We all communicate with differently, and we all get our information in different ways – I take in information differently than my neighbor does. We need a very systematic way to get info out, and in a way that everyone will understand it. And we need to do this every day, not just during disasters.”

-- Chris Donegan, Financial Analyst
Hurricane Irma Deployment, Florida
2017

RECCOMENDATIONS

- Use common language wherever possible – even in briefings, and especially when speaking with the community
- Effective communication is a practice – we need to do it every day, not just during disasters. This is why it keeps ending up in the back of our AARs

“...communicating effectively is imperative. Then when we say its time to go, or we need to do a thing, they don't push back, they follow you because they trust you – that trust is only a result of the effective communications up to that point. Communication has to start early so that you have that trust when you need it.”

-- Doug Bainton, FDNY DART Team
Hurricane Irma/Maria Deployment, US Virgin Islands
2017

RECCOMENDATIONS

- Communication needs to be as clear as possible even before the disaster – this means training opportunities. We need communications training just like we need all the other training
- Every communication is an opportunity to build trust – without trust there can be no effective response

What Can You Do?

Self-evaluation – are you being clear? Did this work the last time you did it? What can you do better?

Organizationally – is everyone on the same page? Have you engaged all of the stakeholders that will be messaging expectations?

Community – have we given as much information as possible? How many acronyms were in it? Are we applying the lessons we learned from the community last time?

Education – what are the training opportunities available and how can we get them? Are we practicing good communication every day?



Thank You

Noel Kepler

noelfkepler@gmail.com

917.907.2722

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Thank You

Noel Kepler

noelfkepler@gmail.com

917.907.2722