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ABLE, READY & WILLING
Best Practices For Employee Accountability In A Crisis

Organizations know their most valuable asset is their employees. So when incidents such as blackouts, cyber attacks and natural disasters occur, it is imperative management accounts for the whereabouts and well being of its workers. Communication must happen quickly and frequently if operations are to continue with minimal impact.

Case in point: Superstorm Sandy in October 2012. This historic weather event not only cost more than $65 billion in damages, but also resulted in tremendous loss of productivity and profits for organizations throughout the Northeast (an estimated two million lost working days). A common driver of loss for the event was poor accounting for and communication with displaced employees.

Ask any business continuity professional and they will tell you. Even the smallest incident can have adverse physical and financial consequences. An afternoon power outage, computer virus or wastebasket fire can be detrimental enough. A worst-case scenario like an active shooter, earthquake or pandemic can be devastating.

Regardless of a situation's severity, management must come together to decide on a course of action. Employees must be accounted for and informed of the situation, and in certain instances, teams must be formed and quickly mobilized.

An enterprise-class emergency notification service (coupled with industry best practices) can help organizations meet the challenge, mitigating risk and its effect on people, processes and profits. Here are a few key tips and best practices for utilizing notification and maximizing employee accountability before, during and after a critical incident.

Plan for accountability.

Effective incident response hinges on the degree of planning conducted prior to the event. Strategies for dealing with a host of different scenarios should be well defined. Employees should understand their role in a crisis, including the actions they should take to inform management of their location and status.

This may mean responding to a notification received over their mobile device, calling into an inbound message board, or notifying managers personally. Whatever the accountability requirement, workers should understand the plan, preferably having been trained and drilled on their required steps long before the incident.

Get the first message right.

For employees to respond appropriately they must first understand the situation. Knowing what has happened, what they are expected to do, and when the next communication will come is essential if they are to react quickly.

Construction of the initial message should follow these guidelines:

Message label.
Identification of emergency message.

Who's speaking or authoring.
Identification of the organization's official who is issuing the warning. It is best for the initial message to come from a respected member of management; someone whose name or voice is instantly recognizable, confident and reassuring.

Intended recipients.
Statement of the targeted audience for which the message is intended. This should include specific division, geographic, or location identifiers.

What they should do, by when.
Explicit instructions on the actions employees should take and the desired time frame. Also includes any statements describing actions staff are NOT to take.

Why they should do it.
A statement on the risks associated with the situation and what specific consequences may be faced if action is not taken.

Repeat.
Repeating of who the message is for and what they should do within the required time frame.

End: Message label and pending information.
Close out the message with the alert identification and any instructions on where additional information can be obtained or when workers should look for updated information as the situation changes.

Take a roll call.

Utilizing Send Word Now's Get Word Back feature, managers can determine who is safe and available to assist. Recipients can respond to a customizable question embedded into the notification message. Employee responses are tallied in reports, allowing managers to make fast, sound decisions.

As a best practice note, in severe life/safety situations it is not recommended one of these responses be "I need help." The employee's location is not known, creating a false impression that assistance is on the way. Instead, the message should include instructions to call 9-1-1 or an inbound hotline to speak with someone directly for emergency assistance.

Keep the information flowing.

Employee accountability is more than knowing employees are safe. It is also about ensuring workers are able to carry out their assigned duties and tasks to support business resiliency.

Your employees are only human; they may feel fear and uncertainty in particular situations. If they don't have the information they need, they will inevitably make assumptions, listen to hearsay, and potentially turn to inaccurate sources for guidance.

Always send additional information as soon as it becomes available and continually post updates to your inbound voice Message Boards. Your employees will appreciate the facts and your organization will get back on its feet even faster.

It is an employer's responsibility to account for its workers' safety and whereabouts during a critical incident. By planning and preparing for post-incident accountability, getting the first message right, taking a roll call, and continuing the flow of information throughout the course of the event, the organization will better protect its most valuable asset, reduce liability risks, and help the business recover faster.

About **Send Word Now** ®

Headquartered in New York City, Send Word Now is the leading worldwide provider of critical communications solutions. The company's easy-to-use web-based and mobile solutions are deployed by businesses, government agencies, universities, and non-profit organizations to ensure fast, effective, communications when it is needed the most.

Send Word Now's enterprise-class notification system is capable of transmitting hundreds of thousands of voice and text messages in minutes while providing a full audit trail for after-action reporting and follow-up. Its conferencing and workflow solutions keep employees informed and connected to the people and information they need.

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