INSIGHT

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THE MOST IMPORTANT MINUTE
Setting the course for successful emergency response

Defined as a time of intense difficulty, trouble, or danger, a crisis can initiate fear and anxiety the moment it occurs. The fear of the unknown may be the most debilitating of the psychological responses to disaster. With fear at the core, the first minute is an adrenaline-fueled race against the clock. Add in an emotional rush of panic and anxiety knowing you must orchestrate your crisis communications plan immediately. How will you respond?

When an emergency occurs, the need to communicate is immediate: it sets the wheels in motion for the duration of the incident. The speed and accuracy of information, and the initiated actions, will impact the successful outcome of an emergency.

There is no second chance to get the first minute right. That is why it is essential to plan well in advance and be ready to execute your crisis communications plan. Doing so allows you to notify your supporting first responders, teams, employees, students, community and/or others you are responsible for with the information necessary to keep them out of harm's way. **There are three core elements to any crisis communications plan that need to happen during the first minute of a verified incident**:

NOTIFY
Providing the information necessary to keep people out of harm's way is paramount to any emergency response and it needs to happen immediately. The time it takes to initiate the notification can impact the overall outcome of the incident and having the ability to reach thousands of people, wherever they are, is imperative.

In order to accomplish this, you'll want to create your notifications before the crisis happens. Imagine every possible scenario and what might be involved.

You will also want to define the recipients of your message. Members of your crisis team, emergency responders, and those at risk, are just a few of the recipient categories you need to keep in mind.

The content of the notification must be clear and actionable. Employees, students, and the affected community will want to know exactly what is happening and which actions to take. Should they seek shelter? Is an evacuation necessary? Is help on its way? The goal of your message is simple: make sure all recipients are aware of the situation and which steps should be taken until the issue has been resolved.

It is also crucial that your message is issued via the right medium. Consider how your audience consumes information: text messaging, desktop alerts, phone calls, digital signage, and social media should all be taken into consideration. Keep in mind that different groups of people may need different information (administrators, executives, staff, the public, first responders, etc.) in order to proceed.

MOBILIZE
Including first responders in your communications is fundamental so you know you are receiving the proper backup when it is needed the most. To accomplish this, be sure to compile and store contact information for every local law enforcement, ambulance, and fire rescue service so they can assist in the incident response. Make sure these lists are updated regularly and saved electronically, but also have a hard copy available just in case.

Imagine the potential difference it can make if the emergency response team is engaged just seconds after the incident is confirmed and arrives to help a few minutes sooner.

Depending on the severity of the incident, you should also include government contacts, such as the mayor, governor, or other elected officials. The media may also be a good resource to help get your message out to the public. You don't want anyone to assume the details of what is taking place. Consider the questions they may ask and have pre-scripted templates available.

COLLABORATE

Once the incident is confirmed, it is necessary to discuss the next steps of the incident response with members of your Crisis Communication Team (CCT).

You can do this by initiating an outbound telephone conference bridge to include each member. This enables an instant unified command regardless of the proximity of the participants.

If you have access to screen sharing or webcasting resources such as GoToMeeting, Webex, Google Hangouts, Join.me, or any similar service, you can link to an unscheduled meeting session. This enables a visual element to the collaboration that will help inform the next steps to take in your response. The good news is that there is new technology available that enables emergency managers to create incident scenarios that can be initiated in one step. Executing these scenarios allows you to perform all the individual actions involved in emergency notification, mobilization, and collaboration in seconds, increasing your probability for a successful emergency response outcome.

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

Below is an example of how an organization can use a scenario, which is created before an emergency takes place.

- An email and text message is sent to all employees informing them of a lockdown

- The local fire and police department receive automated calls that their presence is needed

- The organization website is updated with a large visible message

- Desktop computers display a pop-up alert with the warning

- An audible message is broadcast through the fire alarm system

- Defined community is alerted via Twitter.

- An outbound conference call and web conferencing session is initiated to connect with the Crisis Communications Team.

- Emergency lockdown procedures are delivered to all managers via their mobile device.

Once this scenario has been executed (in just seconds), the right people have been notified, the right resources have been mobilized, and the required collaboration within your team has been initiated. If you tried to orchestrate all of these individual steps once the need for an emergency lockdown was confirmed, you could lose crucial time. However, if these actions for the emergency lockdown scenario are created beforehand, using well-defined policy and procedure as a guide along with the right technology, what once might have taken 15 minutes can happen in well under 15 seconds.

Spend time crafting the first set of actions into your critical communications system so you will be prepared. Assign roles to each team member so they know what their responsibilities will include during a crisis. Define a time to initiate your message, how long it will take to deliver, and who will receive your notice. Once you have a plan in place, conduct ongoing drills and proactive training. Frequent testing and drills will confirm that your team operates with the flow and precision that you want to achieve during the Most Important Minute.

WHAT TO DO DURING
THE FIRST MINUTE
OF AN EMERGENCY

What you hoped would never happen is happening. Lives are at risk. The first minute is a race against the clock. **Here are the three core components you must have in your crisis communications plan.**

PREPARING FOR ANY SCENARIO

Emergencies may vary, but they all require a critical communications plan. If a tornado is spotted, every second counts – that's why you need a pre-set incident scenario that can be initiated with one step... *in seconds.*

TORNADO

1 MINUTE

NOTIFY
Initiate Your Emergency Notification and Response

- **Act quickly – lives are at stake**
- Content must be clear and actionable
- Reach people anywhere via text, desktop alerts, phone, digital signage, social, etc.

MOBILIZE
Activate Emergency Services and First Responders

- Contact law enforcement, fire/rescue and first responders to assist in the incident response
- If emergency services can arrive a few minutes sooner, lives can be saved

COLLABORATE
Assemble Your Crisis Communications Team

- Enable instant unified command of your crisis communications team from anywhere via telephone conference, screen sharing or webcasting such as GoToMeeting, Webex, etc.

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About Omnilert

At Omnilert, we believe no one should ever die or get seriously injured due to lack of timely and accurate information. Our suite of emergency notification and critical communication solutions empowers organizations to keep their people informed and their operations viable during the most challenging times. We transform the way those responsible communicate with their people to rapidly disseminate critical information, automate emergency communications, accelerate emergency response, ensure business continuity, and recover quickly from a crisis. Our people and technology, together, help ensure successful outcomes for our customers.

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