



THE IMPORTANCE OF CONDUCTING TRAINING DRILLS

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Larimer Emergency Telephone Authority
Special thanks to Kimberly Culp,
Executive Director and Val Turner,
Operations Manager for the Larimer
Emergency Telephone Authority for the
concept, design and sample templates.

Introduction

In the span of a year, a government agency can and will be faced with numerous emergency events. Each event varies in size, damage caused and overall impact on the community. While often these events are unexpected, you can still prepare and plan for them with the use of a critical communication system.

There are countless ways to be better prepared for emergencies with a communication system. However, there are some best practices that need to be employed. Knowing the incidents you will face is crucial – or at least the types of incidents. This will allow you to better manage them prior to the event ever occurring. When key events are identified, the next step would be to train for them. You can do this by creating and then conducting training drills. These drills should include all the necessary communication involved in a particular situation. It is important to pay attention to detail as well: notifications in each drill should always follow accurate message mapping.

Moreover, when preparing for incidents by conducting training drills, government municipalities, agencies and departments need to ensure their data is relevant and of high quality. Data must also include location-based information in order to send notifications to specific areas. They can do this by gathering information directly from citizens and staff members, among other methods.

Conduct Training Drills

Regardless of the size or severity of events your municipality will face – the fact remains you will face events every year. When preparing for any event it is vital to create and conduct training drills. While it would be impossible to train for every kind of incident, it is important to at least test your team. When preparing for drills, you must break a drill into three main parts – the before, during and after.

Before

Create scenarios that apply to your organization.

Depending where you are in the country or world, there are different events that can affect you. It is important to consider these events. This is especially true when you are in the process of creating drills for your organization to run.

When considering events think about how they can affect you and your community. If you live on the coast in Florida, you know at some point or another you will be faced with a hurricane – for you it is important to plan and train for this type of event as it has a high impact and frequency. In another community a severe snow storm may be more a more relevant event to train for and anticipate. Additionally, consider events that might not be that frequent, but if not prepared for, could be catastrophic and deadly – such as a terrorist situation.

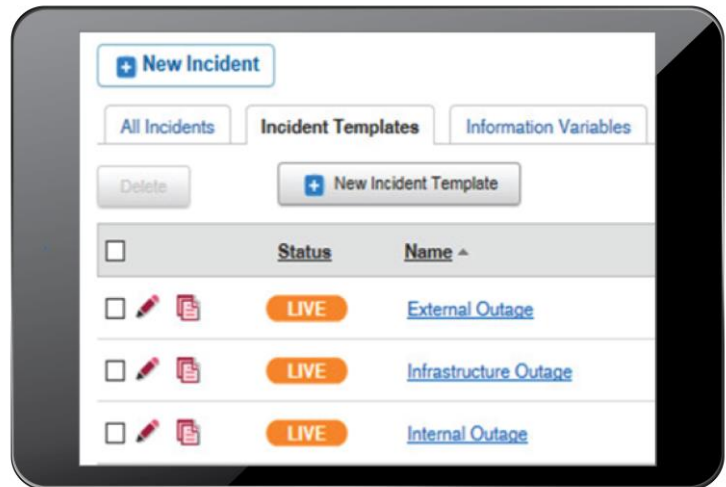
Create Incident Templates That Can Work With Your Training Drill Scenario

Once you have reached the point where you have decided these are the events that we need to plan for, take the next step and create incident templates in your critical communication solution.

Incident templates are a key component for training drills for a few reasons. One, it will allow you to go through the entire communication process within a notification system for a given event prior to it ever happening. After completing the process, you can simply save it for later – when the actual event occurs. Depending on system capabilities, you can even make edits on the fly, making sure your team has the most up to date and accurate information.

Why is it important to have an incident template already in place and ready to go?

Having a template in place allows you to save a lot of time during the incident. This can help your team share information quicker and work on resolving the event faster, not the communication aspect of it. Additionally, during stressful situations people's cognitive abilities decrease significantly – about four grades. This could affect message quality and further enforces the need to create templates prior to events.



Develop Message Maps to Ensure Message Quality

In order to ensure event success, crafting message maps can be crucial. Dr. Robert Chandler, an expert in crisis communications and director of the Nicholson School of Communication at the University of Central Florida, advises creating message maps that are “clear, concise messages created prior to a crisis that simplify complex concepts and speed communication during chaos.” Chandler advises that these message maps should be created in advance, so that organizations "have the time and resources to explore all possible disaster scenarios and map out all messaging needs by audience and stage of crisis."

Follow these 10 steps to increase the success of your message maps.

1. Plan before the incident.

- Allows you to respond faster
- Reduces the chance of sending a misleading or even incorrect message
- Allows your legal team and senior management to pre-approve message templates
- Permits the translation of messages into other languages
- Decreases the anxiety levels of individuals responsible for sending the notification.

2. Follow Chandler's 3-3-30 rule.

- No more than 3 message points
- Deliver 3 short sentences
- Keep the key content in the first 30 words

3. Keep it simple in a crisis.

- Reading comprehension during an emergency drops four grade levels
- Write messages at a fourth grade level

4. Craft your messages to match the stages of an event.

- Early stage
 - The event is unfolding and not all the facts may be known.
 - Provide the information you have
 - Realize stress is high and the time may be short
 - Be clear, precise, and specific.
- Mid-stage
 - There is more information about the event and the desired actions by audience.
 - Motivate the recipients to take the correct actions
 - Usually includes actions and is directive based
- Resolution stage
 - The incident is over and the outcome is known.
 - Provide the information to help everyone resume their lives
 - Describe services or areas that will not return to normal operation

5. Choose your words and watch your tone.

- The response to your message can be affected by the words and tone you use. Think about the reaction you want. Does your message help? Does it create urgency? Does it cause panic?

6. Craft for the recipient.

- During an incident there may be several messages and actions needed
- Create logical groupings of recipients based on qualities like function, role and/or geographical location
- Determine which groups will get which messages

7. Test, Train, and Fix.

8. Look at send and receive models.

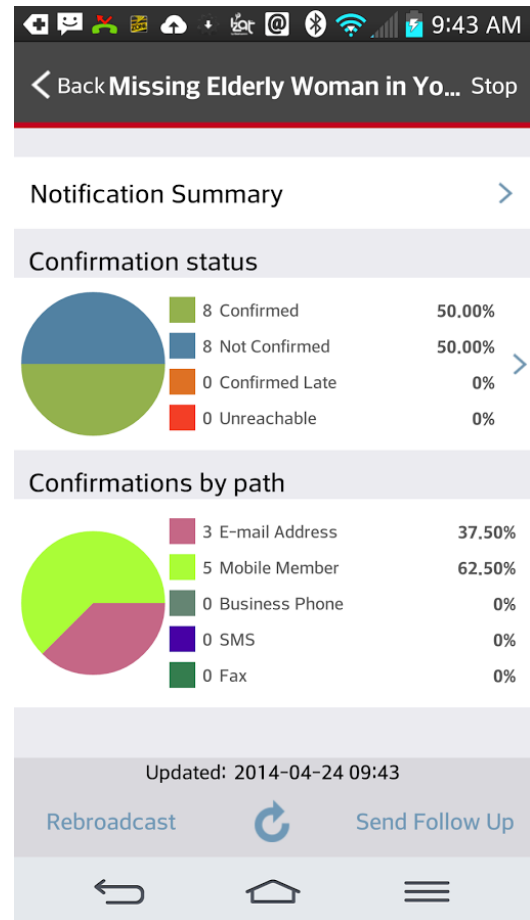
- The notification initiator sends a message
- The receiver gets the message and sends a confirmation or reply
- The notification initiator gets the confirmation or reply and reacts to the feedback.

9. Think about your mode of communication.

- Voice calls (mobile or landline)
 - Needs to convey its message in the first 9 second
- Short Message Service (SMS)
 - Should be brief and to the point – no longer than 120 characters
- Email
 - Can use formatting to emphasize message points (if the user and mail server permit it)

10. Remember that Message Mapping is a science.

- Message mapping can seem fairly straightforward, but considerable time and expertise has gone into researching exactly how to structure messages for recipient response in a crisis.
- Take advantage of message mapping resources available to you, such as Dr. Chandler's book, Emergency Notification



Following these ten steps will increase the chance that a message is not only sent, but received and understood. To learn more and get additional information for each step, please [download our 10 Steps for Message Mapping brief](#).

Leverage Better Data

Prior to ever creating a drill your municipality must understand notification systems need to have good data to be effective – this is even more accurate when notifications are meant to be location-based. The quality needs to be especially high if the scenario calls for extreme precision. To acquire that precision, state and local governments need to be diligent with their collection processes.

There are numerous ways of importing data into a system – not all can be effective for these types of notifications. Traditional methods include importing white and yellow pages, providing names, land line numbers and addresses. While it isn't a bad thing to have this information, clearly it lacks the many other contact paths available, like cell phones and email. Other options that can give a wider range of paths include employee lists for government agencies, utility customer lists and cell carrier lists that provide cell information for residents.



In addition, most notification systems today include a self-registration site or opt-in portal. It is key to properly take advantage of this tool. From these sites residents can input all of their information, including name, number, address and much more. Moreover, if mapping tools are available, citizens can use a pin drop to locate their actual address, rather than relying solely on where it's defaulted on a map. Having this option provides state and local government agencies with more up-to-date information by leveraging the citizen as the source, which saves time and increases the accuracy of the data. Because the information is of higher quality, these agencies have a better chance of reaching citizens during events and making sure events have more successful resolutions.

During

Run Through the Scenarios

Once you have done all you drill preparation, the next logical step is to actually conduct the drill. This is necessary because people are creatures of habit. As the saying goes “practice makes perfect”. You cannot expect your organization to perform the way you need them to without ever walking through the drills.

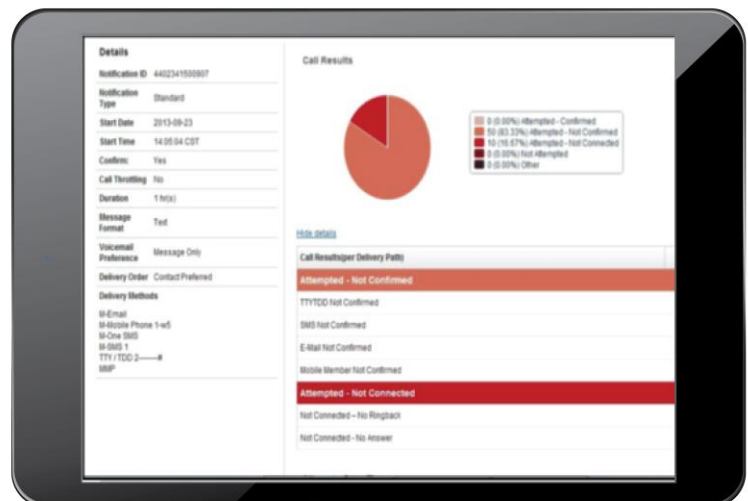
Leverage Pre-created Incident Templates

During your training drills, don't forget all the work you put in during the preparation stages. Depending on the scenario you are practicing, utilize the appropriate incident templates. This can help you see how useful they were and ensure their quality. Any necessary changes can be made now, instead of during an actual event.

Use Live-Reporting

When conducting drills, you will want to see how your organization is performing. You can do this by using live-reporting functionality within your notification system. This is vital because it can reveal who got your messages and who didn't. Moreover, you can see the responses of your recipients and the rate at which they are receiving and sending messages.

Having this information from your reporting tool can help improve your performance as well. During the incident if you can see a specific group, individual, or devices are not receiving or confirming messages, you can retarget them and send additional messages through various different contact paths. Also, if new developments occurs, you can make edits on the fly, ensuring your team is aware and increase the chances the event has a successful resolution.



After

What Happened During the Event

After you have conducted your training drill, there is still some work to be done. It is important to take a step back and see what the impact of the event was. What happened during the drill? Who was affected? In addition to this, you will want to see how your team performed.

Look at Post-event Reporting and Make Changes Where Needed

To gain insight into your organizations performance, you need to look at post-event reports. Depending on your vendor, you can get these from your notification system (including live-reporting help).

Once you have analyzed your reports, this allows you to make logical decisions on your preparation and drills. If specific groups didn't meet your standards, you can find out why and address those issues. Additionally, for those in your organization who missed or didn't receive messages, you can see if their data was bad and reach out to them directly to make updates and/or corrections.

Key Recommendations:

In a perfect world, we wouldn't be faced with any emergency events, ever. However, this is not the case and you need to ensure your organization is ready – no matter what. To be ready, you need to create and implement training drills. These drills will help prepare your organization through practice and uncover any areas in need of improvement. It can also help you understand the impact if anything in your process goes wrong. Furthermore, for unexpected events your organization will have the tools and skills to be able to react appropriately, ensuring that citizens, employees and any other stakeholders are safe.

[Download Sample Drills Here](#)

Emergency Test Scenario – Train Derailment	
Synopsis	A train has derailed in a residential area. The dispatcher is preparing an alert around a disaster that will be sure to need a notification ahead of the call from the Incident Commander.
Goals	Create and draw a polygon, craft a message, determine if a more detailed notification scenario would be in order (add team results, CERT Team calls, Conference Calls to key leadership). Send a follow up.
Scenario Details	A train has derailed in (City) on (Street) between (Street) and (Street). This train was carrying potential hazardous chemicals. Until Incident Command is ready to have you send an evacuation alert, you can get it tested. In this alert you will need to:
	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Draw a polygon using the circle function with a 1 mile radius from the location you have chosen. All residents within this perimeter are to be evacuated.2. Save your polygon - When you save it always use the date and incident in the title so you can quickly find it for re-use.3. After some pre-determined period, almost all systems will force a session time out and you will lose all of your previous work. To ensure this action click the system "Log-off" command.4. IncidentCommand notifies you that they are ready for evacuation: proceed into the create a notification system process. In this you are going to use your previously saved polygon, load it from the saved file and proceed to craft your message.5. Create a TEST MESSAGE (a test message always include the words "this is a test" at the beginning and end of the recording as well as in the subject line) that will be sent to addresses with nocontact information and/or registered employees who will respond to you and provide feedback.6. Send message and monitor reports. You want to check the real time updates to ensure your message is going out.7. From this point you can conclude the exercise or expand your training by clicking about your system to review reports, sort reports, extract reports so you can email access to a tactical responder, set up a follow up notification to a particular type of responder.
Helpful Tips	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Be sure that you are in your TEST env.2. Always record once along with test. Select all polygons for delivery method.3. It is critical to save your polygons with detailed names so you are ready find them later.4. It is best practice to over notify than under notify. Never cut a street in half with your notification. Take the extra few seconds to include the entire street or provide cut-off points that make sense.5. There should always be one contact in these test scenarios. This will be the LETA generic contact. (If there is more than one contact please modify the polygon to only include the LETA contact which should be at or near address or intersection).6. Always include yourself as an individual when sending the notification to your own team. Even if it means the end of training.



About Everbridge

Everbridge provides a unified critical communication suite that helps clients be better prepared, make better decisions, and respond quickly and confidently during disruptive events. When an incident happens, whether it's a natural disaster or an IT service outage, we automate communications to ensure that the right messages get to the right people at the right time.

Widely recognized by analysts as the market leader, Everbridge solutions are trusted by clients in all major industries and government sectors to connect with over 50 million people around the world.

THE ONLY END-TO-END PLATFORM

- **Planning:** Everbridge is easy to set up, maintain, and organize, meaning that you're always ready for a quick, coordinated response. Everbridge ensures that the right messages get to the right people - with the most advanced opt-in portal on the market, streamlined integration with internal and external data sources, and simple group and contact management.
- **Assessment:** When trouble strikes, you need rich insight, presented simply - so you can quickly assess potential impact and make an informed decision to avoid loss. Everbridge offers the only solution on the market that meets these demanding requirements, with the most advanced interactive dashboard in the industry.
- **Response:** In critical situations, ease-of-use can mean the difference between an effective response and a mistake that carries serious consequences. Everbridge is engineered to be simple to use under pressure, with a user interface that accelerates time-to-message and reduces the likelihood of errors.
- **Delivery:** Even during large-scale disruptions, Everbridge stays on. The most advanced platform in the industry ensures that you reach your contacts - every time. And with worldwide coverage and capabilities, including globally local calling infrastructure and data storage, we're ready to support you wherever your people are in the world.

Visit www.everbridge.com to learn more.

