Safety Communications During Severe Weather

The 2017 Hurricane season is one for the record books. Hurricane Harvey dropped a record 51.88 inches of rainfall near Highland, Texas. Hurricane Irma was the longest-lasting powerful hurricane or typhoon ever recorded, sustaining 185-mph winds for 37 hours.

When severe weather strikes, communication between emergency managers, emergency responders, search and rescue teams, and the general population can be the key to life and death. Below are communication best practices officials can use before, during, and after severe weather to help keep people safe.

Build the Right Message

In an emergency situation, messages should be clear and concise. It is recommended that you adhere to the 3-3-30 rules. Messages should have:

- 3 short sentences
- Limited to 3 key ideas
- Using no more than 30 words

Following this methodology, your messages will often contain 1) What is going on, 2) What you want the recipient to do, and 3) When can they expect the next update.

When messages require more information than this, consider using an email, an attachment, or refer recipients to a website.

Optimize Opt-Ins

A coming storm is a great time to remind citizens to sign up for your community messages. When a resident signs up, we can get a very complete and accurate profile of that person if you’re asking them for home phone, mobile phone, SMS, email, and locations that are important to them. It’s critical to have multiple modalities to reach people on, particularly in a situation like a storm, where residents may be displaced and difficult to locate.

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Make sure you’ve got the link to your sign up page front and center on your website. Then, get in touch with local media and ask them to mention the program. Also, take advantage of local events and have volunteers promote and take sign ups.

Allowing residents to opt-in via text keywords is another way to increase opt-ins. A simple process where residents can text a short keyword to a designated number in order to receive messages can greatly increase your reach as a storm approaches.

**Augment Your Data**

Don’t rely on opt-in data alone. Supplementing with additional data will increase your reach.

If you have access to the 911 data in your area, load it in the to your platform, so at the very least, you can ring land lines.

Ensure that this data is refreshed at least once per year.

You will also want to invest in additional data if possible, including VoIP and mobile numbers.*

*Everbridge customers have access to enhanced data offerings and data refresh if interested

**Test Your Process**

If you do not send messages regularly, you will want to send test messages to maintain familiarity with the system and to practice message building. You do not have to send to your entire database; you can test with a small group of known individuals. Making sure to warn your test group, and make those messages clearly with the word “test”.
If you have a public system, it’s a good idea to post with some regularly so community knows the system is currently being used. If there is a storm coming, you can post an advisory that simply says you plan to post and distribute messages through this forum. If you have a system based on phone calls, you can send a message, preferably at a decent hour, letting your residents know they can sign up and get messages via their preferred modality.

If your notification system offers training resources, be sure to access those on a regular basis. You will want to be familiar with all functionality well before any weather emergencies occur.

**Configure for IPAWS**

During a severe weather emergency, it’s extremely helpful to have access to IPAWS (Integrated Public Alert and Warning System), so when infrastructure fails and land lines are not an option, you know you can at least get a one-way message to residents’ mobile devices, or anyone in the area for that matter.

If you have credentials for the government IPAWS system, make sure you have loaded them in your notification system and know the procedure to send a short, concise message.

If you don’t have credentials, but are an eligible public safety agency, you can apply for those credentials.

**Track Your Health Risk Citizens**

During severe weather, your care-dependent citizens are at high risk. They may not be able to evacuate and may need to stay close to treatment.

With that in mind, you should coordinate regularly with your health department to understand where you at risk population is located, and what their special need is. In
addition to collecting needs information when citizens sign up, you can also load this information into your notification platform to help your first responders evacuate special needs or check in on them in the event of an emergency.

If you have this information loaded in your mass communication platform, you can do a simple polling question to your special needs citizens, such as, “Are you safe?” and give them quick options to responded to such as:

+ “Yes, I’ve been evacuated”
+ “I have not been evacuated, but I am safe at present”
+ “I have not been evacuated and I need help”

With this simple poll, combined with the special needs info you have on your citizens, you can quickly triage and execute a plan to help those who are in the most need. A little planning can go a long way

**Operate on Mobile**

If the lights go out, you may need to manage communications from your mobile device. Prepare for this with the following:

+ Keep a number of spare batteries available so you can stay charged.
+ Make sure critical apps are installed on your phone
+ Ensure you have login credentials and/or have enabled touch ID

**Conclusion**

You can’t predict severe weather, but you can prepare. By implementing these communication best practices, you will be ready to inform residents and deploy resources to keep people safe.

**About Everbridge**

Everbridge, Inc. (NASDAQ: EVBG) is a global software company that provides critical event management and enterprise safety applications that enable customers to automate and accelerate the process of keeping people safe and businesses running during critical events. During public safety threats such as active shooter situations, terrorist attacks or severe weather conditions, as well as critical business events such as IT outages or cyber incidents, over 3,000 global customers rely on the company’s SaaS-based platform to quickly and reliably construct and deliver contextual notifications to
millions of people at one time. The company’s platform sent over 1.5 billion messages in 2016, and offers the ability to reach more than 200 countries and territories with secure delivery to over 100 different communication devices. The company’s critical communications and enterprise safety applications, which include Mass Notification, Incident Management, IT Alerting, Safety Connection™, Community Engagement™, Secure Messaging and Internet of Things, are easy-to-use and deploy, secure, highly scalable and reliable. Everbridge serves 8 of the 10 largest U.S. cities, 8 of the 10 largest U.S.-based investment banks, all four of the largest global accounting firms, 24 of the 25 busiest North American airports and 6 of the 10 largest global automakers. Everbridge is based in Boston and Los Angeles with additional offices in San Francisco, Lansing, Beijing, London and Stockholm.

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