How to create an emergency communications plan

A checklist of key steps and questions for agencies in emergency management

Effective emergency management depends on effective communications planning. This checklist is designed to help you create a robust and comprehensive emergency communications plan.

Section 1
Review your applications

Situational awareness is paramount to any first-response operation.

Today, that awareness depends on applications. From the applications that let first responders see and hear what their teammates are seeing and hearing, to the applications that monitor well-being and evaluate threats. As well as the applications that pull every bit of relevant data together, supporting command and executive decisions.

Ask the following questions:

1. What applications will you use to send and receive information in an emergency response scenario?
2. What types of information (email, video, sensor data etc.) will they send?
3. What are their connectivity requirements?

Section 2
Review your devices and their connectivity

History has clearly shown the risks of relying on one technology, transport medium or network during emergency response efforts.

To eliminate such single points of failure you need to plan for redundancy and diversity of devices and networks.

Ask the following questions:

1. Do our emergency response communications devices need to be:
   - Multi-carrier enabled?
   - Multi-network (LTE, commercial LT, traditional landline, satellite) enabled?
   - Off band?
   - Push-to-Talk?
   - Rugged and robust?
2. Do we need a cache of devices for rapid deployment to the field?
Section 3
Review interoperability

A few years ago, interoperability planning focused purely on bridging Land Mobile Radio networks. Today, it must also ensure interoperability between distinct technology types (such as LTE), data systems and applications, and alert and warning systems. What’s more, it must support interoperability across a much broader emergency management ecosystem—including non-traditional public safety agencies and private sector organizations such as public works, utilities, pharmacies and hospitals.

Ask the following questions:

1. Who needs to communicate? Are they first responders? Volunteer resources? Government agencies? Private sector resources (utilities, public works, hospitals, pharmacies, medical device manufacturers, relief organizations, food and water providers)?

2. What networks do they use?

3. Do we have a responsibility to make sure our systems connect with theirs?

4. Do the applications we deploy in the field operate according to standards used by other agencies?

5. Do we need a cache of devices, pre-configured for interoperability?

Section 4
Review the networks

Assessing the coverage, capacity and connectivity of commercial telecommunications networks in the geographical area covered by your plan is a crucial first step. Then you can explore how all three may be impacted in likely emergency response scenarios, and what resources you’ll need to keep communication flowing.

Ask the following questions:

1. Have we completed a test drive to gain an accurate understanding of our telecommunications network coverage?

2. Can the network handle the types and volumes of information likely to be generated in an emergency response scenario?

3. What are the most likely threats to the network, whether manmade (cyberattacks and physical sabotage) or natural (wind, water, fire)? How long could their impact on the network last?

4. What resources might we need to boost network coverage, capacity or connectivity? (e.g. redundant systems; deployable infrastructure; fixed install antenna systems; ERT Go-Kits™; Fly-Away-Kits)

5. Have we ensured carrier and technology diversity—and identified primary and secondary carriers and technologies (i.e. landlines, wireless, satellite) for key communications?

6. Have we spoken to our primary carrier regarding the resiliency of its infrastructure, equipment, and operations—and how it can support emergency response operations?

Section 5
Review your skills

Any technology is only as good as the people planning, deploying and using it.

It’s vital to ensure you’ve the right technical skills and knowledge at every level—from those tasked with plan creation, to those delivering implementation and execution.

Ask the following questions:

1. Do we have the technical expertise we need to create a robust emergency response communications plan?

2. Who’s using the applications and devices included in this plan?

3. Do they need training (or retraining)?

4. Who will deliver this training?
We’re here to help

If you need expert assistance with any aspect of emergency communications planning, contact the Sprint Emergency Response Team (ERT).

Call Toll Free: (888) 639-0020
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government.sprint.com/public-safety

About Sprint ERT
The Sprint Emergency Response Team (ERT), is dedicated to managing all planned and unplanned public safety and government response operations.

A cross-functional group with vast experience in Emergency Response and Mission-Based Support, Sprint ERT consists of a national team of full time, dedicated personnel, as well as more than a thousand ERT Reservists comprised of Sprint Network Engineers, Public Safety Communications Specialists, Government Customer Support, Government Affairs, and Business Continuity and Cross-Sector Coordination Experts. If those sound like the kinds of things you need, let’s talk.