



National Association of State 911 Administrators

911 and Emergency Management

Best Practices for Coordination and Collaboration

7-31-2015

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Introduction

This document has been developed to address a growing need for 911 and emergency management agencies to improve their ability to collaborate and cooperate before, during and after disasters or widespread emergencies.

Most emergencies, but certainly large-scale emergencies, such as natural disasters, involve 911 in some way. First, the 911 system is the primary means by which people get access to the first responders that can help them. As a result, 911 communication centers likely know about a widespread emergency before emergency managers do. Second, major disasters may devastate communications, which means that 911 communications may also be impacted. Third, 911 telecommunicators may experience emotional and psychological trauma as a result of what they see and hear during a disaster or mass casualty event.

Therefore, the disaster mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery activities of emergency managers must include 911 coordinators and PSAP managers as partners, and must also address what will be done if 911 becomes unavailable during an emergency, and provide critical incident support for telecommunicators.

This document is intended be used as a tool for local and state 911 managers and authorities to identify practical things they can do to ensure that 911 is part of what emergency managers do.

The Importance of Mutual Awareness

Interviews with members of the National Association of State 911 Administrators revealed that there is a need for 911 authorities and emergency managers at every level to be aware of each other's existence and the interconnectedness of the two disciplines.

That interconnectedness has three facets.

- First is the fundamental role 911 plays during a large-scale emergency by providing information gathered from incoming 911 calls to first responders and emergency management. First responders and emergency management are dependent on the situational awareness that is provided through the 911 system.
- Second is when a disaster takes out the public telecommunications system impacting people's access to 911. In that situation, the 911 outage becomes part of the incident requiring response and recovery. If a wild fire consumes miles of telephone lines, or if cell service is affected by a disaster or because it ran out of backup power, where are responders going to get information about where people need help?
- Third is that 911 telecommunicators are no less affected by the emergency than the responders. They, too, may need critical incident support during and following the event.

In many parts of the country, the local 911 coordinator is also the local emergency manager. Despite this, it appears that local emergency plans rarely address 911. Planners assume that 911 will be there during a disaster or large-scale emergency. But what if it is not? Emergency plans need to account for

the loss of 911 as an emergency function. Accounting for that means that emergency managers need to work with 911 managers, and the opposite is also true. In order to work together, they first need to be aware of each other. Even when a single person serves both functions in a community, he or she may not have taken steps to ensure that local emergency plans address 911. This needs to be done whether the 911 manager and the emergency manager is the same person or not.

An experience from the state of Iowa illustrates what can result when 911 and emergency management do not have basic knowledge of each other's operations and do not work together. There was a telecommunications outage, but 911 calls were being re-routed because the 911 system was designed to enable that to occur. The local emergency manager heard "outage" and issued a public announcement to the news media and social media providing an alternate number for people to call. None of this was necessary and caused considerable confusion – all due to a lack of understanding and a failure to collaborate. In a more serious, widespread emergency, this lack of understanding and failure to communicate could have exacerbated the situation for everyone involved.

Opportunities for Cooperation and Collaboration

There are several opportunities for cooperation and collaboration. What follows is a list of the types of opportunities that exist in each state.

Local Emergency Planning Committees (LEPC)

LEPCs were established under the Emergency Planning and Community Right-to-Know Act (EPCRA). LEPCs are non-profit community organizations that must include in their membership, at a minimum, local officials including police, fire, civil defense, public health, transportation, and environmental professionals, as well as representatives of facilities subject to the emergency planning requirements, community groups, and the media. LEPCs must assist in the development of emergency response plans, conduct annual reviews at least annually, and provide public information about hazards in the community.¹

Local Emergency Operations Centers (EOC)

Many local governments, typically at the county level, have EOCs that are activated during a wide-spread emergency. Some of them also house a 911 center.

State Emergency Response Commission (SERC)

SERCs were established under the EPCRA, the same law that established LEPCs. The Governor of each state designates a State Emergency Response Commission (SERC) to be responsible for implementing EPCRA provisions within its state. Individuals appointed to the SERC are required, to the extent

¹ Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), Fact Sheet, 1 March 2007.
<http://www.fema.gov/pdf/emergency/nims/lepc_fs.pdf> (Last accessed 7/24/2015)

practicable, to have technical expertise in the emergency response field. SERCs appoint LEPCs within their states, supervise and coordinate their activities, and review local emergency response plans.²

Tribal Emergency Response Commissions (TERCs)

TERCs have the same responsibilities as the SERCs.³

Emergency Management Agencies (EMA)

Every state has a law establishing a State emergency management agency. The head of the EMA is responsible for ensuring that the state plans for and is prepared to deal with large-scale emergencies and for coordinating the state's response during an incident.

Many local governments also have an EMA that helps coordinate the local response during a major incident.

State and county continuity of operations plans (COOP) typically fall under the jurisdiction of the EMA.

State Emergency Operations Center (SEOC)

Most states have a SEOC. A SEOC is a location where key decision makers gather information about the disaster, assess policy options regarding the event, facilitate field operations for emergency service and other disaster personnel, allocate and track resources, collect and disseminate information, and manage the response to the disaster. EOCs help form a common operating picture during an incident.⁴ Some EOCs also house a 911 center.

Telecommunicator Emergency Response Task Force (TERT)

TERT is the concept of communications-specific mutual aid between PSAPs to provide trained PSAP personnel during emergency situations. Unlike most continuity of operations (COOP) plans prepared by individual PSAPs to address specific threats to their own PSAPs, TERT involves providing qualified communications personnel to work in another PSAP. This requires coordination among PSAPs, mutual

² Federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), <<http://www2.epa.gov/epcra/state-emergency-response-commissions>> (Last accessed 7/24/2015)

³ There likely are parallel opportunities for Tribal 911 coordinators and PSAP managers to ensure that 911 is a part of their local emergency planning, emergency management, and EOC activities as is described herein for state and local 911 coordinators and PSAP managers.

⁴ U.S. Department of Homeland Security. <<http://www.dhs.gov/fusion-centers-and-emergency-operations-centers>> (Last accessed 7/24/2015)

aid consortiums, Emergency Management Agencies (EMA) from different municipalities, states and regions.⁵

Several TERT courses are available. Telecommunicators interested in being on a TERT fill out a form to take a class; a supervisor must also be involved. TERTs can be deployed during or following a disaster or a mass incident. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) uses them as an extra resource during an emergency.

Best Practices

This section sets forth simple best practices for 911 coordinators and PSAP managers to implement.

Local Emergency Planning Committees (LEPC)

LEPCs usually include local first responders and should include the local 911 coordinator or PSAP manager. The fire chief usually takes a leadership role in the LEPC and will know the schedule for meetings and exercises, and will have a copy of the local emergency operations plan (EOP). Local 911 coordinators or PSAP managers should:

- Find out when the LEPC meets;
- Attend LEPC meetings and take proactive steps to educate LEPC members about 911;
- Know when training and table top exercises are scheduled and ensure that training and table top exercises include 911, both in terms of having a seat at the table and in terms of the possibility that the 911 system might be impacted by the larger disaster;
- Obtain a copy of the county's EOP;
- Work with the LEPC to modify the EOP, if necessary, to ensure that it provides for (1) the participation of the 911 coordinator or PSAP manager as a resource during a widespread emergency and (2) for the loss of 911 as an emergency function;
- Ensure that any mutual aid memoranda of understanding (MOU) and the 911 center's continuity of operations plan (COOP) are attached to the county's EOP;
- PSAP managers and 911 coordinators are valuable resources for developing Incident Action Plans and "217 plans," which are a jurisdiction's communication plan showing what entities are assigned to what frequencies.
- Invite the LEPC chair to attend 911 board meetings and to visit the PSAP.

⁵ APCO and NENA. *Standard for Telecommunicator Emergency Response Task Force (TERT) Deployment*, APCO/NENA ANS 1.105.1-2009.

Local Emergency Operations Centers (EOC)

Local 911 coordinators or PSAP managers should:

- Take steps to ensure that official EOC activation procedures require him or her to be informed promptly when the EOC is activated;
- Work with the EOC team to formalize relations so that the 911 coordinator or PSAP manager is at the table during an EOC activation when any aspect of the 911 system itself is affected by the disaster;
- Work with the EOC team to implement a formal mechanism for relaying to the EOC information about the incident obtained from 911 calls. Information relay would be facilitated if the PSAP were co-located with the EOC;
- In states with one PSAP per county, consider co-locating the county PSAP in the EOC facility;
- Provision the EOC and 911 with a common mapping platform so that those at the EOC table during an activation know where 911 emergencies are occurring.

State Emergency Response Commission (SERC)

State 911 administrators should:

- Find out when the SERC meets;
- Attend SERC meetings and take proactive steps to educate SERC members about 911;
- Invite SERC members to attend state 911 board meetings and to visit a PSAP.

Tribal Emergency Response Commissions (TERCs)

Tribal 911 officials should consider working in unison/conjunction with State, County and Local 911 officials for synergy and common understanding.

Emergency Management Agencies (EMA)

It is understood that state 911 administrators would engage with the state-level EMA and that local 911 coordinators or PSAP managers would engage with the local EMA, if such exists.

State and local 911 administrators and PSAP managers should:

- Obtain a copy of the state or local emergency plan;
- Work with state or local emergency planners to modify the plan, if necessary, to ensure that it provides for (1) the participation of the state 911 administrator as a resource during a

widespread emergency and (2) what will be done in the event that the state's 911 system itself is affected by the emergency;

- Make sure that 911 is included in all training and table top exercises;
- Ensure that 911 is included in the preparation of after-action reports;
- Ensure that telecommunicators involved in a major incident are given access to the health and wellness professionals that assist with critical incident stress debriefing;
- Identify the most important things emergency managers need to know about 911. Topics could include, but are not limited to:
 - A description of state and local 911 governance structures;
 - How state and local 911 governance structures complement one another;
 - How 911 is funded at the state and local levels;
 - Eligible uses of 911 funding;
 - How the 911 (or NG911) system works;
 - How the 911 system has been engineered for redundancy and resiliency, including provisions for the roll-over or alternate routing of calls in the event of a system failure;
 - The role of 911 in emergency management;
 - 911 centers are the first First Responders, and are the first to know about an emergent event and the first to understand the scope of the event;
 - 911 call centers do not replace the need for an EOC;
 - The importance of accurate GIS data in 911, NG911 and emergency dispatch;
 - The legacy 911 infrastructure cannot process text, video and pictures;
 - Many 911 telecommunicators are not trained under the National Incident Management System (NIMS) or the Incident Command Structure (ICS);
 - Telecommunicator Emergency Response Task Force (TERTs) are valuable resources following a disaster or mass casualty incident and may be requested using the same process as other resource requests;

State Emergency Operations Center (SEOC)

State 911 administrators should:

- Take steps to ensure that official EOC activation procedures require him or her to be informed promptly when the EOC is activated;
- Work with the EOC team to implement a formal mechanism for relaying to the EOC information about the incident obtained from 911 calls. Information relay could be facilitated if a PSAP were co-located with the EOC;
- Coordinate in advance on the type of information that would be useful to an emergency manager for the various types of emergencies (e.g., HAZMAT, mass casualty, road closures), including report structure and frequency;
- Ensure that written protocols require emergency managers to keep 911 centers updated on the information that has been provided to the public, so that a consistent message is given to the public;
- Work with the EOC team to formalize relations so that the state 911 administrator is at the table during an EOC activation when any aspect of the 911 system itself is affected by the disaster;
- Work with the EOC team to determine whether a PSAP should be located in the EOC facility.

Telecommunicator Emergency Response Task Force (TERT)

State 911 administrators should:

- Adopt policies and, if possible, provide funding to support the establishment of TERTs⁶ throughout their respective states;
- Inform emergency managers at every level of government of the availability of TERTs;
- Ensure that TERTs are embedded in the emergency planning process and are addressed in emergency plans.

Local 911 coordinators and PSAP managers should:

- Develop, train and equip TERTs;
- Inform local emergency managers of the availability of TERTs;
- Ensure that TERTs are embedded in the emergency planning process and are addressed in emergency plans.

⁶ TERTs are assumed to comply in every detail with the NENA-APCO ANS *Standard for Telecommunicator Emergency Response Task Force (TERT) Deployment*.

Success Stories

Pennsylvania

The state 911 program exists within the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency (PEMA). The EOC within PEMA has a statewide view of where 911 calls are occurring in real time. This enables them to distinguish calls associated with a major emergency event from calls that are for more routine emergencies.

Eric Frein Man Hunt

In the fall of 2014, two Pennsylvania State Troopers, Corporal Bryon Dickson and Trooper Alex Douglass, were shot outside the Blooming Grove barracks around the 11:00 p.m. shift change. Dickson was killed, but Douglass survived and was able to drag himself back into the barracks. Someone called 911. Meanwhile, the shooter, Eric Frein, fled and became a fugitive.

The initial response to the 911 call was to dispatch first responders to the scene. In Pennsylvania, the shooting of a police officer is a mandatory reporting incident. Incidents requiring an immediate and mandatory report are sent through the Pennsylvania Emergency Incident Reporting System (PEIRS) to PEMA, which is the single point of contact for such incidents. The PSAP ramped up the search area and PEMA supported the state police in Pike and Monroe counties with scene management resources. Throughout the nearly two-month manhunt, PEMA's incident management team supported the base camps with generators, lighting, etc. It all began with the event that triggered a 911 call and everything else ramped up around it.

Washington

In Washington, the state 911 program is located in the EMA. When the state EOC is activated the state E911 office is at the table. In the emergency management world, telecommunications is Emergency Support Function 2 (ESF2). In Washington, the state E911 office handles this function until the other agency people can get to the EOC.

Catastrophic Landslide

In 2014, following weeks of heavy rains, a small, rural community was buried under a massive landslide. The landslide took out the phone lines to that community and several others, and because the cell providers used the landlines for transport, cellular communication was lost, as well. No one could call 911.

Restoring 911 was an aspect of the EMA's response to the disaster. Since the 911 program is in the EMA, coordination was streamlined. One member of the 911 program staff handled the urgent effort to get 911 back up and another member served as the liaison to the affected counties and the EOC throughout the response to the disaster.

Wild Fires

In 2014, Washington experienced a devastating wild fire. The PSAPs were the first to know there was a fire. They reached out to the fire departments and that was how they found out that some of the phone lines were out – the fire had burned down the telephone lines along a several-mile stretch of highway.

The Sheriff's office was responsible for emergency management in the affected county, and the chief deputy for communications was also the PSAP manager. The emergency plan provided for the relocation

of the EOC to a school outside of the affected area. The E911 program's staff began to work on rerouting calls around the destroyed infrastructure while the rest of the EMA personnel helped coordinate the response to the fire emergency.

Tsunami Planning

The director of the Washington E911 program is involved in planning the communications aspect of a Tsunami exercise scheduled for next year. He will be able to help emergency planners plan reasonably for the potential loss of the 911 network, which is land based and would be impacted by such a disaster.

Texas

Hurricane Isaac TERT Deployment

On 26 August 2012, in advance of Hurricane Isaac, Louisiana Governor Jindal declared a *State of Emergency*. This declaration enabled requests for support to be made of neighboring states under the Emergency Management Assistance Compact (EMAC), a nationally adopted interstate mutual aid agreement law. The Texas TERT leadership received informal word via email that a request for TERT support would be forthcoming from at least one Louisiana parish. On 29 August 2012, Hurricane Isaac made landfall in Louisiana. A few hours later, St. John the Baptist Parish made a request for an eight-person TERT through the Governor's Office of Homeland Security & Emergency Preparedness. On 30 August, that request was forwarded to the Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS).⁷ The state of Texas' TERT Coordinator and DPS processed the request, assembled the TERT, and prepared for its first-ever interstate deployment. From 30 August through 6 September, the Texas TERT members supported the Louisiana dispatchers, all of whom were personally affected by the disaster and at least one of whom lost everything.

New Hampshire

The New Hampshire E911 program exists within the Department of Safety. The E911 program and its Concord PSAP are located in the same facility as the division of homeland security and emergency management, the EOC, state police dispatch, and the Department of Transportation's traffic management center.⁸

The E911 program maintains a statewide GIS database of all roads and structures, which, although developed for everyday emergencies, is leveraged for non-everyday emergencies, such as weather-related disasters. For example, the E911 program provides all of the GIS support for emergency management planning, exercises and response; hazard mitigation mapping and planning; and post event field assessments and surveys. The E911 GIS administrator is present in the SEOC during an activation and provides mapping support for road closures, power outages, incident locations, blizzard damage, etc. Specialized utility infrastructure maps created for the Public Utilities Commission (PUC) in conjunction with a road closure app enables the PUC to work with the utilities to direct them to where repairs are needed during and after an emergency event.

During Tropical Storm Irene and Super-storm Sandy, use of the same GIS data by all entities involved in the response kept everyone on the same page. In the aftermath of a tornado in 2008, the E911 GIS staff worked with a Department of Public Safety helicopter pilot to create a polygon of the 50-mile path of

⁷ In Texas, the EMA is a division of the state department of public safety.

⁸ New Hampshire is in the process of hosting a tri-state EOC with the states of Maine and Vermont.

the tornado. They selected all the roads in that polygon, created field damage assessment maps, and then used the E911 data collection field crews to go out with emergency management crews to collect damage data.

Conclusion

Widespread emergencies are increasingly common, whether by the forces of nature or the acts of man. There is never going to be any kind of emergency involving emergency management that would not also involve 911. As a result, it is necessary for 911 and emergency management professionals to clearly understand that each discipline is interrelated and take positive advance steps to ensure that cooperation and collaboration occur before, during and after an emergency.