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Advantage

BEST PRACTICE

**Property Managers and
Emergency Communication**

While safety standards and regulations vary across the country, property managers for multi-occupancy sites should take the lead when it comes to emergency communication.

Even though individual employers at multi-occupancy sites are responsible for the safety of their employees, all tenants should work together, with the property manager, to ensure everyone knows who is responsible for what during an emergency. As the property manager is the common denominator, tenants will likely look to you to provide guidance and leadership. This will never be truer than in the development and execution of emergency communications plans.

ERMS has over 15 years of experience helping clients incorporate emergency mass notification systems into their plans. As a result, we have developed best practices for different situations and industries, including property management.

Emergency Communication – Plan and Prepare

Property and facility managers have much to consider when it comes to emergency preparedness. Their plans should incorporate: worst-case scenarios, consider the safety of employee, tenants, and visitors, as well as how to communicate with all affected parties before and after an emergency. Effective communication is critical. It can help reduce damages and injuries. Effective communication can also affect how quickly business returns to normal, following an incident, minimising downtime.

Communication effectiveness, consistency, and speed of delivery are of utmost importance to those impacted by an emergency on, or near, your properties. Prior to a crisis, property managers should develop a strategic emergency communications plan that is effective and easily executed. To do this you should ask the following questions:

- What type of communication should we incorporate into our emergency response plans?

  Message Template Development

- Whom should we contact and when?

  Stakeholders

- What is the best way for us to contact all affected parties?

  Device Selection

- Do I need to contact all affected parties simultaneously?

  Speed of Delivery

- Who should be responsible for sending and receiving emergency communications?

  System Administrators and Agents

Message Template Development

Creating a strategy to communicate during an emergency is a pragmatic process. The easiest, most effective, and fastest way to deliver a message is the goal. Using an emergency notification system (ENS) provides the functionality and flexibility to do just that. A notification system that allows the use of pre-developed, and easily modified, templates dramatically reduces the time it takes to send a message to multiple device types and to hundreds, or thousands, of recipients with just a few clicks.

Incident management and business continuity effectiveness is also enhanced with the development of commonly used message templates.

Pre-developed templates provide you with the ability to ensure that all communications are written in clear simple language, descriptive terms are consistent among all messages, and device selection is appropriate for each situation.

What type of communication will you incorporate into your emergency response plans? It could include:

- Routine Maintenance Information
- Operational or IT Interruption Notification
- Threat Identification (Pre-Event)
- Emergency Evacuation or Crisis Event Instructions
- Recovery Updates (Post-Event)

By creating templates for predictable and critical messages, as well as templates for events that are unexpected (flooding, power outages, severe weather…) your emergency communications team will able to communicate efficiently and respond quickly if a severe unforeseen event happens.

When developing templates:

- Use simple, clear and straightforward language.
- Ensure messages sent are in a language that recipients can understand.
- Plan to send messages at the right time before, during, and after a crisis.
- Chose appropriate devices for each template, according to the situation.
- Include messages that are pre-approved by the relevant parties.

Stakeholders

Part of an effective emergency communication plan is deciding who should be contacted and when, your recipients or stakeholders. Stakeholders are individuals who have a specific interest or concern about a particular event.

Your stakeholders will vary depending on the event type. Stakeholders can include:

Employees	All or some, for example:
	– Executives
	– Managers
	– Department specific (IT, Operations, or Communications)
	– Team specific (Business Continuity, Emergency Communication team, Emergency Response team)
	– employees located on a specific floor, at a specific location, or within a specific geographical area
Tenants	All, those on a specific floor, or at a specific location
Property Visitors	All, those on a specific floor, or at a specific location
Other	Investors, Social Media, Vendors/Suppliers, External Emergency Responders, Patrons

In addition to the individuals who are physically in the building at the time of the incident, the recipients of an emergency notification campaign should include stakeholders who may be on their way to work or even, other businesses in proximity. For example, if an active shooter is on the premises, a notification could alert them to stay at a safe distance, thus mitigating the consequences of the situation.

Device Selection and Delivery Speed

Just like stakeholders, the device selection will be dependent on the type of event. The devices, or combination of devices, will also depend on the event's reach, severity, and stage.

Reach represents the number of stakeholders affected. For example, if the event is limited to a specific floor in an office tower or condominium, you may only have a few hundred affected stakeholders. However, if the event is a large-scale wide reaching severe weather event, you could have tens of thousands of stakeholders that should receive your notification.

Severity varies from harmless business interruption events (for example, power outage, flooded bathroom, lack of heating or air conditioning, or maintenance issues) to life-threatening events (such as violence, fire, or severe weather).

The stage of the event can also help determine which device should be used. For example, a warning about an imminent threat or evacuation notification that could help save lives, or a status update about pending repairs and expected re-occupancy dates.

Devices used to send important, critical, or emergency communication include:

- Phones (landline, cellular and satellite)
- Email
- Mobile App
- SMS / Text Messaging
- Desktop / Interruption Alert

- Digital Signage
- Beacons / Siren
- Fax
- Pagers
- Social Media

Device selection, as well as severity, reach, and stage, will directly impact speed of delivery. For example, thousands of emails can be sent and received much faster than thousands of phone calls. However, during an emergency, not all stakeholders may have access to email.

Most major emergency notification systems will allow you to choose what devices to use from within your message template settings. By setting this up in advance, the speed by which your emergency communications team selects and deploy a notification will be increased.

In a building or high-rise, office phones or landlines should be used judiciously. Throttling thresholds should be set within the emergency mass notification system to ensure some phone lines remain free for outgoing calls when a campaign is launched.

Each device has its benefits and limitations that should be taken into consideration. For more detailed information about device selection, please refer to the Crisis Communication Device Selection – Best Practice.

System Administrators and Agents

The members of your team with emergency notification system access, who also have the responsibility to set up the system to meet your needs, are called Administrators. The creation of templates and sending notification functions will also be done by Administrators, and authorized Agents. These are individuals who have function-specific access to the ENS, such as sending notifications to particular groups or maintaining stakeholder data. Your emergency communication planning should include which Administrators or Agents are responsible for template development and message sending.

Just like templates and devices, you may need to assign Agents to specific situations or geographical locations. For example, depending on the event, you may want a local Agent to send notifications to local stakeholders. However, if the event is severe and limits a local Agent's ability to access the system (via any browser, phone, or mobile app), then a remote Agent may need to be assigned as back-up to ensure important messages are sent. System Administrators often are employees from departments such as IT, Business Continuity, Security, Emergency Response, or Operations.

System Agents can be any internal employee or external resource needed to ensure prompt messages and notification distribution during an emergency (for example, a marketing communications team member, building tenants who are part of their building's volunteer emergency response team or external communications agency employee).

The Importance of Emergency Planning

There is clear indication that having an ENS is almost mandatory for any line of business. However, simply having it in place is not what makes it valuable. Additional value comes from a comprehensive implementation of your ENS, which requires you and your team to think about your communication plan as a whole and develop clear policies and procedures that help ensure the safety of those on your property.

It is important to remember that the way you approach any critical or emergency situation and communicate during that event, will affect those who look up to you for guidance. A mass emergency notification system will alleviate great pressure, and will help focus your emergency personnel on assisting those in need.