FAILURE TO COMMUNICATE: MANAGING PUBLIC EXPECTATIONS DURING TIMES OF CRISIS

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Objectives

- How Incidents and Emergencies Have Changed Emergency Notifications
- Interfacing with the Community
  - Social Media vs Conventional Media
- The Difference Between Public Information vs Information Management
- Public expectation vs. actual risk (weighing the outcomes in notification)
  - Addressing the 3 most common points of failure
- AB1646- How the law changes the playing field
Mass Notification Today

- Fourth Screen Technology
  - Text/SMS
  - Email
  - Social Media
    - Twitter
    - Facebook
    - Instagram
    - NextDoor
- Door-to-Door (Oroville Dam)
- AM/FM Radio
- Conventional Media
- Print Media (outdated)
- Landline
- Sirens
What this means to YOU?

- Connectivity has grown from word of mouth to millions with a click of a button;
  - Instant access to information (good and bad);
- Information Delay can be Catastrophic
  - Everyone’s an instant journalist;
  - Tell your story;
- Fluidity of Information;
- The expectation has changed;
Mass Notification Circa 2013

- Consent Decree (1990) between the City and ExxonMobil regarding plant operations;
  - Community Warning Siren
  - RAN (Radio Alert Network)
  - Mass Notification
- Old system was a pay-per-use system
  - Low Frequency of use;
  - Bought out several times by competitors;
  - “Shelf” system for the “in-case of emergency situation”
  - Limited familiarly of what it did or how it worked
The Need to Evolve

- Identifying the need
  - Automated
  - Redundant
  - Web-based Solution
  - Integrated into daily operations
  - Geo-coding of maps, pictures, zones

- Evaluating How You Perform (Daily vs Emergency)
  - Internal Communications
  - External Communications
Case Study # 1:
ExxonMobil Refinery Explosion 2015
ExxonMobil Refinery, Torrance
February 18, 2015 ExxonMobil Refinery Incident

- Weather: 65 degrees, overcast, winds from the east, 7mph;
- Explosion Shook the City (1.7m seismic rating)- Station 3 thought it was an earthquake
- Initial call came in at 0850 1st alarm response to fire at ExxonMobil refinery;
- 0854 2nd alarm response called out;
- TFD arrived on scene, established UC with ExxonMobil FD staff
  - Health Hazmat CANNOT respond Code 3 (time delay)
Initial Report

- ExxonMobil reports an explosion in the ESP unit with an initial ground fire that was quickly extinguished by ExxonMobil personnel;
- Major damage to the ESP unit with 2 active gasoline leaks;
- Initial reports of workers missing;
- Product was quickly diverted to the flares;
- 3 minor injuries were reported and treated by XOM personnel.
Risk Determination

- Product identified quickly and determined no public threat by Torrance FD (backed by AQMD)*
- Functionality of the Flares worked as intended;
- Responding personnel did not have appropriate PPE
- Dropped barriers at Del Amo to prevent cars from driving through:
  - Crenshaw barrier left open based on readings and wind direction (BC call);
  - Incident contained, releasing units (approx. 0957)
More Information

- Torrance Fire Haz Mat (E96) assigned to monitoring
  - Little wind, plume straight up
  - No readings from Hazmat

- Main concern/Priority was accountability
  - Initial reports were 8 people missing;
    - Quickly resolved (8 people were decontaminated on-scene based upon fall-out;
    - 3 people treated and transported off-site by XOM personnel
    - **FD never treated anyone.**
Incident Timeline

• 9:11am: Internal Alert FYI
• 9:30am: Shelter-in-Place (internal)
• 9:40am: Reports of Ash in Neighborhoods
Incident Notifications

- **9:45:** Nixle Alert (Public Notification) indicating a 2nd alarm fire at ExxonMobil TFD/TPD on-scene, no air quality issues at this time
  - **0950:** TFD IC advised schools to shelter in place
- **10:05:** Nixle Alert (Public Notification) advising those in “affected area” to shelter in place *
- **10:14:** TorranceAlerts Public Notification (e-911) sent to identified impacted area to shelter in place as a precaution
  - *Message was a pre-recorded message and template modified to reference “precautionary” instead of mandatory*
Communicating with the Public: Conventional Media

- The Media (Conventional)
  - Within minutes, news media was covering the explosion;
  - Positioned overhead (helicopters), on each axis of the facility;
  - Each outlet was reporting something different.
Social Media: Who is Monitoring?

- Social Media
  - People started posting almost immediately with pictures
  - Conflicting information
  - Many reports of “ash-like” substance falling around the City and surrounding contiguous cities
  - City social media pages were slow to update and not all updated with the same information
Lessons Learned: Messaging

- Messaging Needs to Address the 3 C’s
  - Clear
  - Concise
  - Consistent

- Advanced Planning
  - Anticipate a community impact regardless if they are aware

- Messages must be sent in compliments of **TWO** using shape files
  - One to the area directly impacted with a specific action to be taken and provide follow-up;
  - One to the ENTIRE City, notifying them of the incident, where to GET information and where to REPORT information.
Lessons Learned: Messaging

- Develop Holding Statements
  - Do not wait to put information out.
  - Inundation of calls-WC/Dispatch
- Initial notifications: 5-10 minutes from the onset of the incident.
- Updates: 15 minutes for the first hour until you have more concrete information;
- Establish Media Staging IMMEDIATELY!
Lessons Learned: Response

- ALL responding agencies must participate in Unified Command;
- Messaging across every agency should stem from a Joint Information Center (JIC) to prevent confusion and mixed messaging;
- The request for emergency messaging should be requested via radio to public safety dispatch to create a timestamp (evidence collection);
- EOC was in the “hot zone” – need the capacity to have a virtual EOC, especially if asked to shelter.
Lessons Learned: Preparedness

• Sirens were not utilized (threshold was not met), but public expected it—education is key on the front end.

• Shelter-in-place means something different to each person. Need to be more specific as what the expected action is when a shelter in place is issued.

• *Think about your contiguous cities*
Immediate After Action Improvement

- **Templates**
  - Provides for standardization and consistency in messaging

- **Developed Activation Triggers**
  - Alert/Standby/JIC/EOC
  - Position Notification
  - Call Escalation
  - Who’s the PIO?

- **Alerting Social Media Handles and Pages**
  - @TorranceAlerts
Case Study #2:
Reports of Smoke at ExxonMobil
October 23, 2015

‘Shelter in Place’ Sirens Rattle Nerves Near Torrance ExxonMobil Refinery

- Off-duty firefighter reported smoke at refinery- 5:50pm
- Dispatch called XOM-unaware of incident
- TFD Haz Mat unit responds-5:59pm
- Barricades dropped -6:02pm
- TFD HazMat Unit arrives on scene 6:07pm
October 23, 2015

- Call made to EM at 6:03pm
  - FYI incident in progress
- Battalion Chief requests TorranceAlerts be sent to public via reverse 911 as a ‘shelter in place’ - 6:24pm
- Dispatchers were unable to send notification due to ‘system loading error’
October 23, 2015

- EM reached, message translated to be sent via reverse 911 group (e-911) to entire city - 6:30pm
  - Unofficial multiple sources confirming incident was stabilized and order had been lifted - 6:32pm
- All readings clear, units being released 6:37pm
  - Unable to reach the IC to confirm message to be sent
Improvement Items

- Education on Emergency Response
  - Physical deployment of resources, ICS, Unified Command;
  - Public sees incident, wants information now;

- Information will never be clear
  - Situation is changing faster than can be relayed;

- Field response MUST include a Notification Officer- or someone assigned to ENs;

- Infrastructure challenges are a REALITY in timely emergency messaging;

- Hot-zone GIS mapping layers must be imported to phase notification around the refinery.
Case Study #3: ExxonMobil Refinery FCCU Restart
Notification Requirements

- AQMD abatement order-mandated notifications
  - 48 hrs - 1 mile radius
  - 24 hrs - 1 mile radius
- Torrance Unified School District
  - Notification (30 schools regardless of location)
Challenges

- No definitive date;
- Language- who is directing the message;
- Notification of 1-mile vs entire City;
- Conduit for information;
- First time City was named as the resource for information distribution in a stipulated mandate for a private company.
Relying on Third Party Messaging

- Messages become delayed;
- No central point of contact;
- Game of telephone;
- Who is responsible for what?;
  - AQMD is the Point of Authority
- Staying silent when it's not your jurisdiction.
May 7, 2016

- Received word that the start-up would occur May 7, 2016 7pm-7am;
- 48-hr door hanger notices released
- 48-hour optional notification - entire city via TorranceAlerts
- 24-hr notice suspended;
  - Restart delayed 24 hrs
Rescheduled Restart Day

- May 9, 2016
- Social Media Incorporated into messaging
  - Unrealistic expectations;
    - Two-way dialogue is expected
    - Agency response vs personal response.
- Delays in start-up
- Media messaging via social media created uncertainty and unnecessary fear
Media Confusion

Angie Crouch @AngieNBCLA
@SouthBayFLARE @NBCLA Yes our assignment desk is monitoring. You can watch the SCAQMD website as well

South Bay FLARE Retweeted
christina gonzalez @cgfox11 1h
Reopening #exxon #refinery in #Torrance Are they handing out those safety suits to area residents? @FOXLA

ANDREA FUJII @CBSLAandrea
Getting ready to restart #ExxonMobil Torrance refinery after explosion. How concerned are people? @10 #KCAL9 #CBSLA

The Gov't of Japan
Internal Communications

- Ensure EVERYONE in your organization has the right information;
- PR needs to be send in conjunction with any external messaging;
Power Issues-March/Oct/Nov

- **Power Outage**
  - March, 2016- Mylar Balloon
    - “System Disruption”
  - September- Heavy Fog
  - October, 2016-Power Outage
    - 24 min. without power
    - Shelter-in-place order-30 minutes
  - No UPS
  - No independent power supply
Feb 18, 2017

- 0600 - Reports of Fire and Explosion
- 0645 EOC Activation
- 0657 - TorranceAlerts Sent - No release, just explosion and fire.
- 0803 - EOC Activation Canceled
Considerations/Assumptions

- Official Sources-Official Information
- Controlling the flow of accurate information, rather than surrendering to the rumors and opinions of the public.
- People care about
  - Peace of mind
  - Control
  - Survival and;
  - Protecting their family
Common Terminology

- Shelter-in-place is used interchangeably;  
  - Never meant for active shooter or police activity;  
  - Boston Marathon Bombings;
- Ensure your messaging is clear-avoid typos;
- Think about your risks- imagine the unimaginable- it can happen  
  - Japan  
  - San Bernardino

REDONDOBEACHPD: Bicyle Safety Tips: Help Combat Bicyle Thefts. click link for more information.  
[www.nixle.us/8Y6TS](http://www.nixle.us/8Y6TS)  
Reply with a friends # to forward
AB 1646: Developing Integration
Background: Challenges

Disaster after disaster, California keeps falling short on evacuating people from harm’s way

- Spotty notification systems across CA
- Different vendors, different platforms;
- 1646 Steering Committee and language interpretations
- Lack of Consistency with Preparedness Messaging
- Lack of notifications across the region
Alert SouthBay

- AB 1646: “Integrated Alerting and Notification System”
- Requires notification of “surrounding community around petroleum refinery's to be notified of an incident” to include:
  - Schools
  - Hospitals
  - Public Facilities
  - Transient and Special Needs Populations
  - Residential Care Homes
Alert SouthBay

- March 2019
  - El Segundo
  - Manhattan Beach
  - Hermosa Beach
  - Redondo Beach
  - Torrance
  - Palos Verdes Estates
  - Inglewood
  - Rolling Hills Estates
  - Rolling Hills
  - Rancho Palos Verdes
  - Gardena
  - Lomita
  - Hawthorne
Alert SouthBay

 Goals:

- Develop **integrated** alerting regardless of jurisdictional boundary for MAJOR emergencies;
- Develop **standardized** language and templates for emergency notifications;
- Develop consistent **training** for the region;
- Coordinate preparedness **education** and materials for regional access and distribution.
Alert SouthBay

- Organizational Structure
  - Regional Emergency Communications Manager
  - Governance Board (14 Cities)
  - Standard Operating Procedures
  - Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)
  - Credentialing Program
  - One Name, One Brand, One Portal
  - Training Requirements
Alert SouthBay

- Deployment
  - Implementation Set-up
  - Training
  - Regional iPAWS
  - SOP
  - Super-user Training
  - Training and Exercise Calendar
Looking Forward- Message Management

- Mobility will be key for the future;
- Monitoring Systems
  - GoogleAlerts - catching negative trends
- *Enhancements to iPAWS will greatly help with notification of targeted areas;
- SMART Technologies will enhance message delivery
- Integrating Networks;
  - MOUs, MOAs etc
  - AFN Communities
- Scalable Functionality - accuracy and granularity in messaging
- Social Media
  - We are connecting virtually the same way we used to connect through the local deli
Social Media

- The new “word of mouth” has changed
  - Reaching your targeted population
  - Connectivity through friends
    - Exposure
    - Retweets/posts (x25)
    - Conversations
    - Extended reach
      - Information travels, the good, bad, and inaccurate.

- And all this is happening from a Smartphone

- Put the best people you have in charge of social media
Traditional Media Enhances Social Media

- Posts generate “chatter”
- People can turn to traditional media with the use of social media
  - Use it to your advantage
Final Thoughts

- Be Genuine;
  - “Our thoughts and prayers”
  - Tell a story – greater impact

- Practice your plan
  - Plans change, modify as necessary.
  - Be careful about policy
Thank You