

Emergency Communications Planning

Communication with employees, contractors and/or the public during a pandemic is a vital aspect of an agency's overall pandemic plan. The ability to maintain continuity of operations during a period of unusually high absenteeism, as is expected with H1N1, is heavily dependent on whether or not an agency is able to maintain an open line of communication. A pandemic can effect the workforce and, in turn, the infrastructure in unique ways. For this reason, a quality communication plan needs to be fluid enough to address any issue caused by a pandemic, despite its severity.

The following are some critical questions that should be thoroughly considered when developing your agency's communication plan:

- In what ways will you communicate your emergency plans with co-workers?
- How will you communicate with your employees and/or customers? How will they communicate with you?
- What implementations are in place that allows employees to continue operating?
- Who is the overall decision-maker that will activate the emergency communication plan?
- Who is responsible for maintaining alternative means of communication?
- Who is responsible for monitoring the impact of the pandemic and disseminating any new information to employees?

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security recommends involving co-workers in preparedness planning. One of the best methods of assuring your agency's recovery is to provide for your co-workers' well-being. Communicate regularly with employees before, during, and after an incident.

1. Involve co-workers from all levels in emergency planning.
2. Use newsletters, intranets, staff meetings, and other internal communication tools to communicate emergency plans and procedures.
3. Set up procedures to warn employees. Plan how you will communicate with people who are hearing-impaired, have other disabilities, or who do not speak English.
4. Set up a telephone call tree, password-protected page on the company website, email alert, or call-in voice recording to communicate with employees in an emergency.
5. Designate an out-of-town phone number where employees can leave an "I'm OK" message in the event of a catastrophic disaster.
6. Encourage employees to have alternate means and routes for getting to and from work.
7. Keep a record of employee emergency contact information with other important documents in your emergency kit and at an off-site location.
8. If you rent, lease, or share office space with other businesses, it is important to communicate, share, and coordinate evacuation procedures and other emergency plans.
(Info taken from: <http://www.flu.gov/professional/pdf/cikrpandemicinfluenzaguide.pdf>)

Helpful Websites:

<http://www.flu.gov/professional/business/toolkit.html>

<http://emergency.cdc.gov/cerc/pdf/CERC-SEPT02.pdf> (Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication – CDC)

<http://www.ready.gov/business/downloads/sampleplan.pdf> (Business Continuity Plan Template – Ready.gov)

<http://www.flu.gov/professional/pdf/cikrpandemicinfluenzaguide.pdf> (U.S. Dept. of Homeland Security Pandemic Influenza Plan)