

# CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS GUIDE

## STREAMLINE YOUR COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY DURING THE UNEXPECTED

Advance preparation in key areas enables you to respond faster and can have a positive impact on your organization's recovery and employee safety. Below, we've compiled some simple steps you can take to be as prepared as possible to communicate effectively during any crisis.

### 1: CREATE A CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS TEAM (CCT)

When facing the unexpected, the flow of information should be consistent and organized in order to avoid mixed messages. Identify members of your organization who should act as the CCT should the need arise, and make sure that they have been trained on how to properly communicate with internal and external stakeholders. Be sure to include various executives and managers in the CCT to take key roles such as Official Spokesperson, Internal Communications Manager, Employee Liaison, Social Media Manager, Researcher/Writer, etc.

### 2: DETERMINE THE CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS TEAM LOCATIONS

Members of the CCT could be needed in multiple locations during an emergency. These locations could include emergency operations centers, media centers or branch offices. As with other areas of your Crisis Response Plan, these locations should be evaluated and designated with the unique needs of your organization in mind.

### 3: IDENTIFY YOUR AUDIENCE GROUPS

Identify the audience your organization needs to reach during a crisis in order to more effectively and proactively communicate the type of information each segment needs in the case of an emergency. Your audience may include employees, vendors, customers, or other stakeholders.

#### TIP

Regroup Mass Notification enables you to pre-configure unlimited groups for sending mass notifications within seconds. It's easy to keep group contact data up-to-date with features such as our automated API integrations with leading employee and student information systems.

### 4: TAKE AN ALL-HAZARDS APPROACH WHEN ANTICIPATING CRISES

A common mistake many organizations make is not taking an all-hazard approach when formulating responses to crises. Take time to formulate possible responses to various possible situations when the CCT is calm and clear headed, instead of trying to figure out an appropriate response in the middle of a crisis. These might include severe weather, network outages, acts of violence, or many others depending on your location and organization.

#### TIP

Keeping people informed and safe in any scenario is our shared mission with you. Regroup offers clients simple templates that your organization, university, business or community can set up in advance to assist in responding to a variety of the most common scenarios we've seen in over a decade of helping clients send emergency notifications.



## 5: IMPLEMENT AN EASY-TO-USE MASS NOTIFICATION SYSTEM

Having a means to quickly reach your recipients using their preferred contact methods is a necessity when it comes to crisis communications. Using email or time-consuming call-trees as the only methods to alert of an emergency has been proven ineffective. A true emergency notification system like Regroup's offers several customizable messaging capabilities and allows you to send alerts much faster with only two clicks. Our cloud-based platform also facilitates real-time two-way communication and even enables you to relay critical information during power outages or when cell towers are down using our free mobile apps.

## 6: USE YOUR ONLINE PRESENCE

When looking for information, most people naturally gravitate to checking organizations' social media accounts and website. Your stakeholders will likely do the same during a disruption of normal activities due to an emergency or crisis. Be proactive and draft social media posts, blogs, press releases and other communications that can help spread the word in the event of a widespread emergency like severe weather. Ensure that your online presence will be kept up-to-date by assigning this important task to a member of the CCT.

## 7: ESTABLISH MONITORING & INFORMATION GATHERING PLANS

A key component of crisis communications strategies is getting information back from others in the organization during and following a crisis. Establish monitoring and information gathering plans so the CCT knows where to get up-to-date information during an emergency that will allow members to prepare accordingly, adapt strategies, and send help where it is most needed.

### TIP

Regroup's two-way communications enable recipients to respond to requests for status updates or more information from wherever they're located. Our easy-to-use reporting dashboard combines responses into one location so CCT members can receive, read, and respond to them quickly.

## 8: CONDUCT REGULAR DRILLS TO FINE-TUNE THE CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

It's extremely important for the CCT to regularly conduct practice drills to ensure everyone is familiar with the role they will play during an emergency. By practicing responses to real-life scenarios, your Crisis Communications Plan can also be fine-tuned and improved upon. Drills should include everyone who would be involved in safeguarding the organization and its members, and should consider challenging circumstances like power outages, network outages, and the possibility that some CCT members may be unavailable in a real emergency.

## 9: BUILD IN POST-CRISIS COMMUNICATION PLANS

Planning for the moment an emergency strikes is invaluable, but what about 3 days after the hurricane hits, or hours after an office fire has been extinguished? Thinking ahead about how to recover from a crisis and return to normal is just as important. The CCT should be prepared to release updates on when and how your organization can return to normal. Being prepared for best- and worst-case scenarios can save valuable time, reduce anxiety for employees, and ensure business continuity and optimal organizational resilience.

## 10: ANALYZE YOUR CRISIS RESPONSE PLAN & COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

After a crisis, the CCT needs to analyze which procedures were effective and refine plans for how to respond to future crisis situations. Depending on the type of crisis you faced, a simple report with the findings by the CCT could be a proactive way to show others you take the incident seriously and have safeguards in place to avoid that type of crisis from ever occurring again. A mass notification system like Regroup that has built-in reporting can help with evaluating the effectiveness of all communications before, during, and after a crisis, making it easier to document efforts and refine your plans following an incident.



# EMERGENCY DRILL CHECKLIST



DRILLS AND SAFETY EXERCISES ARE ESSENTIAL COMPONENTS OF SUCCESSFUL EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE PLANS. STEPS FOR SUCCESS IN EXECUTING A DRILL INCLUDE PRE-PLANNING, CONDUCTING THE EXERCISE, AND COMPLETING AFTER-ACTION DEBRIEFING.



THIS DOCUMENT WILL HELP YOU PLAN AND EXECUTE EFFECTIVE, LIFE-SAVING EMERGENCY DRILLS.

## 3 REASONS WHY EMERGENCY DRILLS ARE IMPORTANT:

### PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT:

While your security teams might be ready for the worst at all times, most people aren't. Practicing evacuation plans, communication protocols, and emergency response will prepare everyone within your organization, ensuring they follow the right course of action when an emergency arises.

### FIND AND FIX FAULTS IN ADVANCE

Besides the legal requirement to test alarms, conducting drills will help you make sure all of your hardware and software alerting systems are working as expected. Drills can help reveal ways that these systems can be better utilized, or even expose faults you didn't know existed.

### EVALUATE AND IMPROVE YOUR READINESS

After a drill is conducted, your organization may find "weak spots" when it comes to emergencies. A drill is a perfect way to see what needs to be tightened up. You may need better exit lighting, beacon alerts, a contingency plan, or to address gaps in employee knowledge on how to respond to various situations.



# CHECKLIST TO PLAN AN EFFECTIVE DRILL

- ✓ **CONDUCT AN ORIENTATION MEETING**  
Orientations are an excellent first step to ensuring all staff members understand emergency drill protocols.
- ✓ **ASSIGN ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**  
Assign and clarify roles for communication, response, and other organizational needs.  
People who have been assigned critical roles can be evaluated during different types of simulated events.
- ✓ **REQUIRE PARTICIPATION FROM EVERYONE**  
Emergencies don't target only those who have been trained on how to respond. Include everyone in your organization to be sure they're all as prepared as possible.
- ✓ **COORDINATE WITH LOCAL PUBLIC SAFETY OFFICIALS**  
States and various industries have different sets of requirements for emergency preparedness drills. When necessary, or when it makes sense, include local public safety agencies in your drills to simulate actual response times. In many cases, they have helpful advice on how to conduct the best drill possible.
- ✓ **CONDUCT SCHEDULED AND UNSCHEDULED DRILLS**  
Consider conducting unscheduled drills at times when they're not expected. You may be surprised at how many additional faults or weaknesses these unscheduled drills may reveal!
- ✓ **SIMULATE UNUSUAL SITUATIONS THAT CAN OCCUR DURING AN ACTUAL CRISIS**  
A standard fire drill is fairly simple to conduct, but what if people have medical needs or a stairway is inaccessible during a real fire? Brainstorm and include unusual scenarios in your drills to bolster your confidence that a real emergency will be handled well.
- ✓ **TEST EMPLOYEE AND VISITOR ACCOUNTABILITY PROCEDURES**  
Accounting for employees and stakeholders following an evacuation is critical. Any confusion could result in delays rescuing anyone who is trapped in the facility or may lead to unnecessary search and rescue operations.
- ✓ **TEST WARNING AND NOTIFICATION PROCEDURES**  
During an actual emergency is the worst time to discover gaps in warning and notification procedures. Make sure alarms are working and can be perceived by everyone in your organization.
- ✓ **PERFORM A POST-DRILL DEBRIEFING**  
After-action reports provide an opportunity for a detailed analysis of drills. It is important to document the process, and identify successes, challenges, and failures.



# REGROUP FEATURES TO USE DURING DRILLS

## POLLING

Leverage polling and surveying capabilities to take a headcount and confirm the status of your participants.

## TWO-WAY COMMUNICATION

Use Regroup's free AlertManager mobile app to communicate back and forth with security team members or designated safety officials during the drill.

## GEO-TARGETED MESSAGES

Practice drawing boundaries around map locations and ensure your employees and contacts have Regroup's free AlertMe app installed so you can message them based on exact locations if a real emergency ever arises.

## MULTI-CHANNEL COMMUNICATION

Find out what works best for your organization by sending messages through email, text/SMS, digital signage, on-site speakers and more.

## REMEMBER: AMERICANS WITH DISABILITY ACT



**BE ADA  
COMPLIANT**

Many traditional emergency notification methods are not accessible to or usable by people with disabilities. Those who are deaf or hard of hearing may not hear radio, television, sirens, or other audible alerts. Those who are blind or vision impaired may not be aware of visual cues, such as flashing lights. Your warning methods should ensure that everyone will have the information necessary to make sound decisions and take appropriate, responsible action. As a best practice, use a combination of visual and audible alerting methods rather than relying on one method alone.



Visit our website for more information on how our reliable, easy-to-use and effective mass notification system can help with your organization's critical communication needs.

[www.regroup.com](http://www.regroup.com)