Role of Communication and Coordination in Emergency Preparedness and Response

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Agencies Involved

- State Government
- Municipal Authorities
- Fire Services
- Meteorological Agency
- Key Hospitals
- Important Services (Metro, City Bus Service)
- Power Companies
- Water Boards
- Telephone Service Providers

Communications in Normal Times

- Regular Meetings of SDMAs / DDMAs
- Agency-wise Contingency Plans
- Inter-agency Contingency Plans
   --(Standard Operating Procedures)
   -- (Inventories)
- Preparedness Meetings
- Mock Drills

Communications During Emergencies

- Emergency Coordination Meetings at Higher Levels
- Written Directives to deal with Emergency Situations
- Representatives of Agencies in EOCs
- Meetings in the EOCs
- Communication Among the Agency-specific Control Rooms
- Logs to be maintained in the Control Rooms
- Distribution of Minutes of Meetings

Communications At the Emergency Site

- Set up a Coordination Office at Emergency Site (Ward Officer, Local Agency, etc.)
- All the agencies work through the Coordination Office (Meetings, Reportings, etc.)
- Set up basic communication facilities in the Local Coordination Office
- Coordination Office needs to be linked to the EOCs and other key offices

Communications With Leaders and Heads of Departments / Agencies

- Each department / agency should have their protocol of internal communications
- All the departments / agencies should meet frequently and make a common assessment of the situation
- Situation Assessment needs to be made available widely
- Shorter / Simpler agenda, brief meeting notes, and clear directives
- Precise Information needs to be conveyed to political leaders

Inter-Agency Coordination

- Some agency needs to be playing the role of a coordinator
- Coordinate on essential priorities; it need not become meddling in matters of other agencies
- Provide necessary help so that agencies can perform their necessary functions (transportation, equipments, etc.)
- Do not run down or criticize other agencies; maintain a helpful and supportive attitude
- Present a unified picture of the responders: Well-integrated, sharing a common purpose and goal

Communications with Media

- Designate people to brief press; it should only be authorized press briefing
- Convene Press Briefings on Situations (all the information needs to be provided in a clear way)
- We do not need to know everything; there would be uncertainties and contingencies
- Suggest the information that must be disseminated widely
- Provide the information upon sources where we can get more information

Community Outreach

- Leaders should address the people; it has a salutary impact
- Provide information through Television, Radio, Internet and print media
- Upload the information upon Web site on a continuous basis, and appeal to the people to check the web site for regular updates
- Provide information locally through community meetings, RWAs, and local organizations
- Distribute leaflets, briefings, and involve people in the dissemination of information
- Make a specific appeal against rumours, unauthorized news, etc.

Various Attributes of Communication

- Timeliness: Up-to-date Information, it is timely enough to be used for a specific task
- Accessibility: degree to which information is available, easily obtainable or quickly retrievable when needed
- Completeness: aim for getting complete information, incomplete information can be hazardous
- Accurate: the degree of correctness and precision with which information can be obtained and distributed
- Format: should be presented in a format that is uncomplicated and easily understood by the end-use

State of Emergency Communications

- "Firefighters, police, and other emergency personnel at the Pentagon and in New York City could not find common radio frequencies to communicate—cell phone networks flooded frequencies and further hindered information flow in the hours following the 9/11 attacks" (Riley, 2003).
- White House report on the failures of the Katrina response mentioned it as "inability to connect multiple communication plans and architectures clearly impeded coordination and communication at the federal, state, and local levels"

Communications Network

- Communications Network, connecting all the agencies, with secure and priority lines
- Multiple Communication Channels: Landline, Mobile telephony, Satellite Networks, VHF and HF Wireless Sets, WLL, Internet, etc.
- Robust communication channels; need to be checked for their redundancies and protocols be laid down
- Frequencies, phone numbers, and call signs need to be known to all the agencies

Increasing Influence of Social Media

- Set up Face Book and Twitter Accounts
- Provide Information Updates through Face Book and Twitters
- On-line discussion can be organized to address peoples' concerns
- People should be conversant with the medium, and how messages need to be given
- Should go along with the active and dynamic management of web site