

This Annex Suggests General Considerations and Best Practices for creating a Communication Plan that will be effective in an Emergency.

ARE YOU READY?

- *If there is a power outage, how will personnel communicate?*
- *How will personnel and visitors know if there is an emergency situation?*
- *Who will speak or respond to the media and public about an emergency?*
- *Are there communication code words for different types of emergencies?*

Basic Steps When Writing and Implementing Communications Contingency Plans

1. **Conduct Preparation and Development**
2. **Draft the Communications Section of the Contingency Plan**
3. **Develop Personnel Training for Emergency Situations**
4. **Schedule Training, Testing and Subsequent Evaluations**

- *Communications: the ability to pass information to others.*
- *Communication Modalities: equipment used to convey information.*
- *Public Information Officer: spokesperson conveying news and information for the facility.*

Communication is one of the most significant elements of a contingency plan and should include internal and external strategies. It is important also for a facility to have a single spokesperson communicating to the public. 'Communication always fails' is an emergency management truism meaning that communication is often the weak link in an emergency.

A compromised communication system can evolve into a dangerous situation for the public and potential responders, especially during a catastrophic event, and also diminish the ability to provide the appropriate animal care. Multiple or redundant modes of communication will decrease the likelihood of complete failure. For example, spotty outages may require an e-mail or text message to convey that phone connections are out and that communication should flow through e-mail or texting until coverage returns. Written contingency communication strategies will alleviate confusion during any type of emergency.

1. Conduct Preparation and Development

Before drafting a contingency plan for communications, the Facility Contingency Planners (FCPs) and/or stakeholders need to identify the current mode(s) for exchanging information and determine how these modalities are, or can be, integrated into the larger local, state and federal emergency response. The following pages offer a variety of options to consider while evaluating and developing this portion of the contingency plan, and training strategies.

- Assemble the planning team and collaborators associated with communications (see page 3).
- Identify the potential risks. See *Risk Assessment Annex*.
- Identify and evaluate the current plan(s), communication needs and alternative forms of communication during an emergency.

2. Draft the Communication Section of the Contingency Plan

After identifying and evaluating the current standard operating procedures and backup plans (1) draft or edit the contingency plan including internal and external communication strategies, (2) monitor the progress of writing the plan and (3) develop a system for application of the plan. Best practice information for the following topics is provided beginning page 3.

- Internal and External Communication Devices and Technology*
- Communication Protocols and Considerations*
- Emergency Communication Procedures*
- Monitor the Drafting and Implementation of the Communication Plan*

3. Develop Personnel Training for Communication Emergency Situations

- Develop the initial training program to respond to the contingency plan. See Training Considerations on page 7.
- Train personnel on equipment and procedures for communicating during an emergency.
- Conduct initial training exercises and drills to implement emergency procedures and to locate alternative communication equipment.

4. Schedule Training, Testing and Subsequent Evaluations

- Build a communications training strategy based on need and current level of training
- Schedule long-term training exercises and emergency drills for all personnel. Schedule testing of equipment. See considerations on page 8.
- How did the plan work? Conduct post-event evaluations and modify the plan, as needed.
- Revisit the plan as new equipment is acquired.

The following considerations are good business practices that may be helpful while developing the Emergency Communication Plan. Contingency plans will vary depending on the size of the facility, number of personnel, types of equipment and other factors. Not every consideration is appropriate for every managed wildlife facility.

Stakeholders and Experts to Consult on the Communication Protocols and Alternative Actions

Stakeholders can assist in drafting or updating a well thought out emergency communication plan. Meet with experts to discuss the best practices for maintaining lines of communication and backup modes of communication, and their knowledge for integrating the plan into the larger local, state and federal emergency management plans.

- Who are the potential stakeholders and external consultants?
 - Facility management, owners, operations and security detail
 - Veterinarian
 - Critical service providers
 - Regulatory agencies
 - Local emergency management agencies (e.g., city officials, county officials, law enforcement, fire department)
 - Information technology specialists

Internal and External Communication Devices and Technology

To develop or update a plan, the FCP must know (1) how people communicate with others and (2) what types of equipment are viable alternatives while in an emergency situation.

- What are the primary and backup modes of communication for conveying information to the following groups?
 - Other personnel
 - Management
 - Law enforcement, fire, etc.
 - Local jurisdiction(s)
 - Service providers
 - Local utilities
 - Off-duty personnel
 - Vendors
 - MOU/MAA partners
 - Media
 - Donors and benefactors
 - Family members of on-site staff
 - Volunteers
 - Regulatory agencies
 - Insurance company/agency
 - Neighboring businesses and residents
 - Other institutions and organizations
 - Other
- What type(s) of hardware or communication modalities and technology are available to the facility? Where is each located? Is access restricted? Do any of them utilize auto-dialing technology?
 - Manual
 - Bull horns
 - Briefings and face-to-face
 - Hand signals
 - Messengers
 - Whistles
 - Written information

- Phones
 - Wireless
 - Smartphone
 - Text messaging
 - Land line – hard-wired requiring power
 - Land line – hard-wired not requiring power
 - Satellite
 - Solar
- Computer-based
 - Internet
 - Intranet
 - Instant messaging (IM)
 - Video conference
- Radios
 - 1-Way
 - 2-Way
 - Walkie-talkies/CB
 - Radio frequencies/tactical channels
 - Trunked radio system
- Miscellaneous
 - Public address
 - Automated calling systems
 - Facsimile
 - Signage
 - Americans with Disabilities warning requirements (e.g., flashing strobe)
 - Pagers/Beepers
 - Amateur Radio Operator
 - Broadcast television
 - Closed-circuit television
 - Other

Communication Protocols and Considerations

Communication is the most important tool for any facility. The following considerations provide best practices for passing information and maintaining a state-of-readiness for emergency situations.

- Is 24-hour contact information kept up-to-date? See Administration Annex.
 - Facility security and key personnel
 - All personnel
 - Local jurisdictions
 - Neighboring businesses/facilities
- Is a phone tree network organized so that information can be quickly and easily communicated to all personnel? To volunteers? Others?
- Are special communication code words used to alert personnel of an emergency on grounds? (This is not suggested for visitors.)
- Has a standardization of codes been established within a facility? When interacting with first responders, local law enforcement and state jurisdictions the use of ‘plain language’ should be used to avoid miscommunication.
 - For example, Code 1 at a facility may mean dangerous animal escape while a Code 1 to local law enforcement may mean routine – no lights or siren.
- To provide up-to-date internal communication, does the facility utilize email or an intranet?
- Is a public address system used to broadcast important information such as a change in closing time, special announcement or instructions during an emergency?

- Are there alternative forms of communication or protocols for non-English speaking visitors?
- Are special listening devices available for hearing-impaired visitors or other protocols?
- Is signage located in critical locations and in multiple languages (or graphic aids), such as emergency exits or shelters, to communicate safety-related information?
- Is a Facility Information Officer designated as the official voice of the facility and sole person for media contact? See Administration and Business Recovery and Reimbursement Annexes.
- Is an emergency communications expert designated as a resource for the Facility Incident Commander (FIC) and the veterinarian, if applicable, while in an emergency situation?
- Does the facility monitor for potential emergency situations occurring outside the facility?
 - Police scanners
 - Weather radio (NOAA)
 - Community network
 - Radio
 - Television
 - Social media
- Is a nexus, or outside-the-area call-in number, established in the event of downed phone lines for either conveying or receiving information for the following? See Lessons Learned.
 - Personnel
 - Family members
 - Media
 - Sister facilities
 - Board members
 - Donors
 - Volunteers
 - Other institutions or organizations
 - Associations
 - Others
- Is a website managed so as to allow rapid updates to provide the public with up-to-date information and emergency contact numbers?
- If multiple jurisdictions might respond for an emergency, are they able to communicate on the same frequency (e.g., Interagency Radio Communications System (ICIS), party-line architecture or Statewide Communications Interoperability Plan (SCIP))?¹
- Are all modes of communication maintained in good working order and inventoried?
- Are recharging devices for the different communication modalities maintained in good working order? Where are they located and who has access?
- Are backup generators maintained in good working order? See Facility Operations Annex.
- Are backup communication devices held in reserve and stored safely in case of a catastrophe or long-term shelter-in-place event?
 - Texting devices and batteries
 - Hard-wired non-electrical dial-up telephone with an active jack
 - Communication devices stored in a Faraday Cage See Administration Annex.
- Are agreements signed with communications providers so the facility will receive priority service for restoration and/or provisioning? See MOU/MAA Annex.

¹ Many public safety agencies cannot talk to each other because they still have critical barriers to interoperability. Since September 11, 1996, states have been working with the federal government to improve communications between agencies. See National Task Force on Interoperability report under References.

Emergency Communication Procedures

A breakdown in communication may begin with a power outage. Typically, these can be repaired within hours, but catastrophic events may cause outages lasting for days. Having a written backup plan for how to pass on important information and multiple modes of communication are paramount for both large and small facilities.

In catastrophic emergencies, zoological facilities that are public venues may receive assistance from local emergency management officials in establishing effective communication. Following are best practice considerations for all facilities.

- Do all personnel know the chain-of-command for activating emergency communication procedures? See Administration Annex.
- If the public address system fails, is the next modality a bullhorn, which can be used to convey important information or notify all people on grounds of an emergency?
- If normal modes of communication fail, will other communication devices be utilized to notify off-grounds personnel?
 - Text messaging or IM, which usually functions without power
 - Automatic message dialer system
 - Social networks (Twitter, Facebook)
 - A third-party nexus
 - Special warning system
 - Other
- Are specific personnel assigned to contact the following and also instructed how to use alternative devices if normal communication modalities fail?
 - Off-duty personnel
 - Neighboring businesses and residents
 - Vendors
 - Donors and benefactors
 - Service providers
 - Family members of on-site staff
 - Volunteers
 - Other institutions and organizations
 - Regulatory agencies
 - Insurance
 - Sister facilities
 - MOU/MAA partners

Monitor the Drafting and Implementation of the Communication Plan

FCPs should monitor the progress of (1) the plan development; (2) drafting the plan and (3) developing a system for application of the plan.

- Who will be responsible for collaborating with the appropriate law enforcement agencies?
- Who will review or update the facility’s signed MOUs or MAAs? See Administration Annex.
- What is the timeframe for developing and writing this portion of the contingency plan?

- Are new equipment and supplies needed to follow the communication plan?
- Who will develop or adapt the training program and monitor the training?
- Where will the contingency plan be located and how will it be distributed to all personnel?

Training Considerations for Emergency Communications

Training exercises and practice drills will reduce potential risks. The following considerations relate specifically to communications. See the [Training Annex](#) for general training guidance.

Best practice emergency communication training considerations include:

- The preferred common terminology and plain language to clearly communicate an incident or instructions so that the information is understood by all receivers.
- Limit radio and telephone traffic to essential information only.
- Train personnel on the use of all emergency communication devices that they might encounter.
- Conduct a facility-wide practice event using a phone tree.
- Train personnel on emergency communication terminology such as codes.
- Provide new hires with emergency communication training as part of the orientation process?

Best practice emergency communication training considerations for the **Facility Information Officer** include how to:

- Avoid any miscommunication and inaccurate information
- Establish a communication hub
- Develop talking points to reflect the situation
- Liaise with Facility Incident Commander
- Liaise with media
- Liaise with first responders
- Liaise with jurisdictions and agencies
- Liaise with public information officer at the jurisdictional incident command
- Create voice messages for a downed system
- Communicate a 'needs list' to the community
- Utilize social media (Twitter, Facebook)

Sample Table-top Scenarios

Responses to emergency scenarios during a table-top exercise may vary depending upon the location of the ‘incident,’ time of day or night and the animals that might be involved. Develop and personalize multiple scenarios for discussions that reflect the facility and its environment, based on the Facility Risk Assessment. These could then be modified for drills and exercises. The following are sample communication scenarios.

- ❖ **Media:** An emergency occurs at the facility and an investigative reporter calls to find out what is happening.
 - What should be said and who should the caller be referred to for accurate information?
- ❖ **Texting:** The phone system and Internet are down and a co-worker has just collapsed.
 - Who should be contacted, how and what should be said?
- ❖ **Protocol:** An off-duty staff person hears sirens blaring in the vicinity of the facility and the sky is dark with smoke.
 - What communication modalities might work to make contact with the facility and receive instructions? Explain the processes.

Schedule Training, Testing and Subsequent Evaluations of the Plan

- Schedule facility-wide training for the communication contingency plan, after its completion.
- Adapt the new-hire orientation program to include the emergency communication contingency plan training.
- Determine the frequency and schedule a long-term training program for all personnel on emergency communication procedures. Include table-top drills and single exercises on various elements of the emergency procedures and full-scale exercises.
- Determine the frequency and schedule a long-term training program for appropriate personnel on how to use various alternative communication devices (modalities) and location(s).
- Determine the frequency and schedule a long-term testing program for all communication equipment and warning systems.
- After training exercises, or an actual incident, meet with facility personnel, local jurisdictional agencies, and appropriate stakeholders to evaluate the plan’s effectiveness and determine strengths and shortfalls or gaps; modify the Communications Plan, and training, as necessary.
- Research new technologies to improve communications.
- Meet with other institutions to discuss best practices for emergency communication.
- Revise the contingency plan, as necessary or when new communication equipment is acquired.

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