

How much time do you have to communicate with your citizens in an emergency?

Many types of emergencies can be a danger to your communities. Citizens look to local governments for instructions, guidance, and potentially life-saving information before, during, and after a disaster. Have you considered how long your local government has to communicate to your citizens in an emergency situation? Are you prepared to communicate to your citizens in a moment's notice?



Earthquakes

You have seconds. As of right now, there is no way to reliably predict earthquakes. Though you likely won't be able to communicate the risk before an earthquake strikes, there are many life-threatening hazards after an earthquake. You should be able to provide your citizens with instructions regarding dangers such as structure collapses, damaged gas lines, and potential aftershocks.



Tsunamis

Most tsunamis are caused by earthquakes. They can move at speeds of up to 500 miles an hour, so depending on the location of the earthquake and nearby coastlines, the time needed to communicate can be hours down to only minutes.



Active Shooter

You only have minutes to warn those in danger. These events usually affect a small geographic area such as a mall or an office building. Do you have the ability to warn those in the immediate area that they are in danger?



Blizzards & Hurricanes

Most storm systems of this nature are forecast days in advance. You should be able to prepare your citizens with needed communications before the storms hit.



Flash Floods

Though weather forecasts may predict the storms and rainfall that can cause flash flooding, many times the window to warn residents and travelers can be only minutes. Flooding is the leading cause of weather-related deaths in the U.S.



Tornados

On average, 1200 tornados hit the U.S. every year. The National Weather Service can predict tornado-prone weather systems days in advance and can issue watches for areas hours in advance, but when an actual tornado forms, you may only have minutes to issue a warning to residents to take cover.



Wildfires

Those familiar with wildfires know that these dangerous events can move and jump to new areas very quickly, trapping citizens and firefighters with little notice. Being able to communicate the location of a fire, its direction and movement, its wind speeds, and safe evacuation routes within minutes can save lives.



Terrorist Attacks

Though the federal government keeps local governments and law enforcement up-to-date on the terror threat level and specific threats, most attacks happen without warning. You will have seconds to minutes to warn citizens of where the attack is taking place and how to evacuate or avoid the area. Just like with an active shooter or other act of violence, having a plan in place to communicate the threat and suspect information can be critical.

How can you prepare to communicate during a disaster that can cause death and destruction within minutes?

- Have a crisis communication plan in place. In your plan, you should prepare in advance how to communicate for each of the disaster situations above.
- Prepare all of your citizens ahead of time. Share with them critical emergency preparedness tips, evacuation routes, and the channels of communication you will use to send them emergency alerts.
- As part of your crisis communication plan, have a mass notification system in place with the ability for citizens to sign up to receive critical information in emergency situations.
- Make sure that your mass notification system has the ability to integrate with the IPAWS system (Integrated Public Alert and Warning System). IPAWS was created by FEMA to communicate via the Emergency Alert System, the Wireless Emergency Alert system, NOAA, and other local systems such as sirens and digital signs. This means that an emergency alert will go out to all TV's, AM/FM radios, cell phones, weather radios and other systems without interruption.

Planning ahead for disasters can save lives in your community.