

ABLE, READY & WILLING

Best Practices for Personnel Accountability In a Crisis

U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) agencies know their most valuable asset is their people. So when incidents such as active shooters, blackouts, cyber attacks and natural disasters occur, it is imperative leaders account for the whereabouts and well being of personnel. Communication must happen rapidly and frequently in order for response to be effective and for operations to continue with minimal impact.

Even the smallest incident can have adverse consequences. An afternoon power outage, computer virus or wastebasket fire can be detrimental enough. A worst-case scenario like an active shooter, earthquake or pandemic can be highly disruptive.

Regardless of a situation's severity, management must come together to decide on a course of action. Employees must be accounted for and informed of the situation, and in certain instances, teams must be formed and quickly mobilized.

An enterprise-class mass notification service (coupled with industry best practices) can help DoD organizations meet the challenge, mitigating risk and its effect on people and processes. Here are a few key tips and best practices for utilizing notification and maximizing personnel accountability before, during and after a critical incident.

Plan for accountability.

Effective incident response hinges on the degree of planning conducted prior to the event. Strategies for dealing with a host of different scenarios should be well defined. Employees should understand their role in a crisis,

including the actions they should take to inform management of their location and status.

This may mean responding to a notification received over their mobile device, calling into an inbound message board, or notifying managers personally. Whatever the accountability requirement, workers should understand the plan, preferably having been trained and drilled on their required steps long before the incident.

Get the first message right.

For employees to respond appropriately they must first understand the situation. Knowing what has happened, what they are expected to do, and when the next communication will come is essential if they are to react quickly.

Construction of the initial message should follow these guidelines:

Message label.

Identification of emergency message.

Who's speaking or authoring.

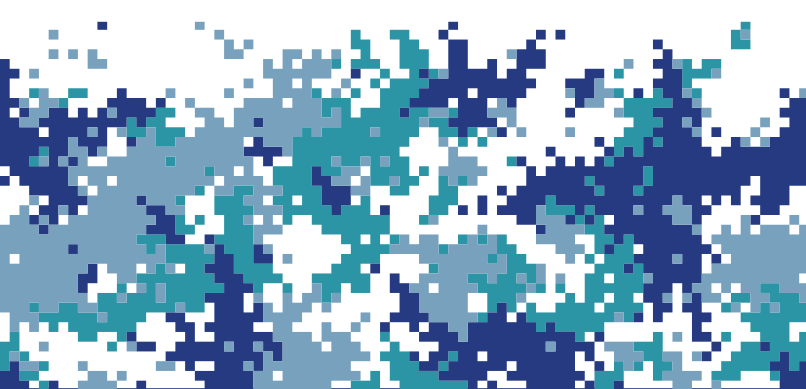
Identification of the organization's official who is issuing the warning. It is best for the initial message to come from a respected member of management; someone whose name or voice is instantly recognizable, confident and reassuring.

Intended recipients.

Statement of the targeted audience for which the message is intended. This should include specific division, geographic, or location identifiers.

What they should do, by when.

Explicit instructions on the actions employees should take and the desired timeframe. Also includes any statements describing actions staff are NOT to take.



Why they should do it.

A statement on the risks associated with the situation and what specific consequences may be faced if action is not taken.

Repeat.

Repeating of who the message is for, and what they should do within the required timeframe.

End: Message label and pending information.

Close out the message with the alert identification along with any instructions on where additional information can be obtained, or when workers should look for updated information as the situation changes.

Take a roll call.

Utilizing Send Word Now's Get Word Back feature, managers can determine who is safe and available to assist. Recipients can respond to a customizable question embedded into the notification message. Personnel responses are tallied in reports, allowing managers to make fast, sound decisions.

As a best practice note, in severe life/safety situations it is not recommended one of these responses be "I need help." The employee's location is not known, creating a false impression that assistance is on the way. Instead, the message should include instructions to call 9-1-1 or an inbound hotline to speak with someone directly for emergency assistance.

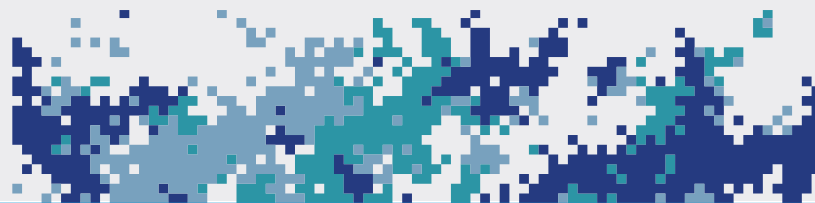
Keep the information flowing.

Personnel accountability is more than knowing employees are safe. It is also about ensuring workers are able to carry out their assigned duties and tasks to support agency resiliency.

Your employees are only human; they may feel fear and uncertainty in particular situations. If they don't have the information they need, they will inevitably make assumptions, listen to hearsay, and potentially turn to inaccurate sources for guidance.

Always send additional information as soon as it becomes available, and continually post updates to your inbound voice message boards. Your employees will appreciate the facts, and your operation will get back on its feet even faster.

It is an agency's responsibility to account for its workers' safety and whereabouts during a critical event. By planning and preparing for post-incident accountability, getting the first message right, taking a roll call, and continuing the flow of information throughout the course of the situation, the organization will better protect its most valuable asset, reduce liability risks, and help the agency recover more rapidly.



About Send Word Now

Headquartered in New York City, Send Word Now is the leading worldwide provider of critical communications solutions. The company's easy-to-use web-based and mobile solutions are deployed by businesses, government agencies, universities and non-profit organizations to ensure fast, effective communications when it is needed the most.

Send Word Now's enterprise-class notification system is capable of transmitting tens of thousands of voice and text messages in minutes, while providing a full audit trail for after-action reporting and follow-up. Its conferencing and workflow solutions keep employees informed and connected to the people and information they need.

