Incident Management & Communications

Top 8 Focus Areas to Mitigate Risk
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Delays and errors in operational communications happen every day – increasing recovery times, impacting revenue and increasing risk. To reduce delays and errors, it is crucial to ensure that the right people have the right information quickly. When managing an incident, ensure that you have a procedure that has been planned and tested for each specific incident type. Each incident type should have a prescribed set of processes and involved personnel – allowing you to resume regular operations quickly and efficiently and comply with organizational and industry guidelines.

In addition to identifying incident types and designing efficient processes, it is imperative that incident management strategies include enabling technologies that can mitigate the risk associated with interruptions in regular operating practices. Organizations must have a comprehensive strategy in place to identify and mitigate risks that can impact its ability to fulfill its obligations to clients and key stakeholders.

In this white paper, we examine the top eight challenges administrators encounter with incident management communications:

- Relying on Emergency Notification Systems to Manage Operational Incidents
- Human Error in Messages and Lack of Automated Processes
- Real Time Reporting and Analytics – Meeting Regulatory Timeframes
- Lack of Situational Intelligence at the Administrator Level
- Challenges of Sequential Manual Call-Outs
- Lack of Integration with Map-Based Information for Responders
- Challenges of Workforce Mobility
- Documentation of Communication for Compliance Purposes
Relying on Emergency Notification Systems to Manage Operational Incidents

It is not uncommon for people to blur the lines between Emergency Notification (ENS) and Incident Management, given that both share the same fundamental principle of quickly and reliably communicating critical information to individuals or groups. However, unlike ENS, which is often used in response to events that could not be planned for in advance, in Incident Management there are fixed processes that have been designed to mitigate the risks associated with common or predictable incidents. This rigidity ensures that processes are followed, efficiencies are achieved and all stakeholders are aware of the resolution status. Trying to use an ENS solution to manage incidents can lead to delayed responses, compliance issues, and increased operational risk.
The differences between incident management and ENS

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Emergency Notification Systems</th>
<th>Incident Management Solutions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Target Audience for Message</strong></td>
<td>People potentially impacted by an incident</td>
<td>Operational response team need to respond to an incident</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Purpose</strong></td>
<td>Protect life and safety of impacted audience</td>
<td>Initiate repair and response for triggering incident</td>
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<td><strong>Message Frequency</strong></td>
<td>Infrequent, as needed for emergencies</td>
<td>Multiple times per day, with several updates per incident</td>
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<td><strong>Compliance Fit</strong></td>
<td>Low – Generally limited to tracking of communication statistics</td>
<td>High – Tracking of all communications with logging, response confirmation tracking, incident journaling and exportable compliance reporting</td>
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<th><strong>Common Uses</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>✓ Disasters (flood/fire)</td>
<td>Coviding medical responses</td>
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<tr>
<td>✓ Terrorist Events</td>
<td>✓ Manufacturing issues</td>
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<td>✓ Active Shooters</td>
<td>✓ Health and Safety incident compliance</td>
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<td>✓ Severe Weather</td>
<td>✓ Cyber Security incident response</td>
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<td>✓ STEMI &amp; Code Alarms in Hospitals</td>
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<td>✓ Security incidents</td>
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<td>✓ Power outages</td>
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<td>✓ Pipeline Operations</td>
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Human Error in Messages and Lack of Automated Processes

Human error is inevitable; however, during incidents where the communication of critical information is of paramount importance, it must be minimized as much as possible. Human error can be attributed to many things, including stress, training deficiencies, or lack of information.
In time-critical incidents, such as power restoration operations at a power plant, it is paramount that all processes are followed to protocol and that critical communication is delivered effectively and according to plan. Because of the high-stress environment, the chance of human error interfering with these processes is relatively high. Decisions made under duress can often be compromised. In fact, according to Dr. Robert Chandler, communication expert and renowned author, a person’s reading comprehension level dropping four grade levels during a crisis situation.

By automating the communications process during an incident, we remove the risk of human error from the equation.

Communications plans, operations playbooks, and run books are often long and complex documents that can be difficult to quickly access or decipher during an incident. Automate as many processes and procedures as possible to improve communications performance during these critical times. This ensures that desired outcomes are achieved and that proper documentation is created. The value of automated responses cannot be overstated: the important reduction in risk exposure that can be achieved through automated responses can reduce response time and increase efficiencies for the organization. When managing a critical incident, these factors are paramount.

**Real Time Reporting and Analytics – Meeting Regulatory Timeframes**

Many organizations are bound to certain regulations that determine the timeframe in which they must communicate critical information to employees, customers, partners, and regulatory groups. In order to ensure that these timeframes are met, and to provide organizations with the concrete proof for compliance purposes, incident management systems should have real time reporting and analytics.

This not only provides administrators with valuable information regarding the success of their communications plans and execution, it also allows them to ensure that they are meeting all governmental and industry regulations regarding their communications. Additionally, to obtain greater insight into potential improvements for communications plans, the most robust incident management solutions allow for custom report generation that meet each organization’s specific communication needs.
Lack of Situational Intelligence at the Administrator Level

When an incident occurs, effective response and quality decision-making are dependent on a complete set of credible information about the incident. This requires situational intelligence at the administrator level.

Situational intelligence, which combines traditional situational awareness with collective intelligence, results in a dynamic process in which information is gathered, data is interpreted and information and updates are shared. Included in this process is two-way communication with resources on-the-scene of an incident, allowing administrators to verify and build on incoming information.

By building situational intelligence, administrators are able to gather information that is related to the incident that could aid in decision making and communication.

Examples of desirable elements of situational intelligence include:

- Responder availability
- Open incidents
- Message responses
- Delivery reports
- Incident analytics

With as much information about an incident as possible, administrators can ensure that they are communicating the right message to the right people at the right time, and are managing the incident as correctly as possible per the provided protocols.

Challenges of Sequential Manual Call-Outs

Some organizations still rely on sequential manual call-outs, or “phone trees.” This requires that personnel manually enter phone numbers one at a time to communicate information, relying on the recipients to then pass that information along in turn. By involving so many individuals in a very manual system, the communication process takes a significant amount of time. By using an incident management system, this entire process can be initiated by a single administrator and a few clicks of a mouse.
Additionally, by involving such high numbers of individuals in the communication process, the chance of human error is incredibly high. Incident management systems significantly reduce this risk that could potentially jeopardize the incident response.

**Lack of Integration with Map-Based Information for Responders**

Geographical information can be critical in managing incidents that occur beyond a single facility or building. Administrators may find it challenging to manage responders if they do not have access to critical map-based information and situational intelligence, including weather and news-feed data.

By integrating map-based information feeds into an incident management platform, administrators improve their situational intelligence and make better decisions when guiding responders in the management of an incident. Additionally, this integration allows for increased efficiencies as the decision making process is unified within the same platform as the notification and incident management tools.

**Challenges of Workforce Mobility**

Managing a mobile workforce adds an entire layer of complexity for administrators who are managing incidents and the mass communication required during this process. Employees are increasingly working from remote locations, whether they are travelling, commuting or working from home – a landline desk phone is no longer a reliable way to communicate information to the people who need it most.

By implementing an incident management system that allows for communication across multiple contact paths, including SMS, mobile, landline, email, fax and pagers, administrators can ensure that the right message is getting to the right people at the right time. This will improve the effectiveness of communications during incident management.

Additionally, with the proliferation of smart phones in the modern workforce, many employees or recipients have the ability to download applications that allow them to be notified via push notification as well as communicate information back to the administrators when requested such as confirmation of receipt, text, image and video data. This all has the potential to significantly increase the situational intelligence of administrators managing the incident.
Documentation of Communication for Compliance Purposes

Many organizations are required by law to have specific incident management protocols in place. The healthcare industry and energy/utilities industry are two common examples that are required to have certain communications standards in place in case an incident occurs.

By implementing a modern incident management system, all the communications processes (which are predefined to improve speed and reduce error) are documented for compliance purposes. In case of an audit or government inspection, these standards can quickly be produced to proof compliancy with industry standards. This saves significant man power in providing documentation and proof of compliance, which in turn saves money and improves operational efficiencies.

Conclusion

With advancing technologies, mass communication tools are increasingly being tailored for incident management across all incident types. Beyond simply offering legacy mass notification capabilities, however, these systems are specifically designed with incident management challenges in mind. When managing the communication of important information and response protocols during an incident, it is critical to follow the exact process that has been devised for each specific incident type.

Incidents that occur within standard operations require frequent, defined updates and are meant to improve operational efficiencies. These communications help save time and money in day-to-day functions, through reducing human error, providing automated access to resources, increasing situational intelligence, automating manual processes, and providing easy documentation of communications for compliance purposes. With these advancing technologies, incident management systems address these challenges, improve operational efficiencies and ensure safety and compliance for organizations across many industries.
About Everbridge

Everbridge provides industry-leading interactive communication and mass notification solutions to organizations in all major industries and government sectors.

Communication failures have historically plagued organizations in their ability to respond to and minimize the human, operational and financial impact of critical events and emergency incidents. Everbridge began with a shared vision: empowering a single person to communicate with any number of people as easily as communicating with one person to save lives, protect assets, minimize loss, and ensure continuity of operations. Everbridge brings technology and expertise together at every level for a complete solution. Everbridge solutions match your unique needs, from safety and survival during a crisis to cutting costs and achieving efficiencies in your everyday operations. Our understanding of mass notification and interactive communication challenges is leveraged in everything we do, from how we build our technology from the ground up to the expertise of the people we hire and best practices we share with the community.

We design the Everbridge system according to several key tenets:

- **Target the individual** – not the device. Everbridge has the most comprehensive notification system available, offering more than 30 contact paths that can be designated by incident type or by escalation steps.

- **Ease-of-use during any situation** – emergency or daily use – so even a non-technical person can communicate effortlessly and without anxiety.

- **Speed and reliability of communications.** Every second counts in an emergency. With global datacenters and an infrastructure unparalleled in security and reliability, the Everbridge mass notification system is designed for rapid and efficient communications worldwide so your message will always go through.

- **Universal accessibility** – with a fully managed system requiring no hardware, no software, no maintenance, and a flexible pay-as-you-grow model, organizations large and small have access to the same powerful communication capabilities.

- **Scalability** – the Everbridge mass notification system provides the ultimate flexibility in communication capabilities to meet changing needs in today’s dynamic environment. The Everbridge system is inherently scalable to grow with and adjust to the requirements of any organization quickly and without disruption to internal processes, infrastructure, or resources.

Visit [www.everbridge.com](http://www.everbridge.com) to learn more.