

911 & EMA in an Emergency



**Daniel J. Long
Director,
Calhoun County EMA**

Calhoun County EMA

- Unusual for a number of reasons:
 - *24/7 staffing*
 - *CSEPP (Chemical Stockpile Emergency Preparedness Program)*
 - *Focus on (1) Alert & Notification and (2) determination of Protective Actions and their dissemination*
 - *Full computerized dispatch consoles (2)*
 - *Ability to monitor all agencies within the county*
 - *However, no “911 screen”*

Calhoun County 911 District

- Up to 7 operators
- Multiple dispatch consoles
- Redundant & portable radio systems
- Backup power supply
- Positive pressure air system for WMD filtration
 - However, not a “hardened” facility (i.e., not tornado proof)

Communications Links

- CSEPP Hotline (works just like NAWAS)
- **Landline Telephone**
- Direct radio channels (EMA & 911 both have multiple channels to use for mutual aid)
- Microwave network link
- Calhoun County has 3 PSAP's
 - Only one active on a daily basis (primary 911)
 - One backup for 911
 - One reserved for Medical Dispatch in a community emergency/disaster (CSEPP)

Communications Links (cont.)

- Instant messaging
- Email
- Backup 911 center is within EMA EOC, so telecommunicators are “just down the hall” during a crisis relocation
- *If needed*: cell phones, possibly SouthernLinc, and VHF radio for direct contact in event of trunked radio system outage
- Backup siren system and TAR (tone-alert radio) controllers at 911 for weather events

Situational Awareness

- Agencies monitor the “Severe Weather Watch” web page
 - <http://www.srh.noaa.gov/bmx>
- Monitor NOAA all-hazards radio
- Monitor national news networks and The Weather Channel
- Both agencies switch to local TV stations during severe weather events
 - Situation awareness **IS** Standard Operating Procedure

911 “Heads-Up”

- 911 informs EMA of suspicious or unusual situations arising from weather, HAZMAT, etc.
- Allows EMA to analyze situation and put personnel on scene before situation escalates
- Calls relating to weather events may be directly transferred to EMA (i.e., “I saw a tornado”); ensures EMA gets all the info to pass to the NWS

911 “Heads-Up” (cont.)

- Certain situations trigger automatic EMA notification:
 - Structure damage during storms
 - HAZMAT of any nature
 - Situations requiring activation of volunteer SAR groups
- “If in doubt, call EMA so they can’t say we didn’t let them know.” – Good rule of thumb!

911 Situation Tracking

- During an event, especially if weather-related, 911 will track certain info for later EMA analysis and action
 - i.e., list of addresses reporting trees down, damage to structures, etc.
- Challenges:
 - Maintaining a current list
 - Clarifying what info is pertinent
 - Privacy & liability concerns
 - **TIME!** Dispatchers are too busy to fax or email info in real-time

911 Situation Tracking (cont.)

- Solutions:
 - Use instant messaging (can be logged and printed later if needed)
 - Pass on only what info is needed (i.e., only addresses and extent of damage)
 - Make a call transfer to an EMA operator if the situation is non-emergent and taking up a 911 telecommunicator's time (i.e., "Don't play the middle man if you don't have to.")

911 Permissions

- Dispatchers have written authority to call for mutual aid if a situation is obviously out of hand
- Can also activate SAR teams during a natural disaster
- Explicitly, dispatchers are permitted to make a “Judgment call” regarding resource activation if lives are on the line

Reasons for Cooperation

- Redundant notification
 - Weather events: Whichever agency catches a watch or warning first will call the other
- EMA maintains the county radio system
 - But 911 will be the first to notice a problem!
- Resource requests
 - Both agencies maintain lists of mutual aid groups, special resources, etc.
- **Don't put all your eggs in one basket!**

Cross-training

- Dispatchers need to know what goes on at the EOC. *For example:*
- Calhoun County 911 dispatches for all volunteer fire departments
 - During a disaster, 911 becomes an intermediary between EOC ESF #4 (Firefighting) and the fireground
 - At what point during an emergency or disaster do mutual aid and resource requests transfer from 911 to ESF 4?

Cross-training (cont.)

- EMA needs to know what goes on at 911 during an emergency
 - Increased call volume
 - Upstaffing
 - Outages in the PSTN
- At what point does EMA need to issue Public Information regarding 911 calls?
- What solutions are available to reduce call volume? (i.e., 211, 311 systems!)

Solutions

- Prepare Press Releases in advance regarding to storms, community shelters, etc., telling people to call EMA or 211 instead of 911 if they need shelter
- Establish a “storm damage” hotline!
 - Put an operator (or 5) in the EOC to take strictly storm related calls w/out injury reports
- Bottom line: **Mitigate the call volume crisis.**

Solutions (cont.)

- Ensure 911 had adequate supplies to sustain operators for several days
 - **MRE's**
 - **Water**
 - **Beds**
- Make an “Emergency List” of operator residences to EMA can arrange transport quickly if needed
- Place an ARES/RACES operator at 911
 - *Amateur Radio is exempt from Murphy's Law*

The Typical Disaster

- ***EOC ESF staffers need to be familiar with the 911 system and who dispatches which agencies***
- 911 SOP's need to be reviewed by EMA
- EMA plans (especially EOP) need to be reviewed by 911 telecommunicators
- Be ready for tremendous call volume at both agencies
 - This means: “Find people to answer telephones before the blizzard.”

What do I do now?

- *Your ambulance may turn into paramedics on a bass boat during a flood.*
- *Fire trucks are not snow plows.*
- *Police officers typically don't do heavy technical rescue.*
- **Dispatchers will be put in these situations.** EMA working with 911 before the disaster means the dispatcher knows there **IS** a solution (*even though it may not have been in covered in basic training*)

Working Together

- Don't hide your SOP's – share them!
- Let new staff hear the war stories from the last time both agencies worked a major event together
- Ensure EMA & 911 have a good working relationship
- Additional training resources for personnel
- 911 should know the EOC is all agencies working together to respond
- The EOC should know dispatch is what makes the response phase possible

Accreditation for 911

- Agencies may wish to pursue CALEA accreditation, regardless of law dispatch duties
 - Commission on Accreditation of Law Enforcement Agencies
 - WWW.CALEA.ORG
- Focuses on liability reduction, management, and ***preparedness***, along with other standards



Accreditation for 911 (cont.)

- National Academies of Emergency Dispatch
 - www.emergencydispatch.org
- Focuses more on EMD (Emergency Medical Dispatch) and call-taking/call-tracking procedures



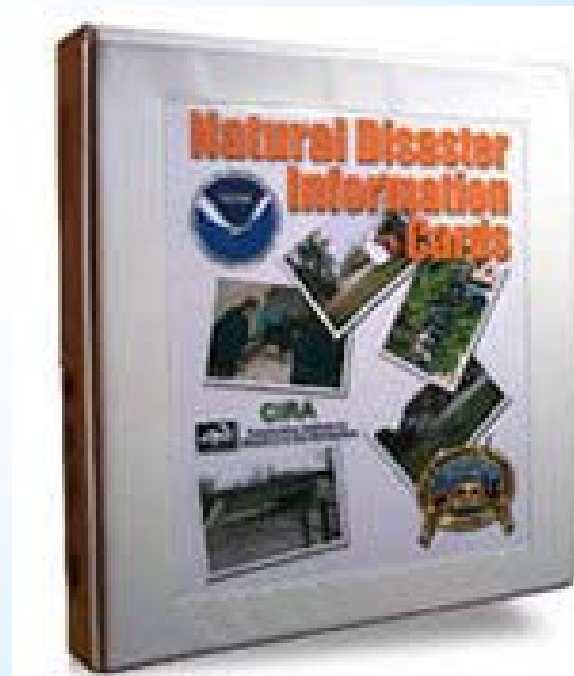
Accreditation for EMA

- Emergency Management Accreditation Program (EMAP)
 - Includes guidance for communications and warning, mutual aid, and resource management
 - www.emaponline.org



Disaster Quick Reference Cards

- City of Fort Collins has developed **natural disaster cards** for dispatchers
- Cards focus on:
 - **Floods**
 - **Blizzards**
 - **Tornados**
 - **Hail**
 - **Lightning**



Card Examples

- **Blizzard**
 - Caller trapped in a residence
 - Breaking limbs in danger of falling
- **Floods**
 - Caller trapped in a vehicle
 - Flooded/flooding residences
- **Hail**
 - Large hail hitting automobile
 - Someone injured by hail

Card Examples (cont.)

- **Lightning**
 - Someone hit by lightning
 - Residences struck by lightning
- **Tornado**
 - Calling from automobile, spotted tornado
 - Calling from automobile, in the path of tornado
 - In residence/business struck by tornado

Cards are Free Online!

[HTTP://FCGOV.COM/OEM/NDIC.PHP](http://FCGOV.COM/OEM/NDIC.PHP)

Can either be printed out, or loaded onto computers in HTML form (for use in a web browser)

**HTML files can be stored on computer:
Put a shortcut on the desktop!**

Also a good reference for those odd 911 calls that might generate a 'heads-up' phone call to the EMA

Other Web Resources

- **www.911dispatch.com/training**
 - List of training and SOP's for various agencies as well as links to helpful info
- **www.icisf.org** – *Hint: Check with local hospitals*
 - Critical Incident Stress Management
 - Helpful training for ALL public safety agencies
 - May be especially useful for times when dispatchers are locked-in, working overtime, and away from families... during a disaster!

Web Resources (cont.)

- **HTTP://TRAINING.FEMA.GOV**
 - **FEMA IS (Independent Study) courses are easy to take online**
 - **You don't have to register**
 - **Students can simply go back to where they left off if they're interrupted**
- ***HINT: Set a goal for dispatchers to work toward completing a new class each month!***