Coping with Technological Disasters Appendix H:

Supporting Information Local Government – Preparing and Responding

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This appendix is provided to assist local governments and decisions makers in understanding the incident command structure that may be formed during the event of a technological disaster. Information is also included on how local governments can structure their own response to keep their constituents informed (such as holding public meetings), some tips on managing public relations, and the types of information local decision makers might want to track during an event.

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Overview of the Incident Command System

As noted in Chapter Four of the guidebook, a local government might consider studying and applying an Incident Command System (ICS). This system, originally developed to manage responses to large wildfires, has since been adopted by many industry and government agencies to manage any kind of emergency such as a technological disaster. This section provides definitions for basics parts of the ICS structure.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency, or FEMA, takes an active role with local emergency disaster planning. FEMA provides resources, training, and help with disaster planning, including a course on the ICS structure. Their training primarily addresses natural disasters but is applicable to technological disasters. More information can be obtained from: https://www.ready.gov/business/implementation/incident

ICS: ICS is a standardized, scalable structure used to organize all aspects of an incident response – from strategic (setting priorities and making decisions) to operational (deploying response equipment and personnel to clean up a spill). ICS provides a common hierarchy within which responders from multiple agencies can work together effectively. ICS has its own chain of command, terminology, forms, meetings, and planning process. Together, these pieces allow people from different agencies, organizations, or companies to understand who does what and what needs to happen next – while creating consistent documentation of each step along the way.

Unified Command (UC): A Unified Command structure is used to oversee an emergency situation, such as an oil spill, when more than one agency has jurisdiction. Unified Command brings multiple responsible agencies together to manage an incident by establishing a common set of incident objectives and strategies. The Unified Command then directs the response through a joint decision-making process. Unified Command is made up of On-Scene Coordinators (OSC) from impacted jurisdictions. Depending on the affected area, these may include: Federal On-Scene Coordinator (U.S. Coast Guard, Environmental Protection Agency, etc.); State On-Scene Coordinator (Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation); Responsible Party, employee or contractor hired by the company responsible for the oil spill.

How to Structure Local Government Response

Many city departments are trained in ICS for activating their chain of command when responding to local disasters. In a spill where UC is established, the local government's ICS may not have the same authority. The Prince William Sound Regional Citizens' Advisory Council has other resources to support communities in understanding their rights and roles in working with UC. Meanwhile, the local city ICS will still be needed to address more local concerns during the incident.

A single leader: It is vital that the head of the local government be in command and it is critical that this person remain in charge for a community's response. There must be a single point of authority and a visible entity to direct the community response. Preparation through the implementation of ICS would identify and empower this person immediately.

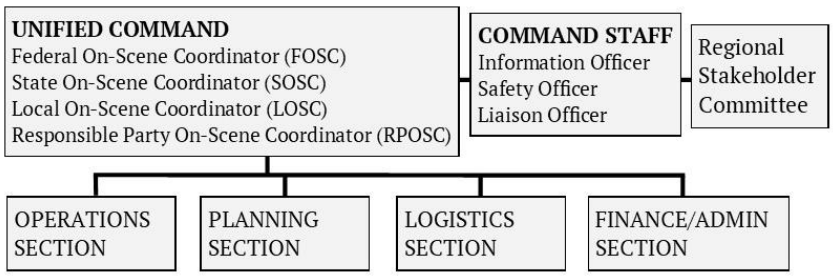

Figure 1: Oil and Hazardous Substance Response Incident Command (ICS) Structure. This flowchart shows the incident command structure that is discussed in Chapter 4 of Coping With Technological Disasters Guidebook.

Chain of Command: The next step is to establish a chain of command, if that has not already been outlined in ICS planning. This structure determines positions responsible for key areas and who they will report to. In ICS, functional sections are already established, such as operations and finance. These duties and responsibilities could be handled by one person or multiple people depending on the size of the disaster, size of the community, available personnel, etc. Important considerations for the chain of command, depending on the incident, may include:

1. Identify the person responsible for:
   - Media questions/inquiries
   - Financial expenditure authorizations
   - Additional personnel hires
   - Issuance of purchase orders and requisitions
   - Correspondence review related to the disaster
   - Delivery management of normal government services
2. Identify one person who will speak for the local city government and establish lines of communication so information about the disaster and the city response is readily available and reliable. Nothing will undermine public confidence more than an uncoordinated effort that results in providing conflicting information about an event or an ever changing public face.
3. Recognize that the disaster will disrupt normal operations and establish a separate office with necessary equipment (computer, phone, internet capability, supplies) and assign personnel to that office for the sole purpose of managing the city response to the disaster. If necessary, assign city employees or hire extra help to staff this office specifically to handle the local response. Immediately following the incident, this office may need to be staffed 24 hours a day for a short time.

Public Relations

Media: Develop a single point of contact (one person or office) to coordinate all media requests and arrange interviews. Ensure everyone involved in the response directs information requests to that person or office. It is vital that this person be fully informed and understand how to properly vet and verify information before publicly releasing it.

Depending on the event, there may be no media interest or media may appear from all over the world. If the latter is the case, international outlets may have deadlines in multiple time zones resulting in this office or position being required to be staffed 24 hours a day, at least at first. If limited resources do not allow someone to be available 24 hours per day (very small communities and villages), ensure that clear information is easily available about where current information can be found, how to submit inquiries, and when responses to inquiries can be expected. Response timeframes must then be kept. Delays to inquiries can generate problems, but most of those inquiring will understand limitations in rural areas if trust is built with solid information and follow up.

Crisis communication has evolved into its own field. Bringing in an expert to lead these efforts or act as a consultant should be seriously considered, especially if the local government does not have a thoroughly developed emergency crisis plan in place and/or is overwhelmed with the amount of interest/inquiries resulting from the disaster.

Social Media: Develop a social media plan to communicate with constituents. Realize that social media will likely spin-up quickly and will likely be riddled with a mix of conjecture, opinion, and accurate facts (and inaccurate facts!). Determine how you will evaluate posts, which you will respond to/engage with, and what to do (or not do) with posts that may be considered inappropriate, inaccurate, or otherwise problematic. Ideally, the local government will already have social media policies in place with context for what content is allowed on their page and how content breaking that policy will be dealt with. If those policies are created, reference them early in the response and then as needed. If social media policies have not been created, determine some framework of how you will deal with problems and be consistent and transparent in dealing with issues that arise. Realize that the perception that local government is removing all negative posts will greatly undermine trust in the information you are putting out, so be careful and judicious about removing and/or blocking content.

If you link to or re-post any information, take care to ensure the information is reliable and a source is known. As online communication is an integral part of crisis communication management (email, web, social media), if an expert is brought in social media planning should be part of their duties.

Details to prepare: Be prepared to provide details about the local area and resources, both for media information and responders who may need local services to support the response effort.

Information and resources to consider providing, if available, include: maps, population, job market, accessibility, accommodations, medical facilities, airport facilities, fuel availability and storage, warehousing and storage yards, loading facilities, heavy equipment availability, local contractors, portable storage. Some of this information may already be captured in Area emergency planning documents:
https://dec.alaska.gov/spar/ppr/contingency-plans/response-plans/

Plan for hostility: Prepare for angry constituents. Plan how to deal positively with hostile community members in private and public meetings. Remember these are the people you represent and they are going through crisis.

The importance of timely, accurate information: Share as much factual information as possible, as quickly as possible. People expect information fast today, so time is of the essence, but don't sacrifice proper vetting of information in the interest of speed. This may include hourly, daily, or weekly updates; news bulletins; or public posting. Remember that constant communication is essential to building trust. If you don't have new information, sometimes it can be a good idea to send an update saying just that. Work to balance regular communication against overload. Messaging can also steer people to event specific information being generated by the Joint Information Center (within Unified Commend) on a given incident.

Consider how information will be conveyed to populations or communities with limited formal media such as radio, television, newspaper, or internet access. One suggestion might be to establish a place for public postings and keep it current with incident developments, changes and offerings in city services, meeting schedules, and general information about the disaster and its response.

In the first days of a disaster when information and the response are quickly evolving, this relay of information could take a full-time person to maintain. If a physical location is used for posting updates, make sure the location is easily accessible and will not create congestion as this likely will become a gathering place.

Liaison: Designate a person and/or office to implement a system to receive input from the community, carry that input forward to the proper person or office, and report back to the community any results or answers from that input. This liaison should be a person trusted in the community and a good listener. They must remain accessible and visible. This official should have a direct link to the highest levels of the command.

Information Committee: In Cordova, Alaska, during the 1989 Exxon Valdez oil spill response, a committee was created comprised of local leaders from various groups, including a city council member, a fishing representative, a fishing processor representative, a hatchery representative, and a local business representative. This committee met, planned for, and implemented systems to provide and receive information to and from the media, community members, Exxon, the State of Alaska, and the United States Coast Guard.

This committee, along with staff hired to help them, allowed the city to get back to the day-to-day business of running the town. The head of local government could then delegate spill responsibilities to the committee. The recommendations of the committee were referred to the city council for action.

Representation of citizens: In the confusion of the immediate disaster, it is easy to be consumed by the event itself and to be influenced by the responsible party. Always keep in mind that you represent and work for the citizens of your community and it is their welfare, livelihoods, and natural resources that are at stake.

Meetings

Formal established groups, as well as disaster-related ad hoc groups, will form in response to a technological disaster. Committees and task forces will be established to address various aspects of the disaster and the response to it. As these groups develop, the following list should be considered in guiding the conduct of their meetings:

- State laws regarding public meetings. For example, Alaska state law requires that all meetings of all municipal bodies be open to the public, with certain exceptions for executive sessions, and that there be reasonable public notice prior to the meeting. Informal meetings also are covered by this law (more information on Alaska's Open Meetings Act AS 44.62.310-312 is included in Appendix I – Alaska Open Meetings Act).
- Keep accurate, detailed minutes and records of any meetings of a public body that operates under local government. These can include city council or assembly, task groups, committees, any group organized under the local government umbrella.
- Notify the public of every governing body meeting.
- Plan for a town meeting as soon as possible after the incident to explain the nature and extent of the disaster and outline both responsible party and government response. If possible, bring in experts not associated with the responsible party to explain the nature and potential effects of contaminants.

Record Keeping

Record keeping is one of the most vital aspects of a community's response to a technological disaster, yet it is one that most often comes up lacking in the final analysis.

The responsible party for a technological disaster most likely can be billed for extraordinary city expenses related to the response. For any entity to make its case for remuneration from a responsible party or disaster relief from government agencies, the entity must document actual costs associated with the event. Often this financial aspect of a disaster can lead to lengthy litigation.

To recover costs in a technological disaster, very precise and accurate records must be produced. For example, it is not enough to say six extra people were hired. All activities must be documented and justified for each hiring. Total personnel costs must be recorded accurately as costs are incurred.

It will be almost impossible to reconstruct records after the fact. Ideally this financial cost recovery should be discussed proactively and as early as possible with the responsible party. Reconstructed records will be challenged and most often result in non-payment of claims. To recover costs for fiscal impacts to local government, track all additional spill related costs such as administrative expenses, additional staffing, or even instances where money was “lost” due to the spill (tourism was affected, commercial fishing declined, etc.).

It is also vital to make records of conversations and meetings and archive them. Detailed records provide a wealth of information for other valuable insights and needs. For example, this guidebook might not be possible if not for records kept during the Exxon Valdez oil spill.

Often, many promises are made in the first days of a disaster. When calmer conditions later prevail, accountants and lawyers may withdraw or contradict the original verbal statements. Should that happen, records of all communications become vital.

The following is a list of records that must be kept following a technological disaster:

- **Phone calls:** Log all calls and emails with date, time, and participants. Include topics discussed, actions agreed to, etc.
- **Financial costs/records:** Keep all financial costs associated with the response separate from normal city accounts. Establish an accounting system so all costs directly related to the disaster can be identified. Be prepared to establish a cost accounting system that details all costs to operate during the disaster, including line item expenditures.
- **Personnel costs:** Keep all personnel costs separate, including those regular city employees who are dedicated to the response. When hiring personnel specifically for the disaster, including those who might replace city employees who have been delegated to disaster jobs, detail the hiring and separate all associated costs. Prepare a separate payroll if possible. Personnel on salary should keep detailed records of time spent in meetings and all other related tasks.
- **Records collection:** Establish a designated location to keep all disaster-related files and records. Appoint one person responsible and accountable for all financial activities. If possible, appoint one person for all clerical record keeping.
- **Meeting records:** Keep detailed, accurate records of meetings including: committees, task groups, and city council or assembly meetings. In essence, any meetings of a public body that operates under local government, particularly correspondence or conversations with officials of the responsible party.
- **Activity logs:** Community leaders and governing body members should keep consistent and precise daily logs of activities associated with the disaster.

Other Considerations

No one can predict the exact nature of a technological disaster. Each will have unique impacts, unlike a hurricane where certain aspects are common to all of these type of storms. As a result, effects of the disaster cannot be predicted. The following list includes a number of considerations, any or all of which could develop in a technological disaster.

- Prepare to receive, send, and archive a large volume of correspondence and general event documentation.
- Anticipate that volunteers will show up and want to help. Be prepared.
    - Local citizens may wish to volunteer to work in the response. While this should be encouraged and facilitated, often the work involves very specialized training. Refusal by the responsible party to use unaffiliated volunteers can lead to frustration and anger.
    - Local authorities should be prepared for volunteers and visitors from other areas to arrive without consideration of where they might stay and find that they need support such as housing.

    - Volunteers can be useful in non-response areas, such as within churches or other civic organizations. There may even be a volunteer referral agency within your community.
    - Additional information on volunteer considerations is located in Appendix K.
- Prepare to organize community involvement. This can include:
    - Task groups
    - Committees with specific interest areas
    - Public hearings and informational meetings
- Prepare to regularly communicate to the public through multiple avenues, including online (email, websites, blogs, social media) and print (newsletters, flyers, short bulletins, public postings).
- Expect conflicts among individuals and groups. Conflict resolution or mediation may be necessary.
- Promote mental health by not overloading individuals with work. Remain aware of expressed, denied, or buried stress. Remain in touch with mental health professionals. Chapters Two and Three of the guidebook directly address mental health.
- Expect employees to abandon jobs in order to obtain higher-paying positions in the response. This will leave government and local businesses short of help.
- An influx of job-seekers hoping for work in the response will stress local facilities such as campgrounds and waste management systems.
- If the response is large enough, employees and contractors for the responsible parties may occupy most of the available hotels, motels, B&Bs, and rooms in private homes, creating a shortage of accommodations.
- Often the responsible party will attempt to assuage concerns of local businesses by purchasing as many supplies locally as possible. In remote areas, this can cause significant shortages of vital supplies, particularly food and fuel.
- Expect visits by dignitaries whose accommodation will interfere with the normal course of business. Prepare information packets for them making it clear what the issues are and what they may be able to do to help. Consider who they would most benefit fromspeaking with and hearing from, and what in the community or impacted area they most need to see. Maintain flexibility around these visits, as politicians frequently change or cancel their plans as needed.
- Be sure to enforce local fees, licensing, and taxes on businesses that come to town to work on the response and any new businesses that may form because of it. These often are overlooked in the heat of the immediate response.

Regional Stakeholder Committees in Alaska

The Regional Stakeholder Committee (RSC) is a group of individuals invited to share their local knowledge and to create a bridge between the response and their communities. The RSC is part of the formal spill response organization in Alaska. The RSC provides a two-way connection between communities, organizations, or local landowners to the Unified Command, which manages the response. The Prince William Sound Regional Citizens' Advisory Council has developed materials to help local communities understand and become involved with this system, which are available on request.

Geographic Information

There may be online tools that provide mapping and resource information useful for identifying priority resources important to communities. Some examples for Prince William Sound and Cook Inlet in Alaska are:

- Alaska Ocean Observing System (AOOS) website (https://aoos.org/): a broad portal/site for finding information on multiple resources such as weather to ocean data. Some key links include: a Gulf of Alaska Portal; CIRT (see last bullet); real-time weather data sensors; research and monitoring assets; and seabirds.
- National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Arctic Environmental response Management Application (ERMA): https://response.restoration.noaa.gov/arctic-erma
- Cook Inlet Response Tool (CIRT): Cook Inlet Regional Citizens Advisory Council's oil spill response application that combines a ShoreZone imagery and video viewer with a long list of GIS spatial data layers and with real time observations and model nowcast/forecasts for winds, waves, and ocean circulation. The CIRT can be found on the AOOS website: https://portal.aoos.org/cirt.php.