



Crisis Communications Tabletop Exercise Guide

A facilitated discussion with leaders about communicating emergency information to employees and key stakeholders



Introduction

During a critical event or crisis, numerous departments, business units and site leaders may be responsible for communicating critical information to response teams or affected employees. Emergency Alert notifications can be sent to employees and key stakeholders using multiple methods, such as email, text message, phone call, mobile app, and desktop alert. Oftentimes, the information needs to be delivered very quickly, and alert senders may need to confirm who received the message and account for the safety of recipients.

After Action Reports have identified several challenges that organizations commonly face, including 1) failure to send an alert because they didn't know it was their responsibility; 2) failure to send an alert in a timely manner because drafting or approving a message took too long; 3) failure to send an alert to all the right people or to too many people; 4) failure to include key information in an alert message, like a detailed description of the threat and what protective actions to take; and 5) failure to assure people received the message and are safe or able to continue performing critical functions.

Instructions

Organize a 90-minute meeting with 3 to 6 leaders that have a role in communicating critical information to employees and partners when crises or critical events occur. Participants may represent various departments, business units, regions, and/or sites. Provide a copy of this worksheet to each participant. One person will lead the exercise and will facilitate discussion with participants. The leader will review the objectives and lead a 10-12 minute discussion for each scenario listed below. A scribe should be assigned to document responses to each question for each scenario.

See Example Scenario: Tornado for an example of what to document for each scenario.

Overarching Goal

Define policies and procedures to improve your organization's ability to reach the right people, with the right information, in the right ways, fast!

Objectives

Upon completing this exercise, participants will...

- Identify risk thresholds for sending employee alerts
- Identify who is responsible for planning, writing, reviewing, and approving the sending of alerts
- Identify the methods for sending alerts in different circumstances
- Identify procedures for writing, reviewing, and approving the sending of alerts
- Identify key information that should be included in alert messages
- Identify actions that need to be taken, like updating plans, policies, procedures, and hosting training

Example Scenario: Tornado

National Weather Service has issued a Tornado Warning that is affecting one of your corporate offices. The event is during business hours and numerous employees are in the area.

Policy & Governance	Procedures	Alert Methods
<p>Will an employee alert be sent to employees affected by this type of hazard? Yes</p> <p>Are there specific thresholds that must be met before sending alerts? Yes, employee alerts are sent for Tornado Watch or Warning.</p> <p>Who is the lead department/unit for sending the alert? Corporate Security, Operations Center</p> <p>Will a message template be created and approved in advance? Yes</p> <p>When will it be sent? Immediately</p> <p>Will you ask recipient to confirm the message of answer a poll? Yes</p> <p>Will certain teams or centers be notified or activated? Yes, the CMT and site leaders will be notified. If impact is confirmed the CMT will be activated.</p>	<p>Who will write the message? The Shift Supervisor</p> <p>Who will review or approve the message prior to sending the alert? The template is pre-approved by Communications and HR, so no further review or approval is needed.</p> <p>Who will send the alert? Security Shift Supervisor</p> <p>In what circumstances will there be follow-up message? Follow-up alerts will be sent to employees that didn't confirm the first message, and additional alerts are sent when there is a significant update to the threat (or the threat has passed).</p> <p>Should we continue sending this multiple times to confirm every person responded to the message? Yes</p> <p>If so, how many times and at what intervals? 5x at 30 min intervals</p> <p>If an employee responds to the alert and says they need assistance, who is responsible for assisting or coordinating? HR and Security</p>	<p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Email</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Phone Call</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Text Message</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Desktop Alert</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Internet</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> PA System</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> TV Monitor</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> MS Teams</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Other:</p>
Alert Recipients		
<p>Internal: IT, BC Manager, Site Leaders, affected employees</p> <p>External: None</p>		
Message Details		
<p>The message will include sender information (Corporate Security), hazard source (NWS), hazard location details (description of area affected), guidance (e.g., get inside and go to basement, stay away from windows), and will ask employees to confirm they are safe after the tornado passes.</p>		
Next Steps		
<p>We should consider whether we should alert 3PL partners or additional groups and how managers could help account for the safety of employees who do not respond to the alert.</p>		

Scenario #1: Workplace Violence Threat

An employee was recently terminated for making threats to other employees. After he was terminated he confronted some employees in the parking lot and said he is coming back to the office tomorrow and he will “watch them suffer” for the way he has been treated.

Policy & Governance	Procedures	Alert Methods
Will an employee alert be sent to employees affected by this type of hazard?	Who will write the message?	<input type="checkbox"/> Email <input type="checkbox"/> Phone Call <input type="checkbox"/> Text Message <input type="checkbox"/> Desktop Alert <input type="checkbox"/> Intranet <input type="checkbox"/> PA System <input type="checkbox"/> TV Monitor <input type="checkbox"/> MS Teams <input type="checkbox"/> Slack <input type="checkbox"/> Other:
Are there specific thresholds that must be met before sending alerts?	Who will review or approve the message prior to sending the alert?	
Who is the lead department/unit for sending the alert?	Who will send the alert?	
Will a message template be created and approved in advance?	In what circumstances will there be a follow-up message?	
When will it be sent?	Should we continue sending this multiple times to confirm every person responded to the message?	
Will you ask recipient to confirm the message of answer a poll?	If so, how many times and at what intervals?	
Will certain teams or centers be notified or activated?	If an employee responds to the alert and says they need assistance, who is responsible for assisting or coordinating?	
Alert Recipients	What other events have similar policies and procedures?	
Internal:		
External:		
Message Details		
Next Steps		

Scenario #2: Cyber Attack – Ransomware

A hacker contacted your IT Department and stated that valuable data containing employee and customer info is breached and the company can no longer access it. A hacker is asking for 1 million dollars ransom in a deal to allow you organization to recoup access to the data.

Policy & Governance	Procedures	Alert Methods
<p>Will an employee alert be sent to employees affected by this type of hazard?</p> <p>Are there specific thresholds that must be met before sending alerts?</p> <p>Who is the lead department/unit for sending the alert?</p> <p>Will a message template be created and approved in advance?</p> <p>When will it be sent?</p> <p>Will you ask recipient to confirm the message of answer a poll?</p> <p>Will certain teams or centers be notified or activated?</p>	<p>Who will write the message?</p> <p>Who will review or approve the message prior to sending the alert?</p> <p>Who will send the alert?</p> <p>In what circumstances will there be a follow-up message?</p> <p>Should we continue sending this multiple times to confirm every person responded to the message?</p> <p>If so, how many times and at what intervals?</p> <p>If an employee responds to the alert and says they need assistance, who is responsible for assisting or coordinating?</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Email</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Phone Call</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Text Message</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Desktop Alert</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Intranet</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> PA System</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> TV Monitor</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> MS Teams</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Slack</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Other:</p>
Alert Recipients		
<p>Internal:</p> <p>External:</p>	<p>What other events have similar policies and procedures?</p>	
Message Details		
Next Steps		

Scenario #3: Active Shooter/Assailant

Security received calls of multiple shots being fired on the ground floor of the headquarters office building. The shooter is reported to be a spouse of an employee, and a description of the person was provided to Security. Shots continue to be fired.

Policy & Governance	Procedures	Alert Methods
Will an employee alert be sent to employees affected by this type of hazard?	Who will write the message?	<input type="checkbox"/> Email <input type="checkbox"/> Phone Call <input type="checkbox"/> Text Message <input type="checkbox"/> Desktop Alert <input type="checkbox"/> Intranet <input type="checkbox"/> PA System <input type="checkbox"/> TV Monitor <input type="checkbox"/> MS Teams <input type="checkbox"/> Slack <input type="checkbox"/> Other:
Are there specific thresholds that must be met before sending alerts?	Who will review or approve the message prior to sending the alert?	
Who is the lead department/unit for sending the alert?	Who will send the alert?	
Will a message template be created and approved in advance?	In what circumstances will there be a follow-up message?	
When will it be sent?	Should we continue sending this multiple times to confirm every person responded to the message?	
Will you ask recipient to confirm the message of answer a poll?	If so, how many times and at what intervals?	
Will certain teams or centers be notified or activated?	If an employee responds to the alert and says they need assistance, who is responsible for assisting or coordinating?	
Alert Recipients	What other events have similar policies and procedures?	
Internal:		
External:		
Message Details		
Next Steps		

Scenario #4: Bomb Threat

An unidentified person called Security to report that he hid a bomb in the mailroom of the headquarters office building. Security was unable to determine if the threat is credible.

Policy & Governance	Procedures	Alert Methods
Will an employee alert be sent to employees affected by this type of hazard?	Who will write the message?	<input type="checkbox"/> Email <input type="checkbox"/> Phone Call <input type="checkbox"/> Text Message <input type="checkbox"/> Desktop Alert <input type="checkbox"/> Intranet <input type="checkbox"/> PA System <input type="checkbox"/> TV Monitor <input type="checkbox"/> MS Teams <input type="checkbox"/> Slack <input type="checkbox"/> Other:
Are there specific thresholds that must be met before sending alerts?	Who will review or approve the message prior to sending the alert?	
Who is the lead department/unit for sending the alert?	Who will send the alert?	
Will a message template be created and approved in advance?	In what circumstances will there be a follow-up message?	
When will it be sent?	Should we continue sending this multiple times to confirm every person responded to the message?	
Will you ask recipient to confirm the message of answer a poll?	If so, how many times and at what intervals?	
Will certain teams or centers be notified or activated?	If an employee responds to the alert and says they need assistance, who is responsible for assisting or coordinating?	
Alert Recipients	What other events have similar policies and procedures?	
Internal:		
External:		
Message Details		
Next Steps		

Scenario #5: Building Closure – Severe Weather

A “Snow Emergency” has been declared by a local mayor (or county manager) and non-essential travel is restricted, so offices in the area must be closed.		
Policy & Governance	Procedures	Alert Methods
<p>Will an employee alert be sent to employees affected by this type of hazard?</p> <p>Are there specific thresholds that must be met before sending alerts?</p> <p>Who is the lead department/unit for sending the alert?</p> <p>Will a message template be created and approved in advance?</p> <p>When will it be sent?</p> <p>Will you ask recipient to confirm the message of answer a poll?</p> <p>Will certain teams or centers be notified or activated?</p>	<p>Who will write the message?</p> <p>Who will review or approve the message prior to sending the alert?</p> <p>Who will send the alert?</p> <p>In what circumstances will there be a follow-up message?</p> <p>Should we continue sending this multiple times to confirm every person responded to the message?</p> <p>If so, how many times and at what intervals?</p> <p>If an employee responds to the alert and says they need assistance, who is responsible for assisting or coordinating?</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Email</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Phone Call</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Text Message</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Desktop Alert</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Intranet</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> PA System</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> TV Monitor</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> MS Teams</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Slack</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Other:</p>
Alert Recipients		
<p>Internal:</p> <p>External:</p>	<p>What other events have similar policies and procedures?</p>	
Message Details		
Next Steps		

Scenario #6: Earthquake – Employee Accountability

A 5.5 magnitude earthquake has impacted several of the company’s office buildings. After the shaking stopped, occupants were asked to evacuate the building so that building engineers could assess the building structure. Within 15 minutes after the incident, leaders have asked managers to locate and account for all staff.

Policy & Governance	Procedures	Alert Methods
<p>Will an employee alert be sent to employees affected by this type of hazard?</p> <p>Are there specific thresholds that must be met before sending alerts?</p> <p>Who is the lead department/unit for sending the alert?</p> <p>Will a message template be created and approved in advance?</p> <p>When will it be sent?</p> <p>Will you ask recipient to confirm the message of answer a poll?</p> <p>Will certain teams or centers be notified or activated?</p>	<p>Who will write the message?</p> <p>Who will review or approve the message prior to sending the alert?</p> <p>Who will send the alert?</p> <p>In what circumstances will there be a follow-up message?</p> <p>Should we continue sending this multiple times to confirm every person responded to the message?</p> <p>If so, how many times and at what intervals?</p> <p>If an employee responds to the alert and says they need assistance, who is responsible for assisting or coordinating?</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Email</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Phone Call</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Text Message</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Desktop Alert</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Intranet</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> PA System</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> TV Monitor</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> MS Teams</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Slack</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Other:</p>
Alert Recipients		
<p>Internal:</p> <p>External:</p>	<p>What other events have similar policies and procedures?</p>	
Message Details		
Next Steps		

Closing Discussion

Discussion the following questions with the group.

01 Overall, what are the biggest takeaways from this exercise?

02 What other scenarios still need to be discussed?

03 What are some strengths identified during the discussion?

04 What are some opportunities for improvement?

05 **Next steps:** Where do we go from here? For example, is there a need to update plans, policies or procedures, or host training or exercises on this topic?



Questions? Please contact Tom Crane at

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About Everbridge

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