

# **10 Best Practices for Emergency Notifications in Public Safety**

*A home of VESTA*<sup>®</sup> White Paper  
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**As we begin a new year, it's a good time to examine emergency notification processes and see where improvements can be made. To assist, we present the 10 Best Practices for Emergency Notification.**

Public safety agencies encounter new challenges daily. As part of their protective duties, they must constantly plan, strategize and update their approach to these issues. Manpower and resources may be limited, making it necessary to utilize the most effective and efficient methods to handle the unexpected while they protect and serve their communities. Industry-supported best practices can – and do – help decision and policy makers develop well-informed plans based on accumulated wisdom and knowledge.

With the multitude of natural and manmade disasters seen this year, utilizing best practices has never been more critical as it relates to emergency communications, particularly for notification systems. Whether you're a county Emergency Manager, a 9-1-1 and Communications Director or in the private sector as an HR Director or Business Continuity professional, the following 10 best practices can help you structure your agency's or business's formalized notification policies. If you have questions about the following information, please reach out your mass notification system provider for help and guidance.

"Better data yields faster more accurate notifications."

~ Jeremy Smith  
General Manager for Emergency  
Notification

### 1

#### Have a well-defined plan

- Formalize your program – put it in writing!
- Delegate authority to specific personnel to issue notifications
- Ensure all users are trained
- Consider realistic tips to ensure successful execution; your system provider should be an expert source
- Keep and organize reference material for system users

### 2

#### Know when to use the system

- Determine ahead of time the situations when you will use the system
- Have a clear process of activation
- Examine the best way to involve stakeholders/recipients in the decision about when we use the system
- Know the benefits of a clear process of activation – timely notification of affected individuals for faster response and enhanced safety!

### 3

#### Use and test the system often

- Configure and run different types of tests within the system
- Review and understand the results
- Evaluate how testing improves the effectiveness of your notification program
- Determine the frequency of tests and by what type (e.g., will you run different tests for different audiences?)

### 4

#### Create standard templates and scripts to be customized at the time of the incident

- Plan for the type of alerts you issue
- Create messages that can be used as templates for different alert scenarios
- Consider out-of-the-ordinary situations to be more effective in any emergency

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### Keep contact information current

- Ensure internal contact list is updated regularly
- Encourage citizens and others to register through Self-Registration Portals (SRP)
- Think of the best ways to communicate to citizens the importance of and processes for registering their information

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### Use several modes of communication

- Ensure your internal contact list includes all appropriate devices
- Encourage citizens to register all devices by which you'll send alerts through the SRP
- Evaluate whether one communication method or more works better than others

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### Craft direct and detail messages

- Ensure message includes – who from, what the emergency is, when / where it took place, recommended course of action, where to go for more information
- Look for ways to reassure
- Provide instruction for end users on how to create quality messages on-the-fly

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### Deliver clear content quickly

- Create messages that can be digested in 30-45 seconds
- Write the message at no higher than a 6<sup>th</sup> grade reading level
- Ensure your messages are clear and concise – audible and written
  - Example Flood Evacuation:  
This is an emergency alert from {name of organization}. {Affected location} is currently flooding. If you are in the area, seek higher ground immediately. If you are trapped by this flood, please call 9-1-1. For additional information and updates go to {emergency website} or check your local media.

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### “Send “all cleared” messages

- Include follow-up for key incidents within your SOPs
- Think about what would be helpful information for your audience(s) to have post incident
- Craft all clear messages

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### Inspect, adapt and improve

- Review reports to determine effectiveness of the message
- Make adjustments to improve effectiveness
- Request assistance and clarification from support staff
- Evaluate for improvements by:
  - Identifying data quality issues
  - Identifying call congestion issues
  - Identifying configuration issues (dialing rules, etc.)
  - Examining message effectiveness
  - Updating SOPs

“The finest language is made up of simple, unimposing words

~ George Eliot