



Best Practice Model

Improved Communications for Emergency Preparedness

San Luis Obispo County (CA) emergency management authority, public health, LTCO, and many other representatives worked together to secure U.S. Health and Human Services (HHS) Hospital Preparation Program (HHP) and Department of Homeland Security (DHS) FEMA grant funds to improve and enhance emergency preparedness communications.

Description

The San Luis Obispo County HPP workgroup consists of representatives from the hospitals, long term care facilities (LTCF), developmental disabilities facilities, long term care Ombudsman (LTCO), public health department, nuclear power plant, emergency management authorities, and many others. Core workgroup members meet monthly. The entire group including first responders meets quarterly. All aspects of emergency planning are discussed including weather related events, flu, terrorism, etc. Emergency planning includes standardization of communication plans, resources, and equipment in addition to identification cards for second responders. Second responders are typically staff of human and social services agencies, service providers, non-profit agency volunteer workers, etc.

Communications

Communications plans include GETS, WPS, and satellite phones for key personnel including the LTCO. The Government Emergency Telecommunications System (GETS) cards are available for no cost and are to be used on landlines. According to the National Communication System's website, GETS provides emergency access and priority processing in the local and long distance segments of the Public Switched Telephone Network (PSTN). It is intended to be used in an emergency or crisis situation when the PSTN is congested and the probability of completing a call over normal or other alternate telecommunication means has significantly decreased. The Wireless Priority Services (WPS) card provides priority for emergency calls made from cellular telephones. Critical infrastructure personnel are eligible for WPS. Wireless Priority Service is an easy-to-use, add-on feature subscribed on a per-cell phone basis; no special phones are required. WPS costs approximately \$30 each year per phone. Satellite phones were purchased by the county government and provided to, among others, the LTCOP and LTCF administrators. A Cooperative agreement permits smaller residential facilities to go to the larger skilled nursing facilities to use the satellite phones. Satellite phones are a type of [mobile phone](#) that connects

to orbiting [satellites](#) instead of terrestrial [cell sites](#). Satellite phones have pre-paid cards with a total of fifty minutes on each phone.

Identification Cards

County government personnel provide the “wording” and template for photo identification cards for LTCO and LTCF personnel. The cards are numbered and have the date issued on the card. These identification cards are used for LTCO and other (2nd responders) who should have access to an area after the disaster and when the area has been secured by officials. Upon showing this identification card an LTCO will be allowed to enter areas that have been blocked to public access.

References

Hospital Preparedness Program

<http://www.phe.gov/preparedness/planning/hpp/pages/default.aspx>

Government Emergency Telecommunications System (GETS)

http://gets.ncs.gov/program_info.html

Wireless Priority Service <http://wps.ncs.gov/>