



# EMERGENCY PLANS: WHERE TO BEGIN?

BY KAT PHILIPS



A storm is coming, an unattended bag was found and evacuation are words that filter through our brains every day as event organizers. The actions we take as event planners could prevent future damage to equipment and provide safety to our guests.

The key to creating a safe environment for our guests and our own sanity is to have an effective Emergency Plan. There are two types of Emergency Plans, a condensed version and a comprehensive version; more notably called an IAP (Incident Action Plan) by law enforcement and Emergency Personnel. The smaller more condensed version should be no longer than a few pages and include the important facts in as much detail as can be given without confusion. The condensed version is called an Emergency Action Plan or EAP. The EAP gives a brief description of what needs to happen when a situation arises. The items that are listed in an Emergency Action Plan are specific to an individual event; there is no right or wrong way to write one. In this article there are examples of what could be used and some tips to help guide the way through the process. This is what I have learned as an event organizer over the years from utilizing an EAP.

The areas to cover in an Emergency Action Plan are the Purpose, Basic Information (who, what and where), Severe weather, Communications, Lost Person Procedure and Emergency Evacuation.

This example shows a simplistic way to explain what the expectations are in a Communications plan, lost child procedure, inclement weather and who to call if any of those things happen. The EAP should also have a broad yet detailed version of the event's evacuation plan stating what is expected of the person whether they are a volunteer or paid staff.

### **THE COMPONENTS OF AN EMERGENCY PLAN ARE:**

**Purpose:** What are you trying to accomplish with your Action Plan? Who is going to receive it?

#### **Example of the National Cherry Festival's Emergency Action Plan Purpose Statement**

- A. This emergency action plan pre-determines actions to take before and during the "National Cherry Festival" (hereinafter referred to as the Festival) in response to an emergency or otherwise hazardous condition. These actions will be taken by organizers, management, operations, volunteer personnel, and attendees. These actions represent those required prior to the Festival in preparation for and those required during an emergency.
- B. Flexibility must be exercised when implementing this plan because of the wide variety of potential hazards that exist for the Festival. These hazards include, but are not

limited to, Fire, Medical Emergencies, Severe Weather, Lost Person, or situations where Law Enforcement is required.

**Communications Plan:** What is the chain of command for your organization? Who is in charge and when?

The communication plan should encompass how and when communications happen within the organization not only during an Emergency but also day to day. It is suggested that you have redundancy in your communication abilities. I recommend a combination of digital or analog CB Radios, wireless Internet (Wi-Fi) and Mifi's (mobile internet that can be on the move and utilized around the property). The use of cell phones with email and text message can be helpful when you have a sensitive conversation that you don't want broadcasted over Radio that usually has an open mic to the public. Something to think about with Radios is "who has them and where are they?" The answer is commonly "I don't know," which means that we need to be more thoughtful about how and when information is broadcasted across channels. Day to day communications on the Radio Channels should be kept to about 4 channels if possible even with the largest events to keep the structure streamlined. Those channels would be Operations, Daily Events, Extended Multi Day Events like Parades and Airshows and one channel for extended conversation that begins off the first three channels. An example would be the Cherry Festival uses channel 2 for Airshow & Parades since they are at different times during the week. When we start using event channels on our radio circuit the police now know which to follow based on the information shared in our emergency plan.

#### **An Example of the National Cherry Festival's Communication Plan**

##### **Radio Channel Use**

- Channel 1 Regular National Cherry Festival Communications (All Emergencies)
- Channel 2 Air Show and Parades
- Channel 3 Event
- Channel 4 Extended Conversation

Please never use radio codes when talking on radios. In one legal jurisdiction someone may say 10-50, he or she is talking about a car accident. Across the line, 10-50 means an officer needs help. That is the way it is across much of the country, 10-codes used in one jurisdiction are not the same as those used in another. That is why it is important that respond-

ers and incident managers use common terminology. There simply is no room for misunderstanding in an emergency situation.

##### **Normal Radio Traffic**

During normal radio traffic you will identify yourself by event or location and your name. For example, hold down the transmit button, count to one, then speak "Festival Dispatch from Open Space." Festival Dispatch will say, "This is Festival Dispatch identify and go ahead Open Space." Then you will speak, "This is YOUR NAME" and then your information. Remember that if you are talking on the radio no one else can. Keep your messages short; think about what you are going to say before you say it.

##### **Emergency Radio Traffic**

If there is an emergency, you will turn to channel 1 and announce "Emergency Traffic Clear Channel" on radios for this and all emergencies. Only Festival dispatch will clear the channel for normal traffic after cleared for an Emergency.

There is one point of contact for Emergencies for the Cherry Festival. All emergencies will be reported to Festival Dispatch. Festival Dispatch will report to 911. The only exception is for a life-threatening situation for which you should call 911 directly.

A Lost Person Procedure is one of the main emergencies that will arise, panicked parents and scared children are not what you want at your event. A simple Lost Person Procedure like the example below will assist your event volunteers in finding lost individuals quickly and allows law enforcement to work with you on a common plan and meeting location in this example we are going to use a Welcome Center.

#### **Lost Child/Parent/Person Procedure Example**

Bring the reporting person immediately to the Welcome Center.

Take a full description of the missing individual (name, age, height, hair color, eye color, what he or she was wearing, where last seen, how long ago). All information is to be obtained BEFORE placing a lost child call over the radio.

The Welcome Center Director or Assistant will state "Clear the Channel" on Channel- 1 to all Festival personnel with a thorough description of the missing individual and last seen location – staff will then start looking for the lost individual.

If the lost person (especially a child) is not found within 7 minutes, call 911.

When the lost individual is found, he or she should be escorted to the Welcome Center immediately.

If the missing person is a child, DO NOT just turn the child over to the waiting adult. When you find the child and prior to arriving at the Welcome Center, ask the child information (last name, address, parent or guardian's names, phone number, favorite Aunt's name, etc...) anything that will help identify the child belongs with the waiting adult. Then have the waiting adult verify the information. Ask the waiting adult if he/she has a picture of the child. Better to be safe than sorry! Parents will appreciate the thoroughness.

Once identification is made, the Welcome Center Director or Assistant Director will make the "Found" announcement on the radio and the "All Clear - missing person located" given by Communications.

All information regarding incident should be logged on the Lost Person Log Sheet by Welcome Center personnel.

**Severe Weather Plan:** Who makes the decision when severe weather is moving in on your event? When should the call be made to cancel and or postpone an event? For example the Cherry Festival has an Airshow, two Parades and a host of events not in our primary event area. Each event area needs its own section of an Incident Action Plan. The plan itself is meant to be an overview of all important attributes of each event, time, date, key people involved such as volunteers and staff. A layout of each area should be included. If the event is a running race, the course route should be included in the plan as well as access points clearly listed. Emergency assets listed on each site and any possible threats to the area. When it comes to a running race or a parade the biggest threat to the event

is the weather and having to evacuate a large number of people quickly.

### Severe Weather example

Weather forecasts and current conditions will be monitored through the National Weather Service's Gaylord Weather Forecast Office web site at <http://www.crh.noaa.gov/apx/>.

Before the event - If severe weather is predicted prior to the Festival or individual events, the EAP

Festival Representative will evaluate the conditions with the Executive Director and he will determine if the Festival or individual events will remain scheduled. The EAP Festival Representative or his/her designee will be identified as such and will be responsible to monitor the weather conditions before and during the Festival.

During the event - If severe weather occurs during the Festival, the EAP Festival Representative or his/her designee will make notification to those attending the Festival/events that a hazardous weather condition exists and direct them to shelter away from the Open Space Park towards Front St.

The event will follow the 60-30 Rule for lightning. If lightning is observed and thunder is heard within 60 seconds, the Festival/Event(s) will be delayed until 30 minutes have passed since thunder was heard.

The word evacuation can scare event organizers, volunteers and guests all the same. When evacuating an area, remember to stay calm, speak clearly and put your plan in action. If the Emergency Plan lists to open access gates and guide people towards shelter then do just that. During an Emergency is not the time to try and change how things are going to be done. Make sure all key players, volunteers, EMS,

Fire Department, Police and Emergency Management Office know the plan and that everyone is working together to get guests and volunteers out of the area safely.

### Emergency Evacuation Example

1. Upon notification of evacuation remain calm, keep radio channels clear.
2. Directors should open all emergency access points in their area and guide volunteers and guests towards main exits of the festival.
3. Once area is clear, report to Operations Trailer for further direction.

All emergencies are unpredictable, that is why they are called emergencies. While we can plan all we want it still doesn't mean we are going to be able to avoid casualties due to weather, property damage or an injury. The job of event organizers is to plan to the best of their ability and make sure that Emergency Plans are created, used, evaluated and then re-written as often as needed. An emergency plan is only as good as those implementing the plan.

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