



The

Broadcasters' Desktop Resource

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... edited by Barry Mishkind – the Eclectic Engineer

EAS SENSE

An EAS Evangelist Meets the NEMA



By Richard Rudman

[September 2013] The Emergency Management community and broadcasters sometimes have a rather “iffy” relationship. Instead of confronting them, Richard Rudman decided to join the National Emergency Management Association.

Then he went to go mingle at their Convention.

I recently became a member of the [National Emergency Management Association](#) (NEMA), the professional association of and for emergency management directors from all 50 states, 8 territories, and the District of Columbia.



NEMA provides national leadership and expertise in comprehensive emergency management, serves as a vital emergency management information and assistance resource, and advances continuous improvement in emergency management through strategic partnerships, innovative programs, and collaborative policy positions. I also learned NEMA membership is open to private parties.

BUILDING A BRIDGE

My decision to become a NEMA member came out of a realization that the major challenge we face in our world of EAS participants is getting wider acceptance in the emergency management community that emergency public information (EPI) – especially through broadcast outlets – is an emergency response resource.

As such, it occurred to me that EPI (and warnings) need to be managed as a core public duty and responsibility along with traditional response resources. The local Emergency Operations Center needs to do more than manage resources and dispatch responders. It needs to “broker” requests for more resources when necessary, including informing the public.

Once this realization across the emergency management (EM) community is in place, overall coordination, sorely lacking now, has a better chance of taking place so all warning systems can work together to provide the public with the best possible timely protective action information. We can then strive for the EAS participant collateral benefit from this commitment to convince more EAS participants to carry local and state EAS messages.

Progress requires, at minimum, revisions to National Incident Management (NIMS) training. After the tragic events of September 11th, the Partnership for Public Warning, Inc. (PPW) was formed to write reports for the FEMA, the FCC and the Weather Service on how to solve this deficiency.

Another PPW work product was the Common Alerting Protocol (CAP). CAP, as most of you know, exists as the open, non-proprietary warning origination protocol that the FEMA implemented as IPAWS OPEN for EAS. (IPAWS is the Integrated Public Alert and Warning System.) The tangible warning benefits expressed in the name, IPAWS, have yet to be realized.

THE 2013 NATIONAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION FORUM

Each year, NEMA holds two national conferences to provide a forum for emergency management professionals from around the country to meet and discuss national and regional emergency management strategies with other experts in the field.

NEMA meetings focus on policy development, emergency management concerns, legislative issues, and federal relations. They give attendees the opportunity to hear, first-hand, the latest on issues that impact their agencies' programs. In their words, "No other source can provide the current, comprehensive, behind-the-scenes information that NEMA conferences offer."



With the support of the California Broadcasters Association, I attended the recent NEMA Annual Management Policy and Leadership Forum held September 9-12th. This annual Forum is always held in the home state of the current NEMA President – this year in Anchorage, Alaska.

COMMUNICATING INTER-AGENCY AND WITH THE PUBLIC

During the NEMA event, I was able to talk to a number of state emergency managers about recognizing emergency public information (EPI) and a manageable response resource, and assuring that information released through different paths is coordinated. Many agreed this should happen.

In fact, there was more agreement on this than I expected. Some of this is due to events like the recent late night WEA AMBER message and the growing role of social media in emergency information distribution.

The national Warning Coordination Meteorologist for the National Weather Service (NWS) attended the NEMA event. I had a chance to meet him. He is aware of the serious EAS "message flooding" issue and will be a future point of contact to try to get resolution for this serious issue.

As many of you may suspect, while "message flooding" has already alienated a goodly number of audiences and program directors, this issue will be an unmitigated disaster when the NWS comes on board with CAP for IPAWS OPEN.

Other EAS subject experts agree with me that this issue must be solved before NWS launches CAP EAS warnings.

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

The program sessions offered during the forum covered a wide range of emergency management issues:

- Emergency Management Assistance Compact (EMAC) Task Force reports
- State Hazard Mitigation Officers reports
- Mass care during a catastrophic disaster – a group discussion
- Preparedness Committee reports
- Homeland Security Committee reports
- Mitigation Committee reports
- Response and Recovery Committee reports
- Several sessions reviewing response to Hurricane Sandy

I could not attend all of the sessions, but I did hear throughout the event that grant funding for state emergency efforts and issues related to the cost of flood insurance are major concerns at all levels from FEMA down to local agencies.

No surprises there!

CHECKING OUT THE VENDORS

Within the vendor community at the NEMA forum, **Google** stood out. They did an interesting presentation on [their Crisis Map tool](#) that was used to help with response information display during Hurricane Sandy.

The presenters said that **Google** created this tool to help people find and use critical emergency information when they need it most. Using **Google's** technology, **Crisis Map**, they said, is supposed to make disaster information easy to find, use, and share.

I had a chance to talk with the **Google** representatives after their presentation. They are aware that bad actors could misuse this tool. They say that they monitor all crisis maps that the user community creates and will take down any that are suspect.

I asked them about using their tool to aid in gathering better and more rapid damage assessment data, if there are apps available for the emergency management community to do this. While they could not come up with a specific

app or apps, they do claim that **Crisis Map** has great value for this aspect of emergency response.

INNOVATION IN ALERTING

One of the more innovative vendors with a display at the event, [ping4alerts!](#), has a technology that can geo-target messages to iPhones and Android phones much better than WEA or any other means I have seen so far.

Their warning method also has a way to bypass ringer muting for iPhones and Androids, allowing emergency messages to get through 24/7 as long as the phone is turned on.

This company has come the closest to allowing emergency managers to draw a small, targeted polygon for a warning message rather than rely on far less granular methods that are only able to resolve to cell tower coverage areas. Their literature states, “If your phone is in a dangerous place, you can be immediately informed of the danger, along with what you should do.”

Another feature of **ping4alerts!**, is that it does not require phone owners to give up personal information. Alerts, they say, are anonymous in both directions.

They can also geo-target beach and coastal alerts so a dangerous jellyfish or shark sighting



or a riptide warning can go out to only those beachgoers who are directly in danger. They

claim they are the only technology right now that has this level of geo-targeting precision.

MORE IDEAS

A number of emergency management consulting firms were at the forum.

I was interested in hearing that one consulting firm is working with the San Francisco Airport on updating their emergency response planning in the aftermath of the recent Asiana Airlines Flight 214 crash.

Several vendors were showing self-heating emergency meals. One, **Chef 5 Minutes Meals**, has eight different entrees that look as good and tasty as any you will see in your supermarket's freezer. The difference is that these meals have a shelf life of up to five years and require no refrigeration.

The heating element is a plastic pan charged with magnesium powder. The powder activates when you break open a sealed water pouch and pour its contents onto the powder container. Five minutes later you have a single serving tasty hot meal.

Some of the entree choices are spaghetti and meatballs, chicken cacciatore, vegetable lasagna, and beef chili with beans. These hot meals are real comfort food that can help sheltered victims deal better with emergency conditions, or help the staff of a broadcast station keep going when disaster strikes.

Technology vendors like **Midland** (weather and public safety radios) and **Hughes** (satellite-delivered IP) were also exhibiting. **Target** was there to support their commitment to supply various supply needs during major emergencies.

MIXING WITH THE ATTENDEES

The NEMA President's reception was an opportunity to meet more attendees and enjoy one of area's civic attractions, the Anchorage Museum. The featured exhibit presented high quality photos of Alaskan day-to-day life.



The emergency management community members that attended the forum are dedicated trained professionals focused on serving a public at risk. They all are challenged by underfunding, political pressures, and a wide variety of area-specific risks.

At the same time, they are all looking for answers to a wide variety of issues, including how to inform the public in an age when the speed and variety of information delivery systems can and do affect the outcome of emergency events, for better or worse. We need to learn more about what they do, and advise them on how better to achieve a common goal of improving warning messages during response.

*A frequent contributor to **The BDR**, Richard Rudman is the owner of Remote Possibilities in Santa Paula, CA, and Core Member of The Broadcast Warning Working Group (BWWG). You can contact Richard at rar01@me.com*

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