

Emergency Services - Staffing for Crisis

Emergency Service Organizations (ESOs) are prepared to respond every day to routine and non-routine incidents. Even a large incident may be mitigated with the resources that are available at any given time. However, some incidents may begin or be upgraded to the disaster level by the definition of an event that overwhelms the current resources available. These events can last from hours to years.

Historically, these complex incidents are rare for most ESOs, but today's public safety climate is becoming more demanding and staffing for crisis is a serious concern for administration and command staff. If the event/incident is of a nature that adequate staff is unavailable to address the emergency, or an environmental factor limits response to certain areas, what are the next steps?

Here are some areas you may want to consider:

Planning, Communications and Public Awareness

- Plan for these events before they occur and put the framework in writing.
- Communicate with all of your internal partners to include governmental leaders, if applicable, local emergency management, and other public safety agencies that may be affected.
- Using the proper channels, let the public know what your intentions are for each event, how normal services will be impacted, and what the estimated duration will be.
- Any time this concept needs to be enacted, we recommend that your legal counsel be consulted before the event if possible.

Establish a solid relationship with your Communications Center

- Review and utilize Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) history to assist your ESO in determining peak times of call volume and compare these against the opposing data.
- If your Center uses an enhanced dispatch system like Emergency Medical Dispatch (EMD), Emergency Fire Dispatch (EFD) or Emergency Police Dispatch (EPD), become educated on what the parameters are as well as the limitations.
- Place a member of your organization in the Communications Center to make critical decisions regarding allocation of resources during these events in addition to what the Dispatch protocols will allow.

Evaluate Calls for Service

- Prioritize or Triage calls for service based on caller information, dispatch information or reports from other agency units on or near the scene.
- Reduce or eliminate response to “Service” type calls during the event.
- Combine staff on units when appropriate.
- Send a smaller response vehicle or less vehicles to incidents than normal.
- Use another agency that may be closer or better suited to address the incident than your agency at the moment.
- Implement dynamic deployment tactics to stage your resources in different locations to protect a broader area.
- Protect life first.....then property.

Summary

Many ESOs are accustomed to calling in additional staff and utilizing automatic/mutual aid from surrounding agencies to mitigate these types of events. However, the above considerations must be flexible and the plan dynamic. Erring on the side of safety for your responders should always be a priority and you may need to be prepared to explain your decisions during or after the event.

Additional Resources

National Center for Biotechnology Information | Crisis Standards of Care: A System Framework for Catastrophic Disaster Response | www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK201063

Michigan Medical Ethics | Ethical Guidelines for Allocation of Scarce Medical Resources During Public Health Emergencies | www.mimedicalethics.org