

Beyond Status Boards and Three-ring Binders: A Practical Approach to Continual Preparedness

Today, emergency managers and public health officials must address daunting challenges that their predecessors may not have faced in the past. Hurricanes, fires and disease outbreaks are not new; however, the unpredictability of the terrorist threat, along with an ability to bring resources to bear in addressing an incident, has changed dramatically.

Effective response to an incident may involve thousands of pieces of equipment, from helicopters to fire trucks. Response also involves thousands of people, including the first responders, medical staff, and infrastructure repair and maintenance technicians—all from multiple jurisdictions united by a system of mutual aid agreements.

In addition to managing resources, guidelines must be addressed, including the Incident Command System (ICS) and National Incident Management System (NIMS) requirements. Finally, if an operation is to receive reimbursement after the incident, accurate documentation of all activity is crucial. With today's complex, interrelated resources, activities, and processes, preparedness is not a one-time event or static ideal. It is continual process that spans all facets of planning, response and recovery. This is the process known as Continual Preparedness.

Rx for Effective Planning, Response and Recovery: Continual Preparedness

Continual preparedness is based on the principle that no single aspect of incident management stands alone. Before an incident occurs, plans must account for available resources. Those plans must tie directly into active response activities. During the response phase, every facet of response is interdependent. Every ambulance deployed to one area is now no longer available to other areas. Every hospital bed taken is one less bed available to

the next victim. If step one of an evacuation plan is completed, responders can then begin step two.

Finally, every activity, deployment, and resource consumed has a direct impact on recovery and reimbursement. Today, planners have recognized the need to better manage the complexities of preparedness. The confusion that arose in response to 9/11, and later in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, underscores these challenges.

Today's Tactics and Solutions: The Good News and the Bad

While the demands of coordinating complex resources and activities remains daunting, the good news is that lessons have been learned and are being applied. Established processes, such as NIMS and ICS, are providing a common framework for multi-agency coordination. Assessments of critical needs and results of simulations have yielded a wealth of critical planning data, identifying needs, locations, resources, and necessary procedures when an incident occurs. Unfortunately, in most cases this vital information lies buried in disparate files unconnected to response operations systems—or worse yet, sitting on shelves in dusty three-ring binders.

In addition to established processes, advances in technology have enabled great strides in communication and collaboration. Emergency Operations Center (EOC) technologies now make it possible to enable collaboration across organizations and locations. During response, incident commanders can instantly access thousands of points of information through status boards covering all facets of response. Unfortunately, while they support improved communications and collaboration, today's EOC solutions are designed only to deliver the data that's put into them. The task of managing complexity still depends entirely on human input.

Achieving Continual Preparedness: Intelligent Resource and Information Management

Thanks to advances in technology, continual preparedness today is a realistic goal for emergency management and public health decision makers. The critical ingredient: an intelligent resource



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and information management solution known as the Previstar Continual Preparedness System (CPS).

Previstar CPS not only integrates information on people, processes, plans, equipment, facilities, supplies and documentation into one system, but it automatically and intelligently manages and updates that information based on constantly-changing conditions. The result is a system that delivers crucial functionality for planners, incident commanders and disaster recovery coordinators alike—dramatically reducing dependence on cumbersome manual data entry and management to ensure that accurate, up-to-date information is available to the people who need it, when they need it most.

Previstar CPS automates and supports critical needs for all phases of crisis and event planning, including:

- **Planning**
 - o Identify shortfalls and predict resource needs
 - o Link planning and response processes
 - o Facilitate hazard mitigation planning
 - o Capture data and lessons learned from exercises and simulations

- **Response**
 - o Maintain real-time situational awareness
 - o Deploy resources based on accurate, up-to-date information
 - o Activate pre-established plans, tasks and checklists
 - o Access system in the EOC or in the field (through any Web-enabled device)

- **Recovery**
 - o Automate documentation of resources used and activities
 - o Align with NIMS/ICS requirements
 - o Reduce audit risk with accurate automated data capture
 - o Accelerate time to reimbursement by leveraging a single system of record for all activity

- **All Phases**
 - o Organize, locate, and display vast amounts of information through a single system of record
 - o Automate NIMS/ICS processes and documentation
 - o Easy deployment over the Web or on site (works with existing status board EOC systems)

A Practical Solution for Tomorrow's Incident Management Challenges

The Previstar system provides a practical solution for achieving continual preparedness. Previstar CPS can be deployed as a standalone system or to work with existing EOC solutions, and it accommodates a complete array of information sources and types, including documents, maps, iPIX photography, and more.

By covering all aspects of planning, response and recovery, the Previstar CPS accommodates the realities of today's interconnected public health and emergency management environment. For everyone involved in today's planning, response and recovery operations, it is a solution whose time has come.

To learn more about Previstar and Continual Preparedness, visit www.previstar.com