

# Preparing for the

# AFTERSHOCK

An emergency communications center must prepare for the aftermath of a major incident, as well as the incident itself.

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**A**s public safety telecommunications professionals, we spend countless hours training and honing our craft. One of our areas of focus is preparing for a large-scale incident such as an active shooter. However, what often falls by the wayside is training and preparing for the aftermath of a large-scale event. Although one can never foresee every nuance that may arise, we will examine a few key points that will help an agency prepare for the aftershock of a large-scaled event to ensure continuity of operations.

## SCHEDULING

The key point of preparation for continuity of operations after a large-scale event is scheduling. After a high-profile active shooter event, one agency saw their call volume explode from an average of 1,200 calls on their evening shift (3 p.m.-11 p.m.) to 2,600 calls during that same period. This continued for approximately three weeks after the incident. In addition to having an elevated call volume, there will be personnel that must attend debriefings that will also impact scheduling. Supervisors or managers might be pulled from their regular duties for special assignments, such as making tapes or transcripts. An agency should examine whether it is qualified (and certified if necessary) to assist with administrative tasks to alleviate the additional tasks of supervisors and/or managers so they can focus on running the emergency communications center.

It is imperative that an agency has a contingency plan to accommodate the expected explosion in the call volume. Most agencies already have a scheduling policy for weather events such as hurricanes or tornadoes. An agency should consider whether this policy could be used for large-scale events as well. Additionally, an agency can examine the viability of using recently transferred or retired employees. Another option to consider is to

have an agreement in place with a neighboring agency that might be able to “lend” a few public safety telecommunicators for a couple of weeks to alleviate the scheduling burden.

## CALLS FOR SERVICE

We all know that during a large-scale event, regular calls for service do not stop. This is true after an event, as well. Field personnel will be pulled for cordons and special duties. While neighboring agencies are always happy to lend a hand, an agency should plan on how those assisting units should be used. Should they be used as cordon units or should they be used for calls for service? If they are used as cordon units, does their own agency policy state how long they should be on the cordon before they are rotated out? Another question to ponder is if these assisting units should be dispatched from a mutual aid channel or by their own ECC. If it is the latter, how should the calls for service be communicated to the assisting agency? By phone? By radio? Or by fax or email? How can an agency ensure that the calls for service are being received and responded to by the assisting agency?

## INFORMATION

A majority of the influx of calls into the ECC are from worried family members

and the media. Undoubtedly, an agency’s emergency operations center (EOC) will be activated during a large-scale event. While activating the EOC and/or an information line will alleviate some of the call burdens, there is the distinct possibility that an information line would not be staffed 24 hours a day. Are there other employees within the agency who can assist with staffing an information line into the late evening hours in an effort to alleviate some of the call burden coming into the ECC? While with an EOC activation there are either communications personnel or communications supervisors who assist with staffing, an agency should examine whether the use of ECC personnel is necessary or if they would be better used within the center.

The most current vital information must be provided to the telecommunicator to efficiently continue working. If your agency does not have “line ups” before a shift to give a “morning debriefing,” consider enacting the practice for a week or two after the incident. This will give incoming personnel the most current information to begin their shift. Additionally, make sure the lineups are held away from the communications floor so the public safety telecommunicators (PSTs) who are working are not disturbed with additional chatter.