

STRENGTHENING CRISIS & EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT PROGRAMS

We already face an overwhelming array of hazards and threats every year, but according to weather predictions, the [strength of hurricanes could double by 2050](#). With the prospect of more dangerous and destructive storms and natural disasters in our future, we need to proactively prepare to protect our people and physical assets.

With the [hurricanes devastating Florida and Texas](#), and the [wildfires plaguing Montana](#), it's even more critical for organizations to establish a Crisis and Emergency Management (CEM) Team and training programs formulated to actively engage employees. Employees are often provided with an [emergency procedures document](#), but short of the legally-required fire alarm drills, we do not put these procedures into practice for the clear majority of our employees. Indeed, many companies take the "compliance approach." They falsely believe that an emergency procedures pamphlet provides employees with the tools to respond to emergencies.

Even companies who take a more active role in planning tabletop exercises or larger scale simulations generally do not involve all employees. They only involve those employees on the Emergency Management Team (EMT) and rely on their remaining staff to remember procedures, follow instructions, and standby until the EMT communicates a response. This approach might have worked prior to social media and instant access to information, but today, employees are not as keen to merely standby and wait. This environment benefits from more transparency and inclusion.

One of the primary goals of CEM Programs is to be understood by all involved. When an event arises, employees should already know the process and understand the procedures to follow. To act in an emergency, employees need to develop muscle memory through practice. In addition, employees are our eyes and ears on the ground. If we train them to look for abnormal situations and encourage them to report these situations through an easy, efficient process (via an App, for example), they can warn the CEM Team of incidents in advance.

Everyone must feel some level of ownership in a Crisis Management Program. Companies can increase ownership by communicating more about their CEM initiatives and plans to protect its people, as well as conducting simulations involving more employees.

I was part of a dynamic Crisis and Emergency Management Team for an energy company based in the United Arab Emirates, and the following recommendations on how to involve more employees in your CEM Program are attributed to my experience on that team.

GET EMPLOYEES INVOLVED:

- Keep employees updated through intranet posts, emails, fliers, etc. A monthly update on the team's activities helps show transparency and engagement. This is also good marketing for the Global Security/Crisis Management Team.
- Conduct in-person and virtual presentations on the Crisis Management Program and incentivize employees to participate via extra points for performance reviews, lunch, or access to fun events. Record these presentations, so employees can watch them on-demand. In-person trainings help instill the content, but with demanding schedules, this is not always possible. I recommend ensuring that an on-demand system tracks those who viewed the training.
- Create content for the CEM procedures using short videos. Employees are much more likely to understand instructions by viewing a video rather than reading a manual. These videos do not need to be elaborate, but they should be short and available on-demand.
- Consider creating an App for employees to store key CEM information on their phones. This should not be a binder-full of your crown jewels, just an easy-to-navigate menu with the necessary information on what to do in an emergency. Employees are more likely to have their phones with them in any part of a building (i.e. conference room, cafeteria, offsite meeting space, etc.) than they are to have a company-directed pamphlet.
- Actively recruit participants to join the CEM or the Support Team. Succession planning is an important element of CEM Programs. Allowing younger members to join the Support Team builds confidence, increases their buy-in, and prepares them to take on leadership roles in the future. Our team made this a priority and heavily trained and involved our Support Team throughout the CEM preparation and activations.

We, as security practitioners, must actively engage our employees in the process and keep them updated on our CEM efforts. This offers reassurance that the company has a method to address situations and a team to actively prepare for different hazards.



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