

PREPARE FOR EMERGENCIES

By Joe Redmond

This year I had the opportunity to participate in emergency response training in Alexandria, Louisiana. I was very impressed with the equipment that they rely on for the types of emergencies they encounter. You may not realize that the issues we face up here in the Northern states, like ice storms, can have a close resemblance to the southern states with tornadoes and hurricanes. In both instances, there could be large areas of downed trees and power could be out for a significant time. I know first-hand how floods can ravish a community. The flooding that took place in the Villages of Schoharie and Middleburgh from Hurricane Irene and Tropical Storm Lee devastated those utilities.

What I learned in Louisiana and took to heart the most was that an Emergency Response Plan is so important for all our water and wastewater systems. When I worked for my village's utility, we had one on the shelf. And yes, I read through it too. It gave me peace of mind knowing exactly what to do in each type of emergency. Unfortunately, I never really knew the importance of that information when I was in the position of plant operation specialist. I always assumed if an emergency were to happen, the superintendent would take the lead and tell me what I needed to do. In most cases that would be true but, have you thought about what would happen if the emergency happened while the boss was on vacation or unavailable? I guess I just got lucky and that did



not happen. Once I became the Chief Operation Specialist, I made sure I knew what was in that little red binder and how to react to each scenario portrayed in the plan.

The Emergency Response Plan is set up in a way that makes the stress of dealing with an emergency a heck of a lot less than flying by wire and making hasty decisions. The first three pages are for your utility's information and a table of contents. The fourth page is where the plan begins and is numbered page 1. Here you will have the name, phone number, email and if equipped, the two-way radio frequency of each person involved with an emergency. Then the plan goes into the locations of each important document. This can be anything from maps, reports, O&M manuals etc. From there, it explains source information, it also contains water quality data, and pump types and their capacities. It contains emergency sources with the equipment information for that source to be utilized. The plan also contains information on the collection or distribution system. Main size and flow data is found in this section.

SCADA and chemical use information is in the following pages. As you can see, there is an abundance of information available to you right off the bat.

The next portion of the plan is where the stress of an emergency can be managed in a way that allows you to make calm rational decisions. The plan highlights each type of emergency and spells out exactly what you would do to deal with each situation. By taking the time to sit down and plan for each problem, you will have a better understanding of what to do and how each decision may impact another portion of your system. Knowing these types of things before disaster strikes can ease your mind tremendously. This plan will provide you with the information on what to do, what valves to use, what tools you will need, and who to contact including their number!



The last few pages of the plan are where you will find the contact names and numbers of every person, company, or news outlet that you may need to contact. I could go on all day telling you about each page in the plan. The point of this story is to get you thinking about emergencies. As stated at the beginning, I was impressed in Louisiana. They have response companies that have surplus military trucks custom outfitted to handle every emergency you can think of. I will admit, I took notes and at minimum will be outfitting my work truck with some essentials.

Please feel free to contact me or any of our Rural Water Team. We have the Emergency Response Plan templates and can certainly assist you with designing a plan that fits your utility's needs, you may also find the documents here <https://nyruralwater.org/downloads/downloads-vulnerability-assessment>. Remember, without a plan, we are running around stressed out and making so many decisions. Let's not waste valuable time making the wrong ones. Develop a good plan, review, and update it often. When disaster strikes, it will be just another day at the office and the customers may never even know you saved the day. 💧💧💧



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