



HOW PREPARED IS YOUR STAFF?

by

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According to the Pew Research Center, 64% of American adults own a smartphone. That figure is well supported by most court organizations when it comes to judges and staff members. In addition, it is common practice to carry a smartphone every day and as is often the case – glued to our ears. Since it appears that the workforce has embraced this technology - why not develop this resource into a tool to assist court leaders in preparing for emergency operations and to assist staff to respond effectively to nearly all emergencies?

The general practice is to assess preparedness and make adjustments while looking in the rearview mirror. Although the unpredictable nature of emergency situations makes it difficult to know for certain if everything will go as planned until after a specific incident has occurred, relying only on seeing what happens when a crisis hits to assess policies, procedures and training efforts, is unwise for the court leader. The actions taken during those initial minutes of an emergency are most critical.

Most plans, regardless if they are operational, strategic, tactical or contingency in nature, are built upon a solid command, control, and coordination of the content, policies, and procedures that shape and govern those plans. Moreover, the success of this planning structure is based on thorough communications and ready access to the appropriate information. Can you relate to this observation: For over thirty years, I have heard the following comments each time an emergency drill was conducted: no one knows what to do; few have the correct contact phone numbers; where do we assemble; my plan is out of date; I never was given a plan; I wasn't told the plan; my dog ate it; (LOL). Becoming very frustrated, something had to be done once and for all because – “all lives matter”.

Court leaders spend an enormous number of hours developing elaborate plans, like Continuity of Operations Plans and Emergency Evacuation Plans. While these plans effectively manage critical incidents, they are often not in the hands of all judges and staff members. Extracted portions are usually copied and disseminated to appropriate individuals, but more often than not, once disseminated; those portions are no longer current, especially key telephone numbers. And so goes the story – on and on and on.

The task that was undertaken was to search, develop and implement a solution that could be on a smartphone and/or tablet and available to every member of the court organization along with other key officials within county government.

THE STORY

There is better than a 75% probability that when a crisis or disaster strikes your court organization that you will not be in your office or at your desk and you will not have your organization's Emergency Operations Plan in your hand. So what good is that 2½ inch binder doing, (other than serving as a doorstop), that holds your organization's emergency operations plan? Not only will you not have it at your finger-tips when you need it most, but all of the other individuals that also have it throughout the court organization may have never read it, probably don't remember it, or worse, possibly do not understand the plan!

Another issue: The dreaded three-ring binder. For the approximate 90% of organizations that are proactive enough to have an emergency operations plan, paper and three-ring binders are the current status-quo. Having these binders sit on a bookshelf, serve as a doorstop, or placed in a drawer somewhere in the staff meeting room is only one segment of the problem. The binders also make it difficult to be at the ready to respond without notice to any type of emergency situation. If you are part of a court organization and can answer yes to any of the following statements, you might have an issue with emergency preparedness of the organization.

1. You have never seen the Emergency Operating Procedures (EOP).
2. The EOP is not distributed beyond the executive staff.
3. You only hear about the EOP at an annual review meeting.
4. You have a copy of an EOP from 2012 or even earlier.
5. You have never been involved in any emergency training or drills

All is not hopeless. Emerging technology that is capable of displacing the binders, or at least providing key information at your fingertips, is here and ready for prime-time. There are mobile application based emergency operation plans that can be used on your smart phone. A key benefit of a mobile application that stores your organization's plan onto your smart phone is the immediate access to your critical emergency information. If you are responsible for ensuring the safety of judges and staff, the greatest benefit of this type of application is that once your plans are synced to the application, your entire plan: contacts; teams; floor plans; all of it including the ability to communicate; is always available, even when internet and cellular service is interrupted. Additional benefits include saving court managers tons of time and effort in updating and communication plan changes, streamlining operations and saving lots of trees.

These smart phone applications are light-years better than paper-based plans. So the next time stuff happens, and it will, Murphy (from Murphy's Law), will make sure of it, which item will you have with you, your smart phone or your 2 ½ inch binder?

OUR SOLUTION

In our search for a better solution to the 2 ½ binder, we found My-EOP, developed by Guest Communications Corporation (GCC). There are other solutions available in the market that will provide different tools and different presentation format. The My-EOP application provides full custom content for your organization in a quick reference format that is similar to a tiered (flip-chart) format.

19th Judicial Circuit EOP	
My-EOP	
Medical Emergency	
General Shelter in Place	
General Evacuation	
Assembly Areas	
Explosion	
Bomb Threat Call Procedures	
Bomb Call Checklist	
How to ID Suspicious Packages and Letters	
Safety Stand Off	
Active Shooter	
Hostage Situation	
Severe Weather Tips	
Flood Safety	
Power Outage	
Earthquake	
Snow Emergency	
Demonstrations	
Phone Numbers	
Judges	
Emergency Phone Numbers	
Court Reporter Numbers	
Staff Directory by Division	
Adult Probation & Pretrial Services Division	
Judicial Administrative Services Division	
Judicial Information Services & Technology Divis	
Judicial Operations Division	
Juvenile Probation & Detention Services Division	
Legal Research Unit	
Psychological Services Division	
Senior Management	
Courtroom Phone Numbers	
Sheltering Locations	
Adult Probation	
Depke	
RLB Shelter	
Mundelein	
PC	
Mass Arrest	
Judiciary Mass Arrest Response Plan & Resources	
LCSO Mass Arrest Response Plan	
Mass Arrest Flowchart	
PD Mass Arrest Plan	
Telephone Contact Information	
SAO Mass Arrest Reponse Plan	
Clerk Mass Arrest Response Plan	
Emergency Phone Numbers Countywide	
Training Scenario	

We have found this solution to be easy to set-up, simple to use and understand, and affordable. Since going live with the application in our organization, we have experienced two emergency (non-drill) situations requiring evacuation and one for a specific focus area that requires immediate attention.

Here are some of the testimonials that were forwarded since the implementation of this My-EOP app.

- "... this mobile app is great. All the critical items that I need to know are laid out nicely and I do not need to look for it."

- "The My-EOP app is easy to use. As a matter of fact, I have a need to call Judge S...for an important item and it was easy because that it is listed in the My-EOP. It saved me a lot of time." says Judge S...

- "...we have a situation one weekend in the Pretrial Office of a water leak and I need to contact the Director of the Division. The My-EOP app saved me and was able to call this person without panicking as to how to get in contact with this person..."

The adoption of the My-EOP tool provides access to the up-to-date *emergency operations plan* anywhere, anytime whenever it is necessary or required. The content in this app are made available for the safety and security of all Judges, key personnel, employees of the 19th Judicial Circuit and the public we serve.