

## Maximize the effectiveness of disaster preparedness

Written by Jeremy Stacy



**At Good Samaritan Hospital Los Angeles, a SaaS-based automated incident management system provides a top-down culture of accountability and reporting for everything from floods to power outages and more.**

The last year has seen unprecedented natural disasters across the U.S., making the Joint Commission emergency management standards requiring hospitals to maintain an incident command system an obvious necessity. Good Samaritan Hospital is among a growing number of hospitals nationwide taking disaster management to a new level via streamlined communication. By moving from a paper-based assessment of resources, people and plans to a software-as-a-service (SaaS) -based automated solution, the hospital has newfound specificity of available resources and precise protocols that strengthens emergency preparedness and response.

In the paper-based disaster plan world prior to the automated solution, drills and incidents at the 408-bed hospital could easily turn chaotic due to cumbersome systems of notification or protocols for use of resources. It was difficult to gain a clear picture of the incident in real time and efficiently coordinate a response with the available communication tools.

The old process utilized a generic resources form that every unit and department filled out and faxed to the hospital command center. As many as 70 paper assessments would have to be manually compiled, which was highly time consuming and inaccurate without full compliance and departmental specificity.

Good Samaritan Hospital made the change from paper-based disaster management to CommandAware, a SaaS incident management system from healthcare management solution developer Concerro. The system allows the hospital to communicate with personnel, track resources and coordinate customized disaster protocols in real time. CommandAware has been at the core of a comprehensive emergency management plan for mandated drills and a number of incidents since 2008, including a power outage and a water disruption.

### Emergency management compliance

The Joint Commission requires hospitals to compile a Hazard Vulnerability Analysis, which ranks hazards on probability, severity and the hospital's preparedness to deal with these scenarios. Hospitals must perform two mandated drills a year, although Good Samaritan performs five drills a year in addition to whatever real incidents occur.

Departmental reporting is the key to a disaster management plan. The incident management system provided the customizable framework to input both departmental resources and reporting protocols into the system. Resource parameters were designed by department heads and are specific to each unit and area of the hospital. Hospital-wide training and department customization was accomplished with the help of the vendor in the span of one accumulative week's time.

The hospital needed to create a culture of accountability and ongoing awareness of resources and incident protocols. Departments with mission-critical resources such as oxygen, nitrous oxide, generator fuel and ventilators log into the Web-based emergency management system every day to update the available inventory of resources. Other resources such as beds, wheelchairs, linens etc. are updated in the system every two weeks. The process cements system familiarity while ensuring that available resource inventory is never older than 24 hours for mission-critical resources.

### Drills and incidents

The Joint Commission Emergency Management standards focus on communication, resources and assets; safety and security; patient care; staff management and utilities management. During Good Samaritan Hospital's recent audit, review times were minimized due to the ability to provide real-time reporting criteria on all six components via the system using an overhead screen versus notebooks and paperwork.

A recent public water main break resulted in the hospital pulling in turbid water that was unsuitable for hospital uses. All areas needed immediate notification and specialized procedural instructions for differing departments. Paper- and phone-based communication would have taken several people in the command center more than an hour to notify all units. The Web-based incident management system decreased the needed response resources to one person who used the mass-notification feature to notify all units in less than 20 minutes.

More efficient communication resulted in leadership spending less time on the phone and more time mitigating the impact on patient care. The incident protocols and communication plan meant that only one of the day's surgeries had to be rescheduled. Because CommandAware provides a virtual command center, the vast majority of the 18-member incident management team monitored the incident remotely from various parts of the hospital, while seamlessly running operations for their departments. More than 80 percent of unit managers were logged into the system to monitor, report and engage plan protocols to rapidly address the challenges of the incident.

Although the incident management software is primarily an internal tool to the hospital, it can be utilized in broader incidents to coordinate area hospital resources when necessary. For this reason, CommandAware was implemented across L.A. County into the clinic association and 83 hospitals organized into 13 disaster resource umbrellas that are all connected to the county's EMS agency.

For Good Samaritan Hospital, a top-down culture of accountability and reporting that flows from the executive team is what maximizes the effectiveness of disaster preparedness. Due to the implementation of an automated incident management system, the hospital went from 35 percent reporting compliance to almost 90 percent today, making for a highly adaptive environment for saving lives, energy and resources.

#### **About the author**

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