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LESSON LEARNED

School Communications: Incorporating School Radio Stations into Campus Emergency Operations Plans

SUMMARY

School administrators should consider incorporating their campus radio stations into their emergency operations plans. This can help disseminate information to the greater campus community during an emergency.

DESCRIPTION

Hurricane Katrina made second landfall as a Category 3 hurricane on the Gulf Coast on August 29, 2005. The storm killed over 1,300 people and caused catastrophic damage in Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama. Louisiana State University (LSU) in Baton Rouge was the closest university in a non-affected area of Louisiana. LSU accepted 2,300 students displaced by the hurricane from other colleges and universities. Additionally, LSU set up a triage facility that received over 25,000 people in the weeks following the disaster. LSU remained fully operational and began the fall semester of classes the week after the hurricane struck. During this time, it was essential for LSU to update evacuees and the university community on the hurricane response and its effects on normal university functions.

LSU administrators used the campus FM radio station to disseminate this critical information. University administrators provided the radio disk jockeys with regular information releases to be read on the air. They also provided spokespeople from the university and the university police department at pre-arranged times to answer call-in questions from listeners. Calls varied from questions about whether classes were cancelled to how to locate missing loved ones in shelters.

LSU administrators received positive feedback on the effectiveness of this information distribution method. Consequently, LSU now has a verbal agreement with the radio station that allows LSU to use the station to disseminate emergency- or crisis-related information. LSU will implement this practice on a case-by-case basis. Additionally, the LSU Emergency Operations Center funded the appraisal process and approved the purchase of a generator for the radio station. The generator ensures that the station will have backup power to broadcast critical information in the event of future crises. The radio station will pay for the purchase of the generator.

School administrators should consider incorporating their campus radio stations into their emergency operations plans. This is an effective way to disseminate information to the greater campus community during a crisis.

CITATIONS

Adams, Ricky. Chief of Police, Louisiana State University. Interview with *Lessons Learned Information Sharing*, 27 Jul 2007.

Department of Homeland Security. *Campus Public Safety Preparedness for Catastrophic Events: Lessons Learned from Hurricanes and Explosives*. Jun 2006.

https://www.llis.dhs.gov/member/secure/detail.cfm?content_id=22147

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