Emergency Communications: Technical Solutions, Political Risks, Community Information, and Lessons Learned

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Emergency Alerts

Public Safety is Job #1

• Failed Notification
• Failed Public Response
• Failed Preparation to Act
Challenges

- Inaccurate Geo-Targeting
- Low Registration Rates
- Failure to Practice Use
- Public Reaction
  - Distrust
  - Confusion on Action to Take
Actions

• Review Existing Tools & Options
• Measure Penetration Rates
• Practice with the Public
• Practice Internal Review and Use
Public Safety Power Shutoff (PSPS) Plans
Authority to Shutoff Power

- CA Public Utilities Code (PU Code) Sections 451 and 399.2(a)
  - Authority to shut off electric power in emergency situations when necessary to protect public safety

- CPUC Resolution ESRB-8
  - Reasonableness
    - Burden to demonstrate is decision was necessary to protect public safety
  - Notification
    - Must provide notice to its customers, to the extent possible and appropriate
  - Mitigation
    - Must provide Mitigation to its customers, to the extent possible and appropriate
  - Reporting requirements
    - Submit a report to the CPUC Safety and Enforcement Division within 10 days
Fire and Severe Weather Monitoring

Example from Southern California Edison

Weather Stations
- Collects high-resolution local weather data
- Enables more accurate forecasting

Situational Awareness Center
- 24/7 weather and situational awareness monitoring
- Co-located with SCE’s Emergency Operations Center and Watch Office
- SCE meteorologists on-site

High-Resolution Weather Data Visualization
- Visualization of weather conditions at circuit level
- Alerts when conditions reach thresholds

Fire Monitoring Cameras
- High-Definition
- Remote-controlled pan-tilt zoom
PUBLIC SAFETY POWER SHUTOFF

Example from Southern California Edison

Last resort public safety measure to mitigate wildfire risk

4-7 DAYS AHEAD

When forecasts indicate extreme weather, SCE will begin predictive modeling to assess potential impact.

3 DAYS AHEAD

SCE monitors fire weather watch alerts from the National Weather Service (NWS) and continues to refine predictive models.

2 DAYS AHEAD

Extreme fire weather conditions forecasted and NWS Red Flag Warning issued. Coordinate with local government and agencies (e.g., emergency responders) first. Initiate customer notifications on possible power shutoff.

1 DAY AHEAD

Extreme fire weather conditions imminent; continued modeling and more accurate forecasts determine affected areas. Continue to coordinate and communicate with local government, agencies and customers of possible power shutoff.

POWER SHUTOFF

Extreme fire weather conditions validated by field resources; notify local government, agencies and customers of power shutoff.

POWER RESTORATION

Extreme fire weather subsides to safe levels and conditions validated by field resources; inspections and patrols of equipment begin, then power is restored to affected communities; agencies and customers notified of power restoration.

PLANNING AND MONITORING

OUTAGE

Concerns with PSPS Plans

- Conditions and transparency in decision making processes
- Effective event notification to stakeholders
- Impact of de-energization on
  - Vulnerable populations
  - Alert and Warning capabilities
  - Water services
- Decision process and timeline for re-energization
- Lack of IOU representation within the emergency response structure
- Mitigation to reduce the need for PSPS plans
What We’ve Seen
Communication Objectives

- Coordinate with Incident Command and all agency partners to deliver accurate and timely information.

- Utilize all channels to communicate: alerts (text, email, landline, WEA), website, media, social media, 211, County government cable TV, kiosks and trap lines, daily press conferences and community meetings, evacuation shelter.

- Monitor social media to correct and contain misinformation and rumors.

- Communication focus to reach Spanish-speakers, and those with access and functional needs.
Communication Challenges

1. Bilingual Communications:
   40% of county is non-English speaker.

2. No Power, Communications, Utilities:
   130,000 customers lost power in Thomas Fire. In Debris Flow, thousands without power, gas, cell, cable TV, water, sanitation.

   Challenging for communication staffing resources and training.

4. Evacuations During Holiday Season:
   Evacuations ran Dec. 6-21. Schools were closed up to 18 days in December and January. SB City College and UCSB delayed finals. Evacuation fatigue prior to debris flow.
Lessons Learned from the Trenches
Questions?

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