

# Houtkin Consulting Newsletter

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## This Newsletter: Accounting for Staff during an Incident

### Introduction.

There is no magic bullet that will help account for staff at the onset of an incident through the first 0-4 and then 24-48 hours. It takes process and education and repeated drills in order to be sure that even a small percentage of staff can see through their own angst to follow the process.

As many of us in the industry saw and experienced during 9/11, some people do not know who they are and how they will react during a catastrophic event. This makes it very difficult to ensure that we can establish a process with a set of guidelines and tools that help staff to focus on accountability. Many will become paralyzed; many will focus on leaving, period. This is understood and leaves us with a question: How can we establish evacuation and accountability processes when even our own Crisis Team/Safety Team and/or Fire Wardens are subject to their own responses to an incident that they may not be prepared to handle? And although we can create process, provide tools and guidelines, education and drills, we never really know how people are going to react. All drills are simulations. We can only hope that by repeating the educational sessions and drills that we eventually raise the percentage of those who will respond to the process and guidelines during an actual event.

We need to understand our community with whom we are trying to account for and remember that when they joined the particular firm with whom they are working, that they did not sign-on to deal with catastrophic events. They joined to better their career or their bank account/investments. And as much as we try to explain that the world has changed, staff are not yet ready to take this on as part of the working requirement.

Every process is comprised of entities that

perform the actions that defined the process. The entities in the Accountability process are staff; the assembly point, the call tree, the call tree process and the event, itself. Every one of these entities are a major variable that cannot be controlled with the exception of the call tree -- although many call trees become out-of-date without regular maintenance. We can only do the best we can to train, educate and exercise. The rest is up to those entities engaged in the process at the time of the incident.

We started this article by saying that there is no magic bullet. This is true. Because of the variables; e.g. the incident; staff response; health/welfare of the communications systems, we cannot establish a single process but rather, suggest a series of processes, establish educational venues, provide a phased-in approach to accountability through various means of communication and finally, ensure that staff have the necessary tools supporting a strong communications process.

### **What is key to Accountability? Commitment to Communication.**

#### **What is Accountability?**

Accountability is a process that can potentially save lives by determining through process and visual and abbreviated methods of communication, status of staff within the first 0-1 hour; 1-4 hours; 4-8 hours and 24/48 hours after the onset of a catastrophic event.

The goal of the process is to attempt to save lives and identify staff status (who needs medical assistance, who may still be left in the building) and to communicate this information to a First Responder to better direct their search into the building. As time moves away from the 0 hour of the event, the process supports communication with family for staff who may be injured and/or sequestered from fear and then completion of the human resource process.

Accountability focusses on saving lives on the onset of the event and through the first 24-48 hours. This is the time when we need to know who needs medical attention (whether physical

or psychological); who is available to continue with the business process; who may have died as a result of the event. This process directly affects the health and welfare of the Business as Accountability of staff focusses on the most important asset of any Company: its staff.

It is called Staff Accountability for 3 reasons:

- Every member of staff has someone who is accountable for communicating with them.
- Every member of staff is accountable for communicating with the company if they choose not to attend the assembly point.
- You are literally - visibly accounting for staff at the assembly point. The knowledge of your staff's well-being is crucial to their well-being and your business' viability.

The Accountability process permits a visible accountability of staff. It is not an automated process.

### **Benefits of Staff Accountability.**

1. To save lives on the onset of an event by being able to visibly locate staff and support those who may be in need of medical attention.
2. To help First Responders direct their search into a building by providing: a street address, a map of the floor (ingress/egress points of the building and the layout of an uninjured floor); the name of a person that can help the injured person respond when they may be medically or psychologically spent.
3. To help to save the lives of First Responders by providing a more directed search.
4. To help healing of staff by being able to account for staff quickly at the onset of an event - cutting short the time at the assembly point so that they may leave the area and connect with their family.
5. To create a process that family members can enable if staff members are not able to communicate after returning home.
6. To support the resiliency of the business by being able to identify available staff and their status.

### **What Accountability is Not.**

Accountability is not a notification process; e.g. a run-through of the call tree process, although it uses the process and call tree information. The Call Tree is a notification tool, not an accountability process.

Accountability cannot be performed by an automated notification/response system. We can never be sure that the "response key" was pressed because the person was alive or due to falling debris that happened to hit the key.

Most importantly, we can never assume that anyone is not in danger until we can visualize them or receive some response from them through physical presence at the assembly point, texting, email or, if possible, cellular call.

### **Buy-In.**

As many know, it can be difficult to get "buy-in" from the business and the staff to maintain their call trees. There is no way around this, unfortunately. Whether maintained on spreadsheets or with notification systems, a plan is required to determine resource requirements and costs for the call tree maintenance process.

"Buy-In" is required from the following Departments: Human Resources; the CEO; the Department Head; the Business BCP representatives and the Administrator.

One would hope that these sponsors understand that Accountability saves lives and moves the Business Community out of the incident phase to that of the healing, continuity and/or resilience.

Most importantly, you must be able to gather "buy-in" from staff. They are the people who will have to make a choice to engage in accountability, at whatever point in the process. They have to be able to reconcile who they are/ become at the onset and during the first 48 hours of an event and be able to see the need to move away from their fears and previous experience to engage or just even communicate their status.

## The Accountability Process - A Phased-In Approach.

If we look at the complete end-to-end process, we find that we may need a phased-in approach because we want to answer the following questions:

1. Did staff evacuate the building?
2. Have you been able to identify those who you cannot account for on your call tree? Could they still be in the building?
3. Have you provided a call tree to First Responders to help them in their search for staff who were not accounted for and may still be in the building?
4. Can you account for staff who are in the hospital or who have passed on as a result of the incident?
5. Did staff make it home?
6. Are critical staff able to assume their roles to respond to the next-day mission critical business process?
7. Is the team of critical alternate staff available to assume the role of critical staff to perform the mission critical process.

We need to identify various means of communication based on time as it moves away from the event and where staff are in the overall, end-to-end process. For example, we may account for staff at the assembly point, but they still have to make it home; still need to check in - especially to gather information from their Management or actually identify that they are able to fulfill the role of performing mission critical business processes the next day.

### Passage of Time. Stress and Staff Retention.

Do not under-estimate the stress people will begin to feel over time as they begin to process what happened.

This could potentially result in a retention issue. Staff become angry, do not want to communicate, need psychological help.

Time	Action	Accountability Phase	Tool
0-1 Hour	Evacuation Assembly	0 Phase 1 Phase	NA Visual Recognition Texting: Blackberry/ Cell Email: Blackberry/ Cell
1-4 Hour	Leaving the Area	NA	NA
4-8 Hour	Arrive Home	2 Phase	Emergency Hotline Landline or Cell
8-12 Hour	Departmental Conference Call	3 Phase	Departmental Hotline Landline or Cell
Next Morning	Departmental Conference Call	4 Phase	Departmental Hotline Landline or Cell

## Where do you start?

### 1.0. Map Your Process.

Map the full process from evacuation to assembly point, accounting for staff, communication to first responders and leaving the area. Once you reach the assembly point, it should only take 3 mins to account for staff.

### 2.0. Choose your assembly point.

Check with your Security or Building Manager as to whether they have defined an assembly point for their tenants. If your Building Manager has not defined an Assembly point for tenants, choose an assembly point that is as far away from the building as your building is tall. Review with your building manager or local Fire

Department before finalizing. Make sure you take all entrances/exits to the building so that staff are not confused.

As well, define places for staff to stand at the assembly point: by business, by direction (North, South), etc. This facilitates the accountability process.

Create hand-held signs so that staff can quickly find their area at the Assembly Point.

### 3.0. Evacuation and Evacuation Tools

1. Check with your Corporate Security or Building Manager regarding their fire and non-fire emergency plans with a focus on Evacuation and Assembly point.
2. If your Building Manager has not defined a non-fire emergency plan, call your local Fire Department for support.
3. Train your staff on both the evacuation process including location of exits as well as other egress points in the building so that they know whether the exit leads to a lobby in the building or an area on the street. This avoids disorientation should they take an exit that they are not so familiar with.
4. Schedule regular evacuation and Shelter-in-place drills with the Corporate Security or Building Manager/Fire-Safety Director. In most cases, these drills are already scheduled.
5. Check staff with health issues and suggest that they bring in 1-3 day's worth of medication in case of a shelter-in-place.
6. Check with your building manager re: the availability of an evacuation chair or trauma board to carry staff down stairs who may be infirm during an evacuation.

### 4.0. Call Tree/Call Tree Process

1. Create your call tree listing of all up-to-date contact information for every member of the your Company. Do not forget consultants. Gather the call tree information: Office, Home, Cellular, Emergency Numbers and email.
  - Identify who will be responsible for

maintaining the call tree and call tree process. Revise monthly.

- Some people have an issue with paper, but the paper form can be small and fit in the wallet. Electronic address books are great: 1) if they are powered; 2) if the cell network is working -- some valid concerns. As well, the paper call tree can be handed off to First Responders to direct their search back into the building.
2. What to put on your call tree? In addition to the listing of staff names and contact information, I put a map of the floor with exits to help Fire Fighters in case there search is visually impacted by fire or smoke. I also like to place emergency numbers for local police, hospital, fire department so disoriented staff has all the information they need in case they are on the street.
  3. A call tree process identifies groups of people who have a primary and alternate person responsible for accounting for them. Some people put the manager as the accountable caller and their staff as the listing of people who they are responsible for accounting for. For every one person accountable for calling even one person, you need a double or a second in case the primary caller is unavailable.
  4. Create the call tree process (primary/alternate callers and who will be accountable for who) for each Business/Department.
  5. Test the call tree with everyone at least every quarter. Numbers change!

### 5.0. Other Forms of Communication The 1/800-1/877 Number

We have to accept the fact that many people will not go to the Assembly point. How do we account for them? There are basically 2 options: 1) The off-premise 1-800/1-877 number and/or 2) notification and response systems.

1. The 1-800/1-877 number could be designed with an extended number of voice mail box/boxes per business and ensure that everyone is educated on how to leave /

access messages.

- Determine two primary and two alternates who will own the number, be accountable for required logons and passwords as well as change greetings.
  - Create the team who will gather and analyze the accountability information during the incident.
2. You can consider a 1-800/1-877 number answered by an operator for human contact . If that's the case -- make sure the person answering is at least 50 miles away so that they are not dealing with the same event you are.
  3. Test the Hotline number with staff. This includes ensuring that everyone in the company knows the number, can retrieve messages and can leave messages. Administrators of the numbers need to test to ensure that they remember the system logon and passwords as well as make configuration changes that may be required to support the business.

#### **A NOTE about Notification Systems**

Notification systems are great but is not necessarily a tool for accurate accounting of staff. Notification systems send notices en masse to subscribers in the database. There is a response mechanism from your cell or blackberry, however these are the issues I see during an actual event:

- The cell network may be transitioned for use by First Responders only.
- Since you do not have visual confirmation of a member of your staff, you really do not know if they were the person who actually responded, where they are or if debris hit the phone and responded in-kind.

#### **Education.**

Write up the evacuation, accountability process, call tree and notification system instructions. Educate staff on a regular basis -- especially new staff and ensure that they share with their family as family members may be the people who actually call in staff status.

#### **Last Thoughts.**

There are many good technical ideas and projects that are now moving through the industry that make an attempt to respond to the ability to account for staff. In some cases their goal is to provide tools for First Responders to determine whether there are people on an impacted floor. These ideas are excellent but require additional work. The IEEE 802.11k specification is now being worked on that will map RFID/Cellular identifiers. But the components and the level of manufacturing is still pending. Here, the staff's security/access id and a wireless network with a device could potentially find staff on a floor that may be impacted. With a request to gather vital statistics on the person, the First Responder could identify whether they may still be alive and then alert additional medical support. But we must remember that net/net, there is no machine that can account for people. It still takes people to query and it still takes people to respond.