

## Communication Strategies

Communicating during an emergency situation requires developing a strategy in advance. It requires you to carefully “map out” the different paths to get your water system through an event quickly and safely, using the resources available to you at that time. It’s necessary to answer questions such as to who, how, and when your water system is going to communicate during an event.

A communications strategy provides structure to public water systems’ contingency plans. A failure in communications can be a disaster, cutting off vital support needed during an emergency. Consider some reasons why your system should develop a strategy:

- to coordinate response efforts;
- to notify the general public of health and safety concerns;
- to warn personnel of danger;
- to inform off-duty employees of their responsibilities; and
- to maintain consumer confidence.

**Stay in-touch with resources on security & emergency information provided for water utilities through WaterISAC.**

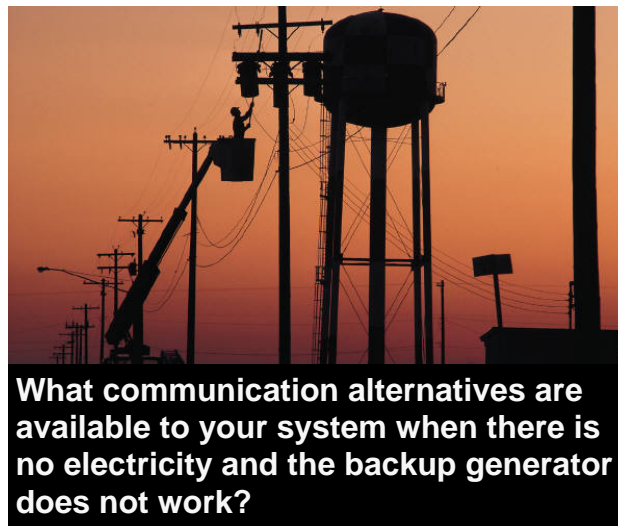
[www.waterisac.org/](http://www.waterisac.org/)

## Communications & Emergency Planning

In contingency planning, a strategy for communication can be divided into two categories:

- “Internal” communications, or communications of commands, requests, or directions by and between water system personnel and others associated with the specific disaster or emergency response.
- “External” communications, or communication of notifications, warnings, or general information to the general public and the water system’s customers.

Your public water system is most likely responsible for communication efforts in both of these categories even though you may not be directly responsible for transmitting general information to the public.



**What communication alternatives are available to your system when there is no electricity and the backup generator does not work?**

## How to Begin

It’s best to create your own communications strategy before a crisis occurs. There are several items to consider when developing your public water system’s communications strategy. Listed below are some examples to help you begin.

- Create a list or table of operations performed daily in order to maintain service from your water system. What forms of communication are used to support each operation?
- Determine needs for back-up communications, including messengers, telephones and high-frequency radios for each operation. How would each operation be impacted without the ability to communicate vital information during an emergency event?
- Prioritize each operation’s need for back-up communications when normal working conditions are affected by an event. What operations have the greatest impact on safety and health and on communications? Which of these should be restored first? (Remember to include procedures for restoring communications in your emergency preparedness plan.)
- Identify strengths and weaknesses of communications between employees of your water system and emergency responders.
- How will information about the emergency event be collected and communicated to the public, stakeholders and the media?

## More Information

- Each water system's contingency plan should include procedures on communications during an event.
- Typical forms of communication include person-to-person, telephone, fax, cellular phone, internet and e-mail and portable radios.
- Each public water system should consider whether its back-up generator is able to power emergency communications equipment in addition to powering required operations. Test this capability regularly; do not wait for an emergency to occur.
- Know your county's Emergency Management Agency (EMA) personnel. Exchange emergency contact information.
- Determine if and ensure your communications equipment, including back-up equipment, are compatible with your emergency response partners' equipment.
- Identify whether your system has prepared communications for water use advisories, boil orders, limited use advisories and no use advisories. Prepare these communications in advance and incorporate them into your contingency plan as part of your communications strategy. Be prepared to provide information to Ohio EPA, the media and the general public.

**ANTICIPATE** what forms of communication are vital to the operations of your water system. Also, consider who you or another employee might be communicating with during an emergency event.

**PREPARE** a communications strategy as part of your water system's contingency plan.

**PRACTICE** the procedures you have developed to ensure communications will not hinder your system during an emergency situation.

For more information, please contact Ohio EPA's Division of Drinking and Ground Waters at (614) 644-2752 or visit our Security Web site:

[www.epa.state.oh.us/ddagw/pwswebpg.htm](http://www.epa.state.oh.us/ddagw/pwswebpg.htm)

Get to know your county's Emergency Management Agency (EMA) personnel. Call the Ohio EMA's 24-hour number at (614) 889-7150 or visit their Web site for more information:

[www.ema.ohio.gov/ema.asp](http://www.ema.ohio.gov/ema.asp)



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*A Guide for Public Water Systems*

## Internal & External Communications During Emergency Events



**Division of Drinking and Ground Waters**

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