Department of Defense
Best Practice Guide

Best Practices for U.S. DoD Personnel Accountability in a Crisis

U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) agencies know their most valuable asset is their people. So when incidents such as active shooters, blackouts, cyber-attacks and natural disasters occur, it is imperative leaders account for the whereabouts and wellbeing of personnel. Communication must happen rapidly and frequently in order for response to be effective and for operations to continue with minimal impact.

Even the smallest incident can have adverse consequences. An afternoon power outage, computer virus or wastebasket fire can be detrimental enough. A worst-case scenario such as an active shooter, earthquake or pandemic can be highly disruptive. Regardless of a situation's severity, management must come together to decide on a course of action. Personnel must be accounted for and informed of the situation, and in certain instances, response teams must be formed and quickly mobilized.

An enterprise-class crisis communications product (coupled with industry best practices) can help DoD organizations meet the challenge, mitigating risk and its effect on people and processes.

Here are a few tips and best practices for utilizing notification and maximizing personnel accountability before, during and after a critical incident.

Plan for Accountability

Effective incident response hinges on the degree of planning conducted prior to the event. Strategies for dealing with a host of different scenarios should be well defined. Personnel should understand their role in a crisis, including the actions they should take to inform management of their location and status.

This may mean responding to a mobile notification, calling into an inbound message board, or notifying managers personally.

Get the First Message Right

For personnel to respond appropriately, they must first understand the situation. Knowing what has happened, what they are expected to do, and when the next communication will come is essential if they are to react quickly.

Message label.

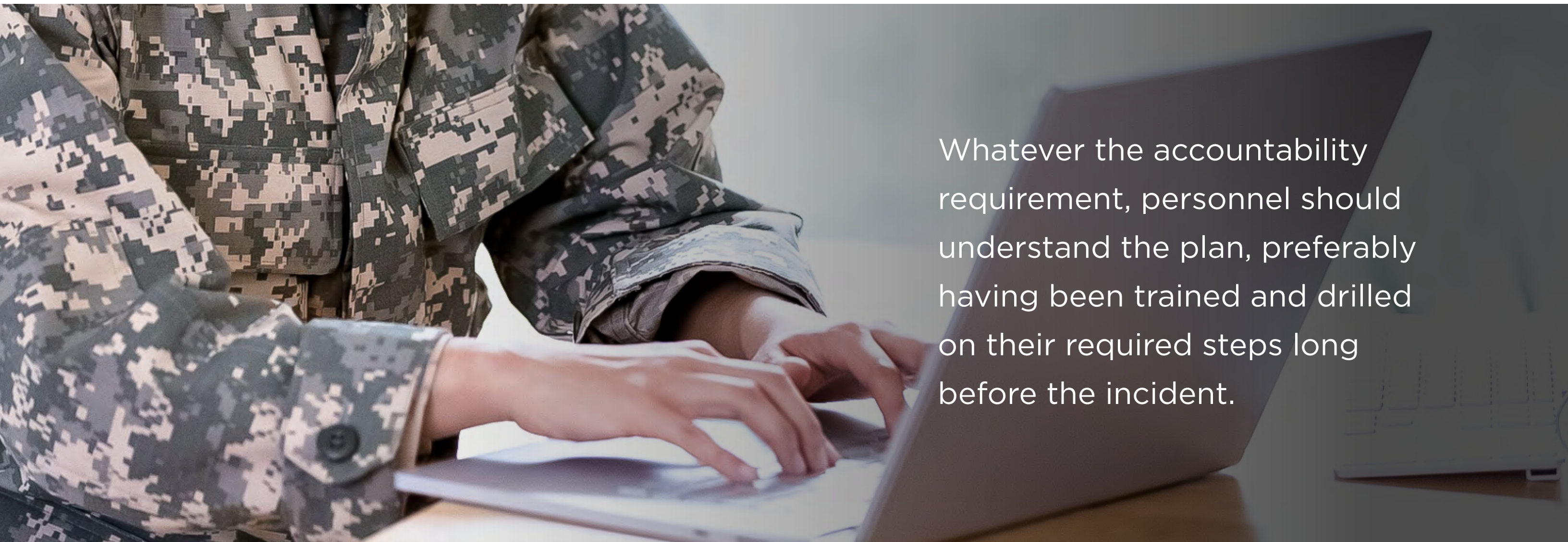
Identification of emergency message.

Who's speaking or authoring.

Identification of the agency's official who is issuing the warning. It is best for the initial message to come from a senior staff member; someone whose name or voice is instantly recognizable, confident and reassuring.

Intended recipients.

Statement of the targeted audience for which the message is intended. This should include specific division, geographic, or location identifiers.



What they should do, by when.

Explicit instructions on the actions personnel should take and the desired timeframe. Also includes any statements describing actions personnel are NOT to take.

Why they should do it.

A statement on the risks associated with the situation and what specific consequences may be faced if action is not taken.

Repeat.

Repeating of who the message is for, and what they should do within the required timeframe.

End: Message label and pending information.

Close out the message with the alert identification along with any instructions on where additional information can be obtained, or when personnel should look for updated information as the situation changes

Take a roll call.

Utilizing two-way polling alerting capabilities, leaders can determine who is safe and available to assist. Recipients can respond to a customizable question embedded into the notification message.

Personnel responses are tallied in reports, allowing leaders to make fast, sound decisions.

As a best practice note, in severe life/safety situations it is not recommended one of these responses be "I need help." The member's location is not known, creating a false impression that assistance is on the way. Instead, the message should include instructions to call 9-1-1 or an inbound hotline to speak with someone directly for emergency assistance.

Keep the information flowing.

Personnel accountability is more than knowing staff are safe. It is also about ensuring personnel can carry out their assigned duties and tasks to support agency resiliency.

Your staff are only human; they may feel fear and uncertainty in situations. If they don't have the information they need, they will inevitably make assumptions, listen to hearsay, and potentially turn to inaccurate sources for guidance.

Always send additional information as soon as it becomes available, and continually post updates to your inbound voice message boards. Your personnel will appreciate the facts, and your operation will get back on mission faster.

It is an agency's responsibility to account for its workers' safety and whereabouts during a critical event. By planning and preparing for post incident accountability, getting the first message right, taking a roll call, and continuing the flow of information throughout the course of the situation, the agency will better protect its most valuable asset, reduce liability risks, and help the agency recover more rapidly.

Learn how the OnSolve suite of products can support personnel accountability during crisis.

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About OnSolve

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