

EMERGENCY RESPONSE PLANNING
NETA Communication Council Call
October 4, 2006

PANELISTS: (in order of appearance)

Bob Neese, Promotions Director, Louisiana Public Broadcasting (LPB)

Tony Brooks, Deputy Director, Arkansas Educational Television Network (AETN)

Barbara Wood, Human Resources Supervisor, Arkansas Educational Television Network

Gwen Wood, Vice President, Distribution Services and Operations, PBS

Cynthia Jackson, Director, Operations and Distribution Services, PBS

ANCHOR: Catherine Christman, Vice President, Communications, South Carolina ETV

I. EMERGENCY PLANNING:WHAT WORKS, WHAT DOESN'T

Bob Neese, Louisiana Public Broadcasting

1. Being a statewide network, Hurricanes Katrina and Rita posed special challenges for LPB during September of last year that carried on throughout the year. We physically did not suffer any damage from the storms except to lose power in Baton Rouge which we covered with our generators at the station and transmitter. After Rita, our Lake Charles transmitter ran out of diesel after the storm and we had no way to get the tanks refilled because there was no phone service.
2. As was everyone else, we thought that the city of New Orleans had made it through the storm with only hurricane damage. When the levees broke, every transmitter in the city was flooded including WLAE and WYES, the two public television stations in New Orleans that lost their transmitters. Since our satellite dishes were still working, we became the focal point of the media frenzy that followed feeding everyone from *CNN*, *NOVA*, *NOW*, *MSNBC*, *Entertainment Tonight*, *the BBC* and any other network you could think about.

This went on for months.
3. On the third day after the storm, we became the temporary home for WWL-TV, the number one station in New Orleans. Their 115-person staff set up residence in our auditorium and their Web team moved into our computer lab. They began broadcasting 24/7 on our cable channel in Baton Rouge with nightly newscasts on our state network. That lasted for a month before they moved back to New Orleans. Their place was taken by WWOZ, the beloved public radio station in New Orleans who stayed until early December.
4. When cable was restored in the New Orleans area, we provided the feed for the WYES and WLAE slots on cable for more than two months. This gave us a strong public affairs presence in New Orleans which has continued to this day because WYES and WLAE now run *Louisiana: The State We're In* and *Louisiana Public Square* on their channels. Some of the cable channels kept us on after the storm. We also used the friendship we developed with WWL and WWOZ to get them to run our spots for special events like our Andre Rieu concert to great advantage.

Here is what we learned:

1. **Long-range planning is essential.** You need to have a broadcast plan for what you are going to broadcast and who is going to do it. The time to talk about it is months before hurricane, tornado, or flood season. We have a two-member news team that utilizes other station personnel to do a weekly magazine show. We are not set up to do wall-to-wall coverage for extended periods of time. We were also hindered by the fact that Robyn Eking, our lead anchor and producer for *Louisiana: The State We're In*, was trapped in her apartment in New Orleans for three days by the flooding. This is where we caught a break because WWL did the heavy lifting, providing newscasts and giving us the right to use their video for our own reports. We did crawls and did a wrap-up show on Friday.
2. **Know your personnel.** If you have people on your staff who have news experience or have shot video before, make sure they are on your broadcast team. For instance, I was an assignments editor for 10 years and a producer and reporter for 15 years and a number of our producers worked in commercial news at one time.
3. **Talk to your engineers.** Know what your capabilities are if the station is on generator. What will operate and what won't like the air conditioning, computers, phones, etc. We had a direct fiber line from Homeland Security that we could have used for live feeds with the Governor, Mayor Nagin and FEMA Director Mike "Good Job, Brownie" Brown if we actually knew about it. Never assume that anyone knows anything in your operation. Make sure everyone is up to speed on the station's capabilities.
4. **Cell phones are worthless** if all the relay towers are knocked down or under water. That was the major problem in New Orleans. No one could communicate with anyone else. Satellite phones are the only thing that works in a true emergency.
5. **Document everything** that you do on video or in stills. We realized after the storm was over and WWL and WWOZ were gone we had few stills documenting that they were there. They can be used later for Proof of Performance spots.

II. AETN's EMERGENCY RESPONSE PLANNING PROCESS

Tony Brooks began by noting that in Fall of 2004, Arkansas governor decreed that each state agency would devise a plan for continuity of operations under emergency conditions. AETN began with its engineering department. They held a table-top drill with all department members. The scenario: a tornado had taken out the state network

headquarters in Conway, *and* the chief engineer was out of state. “It was sobering to realize how ill-prepared we were,” Tony said.

Barbara Wood went on to explain that the table-top exercise covered the first 72 hours following the tornado. She emphasized the importance of phone trees, and phone lists, and a pre-arranged meeting place, if the phones aren’t working.

Tony said AETN had also talked with local businesses and arranged with a bank in Greenbrier, AR (12 miles / 20 minutes away) to set up operations there, if need be. He also pointed out that portions of Arkansas are on the New Madrid Fault. AETN has determined that a 7.0+ earthquake would render the north and east portions of their network unusable, if not destroyed outright.

Barbara added that AETN has begun to look at planning and training to respond to the effects of pandemic flu. Some of Arkansas’ federal funding is dependent on how well state agencies understand the National Incident Management System (NIMS) (For more info: <http://www.fema.gov/emergency/nims/>) She and Tony are guiding AETN in developing response protocols that mesh with those of other state agencies.

III. PBS OPERATIONS & DISTRIBUTION SERVICES

Gwen Wood opened the PBS part of the panel by recalling that, back in January 1997, the public television network satellite Telstar 401 failed, but thanks to a satellite operations recovery plan finished just six months earlier by Gwen, her team, and consultant Sid Skjei, PBS satellite feeds were restored in just 20 minutes.

Gwen outlined the three priorities of a broadcaster’s emergency response:

People first.

Stay on the air.

Payroll continuity.

adding that the #1 cause of damage to broadcast facilities was weather.

Cindy Jackson recalled some of the other emergencies that PBS has faced: the 1984 fire at headquarters, the 1997 satellite failure, September 11th (Braddock Place was not that far from the Pentagon), the satellite outage in September 2003, Hurricane Isabelle that same month, and even a biological threat (white powder in an envelope opened in Viewer Services) in April 2004.

Each instance demonstrated the need for fast communication among the staff and between departments and vendors. In the case of the unidentified white powder, people went from floor to floor, alerting the rest of the building to the problem – a slow process. (A public address system was added later.)

Cindy cited the importance of drills. Start simple, she advised. Rehearse what you’re going to do ahead of time, and then do the exercise. PBS has drilled shelter-in-place as well as other scenarios. They hold drills several times a year.

Since cell phones may be useless in some scenarios, Cindy said that PBS has acquired Iridium satellite phones for key staff, as well as two-way radios. (More info: http://www.iridium.com/using/iri_using.asp) She encouraged all public TV people to get in touch with their local emergency responders. At PBS, for example, they devoted an entire day to the subject, inviting the local fire department, the mayor, and others to talk to the staff.

Cindy and Gwen also praised Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) programs, and urged anyone to contact their local CERT team and get CERT training. <https://www.citizencorps.gov/cert/> They have CERT emergency Go-Kits in their offices, to help them deal with the first 72 hours after a disaster. The Go-Kits contain first aid materials, flashlight, a phone list, lume sticks, respirator mask, gloves, blanket, pry bar, and a hard hat, among other things. (Various go-kits are available for individuals, families, offices, even pets.)

Cindy and Gwen co-authored a white paper on emergency preparedness planning for the 2004 NAB, which they will be sharing with the folks on today's call.

Tony and Barbara were asked to send NETA a copy of the AETN flip-chart booklet given to new employees, telling them what emergency plans are in place.

Bob Neese had the last word: Figure out what your role in the community can be, post-disaster, and know your operation's and staff's capabilities in advance.

NEXT CALL: Creating & Using A Communication Strategy
October 18 at 3:00 pm ET. PBS Lea Sloan and KUAT Mike Serres are the panelists.
Teri Sullivan from WKNO will anchor.
Register online at <http://www.netaonline.org/commcouncil.htm>

These professional development calls are convened periodically on topics of interest and importance to us all. Participation in them is free, a benefit of NETA membership.

Plan now to attend the NETA 2007 conference and hear more about emergency planning.
January 25 – 28 in Norfolk, VA at the Marriott Waterside.
<http://www.netaonline.org/Norfolk07/welcome.htm>