



The Truth is out There

911? 511? 411? 311??

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When I first started addressing and managing, then researching and gathering information on Emergency Management, it quickly became clear that there were dramatically different levels or types of emergencies. Although managing those situations – labeled broadly as *emergency* - might well bring in to play standardized approaches, resources and skills sets, the situations themselves clearly fell into a number of different categories. These categories ranged from full-scale emergencies to serious situations down to more moderate or milder incidents. There were so many sub-categories within these categories, I found they needed to be further classified by the characteristics of the situation: who was affected; how they were affected; who was involved; how situations were handled; the timeline for handling, including “during” and “follow up;” and any special situational concerns and/or skills sets needed by those involved. I ultimately realized as I tried to categorize within those areas, however, there was no single set of definitions or scale of emergency situations in general, so these elements could be applied in so many different ways that a manager preparing for a disaster vs. an emergency vs. an important or critical situation was “all over the map.”

My interest was further piqued and I became even more scattered in gathering and categorizing information and research on this topic when I started looking into infrastructures that were constructed both pre- and post-911. Questions and comments surrounding these infrastructures and their varying levels of success have abounded, resulting in identification of solutions to some concerns. Two such examples are the use of radio frequencies for emergency communication being standardized among first responders and other services within an assistance radius of a disaster or emergency situation as well as simple communication forms (twitter, texting, blast emails to phones and other portable devices, etc.) being integrated for those not only involved but those affected by situations, such as students needing to shelter-in-space in a campus shooter situation in adjacent buildings.

One such activity or tool that has fascinated me beginning in January 2001, probably because of a personal success with it, has been the roll out of “11” numbers to supplement 911 phone services. They were originally designed to take the aggregate use and impact off of 911 with automatic rollovers to unused numbers; 311 numbers were first integrated into critical information processes in 1996 in Baltimore, Maryland and grew quickly to other metro areas with New York City implementing the 311 government phone number beginning in 2002. This full scale implementation included the move from the automatic 911 roll over to the establishment of a separate line, with advertising of the direct-dial 311 number as a government

service to assist community members or those in the area for reporting problems (road/travel problems) or seeking information, typically on anomalous occurrences (such as a transit strike), as well as pushing less static assistance to a phone line rather than to print information (major road construction). 311 – now in over 100 cities and metropolitan areas in over 65% of the states - supported and still supports (in the millions of calls annually) providing general information on who-to-call in all levels of government services as well as unique information such as support for storm/weather issues and for unique situations such as support for greater traffic issues/impasses.

In investigating the integration of 311 in my local community, I learned that almost all “11” numbers are designated for a specific and unique type of information including use for travel information in most of the United States (511) and general emergency assistance in other countries.

SO...in gathering information on issues, activities, categories and support for emergencies throughout the years AND in trying to identify how these activities and tools supported all types of libraries and information centers, I realized that I could easily apply all elements to my own profession: however, I needed to further and systematically categorize library activities to design the very best responses and outcomes. And that’s where I am today – pulling apart situations that are unexpected, stressful, serious or somewhat serious, but certainly not disasters and/or emergencies. I have spent countless hours collecting and identifying the best preparation for mitigation and minimization; ascertaining effect and affect; listing and designing curriculum for skills sets; investigating business-as-usual or business continuity plans; budgeting for preparation and response; and communication planning. Finally, I have begun to list occurrences that are not disaster or major emergency but certainly need their own attention and strategic planning.

Examples of “critical incidents” or issues and activities out of the ordinary in the library:

- Money issues such as theft, counterfeit activities, budget cuts and other situations resulting from the economic downturn
- Staffing/human resources such as accidents, death, firing, quitting, illness/absence, layoffs
- Facilities issues such as temperature extremes, serious cleaning, renovation, some construction
- Organizational issues such as new administration in umbrella organizations, new administration in large library entities, significant re-organization

And why are labels or categorizations so important? Choosing identifiers for what activities or issues are manifesting is an important step. While the term “critical incidents” seems to be the most similar identifier in other professions for these non-emergency or less-serious situations, there are other terms that might fit. “Critical situations,” “critical issues” fit, however, other terms that might better identify would include “priority situation,” “high-priority incident,” or “significant activity” or “significant issue.” While I can choose and use a specific term or set of terms, the most important reason for choosing terms that management will “advertise” and use in organizational documents that work for organizations still includes:

- What terms does your state/local area use? Depending on what type of library or information setting you are “in,” a variety of state, regional or local area support is available. This support in the form of – for example - eligibility for competitive funding,

support from federal agencies (FEMA, FEMA through local counties, etc.), access to training and curriculum, and response assistance is not always applicable but if applicable organizations need to identify what is needed specifically rather than generally or in related or adjacent terms.

- What terms or labels are used by your umbrella organization/entity? In general, library and information organizational wording and documents should reflect the wording and documents from the entity as a whole. Umbrella organization representatives (county commissioners, school district administrators, city council members, mayors, city managers, presidents and chief financial officers and as well as the organization's chief executive officer) should be able to immediately see context and similarities to expedite decision making and allow for successful reportage and competition.
- How are support funds from the umbrella organization categorized? Although terms and identifiers are important, budget codes and budget categories should be coordinated for resource requests, support and tracking. Choice of capital or operating funds, can grant funds be used, can gifts and donations be used and which budget code is used universally is all part of planning.
- Are and/or how are grant funds available from local, state, regional or federal funding sources? Grant funds are available from a wide variety of sources and often federal and state funds are only available through specific entities. In addition, many federal emergency funds were obtained by entities with specific timelines for expenditures and could also be used for trading out operating funding from one funding cycle to another. In addition, some definitions are broader, given some funding explanations. Library and information settings need to be flexible and general in their identification of issue to allow maximum use of outside dollars.
- What terms or categories are used by your insurance carrier? Although many carriers allow for a variety of interpretation, organizations should be consistent in identifying needs and situations. In addition, if more than one department in an organization is involved, ALL departments' terms and identifications *must* be coordinated.
- What terms or categories are used by risk management offices? Not all entities have separate risk management offices, therefore requesting their terminology for using in an organization's documents is of great importance. In addition, often risk offices and officers may not have consistent terminology with insurance. In fact, library and information settings must coordinate choice of insurance for reasonable deductibles, recovering dollars and the broadest coverage for critical or high-priority situations.

So am I any closer to the *categorization* for non-emergency situations?

No, but I am considering a three-part level schematic that uses as its criteria for inclusion in a specific level - the presence of and levels of impact on the two most important groups – employees and patrons.

Am I any closer to the perfect set of *terms* for the (possible) four part schematic?

No, but I am a sucker for finding a term that fits and isn't used by anyone else. At this point, I am leaning, however, toward three terms with specific definitions including "critical incidents" "high-priority" incidents and then "priority incidents." Stay tuned.

And is anyone interested in my personal success with 311?

Probably not - , however, here it is. I live in a neighborhood with ongoing remodeling, razing and rebuilding, new construction and it never seems to end. And I have constant remodeling and

new construction at work. I tend to measure how the neighborhood should behave against how we should behave at work. I am, however, very aware of relationships and realize that neighborhood relationships are more precarious than work relationships and certainly much less controlled. I have learned – don't ask – how NOT to approach neighbors who are in construction and who are, covering the neighborhood streets and yards in nails, not concerned about construction site littering, ignoring construction noises early on weekday and weekend mornings, and who are not on site to handle the issues. The answer? 311...one can – anonymously - report problems (repeatedly) outline what is needed, how often problems have occurred and firmly...more firmly than one might not want to be with one's neighbors...report problematic situations!

Is 311 in your area?

Try it!

Can you use it at work?

Absolutely, in fact work with your community to determine what "11" numbers exist and how your organization might build them into your emergency and critical incident content. For the most part, every available "11" number – exclusive of 911 – can be used at work and at home and fit perfectly with non-911 needs.

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