

Department of Defense Best Practices Guide

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

U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) agencies know their people are their most valuable asset. When there are threats to national security such as active shooters, power grid failures, cyber attacks and severe weather, personnel accountability is imperative. Rapid and efficient communications are necessary to minimize impact, maintain operational continuity and optimize response efforts.



Even minor incidents require containment. Appropriate response protocols can prevent the escalation of adverse consequences during aggravations like a brief power outage or a low-grade computer virus. Worst-case scenarios such as an active shooter, a Cat-5 hurricane or a missing person require an even higher degree of care and attention to detail. At every severity level, management must determine the appropriate course of action. This includes establishing personnel accountability, notifying the chain of command and activating quick reaction forces as necessary.

An enterprise-class crisis communications product (coupled with industry best practices) can help DoD organizations meet the challenges of 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 thorough preparation. Strategies for a host of different scenarios must be well defined. Personnel should understand their role in a crisis, including specific actions on the objective. To provide location and status, they may need to respond to a mobile notification, log into an inbound message board or notify managers directly via voice, text or email.

Get the Message Right

For personnel to respond appropriately at top speed, they must first understand the situation. They need to be briefed on what's happened, told what to do and advised of an ETA for the next communication.

Message label.

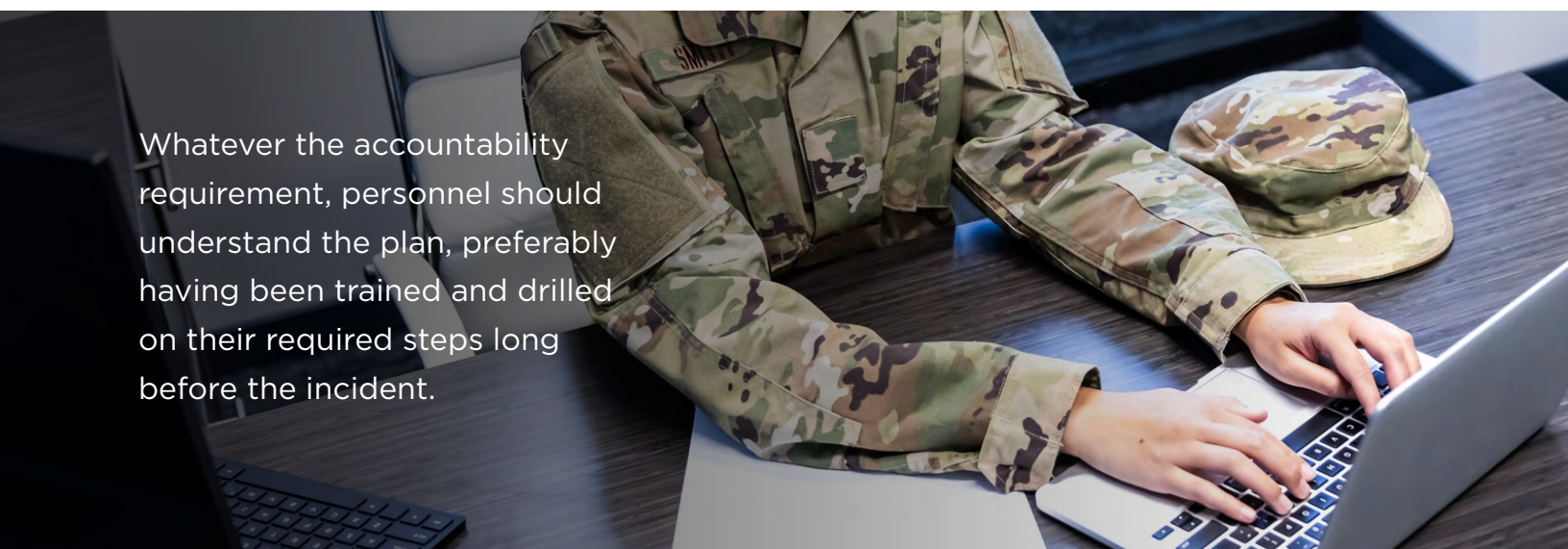
Clearly state the purpose of the message.

Speaker or author.

Identify the agency official issuing the alert. If possible, the initial message should come from a senior staff member — someone whose name or voice is instantly recognizable, confident and in-command.

Intended recipients.

Define the target audience for the message. This should be as specific as possible, including division, department, office location or geographic identifiers.



Whatever the accountability requirement, personnel should understand the plan, preferably having been trained and drilled on their required steps long before the incident.

Instructions.

State what the recipients need to do, and when. Give explicit directions for actions within a given timeframe. Include any actions NOT to take.

Severity level.

Summarize the risks of the situation and what specific consequences may be faced if action is not taken.

Repeat.

Repeat who the message is for and what they should do within the required timeframe.

End with pending information.

Close out the message with instructions on where additional information can be obtained and/or when personnel can expect updated information as the situation changes.

Take a roll call.

After or within the initial alert, utilize two-way polling capabilities to determine who is safe and available to assist. Customizable questions can be embedded in the notification.

Leaders can view tallied responses in easily accessed reports, so they quickly get the information they need to make sound decisions.

Customizable two-way communications provide an option for recipients to request help from designated law enforcement. Depending on the recipient's location (on or off-post) this may be 9-1-1 or an alternate direct dial for on-post security or military police.

Best Practices: In life-threatening situations when the recipient's location is unknown, do not include "I need help" as a response option. This creates a false impression that assistance is on the way. Alternatively, if law enforcement and security have already been notified, be sure to let recipients know in order to provide reassurance.



Keep the information flowing.

Accountability is more than knowing staff are safe. It's also about ensuring personnel can carry out their assigned duties and tasks to support agency resiliency and mission readiness.

When people don't get the information they need, they make assumptions, listen to hearsay and potentially turn to inaccurate sources for guidance.

During critical events, always send additional information as soon as it's available and confirmed by posting updates to your inbound voice message boards. This will bolster confidence and help maintain operation continuity.

The DoD has a high duty of care for its staff, especially during critical events. Effective communications are the first step to keeping everyone safe, ensuring mission continuity and reducing liability. Planning and preparation are necessary to get messages right, establish accountability, facilitate a clear flow of information as the situation unfolds and conduct meaningful post-event debriefs. By following these tips, DoD leaders can protect their people while driving their mission forward.



Learn how the OnSolve Platform for Critical Event Management can support personnel accountability during crisis.

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About OnSolve

OnSolve® offers award-winning critical communications products that enable enterprise, government and business-wide agility during daily operations and times of disruption through integrated technology and expertise. Organizations of all sizes and types can quickly distribute both routine information and emergency alerts to large numbers of people on virtually any device. As pioneers of the mass notification industry, OnSolve sends billions of alerts annually with proven support for both the public and private sectors.

We provide open cloud-based communication solutions that allow users to initiate alerts from any location, synchronize contact data and combine alerting functionality with other existing business systems, removing manual processes and improving efficiency. This provides users with the right information to share with the right people at the right time — so they can mitigate risk, strengthen organizational resilience and better protect their people, places and property.

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