

Governor's Emergency Communications Task Force Minutes, Wednesday, May 28, 2014, Meeting

Present: Commissioner Dora Schriro, *DESPP*; Sulma Avenancio, *Univision TV*; Brenda Bergeron, *DESPP/DEMHS*; Catherine Blinder, *Dept. of Consumer Protection*; Richard Branigan, *Red Cross*; Scott DeVico, *DESPP*; Kelly Donnelly, *Dept. of Education*; Angel Fernandez-Chavero, *Aspire Praxis*; Paul Giguere, *CT Public Affairs Network*; Subira Gordon, *African American Affairs Comm*; William Hackett, *DESPP/DEMHS*; Samaia Hernandez, *Governor's Office*; Kathleen Kabara, *Dept. of Rehabilitation Services*; Gretchen Knauff, *Protection & Advocacy for Persons with Disabilities*; Maria Lino, *The Latino Way*; Stephanie Marino, *Dept. on Aging*; Emanuela Palmares-Leaf, *Latino & Puerto Rican Affairs Comm.* (by phone); Richard Porth, *United Way of CT*; Steve Rabb, *FOX CT*; An-Ming Truxes, *Asian Pacific American Affairs Comm*; Mike Varney, *DESPP*; Dr. Diana Rios, *UCONN*; Carey Thompson, *DESPP/Division of Statewide Telecommunications (DSET)*; April Capone, Garrett Eucalitto, *OPM*; Daniel Micari, *DDS*; Katie Blint, *Northeast Utilities*; Michael Haeflich, *Northeast Utilities*; Michael Chowaniec, *Cablevision*; Sharon Codeanne *Comcast*; Robert Earley, *Comcast*; Theresa Brown, *AT&T*; Cynthia Tangney, *DESPP/DEMHS*; Chris Stan, *Department of Public Health*; Michael Guerrero, *DESPP/DSET*; Patrick Lynch, *United Illuminating*; Tanya Barrett, *United Way 2-1-1*; Bob Labanara, *CT Conference of Municipalities*; Betsy Gara, *CT Council of Small Towns*

Absent: William Gerrish, *DPH*

Welcome and Introductions

Commissioner Schriro convened the meeting and welcomed everyone, thanking them for their attendance and engagement with this Task Force, particularly the utilities for coming today and sharing their best practices. The minutes from the April 28, 2014, meeting were reviewed and approved unanimously.

Briefing from Private Sector and State Agency Panels

The group heard from utility representatives regarding the ways in which emergency and nonemergency communications are conveyed. Terry Brown of AT&T stated that the company provides bills in large print and Braille, and provides closed captioning. Similar to United Way 2-1-1, the company engages a third-party service to provide phone translations in 150 languages. AT&T also has Spanish-speaking representatives. In medical emergencies, repair tickets are expedited. Along with other utilities, the company keeps critical facility priority lists.

Mike Chowaniec stated that Cablevision has a variety of methods for making it easier for people to communicate with the company. The Cablevision website allows customers to select ways to communicate. The company tries to proactively push

information out so that its customers don't have to call to determine the status of their service. Storm preparedness messages are routinely posted. Cablevision has surveyed its demographics, and consequently, everything on their website can be translated into Spanish or Russian with the press of a button. Russian was determined to be a priority language based on interest in programming. Mike Chowanec indicated that the company is always concerned with customer privacy, and so it focuses on general demographics and not, specific information.

Mike Chowanec said that government has an advantage over private industry in that it can capture the public's attention.

Scott DeVico suggested that perhaps information could be transmitted to customers through bills. Sharon Cotian says Putnam County uses the Comcast bill inserts to tell customers, including Spanish speakers, how to sign up for alert messages.

Rob Earley of Comcast suggested a communications plan that makes the most of the public and private sectors; one that enables the state to post all of its information on a dedicated web site – take what is said at a press conference and put it right on a site that everyone knows about. This could include pictures of blocked roads, etc... Earley said the private sector has resources and the state has information.

The question was asked, how could this be translated into other languages easily?

Comcast customers with functional needs can receive large button remote controls, audio narratives, screen readers for web browsers, readable voice mail (transcript of voice mails sent in emails)

Mike Haeflich and Katie Blint of Northeast Utilities (NU) indicated that the electric companies may not reach as many people as cable, because a landlord may get one bill for an entire building. NU has an employee who does a Spanish speaking show that includes information on hurricane preparedness.

NU has some messages that are prepared in advance in a variety of languages, which inform people that "a hurricane is coming, be prepared or turn to this site....."

The State should check to see how many people access the various state websites, so that we could maximize contacts. Put general preparedness messages out, including "check on your neighbor."

The group next heard from a number of state agency representatives. Chris Stan from CT DPH showed the Guide to Emergency Preparedness, which has been distributed to local health departments and is available in many languages. DPH relies on Google Translate, which he recognizes is not perfect. DPH can reach pockets of populations

through local health districts and nonprofit groups such as Asian Family Services and Chinese Community groups.

Cindy Tangney, Supervisor of the DESPP/DEMHS Radiological Emergency Preparedness (REP) Unit stated that under the Voter Registration Act of 1965, if census data indicates that 5% or more of the population speak a particular language, the public information must be translated into that language. In the area around Millstone, Spanish has been identified and therefore, the REP Unit provides Spanish materials both in the Emergency Preparedness Zone and in the Host Communities. REP also posts signs for the transient tourist population. In addition, an annual survey card is sent to residents to identify functional needs, but very few – only about 1% – of the cards are returned.

Director Hackett reported that alerting authorities for the Integrated Public Alert Warning System (IPAWS) communications system are determined by DESPP. IPAWS can be sent out in different languages, but the federal government does not provide the software or any other assistance to do the translations.

Carey Thompson and Mike Guerrero reported that the State 9-1-1 system uses a language service, Language Line, to all Public Service Answering Points (PSAPs) to provide translation services during 9-1-1 calls with local and state law enforcement. They provided the attached summary of requests for interpreters over a 12- month period, with Spanish as the most often requested language. The Everbridge emergency notification system currently used by the State has the capability to track special needs of the public who opt in such as:

Hearing Impaired, Visually Impaired, Speech Impaired, Mentally Impaired, Dialysis, Wheelchair/Mobility, Oxygen Tank, Power Dependent, Refrigerated Medications and a tenth category which has not yet been defined.

Mike Guerrero indicated that when the ENS was established, the Division of Statewide Emergency Telecommunications (DSET) chose not to utilize the special needs categories in the CT Alert System because of the concern that there might be an expectation that all these needs would be addressed in the alerts broadcast to the public by the PSAPs.

CT-N's Paul Giguere reported that he has set up a meeting with TV and radio engineers to discuss messaging from the State Emergency Operations Center to those entities.

Next Steps

Task Force members were asked to reconvene their subcommittees prior to the next full meeting to identify items from their previous reports in order to formulate an outline based on the report structure as directed by the Governor.

Next Meeting

The next full meeting of the Task Force will be scheduled for mid-July, so that the subcommittees will have an opportunity to meet first. The group asked that Outlook calendar meeting invitations be sent out as well as regular emailed agenda and meeting minutes.

NOTE: The next meeting has been scheduled for Tuesday, July 15th from 9:30 am to 11:30 am in Room 348 at DESPP Headquarters, 1111 Country Club Road, Middletown.