Keys to Communicating Effectively in an Emergency

November 5, 2019

CITY OF FORT LAUDERDALE

WE BUILD COMMUNITY

Background

Defining an Emergency

- A serious situation of unexpected occurrence that demands immediate action and communication.

Importance of Communication

- During an emergency, coordinated, timely and accurate communication can:
  - Provide critical information
  - Help save lives
  - Protect property
  - Build credibility and trust
  - Control rumors and misinformation

Organization, Roles and Responsibilities

Organizational Structure

- Work directly with Emergency Management
- Follow National Incident Management System (NIMS) and Incident Command System (ICS):
  - Establishes a common operating structure
  - Allows communication to flow within and across City departments as well as between agencies, organizations and jurisdictions
  - Ensures the City speaks with a single, unified voice

Emergency Operations Center

- Central command and control facility
- May be activated in response to any type of emergency (i.e., natural or manmade disaster, severe weather, disease outbreak, terrorism, infrastructure failure)

Collaborative Process

- EOC brings leaders from operations and support together to strategize, collaborate, share information and help make timely, accurate decisions to address the emergency

- Multiple reporting sessions

- Conference calls with Broward County, local municipalities, state and federal agencies

Strategic Communications Office

- Follows Comprehensive Emergency Operations (CEMP) and Continuity of Operations (COOP) Plans

- Interfaces with key personnel to gather, verify, coordinate, and disseminate accurate, accessible, and timely information

- Acts as a clearinghouse for internal and external messaging

Strategic Communications Office

- Answers key questions including:
  - What information will be shared?
  - Who will it be shared with?
  - When will it be shared?
  - Where will it be shared
  - How will it be shared?
- Controls rumors and misinformation
- Identifies the City's lead spokesperson

Elected Officials

- Be visible, informed and involved

- Run media inquiries through Strategic Communications to ensure the City maintains "one voice," and everyone has the most up-to-date information

- If posting on social media accounts, promote official city accounts and push messages sent out by Strategic Communications

- Do not post or comment unnecessarily. Provide facts and relevant updates only.

- Engage with residents, note their concerns, provide the information to incident command.

Messaging

CITY OF FORT LAUDERDALE

Clear Messaging

- Be Timely

- Be Accurate

- Be Credible

- Be Caring

- Be Consistent (i.e., provide regular updates)

Multiple Platforms

- **Website** - www.fortlauderdale.gov
- **CodeRED** - transitioning to Everbridge for telephone, email, and text alerts
- **Email Alerts** - via Constant Contact
- **Twitter** - @FTLCityNews
- **Facebook** - City of Fort Lauderdale
- **Nextdoor** - nextdoor.com
- **Instagram** - @cityoffortlauderdale
- **Neighbor Emergency Information Line** - 954-828-8888
- **24-hour Neighbor Service Center** - 954-828-8000
- **Lauderserv App** - for smartphone or tablet
- **FLTV** - Government access cable television channel

Before the Emergency

- Plan, train, educate and inform
- State what the City is doing to prepare
- State what the public should be doing to prepare
- Example:
  - Educating the public about hurricane preparedness takes place throughout the year
  - When Dorian formed, messages began a week in advance:
    - Forecast track of storm
    - Weather conditions and potential impacts
    - Emergency preparations measures
    - Ways to stay in touch

During the Emergency

- Messaging includes information about:
  - Incident itself (i.e., what took place)
  - Cause and impact of the incident
  - Actions the City is taking to respond
  - Status of operations
  - Actions the public should take
  - Resources committed
  - Dispel rumors and misinformation
  - Projected next steps
  - Announce regular updates

Working with the Media

- Be available
- Stay calm, stay positive, stay on point
- Be caring, competent, and credible
- Communicate key, simple actions
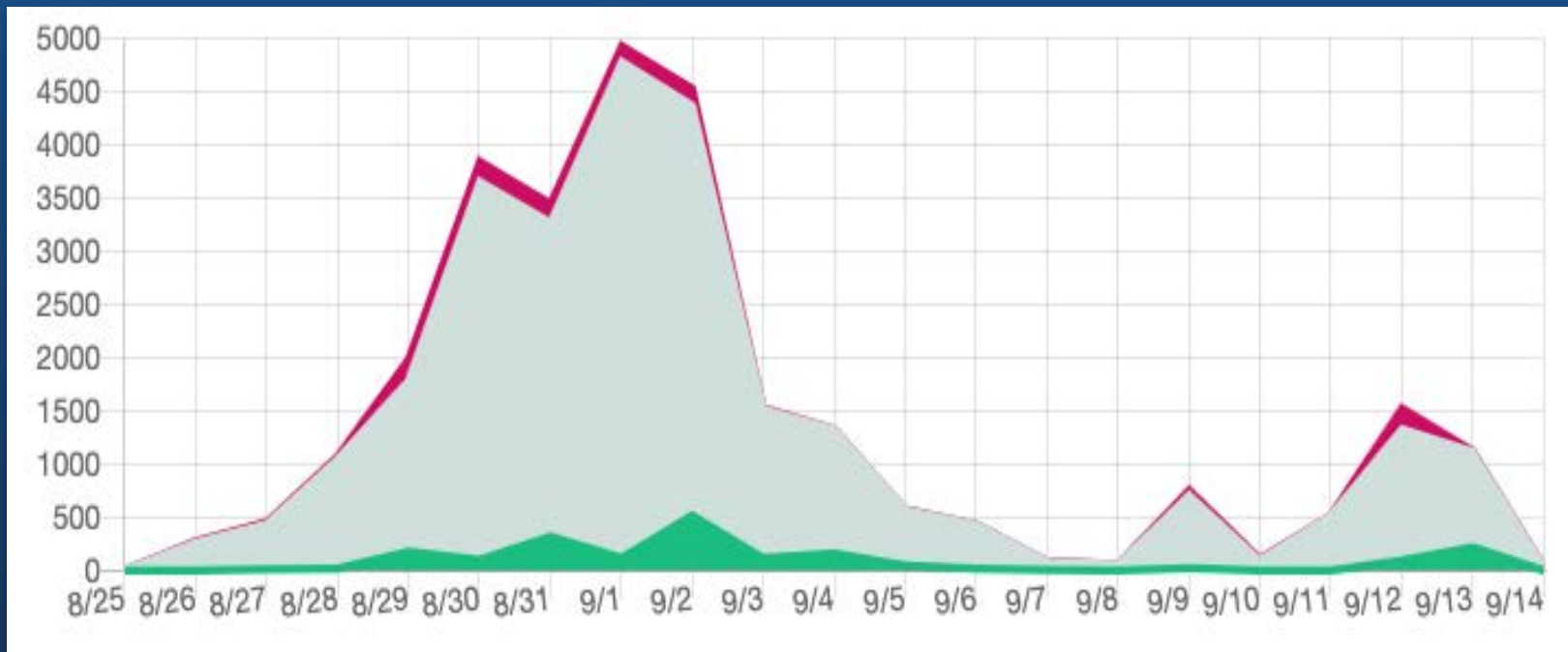- Repeat key messages

Social Media

- Integral part of communications strategy
- Valuable resource for:
  - Immediate sharing of information
  - Monitoring, listening
  - Dispelling rumors and misinformation
- Can represent extremes more than middle
- Use tools that work best for situation

Social Media Monitoring

Zen City - Real Time Monitoring
Interaction Count: 28,601

Social Media Monitoring
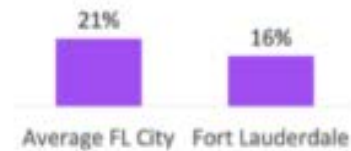
Zen City - Regional Benchmarking

Parking

5%

2%

Average FL City   Fort Lauderdale

Residents talked about **Parking MORE** than the average Florida city (in terms of % of discourse)

Bahamas

25%

16%

Average FL City   Fort Lauderdale
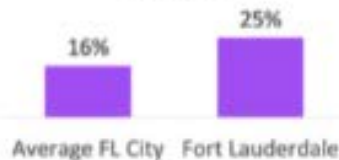
Residents talked about the **Bahamas humanitarian relief MORE** than the average Florida city (in terms of % of discourse)

Schools

11%

6%

Average FL City   Fort Lauderdale

Residents talked about **Schools LESS** than the average Florida city (in terms of % of discourse)
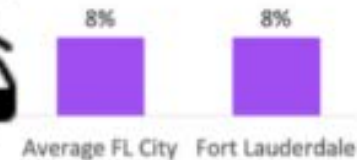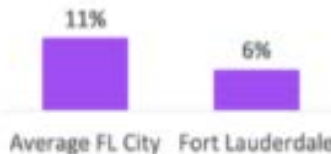
Preperdness

21%

16%

Average FL City   Fort Lauderdale

Residents talked about **Preparedness LESS** than the average Florida city (in terms of % of discourse)

Waste

8%

8%

Average FL City   Fort Lauderdale

Residents talked about **Waste THE SAME AS** the average Florida city (in terms of % of discourse)

After the Emergency

- Messaging includes information about:
  - Update City actions taken to resolve incident and return to normal
  - Update status of operations
  - Recovery actions the City is taking
  - Recovery actions the public should take
  - How the public can access assistance
  - Volunteer or relief programs/efforts
  - Educate public for future
  - Thank those who helped

Evaluation

- Assess effectiveness of communications
- Identify strengths and areas for improvement
- Collect lessons learned
- Incorporate into future plans

Questions