

Just looking for trouble, Part 3

BY DAN ROACH

As promised, some final thoughts on the subject of preparing for (and coping with) emergency situations.

There is very likely a local committee on disaster preparedness that covers your area. Make it a point to connect with them, at least temporarily. They may have the power to give you free access to resources that a broadcaster can only dream about. Even if you don't end up with direct access to their resources, at the very least you (and your newsroom) will have 24-hour contact information for the key folks that will be at the centre of any sort of emergency.

It is important that local government representatives know what role your station can reasonably play as a local disaster unfolds... both your strengths and

weaknesses. From personal experience, I can say that these committees often have outdated and unrealistic ideas about the capabilities of today's broadcasters.

First and foremost, they need to know how to contact key station personnel at the onset of an event. In our highly automated age, this is no longer as simple as it once was. Local officials are quite likely unaware that your facility may not be manned overnight and on weekends!

Committee members may be counting on you to disseminate vital information in a crisis, and can often help strengthen your response by helping you with their own resources. For instance, in a winter-time case in northern B.C., a sudden transmission line failure forced BC Hydro into a position of forcing rotating blackouts throughout the region. Hydro was able to see that the local radio station, which had no backup power of its own, was kept powered up at the studio and transmitter sites so that local residents could be informed of what they could expect from the power company over the next few hours and days.

In this case Hydro and local radio, working together, were able to greatly reduce the danger and anxiety in a critical situation (unless you've experienced an extended power outage in a northern winter, with ambient temperatures of -30 C and lower, you'll have to use your imagination!). Neither party working alone could have been as effective.

Remember my comments on CFX and Victoria's disaster response during their "perfect storm?" One of the problems municipal staff had, even though in this case CFX was staffed throughout the event, was getting through to the radio station to pass on timely information. The station's switchboard was quickly swamped by listeners.

This is another example of something that could have been very easily avoided with an ounce of foresight. The emergency folks *assumed* that CFX would be on-air, and that they could get through easily. At least they were half right!



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Finally, a couple of random thoughts about preparation.

Earlier we discussed the notion of broadcasting from the transmitter site. Further to that, it might be a good idea to prepare a little package of non-perishables at the site, and seal it up so that critical pieces won't wander off while we await Armageddon. I'm particularly fond of those flashlights and radios with the cranks on them instead of batteries inside, but you're free to stock up on whatever you think might be most useful.

Don't count on using cell phones in any emergency; they are inevitably the first to go!

And finally, the last big earthquake in the San Francisco area showed an alarming number of broadcasters were disabled when electrical power failed. Although most of them had diesel generators, most of the fuel tanks fell over when the ground shook, becoming useless exactly when they were most needed. For goodness sake, if you live in an area prone to earthquakes, fasten those tanks to your building wherever practical.

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