



CIVIL UNREST

HOW DO YOU DEAL WITH IT IN THE ECC?

The agency and personnel need a plan in the case of widespread protests.

By Charles M. Vitale, RPL, ENP, CPE

We have seen many incidents of civil unrest in the last couple of years. Some of these events were planned rallies and protests, while others were spur-of-the-moment events that caught public safety off guard. In at least one case, a public safety communications agency inside a police department building was a target. What kind of plan does your agency have in place for these events? Do you have a plan for yourself and your family if civil unrest occurs?

If you have taken any Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) courses, either through independent study or an Incident Command System course (ICS) then you know preparing is key to planning. Arguably, preparation is the most important part of any event, planned or unplanned. The plan may not always work the way we want it to, but it's better to have one than not.

Most emergency communication centers (ECCs) have contingency plans for a lot of things. Does your

agency have a plan if a protest pops up outside your building? We have plans for staffing shortages, power outages and even equipment failure but probably not for civil unrest.

How does an ECC prepare for the possibility of civil unrest? First look at what you could be facing and dispel the notion that all protests are violent or will become violent. Your primary expectation should be that the event will be peaceful, and that everything will go according to plan. The public has a right to make their voices heard. However, we must have an alternative plan if the event turns violent.

Social media is a great predictor of what is happening in the community. A lot of planning occurs on social media platforms, and people stream live on these platforms during the events. There is a great deal of information, called open-source intelligence (OSINT), if we just look for it.

ECCs may be associated with law enforcement departments, fire departments or ambulance services, or they may stand alone. The topics covered will apply to all types of centers and their employees.

One of the first things we should do is be personally prepared. A lot of public safety telecommunicators have uniforms or park in a public safety lot. Do you wear your uniform when you drive to and from work? Do you have stickers on your car that identify you as a member of public safety?

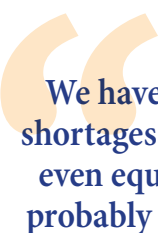
Social media posts have identified public safety stickers on vehicles. Does wearing a uniform make you stand out when stopping at a gas station or grocery store on the way to work? Others have felt as though they were a target due to their uniform; some decided changing into a uniform at work would make them less easily identified. From looking at certain vehicles you can easily tell how big a family one has, what schools people go to, and what profession they are in.

It is OK to be proud of what we do, and we should be, but we also must consider the safety of our family and ourselves.

One of the next topics to consider is a bug-out bag. Some agencies have one of these for supplies (and we will talk about this later) but consider having your own. What if your building is surrounded and you are unable to leave? Do you have a change of clothes? Medications? Food? Toiletries? These are all things that you can put in a duffel or

bookbag. Many of the agencies suggest having 72 hours worth of supplies. This bag can be kept in your trunk or at work. This type of bag is also common with tactical and telecommunicator emergency response team (TERT) telecommunicators.

Planning for your family is one of the most important considerations. Is there a plan for them if you are unable to leave work or are required to stay? When we were young, we practiced EDITH, exit drills in the home. Does your family have a plan for an emergency? This can be as simple as going to a relative outside the area of unrest. Ready.gov has suggestions and plans to respond to emergencies. Also, do not forget your pets. Have medications and food for them when they go with you.



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While these steps may be common sense, we often do not consider unrest or any other emergency. We can focus on the task at hand and worry less about our families by having a plan in place for them. And like any other plan, these plans need to be practiced occasionally so everyone is ready.

These are some of the ways we can prepare as individuals, but what can we do as an agency? The same applies here — plan. Civil unrest can happen in your jurisdiction. One of the first things you can do to help prepare is to communicate with your local law enforcement. Most local departments gather intelligence and put out officer safety bulletins. Communicate any anticipated disturbances or threats made to public safety personnel. Having this information ahead of time can be critical to preparing. If nothing else, additional staff can be brought on to cope with heavier 9-1-1 or administrative calls. Planning also allows for staffing for extra channels that may need to be opened during an event.

Awareness of an incident ahead of time allows us to make sure our public safety telecommunicators (PSTs) are safe. There are a variety of ways we can do this. The first is to move the operation if there is a backup

center in the cold zone or a place where we are relatively sure there will be no violence. Running operations from an alternative site can serve two purposes. This assures PSTs are safe but also gives us a chance to exercise the backup equipment.

An agency can prepare bug-out bags if it doesn't have them already. They can be essential to assuring you have what you need when under pressure to get out of your center in a timely fashion. This bag can be as simple or as complex as needed. It can be as simple as including pens, paper and a portable radio. And it can be as involved as including laptops with CAD installed and an electronic local (or hard) copy of your procedures and notification lists.

What if you cannot relocate your PSTs to the backup site because violence is already nearby? This is where mutual aid and interoperability come in.

Does your agency have the same CAD as a nearby agency or the same radio systems? Can your center divert 9-1-1 and administrative calls to another center? Have you cross-trained with that center if your CAD or radio is different? When would it make sense for another agency to take over for your center? Can your PSTs work out of the neighboring center until the threat subsides?

One of the last questions is, when do we leave our primary center? And if you are going to leave, does it need to be an immediate evacuation, or can it be a controlled evacuation of the center? It is imperative to discuss this before the incident arises. If everyone leaves at once, do response agencies know they will be without a PST for a while? Do you have a way to notify all your employees and the response agencies that there is a problem and that you are evacuating the center? Do you have a plan in place to notify the public through mass notification software and/or social media?

The key to all these questions is pre-planning and working with response agencies to make these decisions before a civil unrest incident. Planning is the key for a smooth response to any type of incident.

APCO created a task force to look at crisis response in the ECC. In 2019, it generated a report with information, checklists and planning information that every center should have. It helps guide the agency to answering some of the questions posed

here. It includes a section on mutual aid resources, a continuity of operations plan (COOP), evacuations and dealing with employee stress.

The crisis response report can be found in APCO's ProCHRT toolbox apointl.org/ecccr-report along with many other helpful resources for an agency and individuals.

We know from experience that we can handle almost anything thrown at us. We also know that we can and should learn from

incidents that have happened in the past. From basic ICS to lessons learned from other agencies, preparation is the key to a smooth operation. We need to look ahead and think of the what ifs just as if we were taking a 9-1-1 call or dispatching. If we can envision it, then we should have a plan for it. ●

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consolidated 9-1-1 center. He is also an Adjunct Instructor for the APCO Institute.

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CDE EXAM #58178

QUIZ:

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) The most important part of the Incident Command System for an emergency communications center in dealing with civil unrest is? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Command b. Operations c. Planning d. Logistics 2) Any protest that occurs will have only one agenda, to become violent. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. True b. False 3) Where should any communication center first look for intelligence about civil unrest? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Local law enforcement agency b. EMS agency c. Fire department d. Homeland Security 4) The article states there are several items that make you stand out to the public. Choose all that apply. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Grocery shopping in your duty uniform b. Getting fuel in your duty uniform c. Thin gold line stickers on your vehicle d. A "Snoopy 2024" tee shirt | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5) What item can you have with you to prepare for being at work for an extended time? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Maps b. Bug-out bag c. Energy drinks d. None of the above e. All of the above 6) What is a COOP? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Continuous operation order plan. b. Continual operation oversight plan. c. Continuity of operations plan. d. Citizen observation and oversight plan. 7) The crisis task force report can be found on what website? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. ProCHRT.org b. ASTM.com c. APCOintl.org d. Monster.com 8) When evacuating your ECC, you should have a way to notify your response agencies and the public of this event? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. True b. False | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 9) An immediate evacuation of your center would include: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. A departure from the center of some employees. b. A departure from the center of most employees. c. A departure from the center of all employees. d. A departure from the center of none of the employees. 10) Which website was reported as having resources to help prepare you and your family for any type of disaster? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Prepare.org b. Ready.gov c. FEMA.gov d. 911.gov |
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