

# 7 Best Practices for Emergency Preparedness and Response

---

# The Impact of Major Crises and Events

The number of major crises and events this year have highlighted the need for electric utilities to assess emergency preparedness and response capabilities and discern whether current processes both meet their needs for safety and continuity in the current climate, and also meet industry compliance standards.

It is essential that utility companies regularly revisit preparedness plans, including revising or updating action plans, checklists, response guides, and other processes that are specific to the unique needs of the organization and industry requirements.

An incident management technology platform provides the tools utility companies need to gain complete situational awareness with a common operating picture or real-time view of all situations and events. The platform can be used on a day-to-day basis and as well as for effective response during natural disasters such as wildfires and storms, human-caused disasters such as terrorism, acts of violence, or cyber-attacks, or public health threats and emergencies. An incident management technology platform also helps with comprehensive critical incident management planning by providing the necessary capabilities to help assess potential risks and adjust plans to ensure preparedness for any incident, emergency or disaster.

In particular, with the COVID-19 pandemic and a record wildfires season in the western U.S., electric utilities should consider whether their current incident management technology provides the capabilities necessary for such essential tasks.



---

## Tasks include:

- + Event Reporting
- + Reliability Coordination
- + Communications
- + Planning and Response Mapping
- + Emergency Operations

With rapidly changing situations, electric utilities need the capability to respond quickly and effectively to any critical incident with detailed plans and procedures laying out concrete actions for response and recovery to save lives, minimize damage or loss of property, and maintain business continuity.

Effective incident management technology platforms provide comprehensive, up-to-the-minute situational awareness which allows greater flexibility and better decision making through a more complete grasp of critical data and details.

Recent crisis situations have had a significant impact on preparedness and response activities – particularly COVID-19 and western wildfires.



# COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the need for businesses and organizations, including electric utilities, to maintain continuity of operations, as well as capabilities for remote coordination and collaboration.

The industry is coordinating closely with government partners through the Electricity Subsector Coordinating Council (ESCC). Currently, the ESCC is holding high-level coordination calls twice a week with senior leadership from the Departments of Energy, Homeland Security, and Health and Human Services, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, and the North American Electric Reliability Corporation.

Utilities' leadership teams and emergency response teams should reassess their emergency preparedness and action plans to keep employees, customers, suppliers and business partners safe while also focusing on facilities safety and continuity.

---

Five areas of focus for utilities in the COVID-19 crisis include:

1. Continuity of operations at control centers
2. Continuity of operations at generation facilities
3. Access to, and operations in, restricted or quarantined areas
4. Protocols for mutual assistance
5. Supply chain challenges

Among the most important capabilities for businesses is to have situational awareness of all conditions and the ability to track essential information and communicate with everyone involved, from employees to emergency management and other local, state or federal officials.

Having complete situational awareness, contact tracing, tracking, monitoring, and reporting capabilities is crucial to help control the spread of COVID-19, to protect health and safety, maintain continuity, and to respond to any other critical incident or emergency that may occur.

The right incident management technology platform gives organizations the real-time situational awareness they need during critical incidents and emergencies in order to track, monitor, and respond effectively.

# WILDFIRES

The number of wildfires has continued to grow year over year with 2020 more than doubling the amount of total acreage burned the prior year.

The worst case for utilities in a wildfire response scenario is sending mutual aid utility crews into a hot zone only for them to be endangered by a lack of coordination between their crews, first responders, and other stakeholders. Effective situational awareness, communication, and collaboration are key to maintaining safety of all stakeholders.

Communication is critical during an emergency response and requires the capabilities to share information and data quickly, in real time with the required internal and external stakeholders, including team members and employees as well as fire or law enforcement first responders and local, state and federal emergency management agencies.



---

Firefighters need to be aware of utilities' infrastructure and activities in the field, and should have access to important information such as:

- + Location awareness between utility crews and firefighters
- + Staging area awareness – to reduce competition for site, and confusion on site
- + Zone status tracking – sharing/posting of evacuation orders, right to return orders
- + Credentialing tracking – confirming what is needed to enter a restricted zone
- + Maps – sharing map layers on fire locations, wind speed, predictions, infrastructure
- + Shutting off power

An effective incident management technology platform supports emergency response activities including receiving and disseminating essential information across the enterprise, situation reports, monitoring weather conditions, facilities status, tracking personnel, deploying equipment, receiving or sending requests for resources, and communicating with internal and external stakeholders.



# Best Practices for Emergency Management and Response

Utility companies should regularly assess emergency preparedness and response capabilities to ensure maximum effectiveness to safeguard lives, mitigate damage to property, facilities, and equipment, to minimize costly downtime, and to ensure compliance with industry regulatory standards.

---

Here are 7 key aspects and best practices related to emergency preparedness and response that electric utility companies should evaluate and consider:

## 1. COMPLIANCE

Reduce exposure to compliance violations with the mandatory NERC Reliability Standards and more effectively safeguard against sanctions and directives related to the Violation Risk Factors and Violation Severity Levels. Strong audit capabilities in a common platform for preparedness and response are especially helpful in the compliance monitoring process. A common platform documents and offers evidence for the utility to address any inquiries.

NERC Reliability Standards are revised frequently, so it is important to ensure your incident management solution will be compliant to new standards from NERC, especially concerning coordinated operations and resource planning and allocation.

NERC's Reliability Standards outline strategies for risk-based solutions which suggest that *"a risk-based reliability requirement should be framed as: who, under what conditions (if any), shall perform what action, to achieve what particular result or outcome that reduces a stated risk to the reliability of the bulk power system?"*





---

## 2. CONSISTENCY

Consider a common incident management technology platform that binds enterprise departments and functions for a structured and repeatable approach to preparedness and response, thus mitigating risk exposure.

## 3. COST MANAGEMENT

The incident management technology platform should provide a scalable platform that allows for tracking and monitoring daily activities, yet is able to rapidly support a full enterprise call to action.

## 4. PRODUCTIVITY

The incident management technology platform should also allow capabilities for data linking and situational awareness across enterprise departments, which leads to a reduction of effort and heightened focus on reliability and risk mitigation.

## 5. EFFECTIVENESS

An effective incident management technology platform enables faster recognition of enterprise actions and situational event status through coordinated management, following industry standards.

## 6. DATA COLLECTION

An end-to-end incident management technology platform that incorporates the necessary internal departments and business functions will increase the context around generation and transmission decisions and justifications.

## 7. EXERCISES

Using an incident management technology platform supports and facilitates regular training exercises so the enterprise and employees are more informed and familiar with how the utility will respond in an event.

---

Situational awareness is central to faster and more decisive response, and that's where incident management solutions like WebEOC® play a key role. Preparedness, response, and recovery can be significantly enhanced by leveraging a centralized platform that provides comprehensive, real-time understanding and a common operating picture of critical incidents as they unfold to help your team accurately assess risks, minimize impacts, and manage responses to safeguard employees and maintain continuity.

By using the WebEOC incident management technology platform, which is the most widely used and battle-tested solution in the industry, electric utilities can ensure more effective preparedness and response, and maintain compliance to NERC Standards.

[SCHEDULE A DEMO](#)



