Reaching Every Voice: Tailoring Emergency Messages and Channels for Vulnerable Populations

An Emergency Communications Guide

February 22, 2024

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

LIST OF ACRONYMS

ARSB	The Amateur Radio Society of Barbados
BCBRA	Barbados Citizens Band Radio Association
BGAN	Broadband Global Area Network
BMS	Barbados Meteorological Services
CBC	The Caribbean Broadcasting Corporation
DEM	Department of Emergency Management
DEO	District Emergency Organization
ECG	Emergency Communications Guide
ECT	Emergency Communication Team
EMAC	Emergency Management Advisory Council
EMT	Emergency Management Team
IEA	Information Ecosystem Assessment
LMR	Land Mobile Radio
NGO	Non-Governmental Organizations
PLWD	Persons Living with Disabilities
SMNW	St. Michael North West
SWOT	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats
UHF	Ultra High Frequency
VHF	Very High Frequency

DISCLAIMER

This guide is designed to serve as a reference tool for developing and adopting communication procedures that will facilitate the delivery of timely, accurate, consistent, clear, and actionable information to vulnerable populations in Barbados during times of an emergency, crisis, or disaster. It is based on a situation analysis of the information ecosystem in Barbados, consultations with key stakeholders regarding their experience with past emergency communications, and insights garnered from the literature review on best practices for emergency communications. While the guide is adaptable outside of the Barbadian context, special consideration should be given to the unique circumstances of the setting in which you are seeking to do so.

INTRODUCTION

During crises and disasters, information is the most valuable commodity. The provision of timely, transparent, understandable, and actionable information is needed by everyone to safeguard their lives, property, and environment. When people are not provided with such, their ability to effectively act in a timely manner and safeguard their lives and livelihoods are inhibited, which in turn can be deadly and have a devastating impact on overall community resilience[1]. This is especially true for vulnerable populations.

Vulnerable populations refer to persons or groups whose capacity to protect themselves and recover from the impact of a crisis, disaster, or any form of harm is affected. Their inability to protect themselves is influenced by numerous factors, inclusive of but not limited to their: age, gender, socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, medical issues, disability, and language proficiency[2]. Given that vulnerable persons are more likely to be adversely affected by crises or disasters, it is pertinent that they have timely access to the information needed to prepare for and respond to these hazards in a comprehensible and actionable format.

Delivering specific, time-sensitive, and actionable information to all members of the vulnerable population in a nation, however, requires some forethought. In particular, emergency personnel need to have prior knowledge of who or which groups are vulnerable, where they are located, and the best means via which they receive information[3]. As such, communicating with the vulnerable population during emergencies cannot be improvised. Instead, it requires planning, and should therefore be an integral part of a nation's disaster preparedness efforts[4].

It is with consideration to this, as well as some of the key findings of The Barbados Information Ecosystem Assessment (IEA) as outlined in Table 1, that this consultation was undertaken. In an attempt to aid Barbados in building community resilience to future climatic, health, and environmental disasters through emergency preparedness and communication, and thus provide an information solution based on key findings, Research Matters Inc., in collaboration with Internews, sought to develop an Emergency Communications Guide (ECG). This guide is designed for key stakeholders (including but not limited to civil society and journalists) and is expected to be instrumental in enhancing their capacity to effectively communicate with the nation's vulnerable population prior to, during, and after a crisis or disaster.

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[1] Prasad, M. (2022). Templated crisis communication for people with disabilities, access and functional needs. *Journal of International Crisis and Risk Communication Research, 5*(2), 233-254. https://doi.org/10.30658/jicrcr.5.2.6

[2] Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). (2015). *Planning for an emergency: Strategies for identifying and engaging at-risk groups. A guidance document for emergency managers*: CDC. https://www.cdc.gov/nceh/hsb/disaster/atriskguidance.pdf

[3] Ibid

[4] Barrantes, S. A., Rodriguez, M., & Pérez, R. (Eds.). (2009). *Information management and communication in emergencies and disasters: Manual for disaster response teams.* PAHO. https://iris.paho.org/bitstream/handle/10665.2/34886/9789275129937_eng.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

Table 1

Key findings of the Barbados IEA that informed the consultation

In accordance with The Barbados Information Ecosystem Assessment (IEA) that was conducted in 2021, during times of crises and emergencies:

1) Some Barbadians:
   - are complacent about disaster preparation,
   - do not have sufficient knowledge of how to effectively prepare for a disaster,
   - sometimes fall victim to disinformation and misinformation, and
   - lack access to some of the key information channels utilised.

2) Persons living with disabilities (PLWD) are experiencing challenges with accessing credible information from local authorities and the media;

3) The government is sometimes delayed with regards to disseminating crisis and disaster communication to the media; and,

4) The use of jargon in crisis and disaster communications sometimes renders the information incomprehensible by the public.

The Need for an Emergency Communication Guide in Barbados

The findings outlined above were recently validated via several participative workshops held during October and November 2023. These workshops were conducted to garner insight from various key stakeholders, inclusive of: disaster management personnel, information providers, and members of the vulnerable population, to inform the development of the ECG. Unlike the IEA findings, which were captured based on the experience of an array of vulnerable groups in Barbados, inclusive of: the elderly (who live alone), PLWDs, single-adult headed households, households with 3 or more children under the age of 21, homeless persons, welfare/unemployed persons, migrants/immigrants, persons with no internet at home, and ex-offenders, the participative workshops garnered insight from four (4) of the mentioned groups; that is, youths, PLWDs, persons without internet at home, and the elderly. Overall, the workshops were instrumental in uncovering several other key findings, as outlined in *Table 2*.

Table 2

Key findings from the participative workshops that informed the consultation

Analysis of the feedback provided by the workshop participants revealead that:

1) Some persons fail to prepare for certain hazardous events despite receiving timely warnings because they are ignorant of its likely impact;

2) The deaf community has no means of communicating with emergency personnel (e.g., fire, police, ambulance service) without the assistance of an interpreter;

3) Whenever the electricity service is disrupted, it leaves the deaf community with no means of communication, as it also interrupts the internet service;

4) The content of emergency communications is not consistent across the different channels used for its dissemination;

5) While much effort is being made by the local organisations that are responsible for emergency management in Barbados to educate the public about disaster preparation and response, the information dissemination mechanisms being used are not optimally effective as many persons, including the consultants, were unaware of their efforts;

6) The frequency with which weather-related emergency communications are issued are desensitizing the public to such communications, resulting in a need for future communications to clearly indicate the anticipated severity and urgency of the event;

7) Currently, Barbados relies on the typical communication channels (i.e., television, social media, radio, websites, word of mouth, and phone applications such as Cap.Cap[5]) to notify the public of impending hazardous events, and therefore does not have an official system (e.g., outdoor sirens) in place to alert persons who are outdoors and not tuned in to these channels;

8) Barbadians do not know what the national alerts for several hazards entail, most notably earthquakes and tsunamis; and,

9) Barbados does not currently have a permanent 24/7 national emergency communications arrangement in place. In the past, especially on occasions when emergency situations emerged during the night, the absence of such an arrangement impeded efforts to widely disseminate emergency communication to the public.

With consideration to these findings and the disproportionate harm that the vulnerable population is likely to suffer in disasters if their needs are not anticipated and planned for, strengthening the nation's emergency communication capabilities is paramount to the safety of its citizens. Accordingly, with support from Internews, the St. Michael North-West District Emergency Organisation (SMNW DEO), the Department of Emergency Management (DEM), and select journalists and information providers, Research Matters Inc. developed an emergency communications guide that can serve to provide guidance to those responsible for communicating emergency information to vulnerable groups.

About this Emergency Communication Guide

The purpose of this ECG is to:

- Streamline the process used by disaster management personnel and information providers to coordinate emergency communications with vulnerable groups, as well as the wider public, before, during, and after an emergency, crisis, or disaster;

- Support the dissemination of emergency communications to different audiences;

- Ensure that the vulnerable populations in Barbados, have the information they need to properly safeguard their lives, their family's lives, and their property during times of emergencies, crises, and disasters;

- Improve the overall flow of emergency communications from local information providers and disaster emergency personnel to vulnerable populations;

- Enhance the dissemination of clear, concise, and consistent messaging across all channels used for emergency communication;

- Strengthen inter-agency cooperation and collaboration in disseminating timely, credible, easily comprehensible, and actionable emergency communications to vulnerable populations;

- Enhance Barbadians' knowledge and understanding of emergency communications;

- Improve disaster preparedness and response among vulnerable groups; and,

- Enhance the Barbadians' trust in local emergency communication.

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[5] Cap.Cap is an IT solution that allows for the simple, fast, efficient and secure dissemination of mass alerts and notifications in emergency and crisis situations to an unlimited number of recipients.

Who should Use this Emergency Communications Guide

This Emergency Communications Guide was especially developed for the civil society, disaster management personnel, and other key stakeholders (e.g. the media, community leaders, NGOs, churches, etc.) who typically communicate with the public during times of emergency, disaster, or crisis. However, it may also be useful to any other organisation and individual who are seeking to adopt best practices for communicating to external audiences under such circumstances. The guide is designed to serve as a reference tool for developing and adopting communication procedures that will facilitate the delivery of timely, accurate, consistent, clear, and actionable information to vulnerable populations in Barbados during times of an emergency, crisis, or disaster.

How to Use this Emergency Communications Guide

This guide is informational, containing suggestions to be used as deemed appropriate and of value to your context, and is not intended to provide definitive direction. It consists of three (3) key sections, labelled as The Emergency Communication Team (ECT), the Processes for Emergency Communication, and Resources.

The **Emergency Communication Team** section[6] outlines the proposed structure, inclusive of key roles and responsibilities, for a National Emergency Communication Team. Although such a structure is especially designed for government agencies and other key decision makers who are responsible for disaster management in the country, it can serve as a useful frame of reference for any organization/stakeholder seeking to establish an emergency communication team so as to be able to communicate in a timely, effective, and inclusive manner during emergencies, crises, or disasters.

The following section, **Processes for Emergency Communication**[7], includes a six-step process that can be adapted for clear and effective communication, information dissemination, and message delivery at different phases of an emergency, disaster, or crisis. Each step provides guidance on the information and activities that are needed for gathering, developing, and releasing key information to the target audience in a timely, accurate, and consistent manner.

- Step 1 outlines the key activities to be undertaken at the onset of an event, whether it is impending or has already occurred, prior to any information dissemination. This step is critical to all who is responsible for disseminating emergency communication to an external audience.

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[6] This section was adapted from the United National Crisis Communications Toolkit and the International Air Transport Association Guidance Document

[7] This section was adapted from a similar section in the CDC's Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication (Manual)

- Step 2 provides guidelines for establishing an ECT and assigning responsibilities to each member. Although the guidelines outlined in this step were especially designed to inform the establishment of a national ECT, they can also be used by any individual or organisation to establish a similar structure and streamline their emergency communication process. In the absence of an ECT, the guidelines are still useful for determining the key resources needed and activities to be undertaken prior to disseminating emergency communications to the target audience.

- Step 3 outlines a structure that allows for a quick and easy way of communicating to external audiences the magnitude of an event and the type of response required. This system can be useful to all who disseminate emergency communications to external audiences for any given event.

- Step 4 delineates the key activities that can be undertaken to ensure that accurate, credible, and relevant information about the event is being communicated regularly throughout its various phases. This step is again crucial to all who are disseminating emergency communications to external audiences.

- Step 5 describes in detail best practices for developing, approving, and appropriately disseminating messages to different target audiences during the different phases of an event and under various circumstances (e.g. when all communication systems are disrupted, or when the event is likely to be severe). It also includes useful message templates to be adopted or adapted as needed. The guidelines outlined in this step can be utilized by any stakeholder, especially the media, to ensure that emergency communications are disseminated, comprehended, and heeded in a timely manner.

- Step 6 is a critical but often neglected step that should always be undertaken to strengthen future emergency communications efforts. It provides recommendations for monitoring and evaluating the communication strategy to garner insights for addressing any deficiencies discovered with the guide.

The extent to which the guidelines in each step are adapted will depend on the event, its [likely] impact, and the available resources. It is recommended that the guide be used to prepare tailored communication plans prior to the occurrence of an emergency, crisis, or disaster. Various **Resources** are included to aid with this process. Such resources include graphics, holding statement templates, key contact information, materials, and resource requirements to help in disaster communications.

THE EMERGENCY COMMUNICATION TEAM

To allow for a coordinated and strategic approach to emergency communication, and in turn improve the effectiveness of the nation's emergency communications efforts, it is proposed that an official National Emergency Communication Team, comprised of persons and agencies involved in disaster/emergency/crisis management, be established. The team may include the following key positions:

1. Subject matter expert/scientist: The subject matter experts are typically those responsible for monitoring and tracking the different types of hazards (e.g. Meteorological Services, Seismic Research Centre, Police, Fire Services, etc.). They are to provide updated, specialised knowledge and guidance in a timely manner to the ECT regarding the event. In particular, they will provide insights into the nature, severity, and urgency of the disaster/crisis/emergency and provide recommendations for addressing/responding to it in a way that safeguards lives, minimises risks, and/or avoids debilitating impact.

2. Communication Representative of the Emergency Management Team (EMT): The communications representative of the EMT (i.e. the team responsible for overseeing the safety response to a particular hazard/event) is responsible for monitoring the situation and keeping the ECT informed of all developments. S/he is also responsible for ensuring that the ECT has all necessary equipment, supplies, and utilities necessary to successfully execute its responsibilities.

3. Communication Team Leader: The communication team leader is responsible for overseeing and coordinating communications before, during, and after the onset of a disaster, crisis, or emergency. Accordingly, s/he will be responsible for the overall management of the ECT, activating the team at the onset of the event, and ensuring that the emergency communication strategy is successfully executed. S/he will stay informed about the evolving situation and adjust messaging accordingly. Overall, s/he will ensure that all stakeholders are communicated with effectively and in a timely manner to mitigate impact, as well as safeguard life and property.

4. Content Developer: The content developer is responsible for drafting all forms of communications to be shared with stakeholders. S/he will help translate technical jargon into easy-to-understand language, and ensure that the messaging is clear, concise, accurate, and addresses key concerns.

5. Technical Experts and support: The technical experts are responsible for providing technical expertise to the process, overseeing and coordinating the technology needs of the ECT, maintaining secure and reliable communication channels, and responding to all technical problems that arise.

6. Administrative Support: The administrative support is responsible for executing all administrative activities needed to facilitate the efficient and effective operations of the team.

7. Online Communications Manager: The online communications manager is responsible for transforming copies of the information drafted by the content creator into formats that are appropriate for dissemination across the different social media and online platforms. S/he will coordinate the dissemination of these copies to all organisations involved in the emergency communication efforts.

8. Media Communications Coordinator: The media communications coordinator is responsible for ensuring that all media personnel are provided with updated information about the event as well as informing the communication team leader and spokesperson of all media enquiries.

9. Stakeholder Communications Manager: The stakeholder communications manager is responsible for ensuring that all key stakeholders, inclusive of: first responders (e.g., Fire Service, Police Service), NGOs, Ministries, District Emergency Organisations (DEOs), and churches etc., are engaged and provided with updated, credible, and easy-to-understand information about the situation for sharing with members within their respective communities.

10. Sign Language Translator: The sign language translator is responsible for translating emergency communications into sign language and will work closely with the online and media communication managers to ensure that the information is disseminated in a format that is understood by the deaf community.

11. Online and Media Communications Monitor(s): The online and media communications monitor is responsible for monitoring conversations about the situation on the various information channels, inclusive of social media and radio, to stay abreast of emerging issues/concerns and keep the team informed of any key developments.

12. Spokesperson: The spokesperson will work closely with the media communications manager and communications team leader. S/he will serve as the official representative of the team and will be responsible for briefing the media on the situation and representing the team at interviews or press conferences. (The spokesperson may be the subject matter expert, the communications team lead, or the communication representative of the emergency management team).

13. Media: The media generally facilitates the quick and expansive dissemination of emergency communication to the masses.

14. Key Stakeholders: The key stakeholders are responsible for aiding with efforts to disseminate credible emergency communications to the masses, especially vulnerable groups.

See *Figure 1* for a depiction of the proposed team structure, which can be modified as needed to suit the context. It is advised that each role has at least one alternative person to fill the position in case of unavailability, and that a directory of the contact information for each member (see Resources section for templates) be created and continuously updated to ensure currency. In the event that human resources are limited, consideration can be given to drawing on the expertise of other stakeholders, and/or one individual can serve in more than one role. Therefore, to ensure the effectiveness of the team, it is advised that a checklist, inclusive of the key functions of each role, be created. Given the frequency with which the nation has been impacted by hazardous events of late, especially short lead time events, it is also advised that an effort be made to establish an ECT that operates 24/7 or has the capacity to do so when needed.

Having such an ECT structure in place will be instrumental in strengthening inter-agency cooperation and collaboration in disseminating timely, credible, easily comprehensible, and actionable emergency communications to the public. It will also serve to ensure that the messaging is the same across all channels, and communications are consistently accessible to different vulnerable groups, especially the deaf community.

Figure 1: Proposed Organisation Chart for Emergency Communication Team
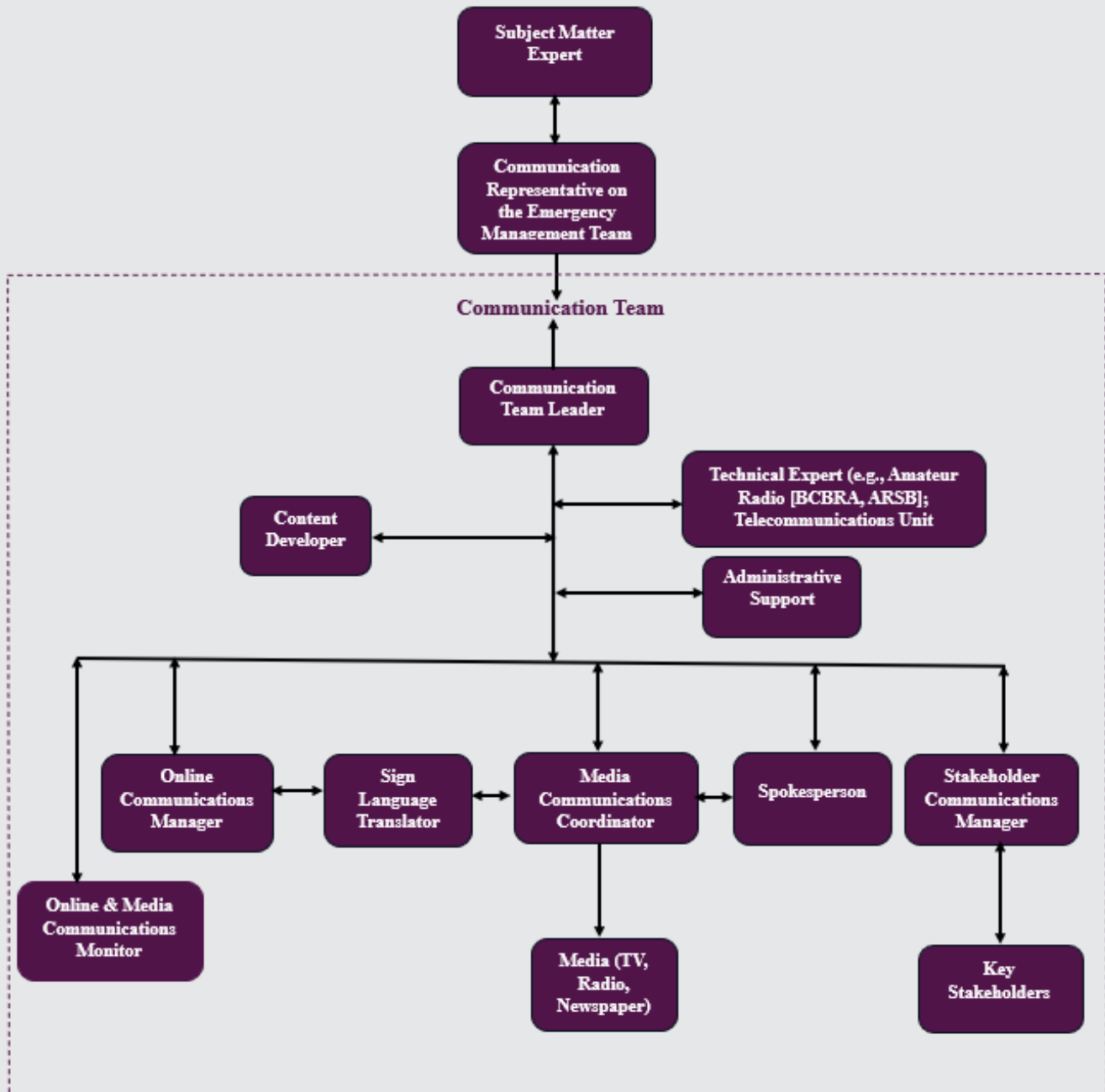
Materials and Resource Requirements

Consistent with consultations, in addition to human resources, the ECT will be in need of a space to execute its operations, as well as numerous materials, communication systems, and technical equipment to enable the efficient and secure dissemination of information. Depending on the event, the nature of the event, and its predicted intensity, the resources may include:

1. **Communication tools:** print (brochures, posters, manuals, press packets, emergency communication plan (digital and hard copy), communications templates, and any additional documents needed for crisis communication, etc.), radio, land-line phones, computers (laptop or desktop), tablets, microphones (wired and portable), satellite phone, cell phone, amplifiers, speakers, camera with still and video capabilities, Very High Frequency (VHF) and Ultra High Frequency (UHF) hand-held or mobile transceivers and two-way radios, spare batteries, battery chargers, and standby transportable VHF emergency repeater stations.

2. **Communication systems:** telecommunication services (voice, video, and data), land mobile radio (LMR) network, Amateur radio, Broadband Global Area Network (BGAN)

3. **Technology:** software programs, printer and copier machine, portable hard drives, flash drives, portable data devices, chargers, dedicated computer server, projector and screen, televisions, recording devices, alternative power supply.

4. **Materials and supplies:** extra batteries, pens, pencils, markers, highlighters, paper, folders, first aid kit, copier toner, printer ink, flashlights (or other emergency lighting), notepads, notebooks, mail supplies, tape, sticky notes, staplers, paper clips, water, food, relevant personal protective equipment.

5. **Facility:** Depending on the event and its severity, the ECT may need the use of a structurally sound, secure, and soundproof facility to execute its functions. Hence, an on-site location can be identified and outfitted for use. An alternative off-site location and virtual channel can also be identified and established in the event that the on-site location is inaccessible or compromised. It is advised that these locations be equipped with back-up power, food, and water for at least seven (7) days.

Having the resources necessary to execute their functions allows the ECT to focus on the situation at hand, as well as maintain a unified and centralised approach to executing the emergency communication strategy. Hence, it is essential to identify, proactively source, and keep an updated record of the materials and resources that are needed by the ECT. See the Resources Section for a template to aid with this process.

PROCESSES FOR EMERGENCY COMMUNICATION

Communicating before, during, and/or after a disaster/crisis/emergency is important. As it is usually a period of much chaos and uncertainty, there is typically a high demand for information, and the pressure to release said information can be intense. Nevertheless, ensuring that the information is accurate and credible as well as timely, from the very beginning is critical. To facilitate this throughout the emergency communication process, the team can abide by the following steps:

Step 1: Verify and Assess the Situation

The first step to providing an informed response to an emergency, disaster, or crisis event is to verify and assess the situation. This involves:

- Immediately trying to identify as many facts about the situation as possible. For instance, what has happened or what is going to happen, when did it happen or when is it likely to happen, who is involved or will likely be affected, how did it happen, and what is currently being done or will be done to address the situation;

- Subsequently, confirming the credibility of information source(s) and verifying with secondary sources where necessary;

- Assessing the (likely) scope and scale of the event;

- Identifying the resources needed to meet vulnerable groups' demand for information;

- Determining the means via which additional information can be obtained; and,

- Identifying all parties, including partner organisations, who should be notified of the (impending) situation (e.g., first responders, schools, faith-based organisations, utility service providers, etc.).

Step 2: Notifications and Assignments

This step entails notifying the parties identified in Step 1 and assigning responsibilities to those who are needed. While the responsibilities assigned to each personnel will likely be predetermined by the guide, modifications may be required because of the nature of the event and/or the availability of personnel. In assigning the responsibilities, the following can be considered:

- What organization, office, or individual is managing the event from an operation and/or scientific perspective?

- How will communication be coordinated with those managing the event? What meetings will need to be attended?

- What are the most pressing priorities?

- What resources are needed? Are the human resources sufficient?

- Who is the spokesperson for this event and what support will s/he need?

- Will travelling be required?

- How many hours per day and/or days per week will members of the team need to be in operation?

- Are supplemental funds needed to meet the vulnerable groups and media demand for information?

- Will additional support be needed?

- Are any of the parties previously identified needed to aid with communication efforts?

- What is the potential for the event to get worse, and will it require more personnel?

- Is misinformation or disinformation about the event emerging or likely to emerge?

- How frequently should vulnerable groups be updated about the event?

- Will subject matter expert briefings be needed, and if so, how often?

Step 3: Determine the Communication Level

A quick and easy way of communicating the magnitude of an event is to develop and make use of an alert level system for the different types of hazards/events that are likely to affect the nation/organization/community. Once established, this system can be used to inform the type of information that is to be disseminated to the public during the different phases of the event. Given that each alert level signifies the level of threat to the public and the type of actions and behavioural changes required, the type of information disseminated to the public at each level should vary accordingly. See *Table 3* for an illustration of how this can be achieved. For this step to be the most effective, an effort should be made to establish and educate the audience on the meaning of each alert level in advance. Whereas level 1 indicates that the event is of minimal concern and no action is needed, level 2 signals that one should be on the alert as the event may or may not occur, and if it does, will likely have a moderate impact. On the other hand, level 3 signifies that the event is either occurring or imminent, and one should therefore prepare to be significantly impacted and take protective actions. Level 4 signals that the event is imminent or occurring and as a result one should expect to be severely impacted. Thus, urgent action should be taken to safeguard oneself.

Table 3

The Type of Information to be disseminated at different Alert Levels

Alert Level	Communication Characteristics
4 **Take Action**	Changes in the nature of event (anticipated time of impact, who will be most affected, anticipated duration of event, etc.)
	Expected conditions as a result of the event (contaminated food, coastal flooding, earth tremors, extreme heat, etc.)
	Anticipated impact of event (e.g. water outages, possible loss of life, landslides, etc.)
	Clear and specific precautionary actions to undertake and/or avoid to safeguard life and property (e.g., evacuate now if necessary, stay indoors, do not drink water, wear long-sleeved shirts and long pants etc.)
	Actions to take if impacted/affected by the event (e.g., seek immediate medical attention, shelter in enclosed space, call emergency hotline, etc.)
	Contact information for emergency personnel (see Resources Section for list of emergency numbers needed by the public)
	Stay tuned for periodic updates via: [state channels that will be used to issue credible, timely, official updates]
3 **Be Prepared**	Changes in the nature of event (what is happening, how is it impacting or going to impact the nation, likelihood of escalation)
	Potential disruptions to be expected
	Actions that should be avoided during this period
	Be prepared to act. Alert level may be upgraded as conditions warrant
	Educational content about the meaning of the current and next alert level
	Educational content about what to prepare for in the event that the alert level is upgraded (e.g., water contamination, service outages, reduced visibility, community evacuation, etc.) and possible actions that should be taken to safeguard life and/or property
	Contact information for emergency personnel (see Resources Section for list of emergency numbers needed by the public)
	Educational content about how to prepare (make an evacuation plan, stock up on cleaning supplies and face masks, cancel or postpone outdoor activities, store food and water, keep cash on hand, etc.)
	Stay tuned for periodic updates via: [state channels that will be used to issue credible, timely, official updates]
2 **Be Alert**	Changes in the nature of event (possibility of impact, if likely to impact, estimated time and severity of impact)
	Be on the alert. Alert level may be upgraded as conditions warrant
	Educational content about the meaning of the current and next alert level
	Educational content about what to prepare for in the event that the alert level is upgraded (e.g., high winds, ashfall, earth fissures, landslides etc.) and possible actions or behaviour changes that should be considered
	Educational content about how to prepare (make an evacuation plan, identify safe indoor spaces, store food, water, and medication to last 2 weeks, get vaccinated, etc.)
	Stay tuned for periodic updates via: [state channels that will be used to issue credible, timely, official updates]
1 **No Action**	Nature of the event (what it is, possibility of impact, if likely to impact, estimated time and severity of impact)
	No action is needed at this time. Alert level may be upgraded as conditions warrant
	Stay tuned for periodic updates via: [state channels that will be used to issue credible, timely, official updates]
	Educational content about the meaning of the current and next alert level

Step 4: Assess and Manage Communication

Ensuring that the information disseminated to the media is accurate, credible, and relevant requires the continuous gathering and updating of information related to the situation. Working closely with those managing the event as well as monitoring online and media coverage of the situation will allow for the accomplishment of this task. Hence, in managing the communication process:

- Keep track of what is happening and what responses are occurring;

- Identify the parties that will be or are being affected by the event, what their immediate and long-term information needs and wants are, and the most appropriate information channels via which information can be disseminated to them;

- Ensure that direct and frequent contact with the organisation, office, or individual in charge is possible;

- Schedule regular updates with those in charge to facilitate the continuous gathering and validation of facts;

- Identify other key organisations or individuals who are collecting information and monitor how it is being compiled;

- Activate a system to continuously monitor what is being reported online and in the media, as well as the public's response to it;

- Continuously assess the accuracy of the information being disseminated and the consistency of the messaging across sources;

- Start an inquiry log for the media and public;

- Schedule regular internal communication updates.

Step 5: Develop, Approve, and Release Message

Once the situation has been assessed, the communication level determined, and the information to be communicated to vulnerable groups has been confirmed, the next step is to create a strategy for communicating said information to the relevant target audiences. This function therefore entails:

- Modifying pre-scripted messages or developing new ones to convey key information;

- Creating a list of questions that the media and individuals from various vulnerable groups may likely ask;

- Reviewing and approving the modified or developed messages for official release;

- Releasing the different forms of messages via the various channels and/or sources identified.

DEVELOPING MESSAGES

The extent to which emergency communications are received, comprehended, and heeded is influenced by several factors, inclusive of individual characteristics (e.g., age, socioeconomic status, disability, education, geographic location, etc.), previous experiences with the particular hazard, the source of the message, and the quality of the message itself, inclusive of its:

- Accuracy
- Clarity
- Timeliness
- Specificity
- Relevance
- Consistency
- Accessibility
- Credibility

Hence, when creating messages about emergencies, crises, or disasters:

- Keep in mind who the target audiences are;

- Present the messaging in a short, concise, focused, and accessible (alternative message formats are needed for the blind, deaf, or persons with low vision or hearing) format using simple, easy to understand language;

- Avoid overly technical language or jargon;

- Ensure that the information is factually correct;

- Be authoritative and empathetic in verbal communication;

- Utilise supporting visual aids, inclusive of maps and diagrams, as persons process information differently;

- Use trusted, knowledgeable spokespersons to deliver messages;

- Keep the messaging consistent across mediums.

The content of the messaging typically varies based the purpose of the messaging, whether it is to influence behaviour, provide facts or updates about the situation, assuage fears, change perceptions, address rumours, or set expectations of what lies ahead. As such, it may include alerts and warnings, directives about evacuation, curfews and other self-protective actions, information about impact response and recovery, and/or information about available public assistance. It is also influenced by the phase of the event as the information needs of individuals within the country evolve accordingly. An understanding of the type of information needed at different phases and for different purposes will help with efforts to respond appropriately and in a timely manner.

Creating Alerts and Warnings

In ensuring that all alerts and warnings are relevant, clear, specific, accurate, accessible, and actionable, they should contain information relating to:

- **The event/hazard:** Identify the event/hazard and its potential risks for the public;

- **Location:** Clearly identify the locations that are most likely to be impacted in a way that persons without local knowledge can understand;

- **Timeframes:** State the anticipated time and duration of impact;

- **Warning source:** Identify the official source of the warning;

- **Magnitude:** Indicate how the event/hazard is likely to impact the public and the anticipated severity of impact;

- **Likelihood:** Indicate how likely it is that the anticipated impact will occur;

- **Protective behaviours:** Indicate what protective actions the public should take and when they should do so. If evacuation is necessary, provide information on shelters and the items that they should take with them; and,

- **Referrals:** State when the public can expect the next update as well as where they can obtain additional official information about the event.

See the below modified flood warning message for an illustration of the above guidelines. In the event that the individual or agency responsible for issuing alerts and warnings differ from those who are responsible for issuing directives relating to the precautionary/preparedness actions that the public should undertake, consider putting systems and processes in place to

facilitate the timely dissemination of both forms of communication (i.e. with little to no delay), especially for short lead time events.

SAMPLE MESSAGE: FLOOD WARNING

[Headline of the event with a clear timeline]

For example: A Flash Flood Warning for the Northern Districts of Barbados.

Effective*:* 16th January 2024 10:00 am
Expires: 16th January 2024 6:00 pm

Description of the event

The Barbados Meteorological Services has issued a flash flood warning for the Northern Districts of Barbados.

This alert message is valid from 10:00 am today 16th January 2024 and will be updated/terminated at 6:00 pm or sooner if conditions warrant.

A flash-flood warning is issued when rapid flooding due to heavy or excessive rainfall in a short period of time (generally less than 6 hours) is occurring or is expected in the warning area.

Hazard information

Heavy shower activity is being generated over the northern districts of the island and rainfall of [*consistently use the same measurement*] 3 to 4 inches is expected this afternoon. The locations that are likely to be most impacted include the parishes of Saint Andrew, Saint James, Saint Joseph, Saint Lucy, Saint Peter, and Saint Thomas.

Anticipated Impact

Possible moderate to significant impacts include:

- Runoff from higher grounds
- Water settling on roads and fields,
- Flooding at the foot of hillsides and coastal roads
- Travel delays with some roads becoming too flooded for traveling in and out of the affected areas.

Precautionary/Preparedness Actions
The public is advised to:

- Stay off the roads if possible
- If travelling in these areas is necessary, exercise extreme caution
- Avoid walking in floodwater, which can contain dangerous waste
- Motorists should not try to drive on flooded roadways
- Stay tuned to the social media pages of BMS as updates will be provided if conditions change significantly

The above guidelines can also be used for emergency communications that are to be delivered to the public using an audio format, whether via radio, television, or podcast etc. An example of an audio communication for a Hazmat fire is depicted below. Such communications can also be made website accessible to members of the blind community and tailored for the deaf.

SAMPLE MESSAGE: AUDIO COMMUNICATIONS

Description of the event

The Barbados Fire Service is currently responding to a fire at a factory on the Mighty Grynner Highway in St. Michael. Officials are working on determining the cause of the fire, but in the meantime are urging residents and nearby businesses to evacuate the area.

As a precaution, a formal HAZMAT (hazardous materials) response has been activated. No casualties have been reported.

Possible Conditions include:

- The public can expect to see thick plumes of black smoke in the area surrounding the Mighty Grynner highway.

Possible Impacts

As a result of this incident:

- The Mighty Grynner Highway has been closed to vehicular traffic.
- Thick plumes of black smoke continue to fill the air
- Smoke inhalation may result in the following symptoms: drowsiness, confusion, eye irritation, shortness of breath, nausea and/or vomiting.

Precautionary/Preparedness Actions

The public is advised to:

- Remain calm
- Evacuate the area IMMEDIATELY
- Avoid the area until the all-clear is given
- Follow instructions from the authorities
- Find alternative travel routes
- Seek immediate medical attention and report to the Department of Emergency Management at 438-7575 if experiencing any of the symptoms (ONLY for those who have been near the Mighty Grynner Highway within the last hour)
- Stay tuned for periodic updates

The next advisory will be issued within the next hour, or as conditions change.

Stay tuned to this station and our social media pages for further updates. If you require additional information on the situation and its possible impacts on nearby homes and businesses, visit the social media pages or websites of the Department of Emergency Management.

See *Figure 2* in the [Resources Section](#) for a sample graphic of another way via which emergency communications can be disseminated in a concise, easily comprehensible format.

Communicating when Facts are Uncertain

During the early stages of an emergency, crisis, or disaster, information is typically limited and there is often much uncertainty. When faced with this situation, it is important to communicate what is known, acknowledge what is unknown, and indicate what is being done to acquire that information. [Holding statements](#) are valuable for such situations. They are pre-prepared, fill-in-the-blank templates that facilitate quick and easy release of information to the general public. Such statements can include the following:

- The date and time of the event

- The location of the event

- Basic details about the situation that have been confirmed

- Actions being taken or to be taken to address the situation

- An expression of compassion or empathy (if appropriate)

- Contact details OR details on when further updates may occur

Messaging During the Event

As the event evolves, the information needs of the media, agencies, organisations, and vulnerable groups changes, and so too should the communication. Communication during this phase should therefore seek to address the magnitude of the crisis, personal risk, and the steps towards recovery and resolution that are in motion. Hence, when communicating during this phase, the message can include information on:

- The progression of the situation and ongoing risks;

- Advice on what actions should be taken to minimise or eliminate personal risk (if any);

- Actions being taken to respond to challenges and address the situation; and,

- Contact information of organisations and/or individuals that can be reached out to for assistance or further information.

In addition, some time can be taken to correct rumors, disinformation, and/or misinformation, acknowledge the public's emotional reactions (e.g., anger, fear, hopelessness, guilt, etc.), reassure the public, and encourage its cooperation with ongoing response and recovery efforts.

Messaging After the Event

In the aftermath of an emergency, crisis, or disaster, communication with vulnerable groups and affected individuals/groups typically include information regarding:

- The overall impact of the event;

- The recovery and rebuilding efforts taking place to manage the situation and return to normalcy or the new reality;

- Behaviours that should be adopted to avoid personal risks;

- Individuals and/or organisations that can be reached out to for assistance;

- The risks of the event reoccurring;

- Lessons learned as it relates to cause, blame, responsibility, resolutions, preparedness, and adequacy of the response;

- The way forward as it relates to systemic and policy changes (if needed);

APPROVAL OF MESSAGES

Once the messages are developed for each potential audience, they are to be approved by leadership and channelled through any other necessary approval processes prior to official release. In doing this, the intended audience and their respective immediate and long-term information needs are to be kept in mind.

RELEASING THE MESSAGES THROUGH APPROPRIATE CHANNELS

Emergency communications are to be disseminated using a variety of channels to ensure that it reaches its intended audiences, especially vulnerable groups. While traditional and social media is most often used to facilitate mass and speedy dissemination of such information to the public, it is not sufficient. Lack of access to these channels by some, disruptions in electricity and telecommunication services, and exclusion of content for the deaf community via these channels tend to impede communication efforts. Accordingly, when releasing emergency communications, the appropriateness of the tools (in-person event, print media, broadcast media, social media, etc.) as well as the methods for disseminating the message (public meetings, email, newspaper, radio, television, recorded phone message etc.) to the intended

audience should be taken into consideration. *Table 4* highlights the channels that are typically used by different groups to access emergency communications.

Table 4

Communication Channels for Dissemination of Emergency Communication to the General Public and Vulnerable Groups When under Normal Conditions

Communication Channels	Intended Audience						
	The General Public	The Deaf	The Blind	Other PLWDs	The Elderly	Persons without Internet	Youth
Social Media (w/ disability friendly features, e.g., closed captions, sign language interpretation)	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓
Radio	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	
TV (w/ disability friendly features)	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
Cap.Cap	✓	✓	✓	✓			
Websites (w/ disability friendly features)	✓	✓	✓	✓			
Word of mouth (community leaders, NGOs, emergency first responders, DEOs, churches, village shops, supermarkets, workplaces, etc.)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

On occasions when the emergency, crisis, or disaster is likely to escalate to Level 4 (see Step 3), it is important that all means of communication be utilized to ensure that the information reaches the most vulnerable in time for them to effectively prepare and respond. *Table 5* highlights the various channels that can be utilized to disseminate emergency communications during such circumstances.

Table 5

Communication Channels for Dissemination of Emergency Communication to the General Public and Vulnerable Groups when Alert Level 4 is Activated

Communication Channels	Recipient Group						
	The General Public	The Deaf	The Blind	Other PLWDs	The Elderly	Persons without Internet	Youth
Social Media (w/ disability friendly features, e.g., closed captions, sign language interpretation)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Radio	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	
TV (w/ diability friendly features)	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
Cap.Cap	✓	✓	✓	✓			
Websites (w/ diability friendly features)	✓	✓	✓	✓			
Word of mouth (community leaders, NGOs, emergency first responders, DEOs, churches, village shops, supermarkets, workplaces, etc.)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Sirens	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Digital Billboards	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
SMS	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓

In the event that the country is ever in a position where all communication systems are compromised, inclusive of radio, the channels identified in *Table 6* were the only channels identified as suitable for dissemination of information to the public.

Table 6

Communication Channels for Dissemination of Emergency Communication to the General Public and Vulnerable Groups when All Communication Systems are Disrupted

Communication Channels	Recipient Group						
	The General Public	The Deaf	The Blind	Other PLWD	The Elderly	Persons without Internet	Youth
Word of mouth (community leaders, NGOs, emergency first responders, DEOs, village shops, supermarkets, churches)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Sirens	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Other Suggested Communication Channels

The data gathering exercise for this guide revealed that members of the deaf community do not have a way of communicating with key emergency personnel (police, fire, ambulance) if they encounter an emergency while alone. As such, additional technology is needed to facilitate more effective communication with members of the deaf community. Therefore, it is recommended that emergency personnel seek to implement technology that allows emergency numbers to be able to support non-verbal and non-audio emergency messages through text, images, and video messages (for e.g. Text-to-911 in the US or using a Telecommunications Relay Service - TRS). Additionally, emergency personnel, as well as information providers can utilize various technologies to enhance their communication with the deaf community (e.g. sign language translator applications such as Hand Talk).

Step 6: Monitoring and Evaluation

When an emergency, disaster, or crisis has subsided, consider reviewing the communication strategy to address deficiencies or correct problems. It is ideal that this review occurs at least one or two weeks after the event has been resolved and that all key learnings are used to update the emergency communications guide accordingly. To complete this function:

- Keep a record of key observations made during the situation;
- Compile, review, and analyse what was reported and discussed in mainstream and new media, inclusive of questions, comments, misunderstandings, and criticisms from the public and other relevant stakeholders;
- Identify the needs of special audiences, especially vulnerable groups;
- Conduct a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis on the communication operations;
- Capture key lessons learnt by answering the following questions:

    o What did we do well?
    o What did we not do well?
    o What are our key learnings for next time?
    o What are the short-term impacts?
    o What are the long-term impacts?
    o How can we improve our response for this type of event?
    o What are our next steps to address all of the above (e.g., public education, policy or process change, training, etc.)?
    o What information would be good to share with the public?

Additionally, the guide can be frequently reviewed, at least on a quarterly basis, regardless of the occurrence of a crisis, disaster, or emergency, as roles and contact information may change.

RESOURCES

Holding Statement Templates for Communicating when Facts are Uncertain

SMS Message/Social Media

[Type of Event]: At approximately [time and date], there was a [brief description of the event] at [location]. We can confirm that [share information on impact of the known event]. The public is being urged to [actions to take or avoid]. Check [Website address/Social Media handle] for further information.

Website/Social Media/Press Release

The [Name of organisation] is aware that at approximately [time and date], [type of event] which occurred at [location] and involved [basic details about the event that have been confirmed]. [Actions being taken or to be taken to address the situation]. We [expression of compassion or empathy]. The [Name of organisation] is investigating the situation and will provide further update as more information becomes available [state when & where (e.g., media, social media, later this evening].

Emergency Communication Team
Contact Details

(Tailor to suit context)

Role	Personal Details	Contact Information	Alternates
Subject Matter Expert	Name: Job Title: Organisation:	Tel (Work): Tel (Home): Mobile: Email:	Name: Job Title: Organisation: Tel (Work):
Communication Representative of the EMT	Name: Job Title: Organisation:	Tel (Work): Tel (Home): Mobile: Email:	Name: Job Title: Organisation: Tel (Work):
Communication Team Lead	Name: Job Title: Organisation:	Tel (Work): Tel (Home): Mobile: Email:	Name: Job Title: Organisation: Tel (Work):
Content Developer	Name: Job Title: Organisation:	Tel (Work): Tel (Home): Mobile: Email:	Name: Job Title: Organisation: Tel (Work):
Technical Expert	Name: Job Title: Organisation:	Tel (Work): Tel (Home): Mobile: Email:	Name: Job Title: Organisation: Tel (Work):
Online Communications Manager	Name: Job Title: Organisation:	Tel (Work): Tel (Home): Mobile: Email:	Name: Job Title: Organisation: Tel (Work):
Media Communications Manager	Name: Job Title: Organisation:	Tel (Work): Tel (Home): Mobile: Email:	Name: Job Title: Organisation: Tel (Work):
Stakeholder Communications Manager	Name: Job Title: Organisation:	Tel (Work): Tel (Home): Mobile: Email:	Name: Job Title: Organisation: Tel (Work):
Other	Name: Job Title: Organisation:	Tel (Work): Tel (Home): Mobile: Email:	Name: Job Title: Organisation: Tel (Work):

Subject Matter Experts
Contact Details

(Tailor to suit context; add Areas of expertise as needed)

Area of Expertise	Name/Title	Organization	Contact Information
Tropical Cyclones (Storms and Hurricanes)	:		Tel (Work): Tel (Home): Mobile: Email:
Floods			Tel (Work): Tel (Home): Mobile: Email:
Drought			Tel (Work): Tel (Home): Mobile: Email:
Earthquakes			Tel (Work): Tel (Home): Mobile: Email:
Tsunamis			Tel (Work): Tel (Home): Mobile: Email:
Landslides			Tel (Work): Tel (Home): Mobile: Email:
Fires			Tel (Work): Tel (Home): Mobile: Email:
Epidemics and Pandemics			Tel (Work): Tel (Home): Mobile: Email:
Hazardous Material (HazMat) Events			

ECT Administration: Materials and Resource Requirements

(Tailor to suit context)

Type of Operations Room	Resources Available	Resources Needed
On-site ECT operations room	Personnel: Communication tools: Other Technological needs: Materials and Supplies:	Personnel: Communication tools: Other Technological needs: Materials and Supplies:
Off-site ECT operations room	Personnel: Communication tools: Other Technological needs: Materials and Supplies:	
Virtual ECT operations room	Personnel: Communication tools: Other Technological needs: Materials and Supplies:	
ECT Messaging Group		
Other		

List of Emergency Contact Numbers

(Develop as needed)

Name of Organization	Category	Contact Information
Ambulance	Emergency Service	311
Police	Emergency Service	211
Fire	Emergency Service	511
Barbados Water Authority (Emergency)	Utility Service	434-4292 (8:30am to Midnight)
BLPC Emergency	Utility Service	626-9000
National Petroleum Corporation	Utility Service	430-4099
Queen Elizabeth Hospital	Hospital	436-6450
National Assistance Board	Government Department	535-3131
Department of Emergency Management	Emergency Management	438-7575

Important Links

Title	Link
Think of Us - Hurricane preparedness and the disabled community.	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5RwKZj8zenU
Managing Communications During Hurricane Season and Tips from the Barbados Light and Power	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NF6HTA4kN8o
List of Barbados Hurricane Shelters (2023)	https://dem.gov.bb/public/downloads/SHELTER_BOOKLET_2023_PUBLIC.pdf
Earthquake Tips: Before, During and After	https://dem.gov.bb/public/downloads/EarthquakeBrochure.pdf
Hurricane Preparedness Checklist	https://dem.gov.bb/public/downloads/HurricanePreparednessChecklist.pdf
Tsunamic Evacuation Map – Speightstown, St. Peter, Barbados	https://dem.gov.bb/public/downloads/BB_Evacuation_A0_1_v2.pdf

Figure 2: Sample Graphic - Understanding Tsunami Alerts [8]

UNDERSTANDING TSUNAMI ALERTS
Know Your Evacuation Zones – [Provide Link to information]

ALERT LEVEL	DEFINITION	ACTION	ALERT METHOD
TSUNAMI Information Statement	No tsunami threat at this time. Alert level may be upgraded once more information is known.	No action is required at this time. Stay tuned for periodic updates via: DEM, BMS, and the local media.	Cap.Cap; Social Media; Radio; Television; Websites
TSUNAMI WATCH	Distant Tsunami possible. Alert level may be upgraded once more information is known.	Be on the alert. Know your evacuation zones. Stay tuned for periodic updates via: DEM, BMS, and the local media.	Cap.Cap; Social Media; Radio; Television; Websites
TSUNAMI ADVISORY	Strong currents and waves that are dangerous to those in and very near the water is expected or occurring. Widespread flooding is NOT expected. Alert level may be upgraded once more information is known.	Stay out of water and away from beaches. Stay tuned for periodic updates via: DEM, BMS, and the local media.	Cap.Cap; Social Media; Radio; Television; Websites; Digital Billboards; SMS; Key Stakeholders
TSUNAMI WARNING	Destructive waves and dangerous flooding in coastal areas is expected or occurring.	Immediately move to high ground, inland, or the 4th floor or above in a building. Listen to the advice of emergency officials regarding evacuations.	Cap.Cap App; Social Media; Radio; Websites; Digital Billboards; Sirens; SMS; Key Stakeholders

Note: Visit the websites and/or social media pages of the Department Emergency Management (DEM) and the Caribbean Tsunami Information Centre to learn more about getting ready for Tsunamis (CTIC).

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[8] This graphic was adapted from the City and County of Honolulu

APPENDIX

Description of Organizations Mentioned in the Guide

- Amateur Radio Society of Barbados (ARSB) - exists to actively facilitate and advance the use of amateur radio in Barbados.

- Barbados Government Information Service (BGIS) - the official communications arm of the Barbados Government, responsible for the dissemination of public information to the various news media and the general public.

- Barbados Meteorological Services (BMS) – an organization with a mandate to observe and understand the weather and climate of Barbados and the region, and provide meteorological, hydrological, and marine services in support of the national needs and international obligations.

- Barbados Today – a locally owned online news source that offers free updates for Barbados at the local, regional, and international level.

- Caribbean Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) - CBC's purpose is to provide a medium for communicating programmes of the highest quality in both transmission and content to attract audiences and advertisers. The CBC operates three (3) radio stations, one (1) television station, and the paid television service, MCTV.

- Department of Emergency Management (DEM) - The Department of Emergency Management is the government department that is responsible for the development and implementation of the Emergency Management Programme in Barbados. It has the responsibility for coordinating emergency management activities in Barbados.

- District Emergency Organization (DEO) - The District Emergency Organisation operates as the volunteer arm of the Department of Emergency Management. The role of the DEO is to organize and coordinate the resources of the community so as to allow for an effective response in time of crisis.

- Nation News - The Nation is the leading newspaper in Barbados. It is published daily (in print and online) by The Nation Publishing Co. Limited and the newspaper's brands include The Daily Nation, Saturday Sun, and Sunday Sun.

- Public Information & Education Committee of Emergency Management Advisory Council (EMAC) – ensures access to relevant and vital information before, during, and after a disaster.

- Telecommunications Unit of the Ministry of Innovation, Science and Smart Technology – is the technical arm of the Ministry responsible for Telecommunications. Its mission is to facilitate a competitive, fully liberalized telecommunications sector while achieving Government's vision of making Barbados a centre of excellence for information technology and telecommunications in the Caribbean.