Training Methods

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Emergency management is defined as the organization and management of resources for dealing with any disastrous situation. It includes plans, arrangements, and rehabilitation to help people in any emergency. In case of any emergency, it is important to warn people immediately so that people can take necessary precautions. For this purpose, public information officers are employed by government agencies. These officers are responsible for communicating certain information through media or other agencies. They also serve as a bridge for enabling communication between government, media outlets and the general public. Due to PIO’s critical role, there are several institutes that train PIO. One such institution is The Emergency Management Institute. This institute offers two days training to all the PIOs. This course targeted audience is newly appointed emergency managers that are from federal and local government agencies. Besides government agencies, this course is intended for emergency managers in private institutions as well. During an emergency, timing is the key factor that has a very great impact on people. It is necessary to have a system of alerts and warnings that not only help people before an emergency but during the emergency as well. The basic purpose of this training is to teach the roles and responsibilities of a public information officer during an emergency. However, the main thing taught in this course was (IPAWS) that is an integrated public alert and warning system (Alert, 2010).

IPAWS is a modernized alert and warning infrastructure during an emergency situation. This infrastructure unifies wireless emergency alerts, the nation’s emergency alerts as well as emergency alert systems of the US. In 2006 when Hurricane Katrina hit few states of the United States, government was highly criticized due to their slow response. Due to this reason many people lost their lives and homes. After this incident President George Bush ordered to establish a system that integrates all the alert and warning systems and provide timely information of any emergency. In the US, this system allows the president to speak to general public regarding certain situations such as war situations, terrorist attacks or any other natural disaster. This will also help Federal, state and local officials to access multiple broadcasts and other communication pathways so that they can create and activate multiple alerts and warning messages. Additionally, this system reaches the public before, during and after a disaster through several means that are available at that specific moment. Another feature taught in this course was to use IPAWS to enable alerts and warning for disable people. Another important feature of this system is that it provides alerts in different languages that are spoken in the US so the non-English speaking people can also benefit from it. However, as this system uses a wireless alert system, people living in rural areas may not be able to receive alerts timely. This is because in most of the rural areas, cell towers are located at a very long distance and wireless alerts may not be broadcasted if an alert area does not encompass cell tower (Bao-cheng, 2011).

After joining any government agency as a public information officer, it is necessary to take this training as this training helps newly appointed officials to learn about the IPAWS infrastructure. Typically, this training is not free so most of the officials avoid taking it. However, during an emergency such as natural disasters when it is important to inform the public, these officials face difficulty in arranging conferences and use several means of communications to communicate different alerts and warning. Thus it is important to take this training soon after joining the agency.

The training of public information officers consists of two days course which should be increased so that all the officers can get more information regarding the alert warning system. Also, fewer practical scenarios were provided during training where one can see the ability of PIO to deal with an emergency situation. However, the course covered several points that are necessary for a PIO to learn. The PIO topics also covered various communication tools, communication resources such as social media to communicate with the general public. Due to the rise of social media, PIOs can access more people by using this platform as regardless of age, people use several online sites. Another important feature of training was that the trainers taught all public information officers about the protocol of writing an alert message. The alert messages are very different from normal messages. As these messages should be specific and effective so that people can immediately act upon the message and take precautions before an emergency or during an emergency. The alert messages are different based on the situation.

Specifically, discussing the health objectives, the course just helps public information officers to alert and warn people regarding several emergency situations. It only provides information about an outbreak of any disease but does not spread awareness about the disease. During a disease outbreak, it is necessary that people should have awareness about the disease such as how the specific diseases are spread, what are the treatments required and information regarding location of the nearest healthcare camps established during the outbreak. The alerts that were learned in this training do not involve any precautionary measure that a person can take during an outbreak. Public information officers are responsible to spread awareness among people when a disease outbreak occurs. They can arrange a different conference that includes specialists that can teach people regarding diseases and prevention techniques as well (Palen & Liu, 2007, April). Although it is the responsibility of public information officer to arrange and organize events and conferences that cover certain issues yet still in this training, no planning and organizing techniques were taught. Thus this course does not meet the health objectives of people. However, the only health objective achieved in this course is that public information officers can inform people about the outbreak using IPAWS infrastructure so that people have at least an idea that they are vulnerable to specific diseases. As people are not aware of the causes and prevention of any disease the outbreak alerts cause more panic among people and will create a situation of chaos. It is therefore important that this training should also teach PIOs about spreading awareness among people regarding any situation. For instance, in spite of providing an alert of Tsunami, PIOs should also help the public by providing several precautionary measures that an individual could take in that time. Also, many social media sites spread fake news regarding threats and disease outbreaks that the public is not aware of. It is therefore, the responsibility of public information officers to address the public regarding this false information that can cause distress in people. However, in this training PIOs were not taught to combat these situations.

  Public safety and security is the main reason due to which several alert and warning systems were made. The basic purpose of training public information officers is to help them in tackling various emergency situations. Due to the immense benefits of this training, it is important to increase the duration of the training so that PIOs can learn more about the alert and warning system. Also, this training should incorporate certain health objectives as well so that PIOs can effectively send alerts regarding several diseases spread. Additionally, the training should include ways on how to organize events and conferences and how to increase communication between government and the public. (Hughes & Palen, 2012).

**References**

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