

First – most important, THANK YOU.

You are in an industry that some may not understand – why do we need to prepare, why do we need to think about scenarios, emergency operations centers – nothing is going to happen to us. Some may think this, but here in the Midwest – emergency preparation is important – and thanks to you and groups like yours – and our Emergency Management Director Keith Stammer – we had practiced, drilled, and even opened the E-O-C a couple of times for various events. That was a benefit – so continue your exercises in your community -- they do teach us novices a thing or two!

Today, I'm focusing on the role of communications during the disaster, the Public Information table in the EOC – or in my case Keith Stammer's office – since I hijacked it within 30 minutes of arriving to the EOC and he wouldn't get it back until 4 weeks later. I've never given this presentation with Keith in the room – and I mention him several times – so please know, I'm not trying to brown-nose – I've said the same things about him when he wasn't in the room.

I am being honest about my role as PIO and how I worked with our EOC Director in a disaster.

Overview Joplin --- May 21

Nighttime Population 50,000

Daytime – swells to over 225,000

May 22, 2012

- ◆ City emergency management department first alerted to significant weather possibilities around 12 noon.
- ◆ Tornado watch/Thunderstorm watch issued shortly after noon.
- ◆ First tornado warning issued at 5:17. Sirens sounded.
- ◆ Second sounding of the tornado sirens at 5:37.
- ◆ Tornado first touched down in the City at 5:41

Overall destruction slide

- ◆ First touchdown western edge of the city
- ◆ Initially an EF-3; approximately ¼-mile wide Quickly grew to an EF 5 – more than 200 mph
- ◆ Ground speeds 10-25 mph nearly a mile wide at broadest point
- ◆ Traveled 6-7 miles on ground (about 20 min) throughout entire City, rolling into City of Duquesne, then continued through Jasper County and Newton County before pulling up.
- ◆ Tornado debris visible on radar Debris found as far away as Springfield, MO – approximately 70 miles

Mike Bettes Storm Chasing Video

Storm slides

**All Disasters are local – they start local, they end local.**

1. Media – over 200 news agencies wanting the story – many came to town!!!
2. National news agencies have “freelancers” throughout the country that can travel quickly to a disaster.

3. Local, regional, national and international – all formats of media here in Joplin.

They called, texted, emailed.... Over 460 texts in one day

#### 4. Respond to locals first

### **“Get your facts first, then you can distort them”**

Very important to provide a profile to media – Facts about Joplin, community, citizens, etc.

Prepare that NOW – don’t wait

In a Disaster – you’re going to be challenged – adrenaline, stress, and emotions all play a factor

Keep in mind - we’re not story tellers – that’s what they want.

We’re not spinning stories, or telling tales

**We are the statisticians – the facts, ma’am just the facts** (in a world where emotions are prevalent)

### **Be First, Be Right, Be Credible**

Tornado hit at 5:41 p.m.– Our first press conference was at 5:30 a.m. – Cunningham Park – ground zero

Held two more that day; then held “two a days” for several more days; held 1 every day until mid-June

#### ***3 key points – most important topics of that day/time***

Some areas are harder to address in specifics - respond “We’re working on this area, but we don’t know that yet” And try to address that NEXT press conference

### **Takes a Calvary** Ryan Nichols – Springfield/Greene County Emergency Management

Not just local representation – need local, state and federal (Barb)

Call in the resources – ones available (may be regional – other locals are too busy)

(PIOs from City, and City manager, zoo, community and trade colleges, utilities, etc.)

Have these networks in place NOW – a Disaster is no place to be exchanging business cards

### **Social Media can be friend – or not**

Helps push out information quickly; have to have enough resources to be effective

Quickly correct inaccurate information

MUST have dedicated staff to this task – 12 – 18 hours a day

Interesting to note busiest times for social media – EVENINGS – when we were trying to leave!

14,674 friends today

### **Federal Government = Force Multiplier**

GREAT resources – but takes locals a little time to catch up, catch their breath, and actually realize WHY they’re there.

FEMA had 820 staffers, at peak – try to remember their names during a crisis!

Numerous federal & State agencies bring resources – hopefully their PIO too – great help

Watch all the moving parts – JIC formed –  
Chamber, Realtors, Schools, etc. – interactive flow of communications  
FEMA Barb & Debris Team took care of that priority  
Housing, schools, businesses  
Listen to local media – coffee shops, beauty salon chatter  
Council communication – key : WHO IS YOUR AUDIENCE that may feel forgotten???  
Changed to a Virtual JIC after awhile – hard to find time to come to the table

**Have a sage in your pocket** – Keith Stammer & Crystal Payton

Calming force – provided counsel, great feedback  
If you don't have one close – go find one  
Workload is tremendous, immediate, and never ending – overwhelming!!!

**Expect the Unexpected** –

Circus was coming to town      Cancelled – Hall was not available  
Elephants are in town – hey let's use them to move debris, trees in Cunningham Park!  
Animal advocacy groups would seriously frown on this – had to address it immediately

**Slide - News Release : City does not condone the use of circus animals for debris clean up**

**Be Innovative**

Tetanus Shots and Debris Segregation Sheet  
Video for Town Hall meeting – explaining EDR  
**You Tube video – City Manager – Debris Management**  
Radio Station Group – major resource to provide information – was wall to wall for 9 days  
Traffic Signs – thank you MoDOT  
Building Division – Kept all information for Commercial, Residential & contractor demolition  
MO National Guard – out in public, on streets, used them as “messengers” – helped communicate

**Tornado Assistance Information Line** – TAIL - the end of the storm

**Find Fun – And the Candy House!**

**Luck Comes in Handy** – Good people, good community, willingness to accept collaboration

**Over 155,000 volunteers**

Thousands of faith based groups, individuals who mobilized

## Lessons Learned:

**Document EVERYTHING - keep only 1 notebook at a time – chronological order helps as days progress**

Notations on a calendar, big events, items to remind you of the day

News Releases will help later – but they don't state the PERSONAL side of the story

Or the internal activities of staff and EOC

Keep only ONE notebook active – VERY HARD for me to do –helps to keep organized

PHOTOS – VERY IMPORTANT! Shoot when you can....

Even if no one else is – ESPECIALLY when no one else is!

## There's Strength in Numbers

Get a Field PIO – or two or three

Media was good to us, but it could have gone differently

PD had to move media trucks, break up their "turf wars" so to speak – waste of their resources

Anniversary Event – reorganized the JIC of local PIOs; reached out to Springfield again for help

Focus on Skill sets – not titles

People have strengths – recognized these & utilize them

Assign responsibilities for disasters **BEFORE they happen – and train the people in downtime**

**Train EVERYONE – not just the department heads. They'll serve in leadership roles, but staff need to know their jobs as soon as they can. Everyone does want to help – let them.**

## Extra Points for Technology Skills -- Know your technology

I.T. is going to be slammed for services from everyone

Get portable printer, laptop, iPad, whatever you can budget for emergencies;

Keep it with you – know how to "plug in"

Springfield rocks – came in; showed them an outlet – and they took off cranking out stuff

## Collaboration is KEY

[www.joplintornadoanniversary.com](http://www.joplintornadoanniversary.com)

Technology skills were also needed for One Year Anniversary.

Website Content and Design – huge factor

One Year. One Community. One Direction.

## The Miracle of the Human Spirit -- Continues to be our Mantra

We are a strong community – and our citizens are resilient. But without the assistance of many volunteers, some here in this room, we wouldn't be in where we are today – in the recovery and rebuilding phase.

18 months later – still moving one direction -- FORWARD.

Thank you. Questions.