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Getting The Message Out - Virtually

Providing **timely, coordinated information is critical to public safety** in times of emergency. With the onset of COVID-19, **New Jersey Office of Emergency Management (NJOEM)** moved quickly to adapt its **Joint Information Center (JIC)** to the virtual environment for everyone's safety. Early in the process NJOEM utilized an Adobe Connect platform operated by FEMA,



which functioned as an "open room", where the state was able to invite their federal and state ESF partner agency Public Information Officers (PIOs) and other contacts. Anyone with the invite was able to use the room at any time to chat the group with any questions, upload documents (e.g., the governor's executive and administrative orders) for others' awareness, and coordinate on information campaigns. This allowed everyone involved to stay connected at home or while at different command posts. There was also a chat message function where any person with a login could ask a question and an appropriate agency or person could respond back correctly. This also allowed staff to view rumors circulating around and curtail them early.

As priorities shifted and new events needed to be managed, **NJOEM decided to build their own platform** via the Homeland Security Information Network (HSIN) Adobe Connect to ensure they had ownership of the platform and could therefore immediately open a virtual JIC to manage a new event at any time. This has been a critical capability as it has allowed NJOEM to seamlessly operate it for other events, including Tropical Storm Isaias and nuclear exercises. As part of this process, NJOEM can keep documents like special news broadcasts (SNBs) and press releases available for partner access, which has sped up PIOs' actions during exercises even while operating separately.

A significant **lesson learned for New Jersey was tasking someone with the role of managing the JIC** – checking if questions have gone unanswered in the chat, updating information, supporting document upload needs, and ensuring that the right personnel were able to access the system, so that there was rapid information flow and strong message coordination.

In the evolving environment of the past year and a half, it has provided **Laura Connolly, PIO with NJOEM**, with the peace of mind that they could stand up a virtual JIC for an event in less than five minutes with previously tested technology. New Jersey plans to maintain its virtual JIC capabilities moving forward to ensure they are ready to maintain uninterrupted public communication and coordination in the event of any type of incident.

Next to doing the right thing, the most important thing is to let people know you are doing the right thing.

-John D. Rockefeller

If you would like more information or have a state practice you'd like to highlight as part of this ongoing series, please contact Lauren Goodwillie.

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