



E Team

Situational Response IN ACTION

St. Louis County: Counting on E Team for Emergency Management

St. Louis County, home to more than 1 million people, is the most populated county in Missouri. The area is unique – in addition to a large county government, it encompasses 90 municipalities, 60 full-time police departments, as well as 43 fire departments/districts and several private ambulance companies. Due to the varied government entities and organizations, public safety and first response coordination in St. Louis County is complex. The St. Louis County Police Department’s Office of Emergency Management (OEM) embraces this complexity – relying on cooperation and coordination to succeed in its daily task of overseeing emergency management functions for the entire county.

The Technological Transition

Previously, St. Louis County coordinated emergency response “the old fashioned way,” according to Mike Smiley, Deputy Director, St. Louis County Police Department, Office of Emergency Management. “We used radios to transmit information from the field to our Emergency Operations Center (EOC). In addition, staff wrote reports from the field and then emailed them to different departments,” he said.

“We can share vital incident information easily and immediately with our regional partners.”

The “old fashioned way” had its share of challenges. The OEM would edit and forward critical documents to teammates, who would edit again and then re-forward to additional teammates. This method of data transfer often led to version control issues as well as a loss of data integrity. It also limited the distribution of critical information to only those on existing email mailing lists. For example, if an official who was not on one of the existing email lists wanted to know what was going on at the EOC, he or she had to either place a telephone call to the EOC and then find a colleague with the time to provide detailed information on the status of the incident, or physically go to the EOC to gather the information first-hand.

“We recognized that St. Louis County needed a Web-based, collaborative communications tool that had mapping and resource tracking capabilities,” Smiley said. “We wanted to improve the ‘brick and mortar’ EOC because as soon as anyone left the EOC, they were cut off from the flow of real-time information. To improve situational awareness, we decided to virtualize the EOC and started looking for solutions that could meet our needs.”

Situational Readiness

St. Louis County, MO



Challenge:

Implement a Web-based, collaborative communications solution with mapping and resource tracking capabilities, that virtualizes the ‘brick and mortar’ EOC, improving situational awareness by providing real-time access to information.

Solution:

NC4’s E Team collaborative incident management system provides St. Louis County with a comprehensive set of tools to manage and report on daily incidents and events, both large and small, anytime, anywhere.

Benefits:

- ≡ Web-based solution gives users the ability to access the system remotely
- ≡ Improved data integrity by communicating and collaborating on the same system with other jurisdictions
- ≡ Common operating picture expedites after-action reporting
- ≡ User-friendly interface enables EOC volunteers to be up and running on the system quickly, without extensive training

NC4 Aids in the Transition

The OEM evaluated five or six different solutions, ultimately selecting NC4's emergency management solution, E Team. In fact, St. Louis County is part of other regional emergency management organizations that also decided to leverage E Team, which further validated the OEM's decision.

"What we liked about E Team is that we can configure the system the way that we need to for our everyday use while keeping the information internal to the OEM," Smiley said. "At the same time, when necessary, we can share vital incident information easily and immediately with our regional partners."

The OEM uses E Team in a variety of roles, but its main purpose is to coordinate management efforts during incidents and planned events. To ensure that the OEM is prepared for future events, the organization often performs test exercises to train new staff on E Team, as well as refresh existing users' skills. That said, the best training is often experience.

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"We like the fact that E Team doesn't require extensive training, because we often have volunteers from around the county assisting the EOC during an emergency who may not yet be familiar with the technology," said Smiley. "We are pleased that we are able to fully utilize E Team's robust applications even though we are still building our fully-trained user base. The technology is user-friendly and we can make adjustments to our training program based on real-life events and emergencies."

Recent real-world "tests" of E Team occurred between July 2006 and January 2007 in the form of multiple power outages. In July 2006, a powerful storm caused one massive power outage leaving more than 700,000 people without power – many for more than a week. In December 2006 another storm caused a second large-scale power outage. Mother Nature completed her hat tricks of power outages in January 2007 with a third storm cutting power for many citizens yet again. During each instance, the St. Louis County Police OEM activated the EOC and used E Team's management capabilities for an extended period of time. E Team was integral in allowing public works personnel, health officials, workers from the Human Services Division, and representatives from the Red Cross, as well as responders from both the police and fire departments, to support those in need efficiently and successfully during the series of power outages.

"We discovered an additional benefit of NC4's emergency management technology when we began our after-action reporting. With E Team, data collected during incidents, such as the blackouts of 2006 and 2007, is located in one place that is easily accessible," said Smiley. "After-action reporting used to take a long time because incident data was scattered in different offices throughout the County. Now, it is not only easy to find and compile, but also easy to learn from the past. We're able to examine lessons learned from past events, incorporate recommendations for the future into the system and share those recommendations with all staff simultaneously."

Situational Readiness

More about NC4

NC4's Situational Readiness solutions are a suite of integrated applications that revolutionize how government and businesses collect, manage, share and disseminate information to mitigate risks, manage incidents, and securely communicate and collaborate with one another. Aggregating and integrating information from public and private sources, NC4 leverages its cutting-edge technologies to bring users a highly customized presentation of relevant information in a single, easy to use console.

NC4 has a number of solutions that address the specific needs of corporate security, business continuity, enterprise risk management, supply chain management, travel management, crisis management, emergency management, intelligence fusion and law enforcement, as well as for federal agencies with a need to share critical information across organizational boundaries.

To learn more about how NC4 can benefit your organization, visit www.NC4.us or call 877-624-4999.



100 N. Sepulveda Blvd.
El Segundo, CA 90245
877-624-4999
www.NC4.us

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