

When Emergency Aid is Needed, They Put Out the Call

PURVIS Emergency Notification System Enables American Red Cross Rhode Island Chapter to Quickly and Efficiently Request Assistance From Area's 600+ Volunteers

The Organization:

American Red Cross Rhode Island Chapter

The American Red Cross Rhode Island Chapter is a humanitarian organization, led by volunteers, that provides relief to victims of disasters and helps people prevent, prepare for, and respond to emergencies. It does this through services that are consistent with its congressional charter and the fundamental principles of the American Red Cross and the International Red Cross Movement.

All Red Cross disaster assistance is free to clients. The Red Cross is not a government agency and relies on private donations to provide emergency assistance to Rhode Islanders in crisis.

The Challenge:

The American Red Cross Rhode Island Chapter is frequently called upon to activate teams of volunteers to respond to incidents such as fires or flooding. Due to this pressing need and the importance of being able to quickly respond to these emergencies, the organization sought a faster and more efficient method to notify its more than 600 volunteers of emergency situations where their assistance is needed. The traditional phone tree method they were using was taking three Red Cross volunteers up to two 8-hour days for initial calls, using valuable time that could be better spent apprising volunteers of the specifics of a situation and dispatching them to a site.

“In an emergency, there is very little time available to spend trying to track down every volunteer and pass along necessary information,” said John Holt, the chapter’s chief executive officer. “With only nine full-time staff members and a cache of more than 600 dedicated volunteers, it can be very difficult to accomplish this in a timely manner using more traditional technologies.”

During the search for a better method of notification, it was recommended that the organization take a close look at PURVIS Systems’ Emergency Notification System (ENS). After a demonstration of the software, the Rhode Island Chapter was impressed.

The Solution:

A secure system that enables key officials, first responders and emergency personnel to quickly and easily send and receive mass notifications, PURVIS

ENS enables the Rhode Island Chapter to pass along the specific information needed to best respond to an emergency situation. The information is sent to groups of volunteers or to volunteer captains, who can then accurately determine how many volunteers are needed and which of them should be called into action. Also, by eliminating the traditional phone tree method of notification, the organization's leadership is able to spend significantly less time notifying volunteers and more time thoroughly addressing each emergency situation.

"We learned that PURVIS ENS will allow us to not only contact all of our volunteers but also to track which of those volunteers actively receive a message," said Holt. "The user-friendly system also makes it easy for the volunteer captains to communicate with groups using whichever technology they are most comfortable with, whether that be e-mail, voice, text message or another method. Volunteer captains select who the message is being sent to, and after one call, the volunteers selected are notified through their requested method of contact."

Within moments of an alert being placed, selected volunteers receive a message with specific information. Recipients can then rapidly respond to volunteer captains and let them know if they are able to assist with the emergency. A tracking mechanism within the PURVIS ENS system also enables volunteer captains to determine if the message was received, what positions still need to be filled, and which volunteers are qualified to fill them. In addition to volunteers, the Rhode Island Chapter can use PURVIS ENS to contact local agencies, such as food banks and the Salvation Army, for assistance during emergencies.

Another positive PURVIS ENS feature for the Rhode Island Chapter is that PURVIS Systems hosts and backs up the system itself at two secure locations to ensure system availability. Given the Rhode Island Chapter's limited office space, being able to avoid the expense and resource drain inherent in hosting new technology systems makes the PURVIS ENS a cost-effective and valuable addition.

Once the PURVIS ENS was implemented, the Red Cross Rhode Island Chapter immediately utilized the system during a statewide hurricane evacuation drill. The organization's recorded response times were considered well above average against other statewide Red Cross Chapters. Shortly after, the PURVIS ENS was successfully used to request volunteer assistance to aid those affected by a fire emergency in Westerly, Rhode Island.

The Result:

The Red Cross Rhode Island Chapter has successfully utilized the new system during both staged and actual emergency scenarios with great success and is expanding their use of the system daily. It has decreased its average response

time needed to deploy a full shelter team that can handle a mass care situation by nearly 50% since implementation, putting an emergency response team on the scene within 25 minutes.

“Our organization is more efficient thanks to the use of PURVIS ENS and, as a result, we are even better positioned to meet the emergency response needs of the Rhode Island community,” said Holt.