



**Emergency and Security Systems
Minutes of the First Roundtable
Thursday, April 23, 2020**



Panelists:

- Guiselle Mejía Chavarría, Director, Costa Rica 9-1-1 Emergency System
- Juan Zapata, Director General, Ecuador ECU-911
- Benoit Vivier, Manager of Public Affairs, EENA

Intervention:

- David Pérez Esparza, Head of the National Information Center of Mexico

Topics addressed

- I. Measures implemented by Emergency and Security Systems to address COVID-19
- II. Measures implemented by Emergency and Security Systems to protect personnel
- III. Keys to communication with the public
- IV. What to do about domestic violence calls
- V. How to reduce inappropriate or improper calls

KEY POINTS

- ♦ Increased call volume, including for domestic violence.
- ♦ Creation of a second line for information and enquiries to relieve call volume on the emergency line.
- ♦ Need to communicate in a simple, coherent, and consistent manner, using all possible channels, in order to reach all audiences, including minorities and vulnerable groups.
- ♦ Implementation of measures to protect emergency services personnel and measures to sanitize facilities and work equipment.
- ♦ Interagency protocols for dealing with cases of domestic violence. Development of tools for victims to contact emergency services through other channels, not just by telephone.
- ♦ System of penalties and campaigns to reduce misuse of the hotline. Key to reducing costs and saving lives.

I. RESPONSE ACTIONS

1. From Costa Rica's 9-1-1 Emergency System:

- Application of Ministry of Health guidelines to identify cases of COVID-19.
- Launch of the Citizen's Helpline service (LAC-1322) to respond to enquiries and information requests from the public, reduce disinformation, and prevent the collapse of 9-1-1. Development of protocols and procedures in record time for the management and operation of line 1322.
- 25 percent increase in installed capacity.
- Installation of the 9-1-1 Office at the Ministry of Health for monitoring and documenting cases of COVID-19.
- In a couple of weeks a Psychosocial Office will be in place, led by the Ministry of Health to provide another service to assist members of the public on aspects related to economic and emotional impacts, which in extreme cases can lead to suicidal thoughts.

2. From Ecuador's ECU-911:

- Activation of the National COE (Emergency Operations Committee) and the provincial and cantonal COEs.
- Adoption of 28 resolutions by the National COE to deal with the emergency, which are strictly mandatory throughout Ecuador.
- Working groups and technical panels work on protocols and manuals for emergency assistance in different fields.
- Handling of calls on the health crisis, including emergency calls with a possible ESPII code, citizens who have breached the epidemiological barrier, emergency calls concerning domestic violence (immediate attention), calls about clustering and the curfew, and about alleged fraud and price speculation. In addition, they continue to receive emergency calls in four other categories: public safety, risk management, traffic and mobility, and municipal responses.
- Assists with information for cases of mandatory preventive isolation and coordinates transportation and transfers to other jurisdictions.
- Normally emergency calls concerning health management represented 11 percent of the total; now it is 33 percent.
- The volume of emergency calls has risen by 159 percent. Line 171 was set up to relieve 9-1-1 volume.

3. From emergency services in Europe:

- Activate the use of "**non-emergency**" lines, in order to relieve call volume on lines used specifically for emergencies. These "**non-emergency**" lines are used for medical inquiries or requests for information on lockdown measures.
- Increase the personnel available to handle emergency calls by hiring students or retired operators.

II. ACTIONS TO PROTECT PERSONNEL

1. From Costa Rica's 9-1-1 Emergency System:

- Division of emergency operators into two centers as a mitigation measure in case of contagion, and disinfection of the facilities.
- Teleworking for all administrative personnel to minimize the risk of contagion.
- Rigorous sanitation and facility admission measures
- Increased supply of protective equipment and cleaning products
- Installation of a psychosocial panel to provide psychological support for personnel.

2. From Ecuador's ECU-911:

- Application of biosafety measures. Personal protective equipment (masks, gloves, alcohol gel) is delivered daily for each shift, staff's temperatures are taken at the entrance to the facilities, and facilities and work stations are disinfected.
- Under the state of emergency, a resolution was issued to enable each local chief and zonal coordinator to establish working hours according to their needs.
- Application of an occupational health protocol in the event that a staff member presents symptoms. That person goes into mandatory preventive isolation.
- Biosafety measures are also applied to the buses that transfer people coming out of mandatory preventive isolation.

3. From emergency services in Europe:

- Measures to limit contact between operators: optimization of rotation and ergonomics, use of teleworking, and prohibition of external visits.
- Make contingency plans in case a staff member tests positive for COVID-19.

III. PUBLIC COMMUNICATION

1. From Costa Rica's 9-1-1 Emergency System:

- Enabled simultaneous translation service in Costa Rican Sign Language (LESCO), in coordination with the National Center for Persons with Disabilities (CONAPDIS), so that people with hearing disabilities can obtain information about COVID-19 and report emergencies to 9-1-1.

2. From emergency services in Europe:

- Messages to the public must be understood by all and be simple, concise, and consistent over time. The target audience should include the hearing and visually impaired, as well as linguistic minorities.
- All available channels should be used to get the messages across to the different audiences (digital media, TV and radio, social networks, mobile alert technologies, apps, websites, SMS).

IV. DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

1. From Costa Rica's 9-1-1 Emergency System:

- Lockdown, coupled with economic hardship, contributes to an increase in cases of domestic violence.
- In 2019 there was a daily average of 209 incidents of family violence; so far in 2020, the daily average is 310 incidents.
- The protocol in force for dealing with these cases, which provides for immediate police intervention to address safety issues, involves the Red Cross in cases where there are injured persons, while both the National Children's Trust and the National Women's Institute provide assistance to victims.
- They will soon be enabling a silent application so that victims can access available resources and contact the emergency services. The application will provide a discreet mechanism for filing complaints and requesting assistance.

2. From Ecuador's ECU-911:

- They have a daily average of 258 domestic violence calls, but there is under-reporting of such cases.
- Application of interagency protocol.
- As these are sensitive calls, the evaluator must be properly trained to handle calls of these types. Seventy multipliers were trained in psychological first aid, applied psychology, human rights, assertive communication, and empathy. This training has been replicated, with the result that a total of 2,500 officials have been trained.
- Once an alert has been declared in this regard, resources are immediately dispatched. Personnel from the National Police or the Ministry of Public Health go to the scene, and they are complemented by rights protection entities, so that victims can receive psychological care or be taken to shelters.
- ECU-911 is analyzing the possibility of receiving emergency assistance requests via text message because requesting help in a lockdown situation where the victim lives under the same roof as the assailant is more difficult.

3. From emergency services in Europe:

- Before the pandemic was declared, most countries already had a domestic violence hotline.
- The authorities in countries such as Belgium, France, and Spain anticipated an increase in such calls as a result of the lockdown measures. Consequently, they sought to strengthen the number of people who could handle such calls, and to expand communication channels so that victims of domestic violence could contact the emergency services. For example, receiving emergency requests via text message.

4. From the National Information Center of Mexico:

- A protocol for the protection of women and vulnerable groups is being developed.
- A report was published on calls received for all types of violence, including gender-based violence. It is used by the police and social services.

- A strategy of "de-policing" the response, and giving a greater role to the "soft power" of social workers, psychologists, etc.

V. MISUSE OF THE HOTLINE

1. From Costa Rica's 9-1-1 Emergency System:

- Misuse of the hotline is not a crime, but anyone who misuses 9-1-1 receives an administrative fine.
- Two types of unwanted calls to the hotline:
 - i. Improper or malicious calls that incur a fine. A bill based on the Ecuadorian model is being proposed that would introduce more severe penalties, such as elimination of the IP of the telephone from which the call was made.
 - ii. Calls by mistake, which occur as a result of default or unintentional dialing. These calls also represent a cost for the Emergency System. In order to reduce the number of such calls, a campaign was carried out whereby the person received an awareness message. The campaign was effective and the aim is to replicate it.
- Such calls lead to inefficient use of public resources and put the lives of people who are actually suffering an emergency at risk.

2. From Ecuador's ECU-911:

- Two types of regulations:
 - i. The Comprehensive Criminal Code punishes those who misuse the line with 15 to 30 days of detention.
 - ii. ARCOTEL, the telecommunications regulator, suspends the telephone line at the third recurrence. Approximately 35,500 lines were suspended between January and March.
- ECU-911 called for the same penalties be applied during the COVID-19 emergency as are imposed on those who violate the curfew. The first call would carry a fine of US\$100; the second, US\$400; and the third, 15 to 30 days of detention. The fines would be charged to the offender's telephone bill, starting in August.
- 49 percent of calls (approximately 720,000) constitute inappropriate calls. This means that around 5 out of every 10 calls amount to a misuse of the line. In economic terms, misuse costs ECU 9-1-1 approximately US\$1,400,000.

3. From the National Information Center of Mexico

- They will soon present a technical document with 15 strategic measures to mitigate the so-called "invalid" calls, which include hoax and mistaken calls. They have used the Ecuadorian model as a reference. They hope to reduce the number of invalid calls by 60 to 70 percent. Such calls carry a high cost in human and economic terms.