



EPAD IN ACTION PUBLIC WARNING

“If disaster strikes, many citizens would not get the warning in time to take protective action. This is especially true if the disaster strikes at night. Existing public warning systems are fragmented, uncoordinated and fail to reach many people at risk. With the right leadership, we can develop a warning capability that will truly protect our citizens.”

Kenneth Allen
Executive Director
Partnership for Public
Warning

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Emergency Response **Problem:**

At 2:40 AM on January 6, 2005, two freight trains collided in Graniteville, SC, releasing an estimated 11,500 gallons of chlorine gas. It wasn't until two hours after the deadly gas began leaking that the public information director for the South Carolina Emergency Management Division was asked to issue a federal Emergency Alert System (EAS) warning. The director used the telephone to issue the warning to radio and TV stations, but he could not be certain it actually reached anyone. Because of the early hour, many radio stations were not staffed and there was no guarantee that residents were listening to the radio or watching TV. As a result, many people slept through the disaster, not knowing about the wreck and chemical leak until they awoke near dawn and turned on the television and radio. Residents desperately sought answers. Dozens grabbed the nearest phone and dialed 9-1-1.

Chlorine gas is so deadly that it was used as a chemical weapon in World War I. The gas is heavier than air and sinks to the ground. Unfortunately, some of the victims at Graniteville dropped down to the ground to get air as they might in a smoky fire. This mistake cost them their lives. Nine people were killed and hundreds injured as a result of exposure to the gas. Thousands were evacuated from their homes. It is unclear whether some of the exposures could have been avoided. The FCC mandates that all TV and radio stations are required to carry any presidential message. However, when operated regionally, it relies on voluntary participation from radio and broadcast television stations. And its reach is limited. Except in rare cases, it does not link with other modern devices including satellite televisions, cell phones, sirens, telephones or computers. A better, more coordinated public warning system could have helped.¹

E-Safety and EPAD **Solution:**

An E-Safety Network would have solved many of the public warning problems experienced during this hazmat disaster. As a data-sharing framework, it embraces the use of national data standards and encourages information exchange across jurisdictions and disciplines. By using the Emergency Provider Access Directory (EPAD), South Carolina's Emergency Management Division could have easily routed messages to the appropriate emergency agencies, radio and television stations and other disparate alerting mechanisms, without making telephone calls or needing to know their electronic addresses. The public would have had the information they needed in time to take appropriate action.

Registration in EPAD is an important first step for achieving efficient information exchange. Emergency agencies and authorized private entities register how and where they want data sent to them. They indicate their incident information preferences with corresponding geographic areas. This simple act of EPAD registration enables the geographic targeting and cooperative exchange of vital information about a mass emergency or a single event to all appropriate authorities quickly and securely.

COMCARE is a national non-profit alliance dedicated to **advancing emergency response**. We promote the adoption of modern, interoperable emergency systems and the development of new procedures, training, and tools to maximize their value for emergency responders. We encourage cooperation across professional, jurisdictional and geographic lines, seeking to improve effectiveness through solutions that integrate emergency response professions, government, the public and private industry. COMCARE's 100+ organizational members represent the wide diversity of the emergency response community.

¹ "Graniteville Toll Rises to 9", January 9, 2005, Page A1, "It is Unknown Whether Earlier Alert Could Have Saved Lives", "Public Was Warned Hours After Leak", January 16, 2005, Page A1, "911 Calls Capture Fear, Chaos, Pain", January 22, 2005, Page A1, The State (Columbia, SC)