

Emergency Planning, Preparedness, and Response

Finding “What Good Looks Like” Customizing ICS for Utilities

The Challenge

In late 2012, a large West Coast utility experienced a severe windstorm. Approximately 408,000 customers lost power across the service area. The restoration process lasted nearly eight days and resulted in new regulatory requirements. Following the restoration, the utility engaged Davies Consulting to conduct an independent assessment and root cause evaluation of the company’s preparedness and response effectiveness.

In response to the findings and recommendations in the Davies Consulting report and new regulatory requirements, the utility undertook a program to assess and improve incident response companywide. This program addressed all functions of restoration. The assessment led to the utility’s decision to implement Incident Command System (ICS) to drive improvements in incident response and to engage with external ICS experts to implement that decision.

After a few months, the team’s progress slowed. They were finding it difficult to see how ICS could be adapted to meet utility-specific circumstances and advance their current practices to meet or exceed industry best practices. The utility re-engaged Davies Consulting to help re-energize their effort.

The Davies Consulting Approach

- Reconfirmed goals, determined what work had been completed, and identified incomplete tasks that are essential to successful ICS.
- Engaged all major stakeholders and executive decision makers in a day-long workshop to discuss and develop ways to adapt ICS structure to the utility’s organization and operational circumstances.
- Integrated industry best practices into the utility’s response plans.
- Reviewed various project team plans and outputs to ensure that key interdependencies were known and addressed.

- Incorporated all plan advancements and changes into a new emergency management plan, including:
 - A Plan Maintenance Procedure;
 - Hazard Level Identification;
 - An Advanced Catastrophic Level procedure for damage assessment;
 - A “One Voice” approach to communications; and
 - A resource tracking plan.

The Results

- Through the project teams’ efforts, the utility met their regulatory requirements with a quality product and in compliance with an aggressive deadline.
- The utility’s entire emergency management process was reviewed, revealing some valuable systems (which were retained) while exposing areas in need of improvement. The utility was able to upgrade and improve their process on a timeline that satisfied the PUC directive.
- Davies Consulting helped to create a customized emergency management strategy in a way that held true to the principles of ICS and applied them in a practical way that fit with the specific circumstances of the utility. This is a leading example of a strict utility application of ICS.
- The utility is implementing ICS, enabling their employees to better respond to future incidents in a manner that meets customer expectations and regulatory mandate.

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