



An **Emergency Response Plan (ERP)** is usually one of the last steps an organization takes as part of their Safety Management System (SMS), yet in light of what was once jokingly called the “Mexican Beer Flu” (No longer the least bit funny) I have moved this article up on the list. Our son picked up the Coronavirus (COVID-19) from his work and after being advised to self-isolate with only his dog for two days, he was taken to the hospital in an ambulance and is now on a respirator to help him breathe and live. We’ll discuss what went wrong later.

So, who needs an Emergency Response Plan? The simple answer is every organization and EVERYBODY. They’re not something new. I can remember over 70 years ago, having fire drills in school and my class having to meet under the basketball hoop where roll call was held and we were impressed on how very important that was to know what to do. Before credit cards, Mom & Dad always had a small savings tucked away for a “rainy day”. These were ERPs on a small scale and emulate the Boy Scout’s motto of “Be Prepared”.

While the SMS regulations center on risk management and may not require an ERP, I feel that, like Human Factors training, it is part of the “Big Picture” to increase Safety.

More than one aviation company has ceased to exist for lack of an ERP. One that I recall was a small “Mom/Pop” company that did scheduled flights from small Northern communities to larger hubs. One of their aircraft crashed in a swampy area with no survivors. It was one of those accidents that made you wish you had a desk job, as the insects ruled the land there and they were welcome to it. It was sort of like the Everglades without the alligators or any human life within 100 miles. The only way in or out was by helicopter which couldn’t land. A S-61 was contracted to lift the destroyed aircraft out, but even it was pulling 100% torque just to lift it above the surface as it was full of water. The S-61 dragged the aircraft and finally it lightened enough to fly it to a road where we were able to inspect it. Long story short, it was a CFIT accident with both engines developing power up to point of impact. All occupants had drowned. “Mom/Pop” were devastated, but when the press came looking for a story and cause, they were told in no uncertain terms to “F... Off”. What was even worse, the deceaseds’ belongings that were now drying out in their storage were placed in boxes and shipped to the next of kin without being cleaned or sanitized. One wife, in particular, took exception to this and the press now had a story. The company soon ceased to exist. The owners even had to sell their home and leave town.

Any aviation accident ERP must have a detailed section on dealing with the media because, “if you don’t feed the monster, it will feed on you”.

A useful ERP can not be a “cookie-cut” plan that you buy and just fill in the blanks. It should be developed by a team within the company that looks at all the risks a company could face that could jeopardize its existence. This could be a fatal accident, fire, etc. They then require a class of emergency that will dictate the degree of response. Next, it has to spell out who will be doing what and what manpower will be required. Through all this, to what degree does or can the company continue to operate? Finally, to what degree of newsworthiness will the incident generate and who will be the point of contact? The answers to all this must be put in a simple context that will work if the time comes.

As an old saying goes, “there is more than one way to skin a cat”. (This phrase is thought to originate in the Arab world centuries ago, but its meaning is clear)

The following template is one we have developed and assisted others with.

1. The manual should be in a **red** 3 ring binder. This makes it easy to find and red helps highlight its importance.
2. An Amendment page will be needed somewhere with amendment number, change made, date entered and by whom.
3. Next comes the first page of “Emergency Contact Numbers” on a separate **Pink** page that makes it easy to find and will be the most changed page in the manual. It will usually start with the Accountable Executive’s (AE) name and contact numbers. It will have a column to the right of each name that will list the classes of emergency he/she would be contacted for. (usually **all** for the AE) At the bottom of the list will be the NTSB (or your country equivalent), the applicable regulatory body, police, airport authority, etc.
4. Next is where the fun begins, determining the classes of emergency and what needs to be done for each. We use **Class A** - Aircraft destroyed and/or loss of life. Followed by the likelihood of news coverage in brackets. I include the media, because I had to deal with them for seven years at any accident of interest to them.

Class B – Major Accident = serious damage or injury

Class C – Minor injuries and/or damage to aircraft

Class D – Missing aircraft

Class E – Environmental damage

Class F – Fire with damage over xxx dollars

Class O – Other. The catch all for any occurrence likely to damage reputation. (eg. drunk passenger starts a fight in flight)

Class P – Police involved occurrence. This could include a terrorism threat.

Class R – Reportable incident to NTSB

Class W – Weather related. (eg. hangar flooded, earthquake wind causing significant damage)

Class X – A class to be added in the unlikely event of an epidemic, pandemic or the like. While not an acute emergency, it is a problem that well thought out directions beforehand can make a huge difference.

Chapter One should spell out the Why and How the manual will be managed. (ie. importance of correct company response, annual review, etc.)

Chapter Two should cover in detail, what each class is and the appropriate response to it.

Chapter Three outlines the Headquarter’s responsibilities.

Chapter Four outlines the site responsibilities of the company.

Chapter Five provides guidance for the Accountable Executive’s responsibilities.

Chapter Six deals with how to deal with the media. Here is where I’d like to offer advice from a many times bitten hand. For example, we had a single pilot aircraft fatal on a small island accessible only by a small ferry (See #27, Issue October 2017 – Seven years of TSB Investigation Part 2, Accident # 5). The aircraft had struck trees on the top of a small hill that we accessed by a hike and up a ladder in pouring, rain. An insurance adjuster was with me and we began to document the wreckage, hoping to get it done before dark. Suddenly, a head popped up at the top of the ladder. I informed the person that this was a restricted area as the tape at the bottom of the ladder indicated. He explained that he was a news reporter and just wanted to take a few pictures and get a story. I was legally required to provide access and provide the facts as I knew them. First I asked for his reporter identification, which he had left back in his office. Being very miserable, wet and cold, I informed him I could not help him and to stay behind the access tape. He disappeared only to show up 3 hours later with his identification. He wanted me to hold a wrench over the wreckage for a picture, but that was not in the deal. He asked who the other investigator was and I explained he was an insurance adjuster. When he asked the adjuster what his name was he got a rude reply that started with the letter F. He took his pictures and left. He sold his

pictures to many press organizations with the caption “Unnamed Insurance Adjuster Showing the TSB (me) the Cause of the Accident”. Needless to say my headquarters was not happy with that as, technically, only I should’ve been working to determine cause. If you want to see the power of the media, go to YouTube and search for “United Breaks Guitars”. This resulted in the CEO of a major airline apologizing to the world for not paying for the repair of a guitar they broke.

I strongly suggest you help the media do their job by having a prepared dossier with a clear picture of the incident aircraft ready, with lots of positive info of it and the company.

Chapter Seven should consist of the forms to be used to record information of every call, etc.

Finally, the COVID-19 response illustrates an ERP that was not prepared for what occurred. There was insufficient equipment and lack of decision making to “nip it in the bud”. It also saw a company that failed to stop the spread by requiring its employees to work if they wanted to get paid.

At least I hope we will learn from our mistakes.