

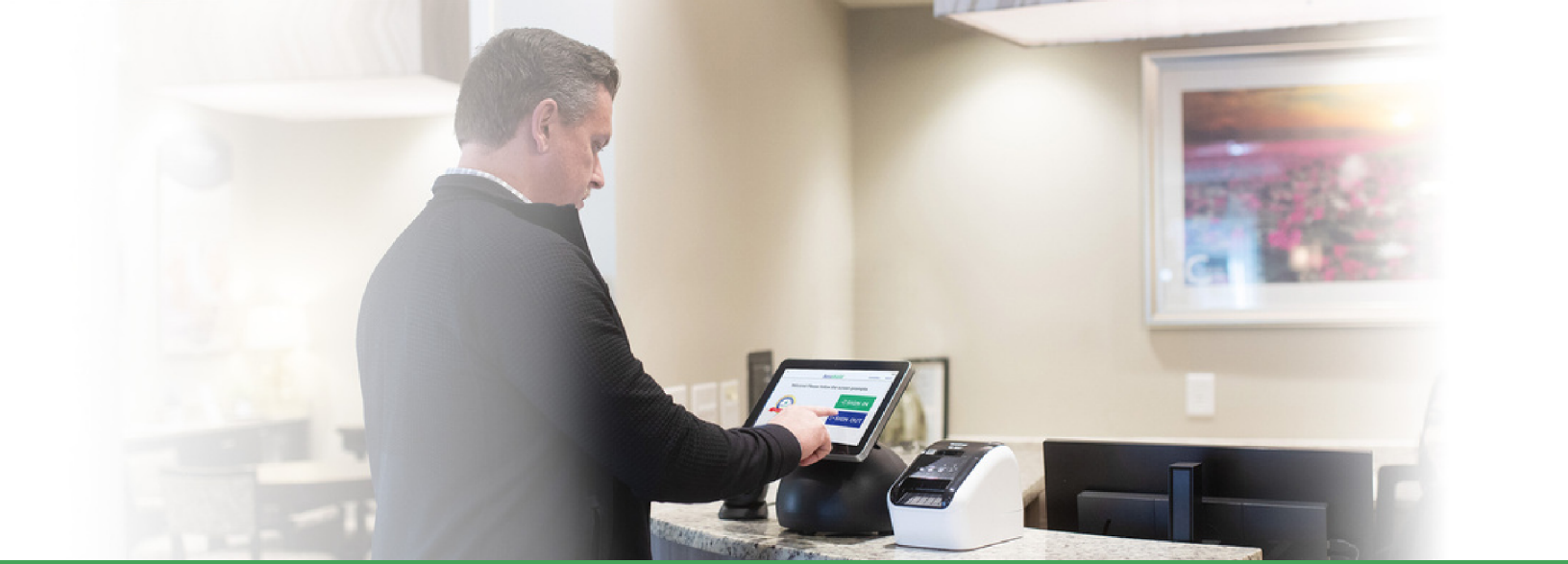
The Critical Importance of Emergency Planning and a Reliable Accountability System



by Stan Szpytek, President, Fire and Life Safety, Inc.



Accushield



Safe and effective emergency

operations within long term care (LTC) facilities during times of peril do not happen by accident. The vulnerabilities and complexities of residents associated with LTC properties including skilled nursing facilities, assisted living communities, memory care and behavioral health facilities can never be underestimated; especially during times of crisis. The same is true for independent senior living communities when emergencies and disasters occur requiring these types of properties to initiate evacuation or shelter-in-place procedures.

One of the most important questions that a team of an LTC facility or senior living community may ever have to answer is, “Should we stay or should we go?” Whether the plan is to evacuate the premises or shelter-in-place during some type of emergency incident, having reliable plans in place including processes to ensure accountability of residents, staff and visitors is of pivotal importance.

Many sectors of health care in the United States including skilled nursing facilities, hospitals, in-patient hospice, dialysis centers and other provider types that receive federal funding from agencies like the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) are required to comply

with stringent emergency preparedness regulations. Since 2016, CMS has enforced comprehensive regulations to help ensure that these providers are prepared to handle all types of emergencies including major disasters. As a regulatory requirement and in accordance with recommended practices, health care facilities of all types should develop an “All Hazards” approach to managing the wide varieties of incidents that can adversely impact their operations.

While senior living communities that are not regulated by CMS are not required to comply with federal emergency preparedness requirements, each state has their own regulations that address this critical element of operations. In general, all senior living providers should develop comprehensive emergency management programs and plans to help ensure levels of safety, preparedness and accountability within their communities.

The concept of “accountability” is a common denominator in the management of every type of emergency or disaster; regardless of applicable regulations. Quite simply, accountability equates to safety during the management of an emergency incident, big or small. CMS states that regulated facilities must

develop emergency plans and contingencies for incidents as big as hurricanes and as singularly focused as a missing resident in accordance with a Hazard Vulnerability Assessment (HVA).

The HVA process is the first component of an All Hazards emergency management program and is designed to identify all of the potential threats and perils that can impact an LTC facility or senior living community; both internally and externally. Once these hazards have been identified, the provider can plan for adverse events in a manner that aligns with the incidents that are most likely to occur.

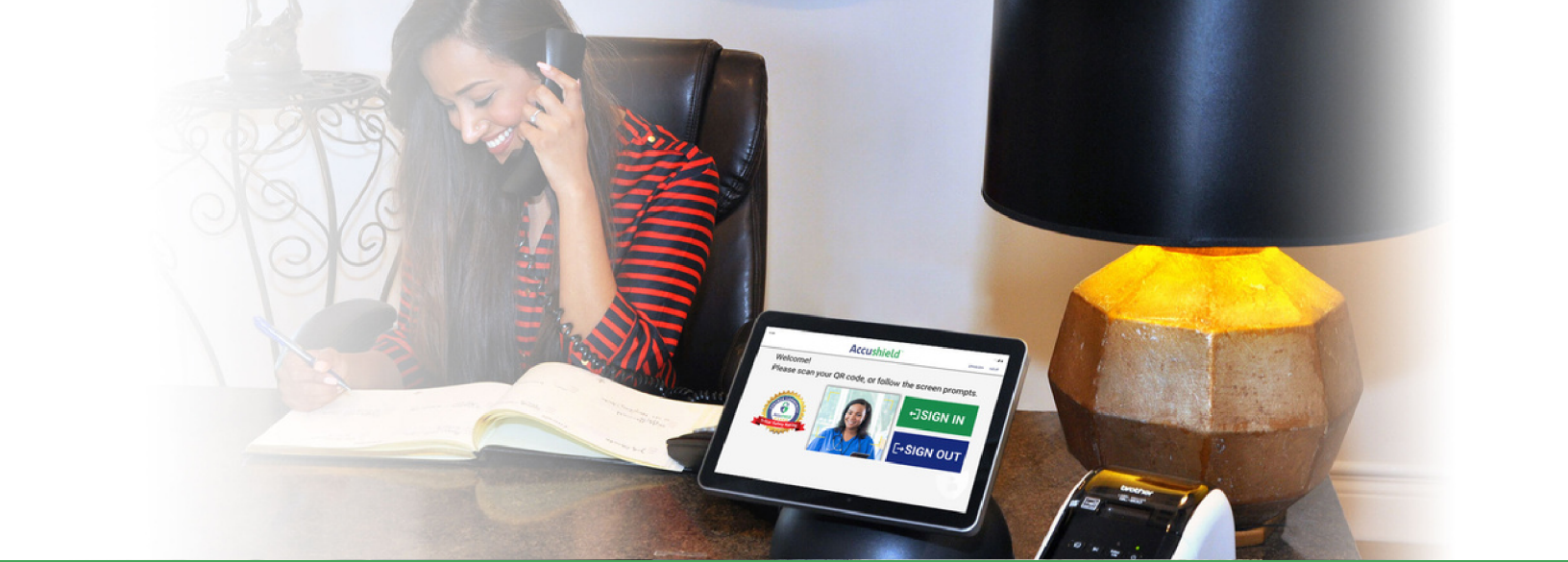
The second component of an All Hazards emergency management program is to utilize a system of command and control to effectively manage emergency incidents as they occur. The standardized, All Hazard emergency management model most commonly used is known as the Incident Command System (ICS). This is the same emergency management process utilized by first responders of all types including fire departments, law enforcement agencies, emergency medical services and other emergency management agencies. There are two versions of ICS that have been developed for LTC facilities and senior living communities known as the Nursing Home Incident Command System (NHICS) and the Assisted Living Incident Command System (ALICS). While these systems were specifically drafted for these two types of environment of care, they are both interoperable with other versions of ICS to help promote compatibility between all of the different organizations needed to manage an emergency or disaster.

Once these two components of an All Hazards emergency management program are in place, a provider can move forward to develop plans and

protocols to address the wide range of hazards and perils than can impact an LTC facility or senior living community. While identified threats can include everything from wildfires, tornados, active shooter, missing residents, floods and the dozens of other potential incidents that can occur, the question of “should we stay or should we go” is almost always a factor that must be considered. Regardless of the answer to that specific question, accountability is a concept that must always be considered.

The decision to evacuate an LTC facility or senior living community or hunker down and shelter-in-place comes with awesome responsibility. It doesn't take a scientific study to know that frail and elderly residents are particularly vulnerable to the hazards associated with evacuation including physical transfer trauma like broken bones and soft tissue injuries. Additionally, medically infirmed residents as well as elderly residents who live independently often suffer emotional trauma when separated from their familiar environment of care and personal living spaces.

The decision to evacuate an LTC facility's vulnerable population or shelter-in-place should be made with the best possible information available at the time of the incident. In accordance with the concepts of ICS, the facility's Incident Management Team (IMT) assembled at the time of the emergency will determine the strategies that will be utilized to safely manage the scenario. In most cases the strategy to either shelter-in-place or evacuate will be made in coordination with emergency response agencies. During major incidents where a region's emergency response resources are spread thin due to the scope, severity or duration of a disaster, these decisions may have to be determined by the LTC facility's IMT alone.



Emergency operations typically use prescriptive steps to manage dynamic situations. Having an understanding of the resources and assets present and available at the time of an adverse incident are of critical importance. Simply put, knowing the people and stuff that you are trying to protect will help promote safe emergency operations. One of the first steps in successful emergency operations conducted by fire responders, skilled nursing facilities, senior living communities and any other organization includes an accurate inventory of resources.

For the purposes of this paper, the resources and assets that we will focus on are the human resources including residents, staff and visitors. Having knowledge of who is in a building or on a campus at all times will provide the LTC facility's IMT as well as first responders with credible information needed to promote successful emergency operations. Having a reliable accountability system in place during times of crisis helps ensure the safety of all stakeholders associated with the LTC facility or senior living community.

Before technology was integrated into inventory control, keeping track of supplies, equipment and the material needed to operate any type of business was typically a paper-based process that used documents like ledgers and checklists

to keep track of inventory. The same is true with human resources. It is a common practice in occupancies of all types to physically sign-in and sign-out to keep track of people. Today, visitor and employee management systems are much more sophisticated and embrace technology to promote accuracy and convenience.

In LTC facilities and senior living communities, first response agencies around the world recognize the importance of knowing who is in a building that serves a vulnerable population at any given time. If a boiler explodes, a vehicle crashes into a building or some other type of emergency occurs, those first responders will immediately want a manifest of who is in the building.

In the old days and maybe even still today, a common practice to promote accountability was to have a written list printed out and inserted in some type of container like a plastic tube or folder and have it available at central location for first responders to reference during an emergency. Of course, it was and still is difficult to keep this type of list updated and accurate at all times given the coming and goings of people in every type of building. For the purposes of accountability during an emergency, accuracy is essential.

Charles Mann, a former Senior Living Executive Director, and founder of Accushield, realized the value of capturing key visitor data at the front desk. Launched in 2013, Accushield elevates safety and security measures for providers by capturing critical visitor data at the time of entry and exit. In the event of an emergency, facility managers have timely access to reports to identify who's in their building, how to triage residents for evacuation and more.

Fast forward to the present day and the solutions offered by Accushield continue to not only elevate emergency preparedness compliance, but also create peace of mind for residents and their loved ones.

"In a post-pandemic era, it's vital to inform residents and their family members of the protocols and tools used in the facility to respond to an emergency. They want to know what plans are in place to ensure their loved one is safe as well as how they'll be informed if an

event occurs," says TK King, Vice President of Healthcare Strategy at Accushield.

Integrated into the operations of 7,000 facilities throughout all 50 states in America, Accushield replaces outdated and risky paper processes with an easy-to-use kiosk and mobile app. As individuals enter and exit the community utilizing Accushield technology, customized questions capture details to help satisfy compliance, elevate safety and security, prevent avoidable exposures, and drive operational and resident outcomes.

The advantages of embracing technologies like those provided by Accushield will give LTC and senior living operators the ability to provide their stakeholders with a trusted and reliable "accountability" solution when managing emergencies and disasters.

Learn more about Accushield by visiting www.accushield.com.

Knowing who is in your Community during an Evacuation is critical. The Accushield kiosk gives management a quick and easy way to account for all on-site residents, staff, and visitors.

” The difference between [hurricanes] Irene and Sandy was major. Instead of dealing with all the paperwork, we now have the Accushield reports (Accushield Evacuation Management) that we can look at to identify, more efficiently, more accurately, more quickly, and in a very tumultuous time, who's in our communities or where they have evacuated to. We can look at those reports and talk with families. "Your mother has exited this building, and she has been identified in this building." So it was a much easier process.”

– Dr. Carol McKinley – President and CEO – Simpson Senior Services

Stan Szpytek is the president of the national consulting firm, Fire and Life Safety, Inc. based in Mesa, Arizona. He is a consultant for Accushield and is the Life Safety/Disaster Planning Consultant for the Arizona Health Care Association, California Association of Health Facilities (CAHF) and Utah Health Care Association. Szpytek is a former deputy fire chief and fire marshal with more than 40 years of experience in life safety compliance and emergency preparedness. For more information, visit www.FLSafety.org or e-mail Szpytek at Stan@FLSafety.org.