

NEVADA 2-1-1 RESPONSE REPORT FOR THE 2011 CAUGHLIN FIRE

This document covers the information that could be gathered from Nevada 2-1-1's handling of the 2011 Caughlin Fire on November 18th, 2011.

December 6, 2011



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OVERVIEW

The Caughlin Fire on November 18th, 2011 was the second time in as many months that Nevada 2-1-1 was called into action during a community disaster. It was also the first time that Nevada 2-1-1 had the opportunity to activate both the northern and southern call centers to respond to a single incident. In addition to Nevada 2-1-1's lines, Crisis Call Center's business lines were given out to the public as they were during the Reno Air Races Disaster. A great number of people from the public depended on the information given by operators to assess the risk of themselves and their loved ones.

Within the first 24 hours, nearly 1,500 calls were handled by operators from Nevada 2-1-1 in both the Reno and Las Vegas offices. Information about the fire, boundaries, evacuation notices, evacuation procedures, road closures, local Nevadans wishing to help the community by volunteering, and animal control inquiries were distributed to Nevadans and their families. A small handful of national calls and some from California were received from concerned family members and Nevadans abroad curious about their homes. We were there to answer those calls.

*Nearly 1,500 calls were handled
in the first 24 hours*

THE STORY

In the early morning hours of November 18th, a phone call came in to Crisis Call Center's Call Center Director. The call was from the Emergency Operations Center and the message was simple: Nevada 2-1-1 is being activated. Seconds later a flurry of text messages and phone calls went out alerting staff and volunteers that they were needed. The time was almost 5:00am and the hills to the southeast of Reno were ablaze.

In the next 24 hours, with approximately 40 call takers, Nevada 2-1-1 addressed over 1,500 calls from Nevadans. The memory of the Reno Air Races Disaster was fresh in the minds of many of the operators, but this disaster was different. Nevada 2-1-1 handled over 1,500 calls, nearly 75% of the calls that we received in the full week of the Reno Air Races Disaster response and close to three times the volume of the busiest day during that week!

*1,197 Callers wanted
evacuation information*

SUCSESSES

The Caughlin Fire was the second disaster that activated Nevada 2-1-1 and demonstrated how much we had learned from the previous incident. One exciting opportunity available during this disaster was the ability to bring both Nevada 2-1-1 call centers on-line, a move that dramatically increased the level of our service. Also, many of the challenges from the Reno Air Races Disaster, such as communication issues, data entry issues, lacking standards when taking calls and an inability to log calls directly into CommunityOS, had all been addressed. Lastly, our disaster response had incredible inter-agency support from local agencies like the United Way of Northern Nevada and the Sierra.

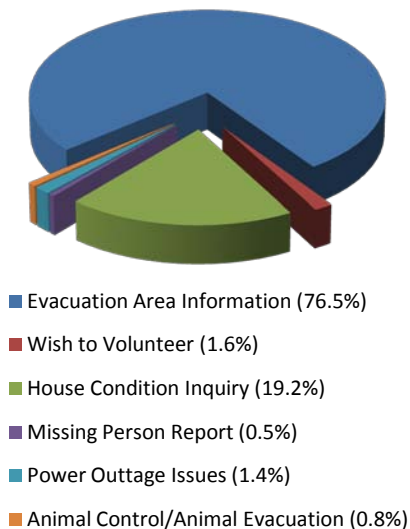
Caller has not been evacuated yet, but has no television to check for local media updates, wanted the evacuation boundaries.

- 11/18/2011

Perhaps the greatest victory during this disaster was having both call centers on-line and taking calls. Working in sync at both places enabled our disaster response to handle an unprecedented number of calls in a single day, over 1,500 calls or about the same number of calls both call centers handle in a week's time! Without the seamless work across Nevada 2-1-1's call centers our disaster response would have reached only a fraction of the community that we actually served.

The Nevada 2-1-1 Disaster Portal played a vital role in streamlining our processes. The Disaster Portal acted as a centralized hub, not only for logging caller information, but also for news and resource updates. Operators had the benefit of accessing the same information and resources as operators in the other side of the building and even 800 miles away the second that it was available. As a result, callers received the same level of service regardless of where the call was routed within Nevada 2-1-1. Having the Disaster Portal accessible to all Nevada 2-1-1 operators dramatically cut down on the paper and overhead associated with paper call sheets and raised the quality of our service during a disaster.

Incoming Calls by Purpose



Lastly, during the Caughlin Fire, Nevada 2-1-1 benefitted immensely from inter-agency support. When the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) activated Nevada 2-1-1, key staff from the United Way of Northern Nevada and the Sierra (UWNNS) was also alerted and arrived with the first wave of 2-1-1 staff. The incredible support of Karen Barsell, CEO and President of UWNNS, in addition to the technical and strategic planning of Kelsey Piechocki, Senior Vice President of UWNNS, must be recognized as a success because their involvement was pivotal in supporting our operators' needs systemically and physically.

CHALLENGES

Nevada 2-1-1's disaster response was streamlined and focused during the Caughlin Fire, but it was not without challenges. Early in the disaster a few unforeseen challenges arose, one in particular was technical in nature and dramatic in consequence but held no long-term ill effects. Once our operators were setup and introduced to our disaster processes, they took off running and were "an impressive sight of calm organization" according to one observer. Another challenge facing Nevada 2-1-1 is how to handle our staff and take care of their well being while keeping our processes focused on servicing the community.

At 7:00am, Nevada 2-1-1 calls being routed to Nevada 2-1-1's call center in Reno are shifted to the call center in Las Vegas. Unfortunately on November 18th when the routing of calls changed, several issues compounded and crippled our ability to take calls. Phone system issues prevented operators from taking calls, while the processes to change the call routing were shrouded by years of not being used. It took 38 minutes to resolve all of the issues; 38 minutes in a time when over 200 calls per hour were being made to 2-1-1.

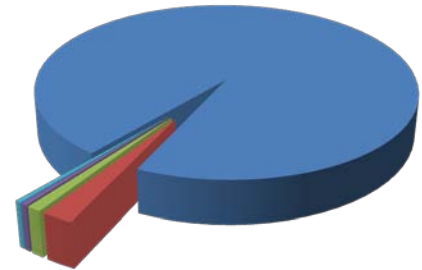
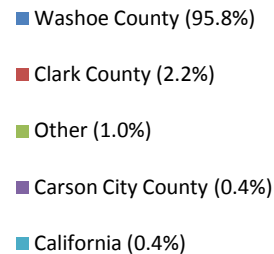
During a disaster response, staff and volunteers come and go to support the needs of the disaster. As a consequence, constant training and debriefing are necessary to inform people of what is going on and to learn from their experiences and be aware of their well-being. For the Caughlin Fire a majority of the calls took place during the first 12 hours, this decreased the need for having processes in place to take care of the 'flow' of people. In the event of longer disasters, we need to have established processes to manage the 'flow' of staff and volunteers coming and going to avoid burnout while maximizing our service.

RESOLUTIONS

In the days after the Caughlin Fire, discussions have been made as to how to deal with our challenges more effectively. By identifying our current setup and readiness plan we have been able to identify opportunities to better handle a future disaster.

Addressing our call routing has been a priority in the days following this disaster. Working closely between the two call centers, we have identified the tools needed to directly control where calls are routed. Instructions on how to use these tools have since been crafted and distributed to key members of our disaster response team to ensure issues, like those that occurred on November 18th, do not happen again.

Incoming Calls by County



Layout plans have been created to maximize the number of operator stations in use during a disaster while allowing for the creation of a briefing/debriefing room. The briefing/debriefing room will be pivotal in training incoming staff and volunteers, priming them for the disaster while acting as a refresher course to our disaster processes.

The briefing/debriefing room will enable our information director, a new role responsible for keeping current information available on the disaster portal, to get feedback from the people using the portal to better address the needs of the operators. Lastly this room will be uniquely positioned as a place for operators to ‘decompress’ away from the calls before they leave for the day; this will be crucial in the event of multi-day disasters that could fatigue our operators.

While the briefing/debriefing room will prove invaluable in future disasters, it was important for us to not give up stations for operators. Keeping this in mind, several new stations have been identified and are ready for use in the event of another disaster.

During the Caughlin Fire, our disaster response enjoyed a direct connection to the EOC’s press releases via webEOC, a web-based dashboard equipped with the latest press releases. As the day continued, however, we found that webEOC was no longer being updated. Consequentially, Nevada 2-1-1 was privy to the same information as the press, at the same time as the press. This problem was exacerbated when “Dial 2-1-1 for more information” was being touted by new sites and channels on topics and services that 2-1-1 was not providing, most notably when 2-1-1 was claimed to be registering people to alert them when it was safe to return home¹. In response, we are looking into avenues to increase the timeliness of information and ensure that press releases are inline with our services through the help of the EOC.

Nevada 2-1-1’s disaster response to the Caughlin Fire held an assortment of unique challenges and victories. Through this crisis, we have gained even more experience, building upon what we had learned from the RARD. Many of our challenges from the RARD led to our victories during this disaster. With this in mind, we are scrutinizing our challenges from the Caughlin Fire to realize the lessons that this tragic fire can teach us in preparation for the next disaster.



A section of our layout plan

Caller wanted to say that she is grateful to everyone involved!

-11/18/2011

¹ Nevada 2-1-1 did not, nor did it ever claim to, provide such a service.