Bridging the Gap: Synchronizing Response Efforts with a Common Operating Picture

Decision-making during emergencies is complex. First responders must alert the public, coordinate evacuations, manage personnel, and direct resources. Each of these tasks has their own set of complex subtasks. For example, evacuations require dynamic traffic management that adapts to changing conditions like roadblocks or choke points.

Disparate systems limit the information first responders can access and significantly reduce their ability to see the whole picture. This is made worse by siloed communication. Agencies use separate systems, causing delays and confusion due to unsynchronized information. It is crucial to support first responders and emergency managers with modern solutions that simplify and improve procedures to help them be more effective.

Unifying decision-making is a simple and effective way to improve emergency response. So, how can we achieve this? A common operating picture.

What is a Common Operating Picture?

According to FEMA, *"A common operating picture is a continuously updated overview of an incident compiled throughout an incident's life cycle from data shared between integrated communication, information management, and intelligence and information sharing systems. The goal of a common operating picture is real-time situational awareness across all levels of incident management and across jurisdictions."*

Building an Effective Common Operating Picture

If we want to create a true common operating picture, we must do more than display information on a map. We need to look beyond what we can see and create an environment where critical information is available in real time to first responders and emergency managers. This ensures decisions rely on accurate, relevant, and actionable information.
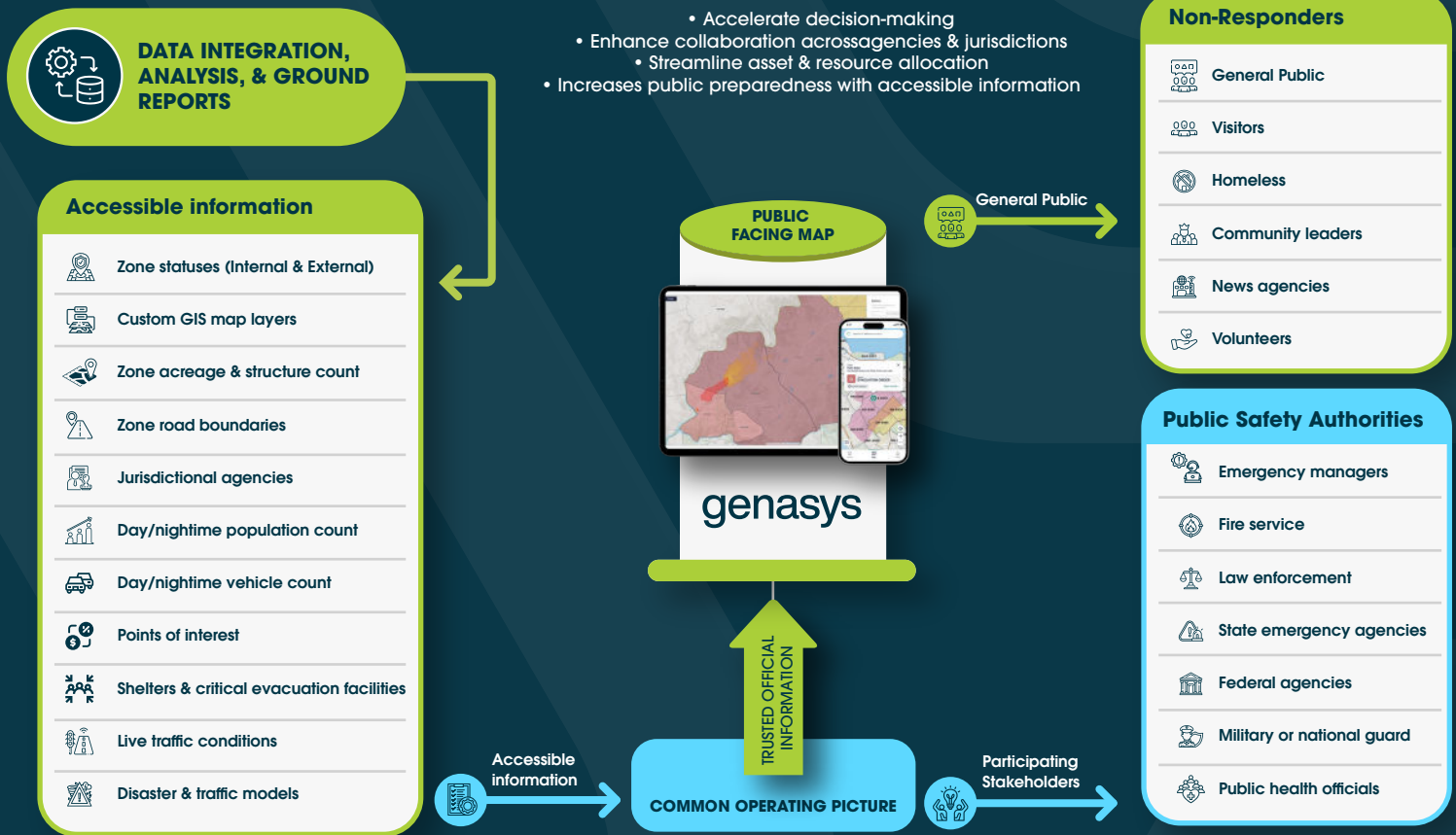
It is also important to understand that displaying visual information on the map can reach a point of diminishing return very quickly. Too much visual "noise" can create unnecessary confusion and even slow down decision making.

To create an effective common operating picture, first responders need to have access to high priority data that directly supports their planning and decision-making. Sharing this information among all participating agencies accelerates and improves decision-making. When everyone sees the same data, confusion is reduced, and coordination is improved.

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During an emergency, a common operating picture allows all participating agencies to work from the same source of truth to:

• Accelerate decision-making
• Enhance collaboration acrossagencies & jurisdictions
• Streamline asset & resource allocation
• Increases public preparedness with accessible information

DATA INTEGRATION, ANALYSIS, & GROUND REPORTS

Accessible information

- Zone statuses (Internal & External)
- Custom GIS map layers
- Zone acreage & structure count
- Zone road boundaries
- Jurisdictional agencies
- Day/nightime population count
- Day/nightime vehicle count
- Points of interest
- Shelters & critical evacuation facilities
- Live traffic conditions
- Disaster & traffic models

PUBLIC FACING MAP

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General Public

Non-Responders

- General Public
- Visitors
- Homeless
- Community leaders
- News agencies
- Volunteers

Public Safety Authorities

- Emergency managers
- Fire service
- Law enforcement
- State emergency agencies
- Federal agencies
- Military or national guard
- Public health officials

Accessible information → COMMON OPERATING PICTURE

TRUSTED OFFICIAL INFORMATION

Participating Stakeholders →

Genasys Protect

Genasys Protect, the cornerstone of the Protect Platform for Protective Communications, provides first responders and emergency managers with the tools they need to enhance the most critical areas of disaster response including reducing the time from incident recognition to community notification.

Key Benefits

- Accelerates decision-making
- Enhances collaboration across agencies & jurisdictions
- Streamlines traffic management and resource allocation
- Improves mass alerting capabilities
- Increases public preparedness with accessible information

Key Features

- Intelligent and flexible zones
- Accessible situational awareness information (Common operating picture)
- Disaster and traffic modeling/simulation
- Public portal via the Genasys Protect citizen's site and mobile app

Synchronize and Succeed:
Benefits of a Common Operating Picture

Centralized, Real-Time Information Sharing and Collaboration

A common operating picture integrates critical data from multiple authoritative sources into one platform, and a single pane of glass providing real-time updates on incidents like weather, evacuation routes, and resource status. This shared view ensures that first responders, Emergency Managers, and allied agencies are seeing the same up-to-date information, reducing delays and errors. It streamlines communication and minimizes the need for manual data sharing, which speeds up decision-making. This becomes especially important during incidents that involve multiple agencies and jurisdictions.

During large-scale events like hurricanes, a common operating platform allows cooperating agencies to coordinate efforts, align strategies, and allocate resources efficiently. By breaking down communication silos, it enables a unified response, reducing overlap and ensuring a more effective approach across jurisdictions.

Flexibility to Adapt to Changing Conditions

One of the critical challenges in emergency response is the need to adapt quickly to changing circumstances. Events like wildfires or floods can evolve rapidly, requiring adjustments to evacuation zones, resource needs and deployment. A common operating picture supports flexibility by providing real-time updates that are visible across agencies and personnel. This ensures everyone involved is aware of the latest developments and can modify their actions accordingly. When a significant change in conditions occurs, a common operating picture enables first responders and all key decision makers to share information quickly and stay informed. This kind of clarity reduces the risk of miscommunication.

Efficient Resource Allocation

A common operating picture streamlines resource deployment during emergencies. With a unified view of the incident, decision-makers can quickly identify areas needing support and allocate equipment, personnel, medical aid, and logistical supplies accordingly. When resources are limited, this is not just beneficial, but rather, it's critical. For instance, during a wildfire, knowing high-risk zones allows responders to prioritize actions, protect critical infrastructure, and evacuate residents effectively. This precision ensures assistance reaches those in need and maximizes the efficient use of limited resources.

Improved Public Communication

In emergencies, accurate, timely updates keep the public safe. By accelerating decision-making, public safety officials can send alerts to the public faster. This works in conjunction with intelligent zones and public facing platforms.

Intelligent Zones

Intelligent zones are built by integrating diverse, reliable data sources such as GIS, population demographics, and historical trends to inform evacuation strategies and optimize resource allocation during emergencies. They make key situational status information available to public safety personnel. Intelligent zoning accelerates the decision-making process by clearly defining areas of concern, allowing first responders to quickly identify hazards and streamline evacuation efforts. Additionally, they enhance communication by integrating with mass notification channels, ensuring timely alerts and instructions reach residents in affected zones. By extending the benefits of intelligent zones, a true common operating picture benefits all participating agencies.

Public Information Platforms

Effective public information platforms, such as the Genasys Protect citizen's site and mobile app, work similarly to the common operating platform by making properly vetted information available to the community during emergencies.

By sharing key information like evacuation routes, road closures, and shelters it:
- Helps community members make informed decisions.
- Reduces misinformation.
- Builds trust between agencies and communities.

A direct communication channel between first responders and the public minimizes confusion, ensures smoother evacuations, and alleviates some of the burden on 911 centers by providing an alternative for information seekers not in immediate danger.

Preparedness and Training

A common operating picture is not only valuable during active incidents, but it also plays a crucial role in preparedness and training. By providing a comprehensive overview of potential hazards, past incidents, and simulated scenarios, a common operating picture enables agencies to test their response plans before a disaster strikes. This allows responders to familiarize themselves with coordination procedures, build muscle memory for critical actions, and identify gaps that can be addressed proactively. A well-prepared team is more likely to execute an effective response when an emergency occurs, reducing the time taken to act and increasing the overall safety of the community.

Simulation and Modeling Technology

Emergency managers can run simulations using the latest information, helping them evaluate outcomes and refine response strategies. This proactive approach identifies planning gaps and prepares teams for real emergencies, making simulations more relevant and valuable. Like with intelligent zones, a common operating platform enhances the effectiveness of countless emergency management solutions by sharing their benefits with all participating agencies.

Real-World Application

Since its implementation in Siskiyou County, Genasys Protect has consistently improved responses to various emergencies. Officials established clear zone boundaries, streamlining communication and decision-making, and established a common operating picture among neighboring counties. Common operating pictures elements were especially notable during wildfires affecting multiple jurisdictions.

The common operating platform provided real-time, unified information on affected populations, enabling first responders to allocate resources efficiently. Law enforcement personnel from the County Sheriff's Office and the Yreka Police Department could quickly inform mutual aid responders, agencies, and the public about changes to evacuation orders through the common operating picture. This clarity reduced the time spent defining evacuation areas and built public trust through timely updates via the Genasys Protect app. Overall, integrating a common operating picture enhanced their coordination, communication, and effectiveness when safeguarding affected communities.

Further Enhancing Collaboration

Collaboration is crucial in emergency management and there are many ways to improve it beyond a common operating picture. Genasys Evertel addresses this need by providing secure, real-time communication tailored for public safety agencies and other critical sectors. With a focus on security, Evertel ensures the integrity and reliability of every message, enabling swift decision-making and effective cross-agency collaboration. It allows professionals to quickly form ad-hoc groups for immediate incidents or maintain long-term communication within teams. Meeting stringent compliance requirements such as CJIS, FOIA, and HIPAA, Evertel offers end-to-end encryption and a government-use-only cloud solution, making it the ultimate choice for secure and dependable communication in mission-critical situations.