

## Continuous practice provides safe emergency management

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If a city's distribution of tap water is interrupted or the tap water get inconsumable through contamination or needs to be boiled before use, the whole community is influenced. Both public and private sectors are immediately affected. Kindergartens, nursing homes, dentists, restaurants, caterers, prison houses, immigration centers, sports arenas, industries, and hospitals, all depend on access to water. Today, expectations and demands are huge on the water utility to quickly detect, manage and inform the citizens, customers, media and all the municipality functions of any disruptions in the water supply.

The principles of responsibility, proximity and similarity are important foundations for crisis management in Sweden. Gästrike Vatten, responsible for water and sewage in four municipalities, is a part of the local municipalities in crisis management. In their crisis management work, many municipalities in Sweden have focused on developing plans for extraordinary crisis. An extraordinary crisis situation has very specific needs and is governed by a special law. This means that the cooperation with municipal authorities and crisis communication is very rarely practiced. Instead, Gästrike Vatten has chosen to focus on developing distinct procedures and working methods for the common disturbances that occur several times a year. This makes the organization accustomed and comfortable with the method and better prepared for a major crisis.

Gästrike Vatten has distribution areas where the water supplies are highly vulnerable, the risks are many and alternative water supplies and water plants do not exist. Since 2010 Gästrike Vatten has focused on prevention, cooperation and long-term solutions. Two key elements in this were the creation of a distinct Crisis management strategy, and the direct and continuous management of accidents and disturbances.

The purpose of the development of the Crisis management strategy was to establish defined procedures and a method that can be applied to any disturbance so that all employees become confident with the routines. Thereby, when an extraordinary crisis happens, the organization do not need to face the challenges of working according to a new strategy in addition to manage the present disturbance or crisis. This approach also creates an opportunity to detect and manage a crisis early when an accident or disturbance occurred. Guidelines for reconciliation and establishment with the owner municipalities was also included in the Crisis management strategy. The process of developing the strategy involved all managers, water strategist, communicator, and HR strategist.

The result of the work is a method with several crisis management levels. These are color-coded for quick recognition. The approach is already applied at major events and escalated in a crisis. Indicators provide support for evaluation and decision on crisis management level. Templates and checklists are available to support agenda, documentation and communication, internally and externally. All employees are responsible to react and act to operational alerts and information received in order to determine whether action needs to be taken to prevent a crisis.

Our experience are that the process to find and develop the method is time consuming because many people need to be involved. However, the participation in the development of the method is what make the method useful and intuitive when it needs to be used. The strength of the method is that it is used in practice several times a year at major disturbances which contributes to ongoing internal discussion, development and establishment of the method. As such, the organization is practicing constantly and getting better and better.

The result of the method allows us to react quicker to information received, and the ability to decide if we need to take action or not. Decisions are better documented and individual dependency has decreased. By early detection and decision making, we believe that crisis can be prevented and our customers will not notice neither our work nor any negative effects. It should be added that close cooperation with the rescue service and the environmental agencies are prerequisites for many of the actions. The feedback to the method has been positive, both internally, and from the municipal owners, the rescue service, regional authorities, and insurance companies that have been affected by events in 2014, 2015 and 2016.