GUIDEBOOK 101

Establishing a Reliable, Robust Emergency Relief Supply Chain

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Establishing a Reliable, Robust Emergency Relief Supply Chain

A reliable, robust emergency relief supply chain can transform a warehouse or DC from "zero" to "hero" with the flick of a switch

Emergencies can happen at any time and any place. They can range from a tropical storm that brings a flooding storm surge on land to something as catastrophic as a global pandemic that impacts nearly every corner of the world. Somewhere between these two extremes lies a vast range of threats that can throw even the best-laid supply chain plans out of whack.

Building operational resilience in this VUCA world—where volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity are the "four horsemen" threatening supply chains—isn't easy. Consider this: During the typical week, more than 100 disruptive different events occur, including natural disasters, factory fires, changing government policies, and threats to human health—to name just a few.

In this guidebook, we explore the key supply chain challenges that organizations, institutions, and municipalities face when disaster strikes and hear how a reliable, robust emergency relief supply chain can transform a warehouse or DC from "zero" to "hero" with the flick of a switch.

Fulfilling Critical Needs

In 2019, most global organizations were grappling with international trade wars, labor crunches, transportation capacity shortages, and geopolitical issues like Brexit. In March of 2020, the entire world's attention had shifted over to addressing a global pandemic and coping with the steep toll it took on life, livelihoods, and entire economies.

"Emergency services have become top of mind for companies in 2020," says Bill King, Tecsys' chief revenue officer. "Through the pandemic, we've seen supply chain disruption and product shortages across many different industries, where a lack of supply chain visibility became a major constraint."

This visibility gap was particularly relevant in the PPE sector, where early in the pandemic first-responders and other people working on the front lines couldn't get the protection they needed to be able to treat patients and/or do their jobs.

King says organizations that had Tecsys' supply chain software suite (which includes warehouse management, transportation management, and distribution management) in place fared better than others. "They were able to deliver critical, pandemic-related supplies to the right locations and at the right time," King says, "in order to effectively address public safety."

Turning the Lights On

At the core of any good emergency relief supply chain is a "lights out" warehouse or DC where critical supplies are stocked in case of emergency. When a disaster occurs, the lights go on in those facilities, where trained personnel use Tecsys' software suite to run the operation. "We also provide the employee training and/or temporary workers needed to get up and running quickly," says King.

In many cases, these facilities are left unattended during "normal" times, and not always ready to act when an emergency occurs. Much like a Florida homeowner tests his or her generator when a hurricane is approaching, these facilities are left to languish until an actual emergency occurs.

Then, they have to quickly spring into gear—an expectation that's particularly onerous at facilities where medicines and other time-sensitive materials are being stored for future use. In absence of lot control, expiry control, and material track-and-trace, for example, antibiotics and other critical supplies may be unusable when it comes time to turn the lights on.

"These warehouses often sit dormant for years, filled with supplies that no one has any visibility into," King explains. "When you add temporary labor to the equation, the situation becomes even more confusing and ineffective as people fumble through the process of finding and delivering critical supplies."

With an emergency warehouse readiness solution in place, the same location is always fine-tuned and ready to rise up and meet whatever challenge is put in front of it.

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Source: resilinc.com

Going from "Zero" to "Hero"

Much like insurance coverage only kicks in when you actually need, the emergency relief supply chain has to be standing at the ready, eager to jump in and help when called upon. "When someone hits the panic button, it has to be able to go from 'zero to hero' within days (or less)," says Bill Denbigh, Tecsys' director of product marketing and business development, "and with a completely fresh start, using everything that's at your avail in that facility."

Tecsys' Emergency Warehouse Readiness Solution helps municipalities, institutions, and organizations achieve these goals by providing the technology, processes, and people needed to address unusual situations quickly and effectively. The concept is straightforward: organizations store equipment, food, medicine, and other emergency supplies that might be needed at a moment's notice.

When called upon, these facilities rely on Tecsys' software and technology to instantly turn on and kick into action. "This is a sophisticated supply chain that has to be able to switch on the dime, reconfigure on the fly, and be able to respond differently to unusual situations," says Denbigh.

In return, organizations get a very elastic solution that can scale up or down as needed, and where lights are always ready to "turn on" quickly. "Warehouses can run in standby mode at a very low cost and with very low usage rates, then scale up to meet the immediate emergency demand," Denbigh explains. "Then, they go back to standby mode when the threat has passed."

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Managing the Surge

When one large state university medical center needed help managing the surge of COVID-19 suppliers being fulfilled and shipped through its integrated delivery network, it called on Tecsys to implement an emergency warehouse readiness solution that would not only address the current issue, but also prepare it for the next emergency.

"The university medical center wanted to more efficiently track and deliver all of its COVID-related supplies and medicines," says Harry Dimirjian, director, client solutions, at Tecsys, which had been working with the school prior to the pandemic. When COVID-19 emerged, it needed a warehouse and inventory management system that would support its emergency operations. "They were handling everything manually," says Dimirjian, "and really had no idea what was in their warehouse."

Seeking a quick WMS implementation (4-5 weeks versus the typical 6-month time span) that could be orchestrated remotely due to shutdowns and social distancing), the hospital worked with Tecsys to modernize its emergency supply chain operations. Using GoPros and its own 6-person technical team, Tecsys conducted operational assessments and then worked remotely to design and implement the new warehouse management system.

Tecsys handled the employee training remotely, conducted the necessary functional testing, took the system for a dry run, and then took the university medical center live in under six weeks. "That was unprecedented in terms of implementation timing," says Dimirjian, "but the hospital is really happy with the system and benefitting from its functionalities."

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They Were Ready for COVID Response

As a long-time emergency service provider for numerous municipalities, Tecsys recently worked with one large U.S. city whose health department relied on manual picking and paper-driven processes in its warehouse and working with a third-party logistics (3PL) provider. When it found itself engulfed in the H1N1 virus in 2009, it asked Tecsys for help modernizing its own warehouse and also balancing its requirements with its 3PL's capabilities.

For the health department, Tecsys created a project plan, implemented a standalone WMS, handled the employee training, conducted the validations, and rolled out the solution to three different warehouses. It also established contingency plans for various scenarios. "We gave them a highly flexible system that helps them respond to the unexpected," says Jonathan Frankfort, principal, supply chain specialist with Tecsys.

When COVID-19 reared its head in 2020, the city was ready to respond quickly to the problem. With established emergency-response protocols in place and internal resources that understood how to manage in the face of adversity, the city ramped up quickly when the pandemic emerged. "It was able to get ahead of the curve," says Frankfort, "and respond effectively to the crisis."

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Tackling Current Issues

As one of the major challenges of modern supply chain management, volatility is keeping supply chain managers up at night right now as they work to proactive identify problems, mitigate issues, and make sure those problems don't repeat themselves.

On a global basis, the emergency supply chain will soon be called upon to turn its lights on and help distribute the COVID-19 vaccine. This will require a monumental effort that includes a robust emergency relief supply chain; Tecsys is no stranger to such efforts.

In 2009, Tecsys worked with a major pharmaceutical distributor to establish four DCs that would distribute millions of the H1N1 vaccines to as many as 150,000 sites across the U.S. It was the largest public health initiative in the CDC's history that delivered, in just two months, some 125 million doses of the vaccine with 99.99% order accuracy.

These and other real-life examples reveal an emergency supply chain that's being called upon more frequently to deliver critical supplies to people who need them. "You can have all the PPE that you want, but if it's stacked in a warehouse and no one knows it's there, it's not doing anyone any good," says Denbigh.

But what if you could manage the inflow of orders, allocate properly, get products to the people who need them, and more effectively manage the disaster? That's the question all companies should be asking themselves as they prepare for the post-COVID world and the next potential disaster.

"The disaster recovery supply chain is really just another supply chain," says Denbigh. "Managed effectively, it can really help people. However, you need to know what you're doing and apply the right technology, tools, and people to the task. If you do that, you'll nail it. But if you mess that up, you're going to be in pretty bad shape."

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To companies that want to improve or replace their own emergency relief supply chains, Frankfort says that because we live in a world where the next crisis in inevitable, being able to "flick the switch on" and respond quickly is becoming table stakes for many organizations.

"Having an emergency supply chain in place is crucial because you really don't know what's coming next," he says. "Even if you don't know what's around the next corner, if you set yourself up with a partner that can help you identify and navigate the issues, you'll be well positioned to address them as they surface."

With the help of a robust technology platform, emergency relief supply chain planning means you are ready to turn on a dime as soon as someone hits the panic button, and then revert back to standby status until a new emergency, catastrophe, or disaster rears its head. A responsive supply chain design paired with an agile tech stack can give municipalities, institutions, and individual organizations alike the tools to kick their operations into high gear exactly when they need to without missing a beat.

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