Emergency Operating Centers Handbook

Federal Emergency Management Agency

EMERGENCY OPERATING CENTER (EOC) HANDBOOK

Federal Emergency Management Agency

FOREWORD

This Emergency Operating Center (EOC) Handbook is designed to provide information to State and local officials responsible for emergency management on the need for and the development of a direction and control capacity in their communities.

This handbook focuses on the EOC facility-planning it, developing it, and its operational use in times of emergency-recognizing that adequate direction and control capabilities must consider all appropriate hazards that threaten a community or State, and must be designed accordingly. A fixed EOC facility is considered essential to this functional capability but consideration must also be given to the added value of a mobile command center. This additional capability permits on-the-scene direction and control where the emergency is site specific and provides the community with a capability to relocate its primary direction and control operation if the fixed EOC facility is threatened, damaged or otherwise made inoperable. Guidance on mobile command centers will be issued separately. This handbook is being published with an operational section (a technical section will be published at a later date) and is printed in looseleaf form for easy incorporation.

It is intended that this handbook be used as a guide to assist communities in determining and fulfilling their needs, while encouraging them to exercise as much creativity and initiative as may be required to achieve the best possible operational capability.

When the decision is made to proceed further in EOC development, local, State, and FEMA Regional officials should join in a cooperative effort to ensure that appropriate financial and technical assistance is made available to bring the EOC through the different stages to an operational facility.

With regard to the Federal EOC funding program, it is essential to consult FEMA's regulations in Title 44 of the Code of Federal Regulations; CPG l-3 Federal Assistance Handbook, Emergency Management, Direction and Control Programs, and CPG l-32, Financial Assistance Guidelines, for criteria and guidance.

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CONTENTS

CONTENTS (Continued)

INTRODUCTION

Direction, control, and warning are essential functions of emergency preparedness and response operations. They provide the capacity for the nation's State and local leaders to control government resources, communicate decisions to the public, and deploy assets to meet critical needs. The functions are essential to government providing the appropriate response in all major emergencies that results in saving lives and protecting property and in coordinating recovery operations.

Emergencies-whether natural, manmade, or acts of war-place extraordinary strains on all levels of government. Demand for service escalates, while the ability to deliver diminishes. Special skills, equipment, and facilities are needed. These requirements create a need for government officials to direct and control their respective governments and communities under the most adverse circumstances.

A key question for the emergency management planner is whether the jurisdiction has provisions for centralized and coordinated direction and control of all potential emergency efforts. Consideration must be given to:

1. Types of potential emergencies (Hazards Analysis).

   a. Natural.
   b. Manmade.
   c. Acts of war.

2. Resources available to cope with emergencies (Capability Assessment).

   a. Personnel.
   b. Equipment.
   c. Supplies.
   d. Plans.

Managing government on a daily basis is not the same as during an emergency. The number and nature of problems differs greatly from those in normal governmental operations. To gather information during an emergency, make decisions, and direct necessary actions requires close coordination between key officials.

Such coordination is best obtained when these officials and key support staff are located near each other, preferably in the same faeility, and have direct lines of survivable corn munication. A central facility--from which all local emergency efforts can be coordinated and directed-is essential for emergency response and recovery. This means that government must prepare for the possibility of an emergency that will significantly change operating procedures. Government must be ready to direct and control emergency operations. This facility is referred to as an Emergency Operating Center (EOC).

The Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) EOC program is designed to help local officials plan, construct, equip, and operate such a center in their area. The program also recognizes the importance of supplemental mobile command center capability. FEMA provides up to a maximum of 50 percent of the funds required to develop an Emergency Operating Center, based on criteria set forth in the CPG l-3, Federal Assistance Handbook: Emergency Management, Direction and Control Programs.

In addition, FEMA provides technical assistance through State governments to ensure that desired physical and operational standards for EOCs are achieved. This assistance is offered for Federally assisted and locally funded EOCs and may also be requested for local efforts not involving FEMA funds.

This handbook provides managers at State and local levels with basic information on initiating planning. It shows how the direction and control process moves from the planning stage, through development of an EOC, to emergency operations during and following a major emergency.

The handbook is based on data collected by FEMA and is intended as a guide. Nothing contained in here should be construed to deviate from or take precedence over policy otherwise established by law, Executive Order, or FEMA.

Options are recommended for incorporating certain features in the EOC to give the planner a general sense of direction. These suggestions are not intended to inhibit the planner from developing other options which would better serve the needs of the community or EOC.

This handbook provides FEMA guidelines to State and local governments to assist them in formulating emergency plans and operational capabilities.

This handbook supersedes those portions of the Federal Civil Defense Guide and other Defense Civil Preparedness Agency (DCPA) publications providing EOC guidance. It is not intended as guidance for meeting requirements for financial assistance eligibility and com pliance For guidance in these areas, the reader is referred to FEMA regulations in Title 44 of the Code of Federal Regulations, to FEMA publication CPG l-3, Federal Assistance Handbook, Emergency Management, Direction and Control Programs, and to FEMA publication CPG l-32, Financial Assistance Guidelines.

The multi-hazard functional approach to emergency management that is a feature of the Integrated Emergency Management System (IEMS) strategy and the related IEMS process for hazards analysis, capability assessment, and multi-year development planning are reflected in this handbook.

CHAPTER I

PLANNING FOR EOC DEVELOPMENT

Basic steps in planning the development of an EOC at minimum cost are listed below and discussed in detail in the balance of this chapter. Throughout, emphasis should be on maximum use of existing facilities, equipment, and supplies. The steps are:

1. Defining functions to be performed in the EOC.
2. Planning responsibilities.
3. Determining size of EOC staff and organization for operations.
4. Determining amount of space required for the EOC.
5. Identifying suitable existing space for the EOC or defining requirements to develop space.
6. Establishing the location of the EOC, including provisions for use of EOC space in normal periods.
7. Determining layout for the EOC.
8. Determining needs for communications and warning.
9. Determining needs for other EOC supplies and equipment.
10. Providing for Standard Operating Procedures (SOP).
11. Providing for EOC training and drills.

A. Defining Functions to Be Performed in the EOC

The first step in planning the development of an EOC is to define functions to be performed. Once these functions are determined, necessary staff, organization, size, and functional layout for the EOC can be developed.

EOC operations and management differ widely according to the situation. The direction taken by an EOC and areas over which it exercises control can generally be divided into three categories:

- Normalcy, when no emergency is taking place or anticipated.
- Emergency Without Warning, such as earthquakes, terrorist attacks, or hazardous material incidents.
- Emergency With Warning, such as an impending flood, tornado, hurricane, or international crisis providing strategic warning.

Each emergency condition will be discussed in Appendix A, with detailed guidance on the direction and control functions of the EOC.

B. Determining Size of EOC Staff and Organization for Operations

In planning for an EOC, attention should be given to the types and numbers of personnel essential to the effective direction and control function. This planning will be accomplished within the organizational context that you anticipate will be responsive to EOC functions. Staff organization for operations should include the four funetional categories listed below.

1. Policy. Composed of the executive head of government and the principal officials responsible for policy decisions; i.e., department heads of the primary departments of the affected government, legal advisors, public information personnel.

2. Disaster Analysis and Coordination. Made up of specialists responsible for collecting, analyzing, and evaluating disaster data, and responsible for working with community business, industry, service and volunteer groups to ensure maximum availability of resources for emergency needs. Coordinates use of resources within the EOC to achieve their maximum availability for emergency needs.

3. Operations. Responsible for directing the emergency operations of field forces from the EOC in consonance with resources made available by the coordination efforts within the parameters established by the policy group.

4. Resources. Responsible for working with community businesses, government, volunteer groups, and individuals to ensure maximum availability of resources for emergency needs.

After the EOC staff size is determined, an organizational chart should be developed to show the chain of command and emergency assignments.

Further discussion of staffing and organization is in Appendix B.

C. Determining the Amount of Space Needed for the EOC

There should be a minimum of 50 square feet per EOC staff member assigned to the EOC in an emergency on a sustained 24-hour basis. A range of 50 to 85 square feet per person is recommended, but should be determined based on the EOC concept of operation and extenuating variables agreed upon by the applicant, State, and FEMA Region.

D. Identifying Suitable Existing Space for the EOC or Defining Requirements to Develop Space

The first consideration in establishing an EOC should be the use or appropriate modification of space in existing government-owned structures. National Fallout Shelter Survey data should be analyzed to locate possible EOC space in existing government structures that can be used or modified. Buildings selected should provide appropriate operating space and maximum available fallout protection, with a protection factor (PF) of 100 the desirable minimum.

If there is no space with the recommended protection factor of 100 in an existing government-owned structure or if it is not feasible to provide the recommended PF by modification of space in an existing government building, incorporating an EOC into a planned multipurpose government-owned building should be considered. Consideration of space must take into account risks from all hazards.

Construction of a separate EOC facility should be considered only after it has been determined that it is not practical to develop an EOC either by modification of an existing structure or by incorporation into a planned government building.

E. Establishing EOC Location, Including Provisions for Day-to-Day Use of EOC Space

Every effort should be made to locate the EOC in or close to the heart of government offices. This has many advantages. For example, members of the emergency staff, such as police and fire dispatchers, could operate in the same facility in normal peacetime operations, natural emergencies, and a war emergency. Where possible, administrative offices of the emergency management agency should be located in the EOC. Off ices of the mayor or other key executives should be nearby.

Such location and day-to-day use of the EOC helps ensure immediate availability of key officials and communications. Equipment can also be kept at a high level of readiness. A skeleton EOC staff is on hand at all times when the EOC is staffed on a 24-hour basis by police or fire dispatchers. Should a period of increased international tension occur, the staff can be expanded rapidly.

Where daily use of the EOC by personnel with emergency assignments is not practicable, use by other personnel is acceptable (however, the EOC will not be eligible for Federal funding) provided:

1. A checklist outlining procedures to convert the space rapidly into an EOC is posted;

2. Such conversion can be carried out expeditiously to allow the EOC to operate as planned in emergencies;

3. Personnel with no emergency assignments will be able to commence and continue actions required by the checklist until relieved; and

4. Exercises to practice rapidly converting the space to EOC use are held at least once a year.

Additional information on EOC locations is in Appendix C.

F. Determining Layout for the EOC

EOCs should be physically arranged to permit close, continuous coordination and immediate, positive action by all interested departments or agencies. The EOC layout should include a nerve center, called the "Operations Room," from which direction and control is exercised.

Space outside the Operations Room or in other protected buildings or EOCs may be used to permit detailed analysis of recovery problems by persons concerned with resource management and continuity of government.

Allocation of gross EOC space to operating elements and development of a functional layout are the responsibility of the local government's project planner. General guidelines are:

- The layout should provide for minimum interference between operating and support areas (such as eating, sleeping, mechanical equipment, health, and sanitary facilities).
- The operational areas (including the Operations Rooms, communications and message centers, and executive office space) should be arranged to provide maximum efficiency in the interchange of essential information.
- Necessary provisions should be made for storage, though such use of space must be carefully planned.

Detailed development of the EOC space layout should be based on information in Appendix D.

G. Determining Need for Communications and Warning

The following functions, essential to a primary local EOC, should be considered when planning for communications and warning.

1. Receipt and dissemination of attack warning, including operation of sirens, public address systems, or other methods available to alert the public.

2. Conveyance of other emergency instructions or information to the public.

3. Maintenance of contact with other EOCs, including city, county, or state governments, as appropriate, and with public shelters.

4. Two-way communications with police, fire, rescue, health, engineering, and other operating units of government.

5. Receipt and dissemination of radiological data.

6. Provisions to measure, plot and project radioactive fallout.

7. Staff alerting (paging systems, etc.).

Communications and warning is addressed more fully in Appendix E.

H. Determining Need for Other EOC Supplies and Equipment

After the layout of the EOC has been decided, requirements for nonfixed equipment, supplies, and rations should be determined as described below.

1. Furniture and Office Equipment. Provide necessary furniture and office equipment. When possible, procure folding or collapsible items to reduce storage space needed.

2. Food Supply. Three options to satisfy food needs for operation at full staffing are: (a) public fallout shelter food supplies, (b) commercial foods with relatively long shelf life or (c) a combination of (a) and (b). It is recommended that EOC foodstuffs be rotated with an existing body of local government, such as local jails, to ensure fresh foods at the time an emergency is declared.

3. Kitchen Equipment and Supplies. Equipment and supplies needed depend on the tvpe of feeding olanned. If public shelter food supplies are used, conventional kitchen equipment is not necessary. Coffee urns and, possibly, hot plates are desirable. If commercial foods are used, ranges, refrigerators, and sinks may be needed. Paper cups and plates and plastic utensils should be considered in lieu of dinnerware and silverware. They are easy to store, lightweight, and economical. Provisions should be made to dispose of, or properly store, the trash generated by use of disposable items.

4. Medical and Sanitary Supplies. Medical supplies should be limited to those required for a dispensary-type operation. Sanitary supplies should be sufficient to meet needs of assigned EOC staff for a two-week period.

5. Status and Situation Boards. Visual displays are necessary to permit immediate access to information by all EOC staff members without verbal interruptions. Use examples shown throughout this document and/or additional aids devised by your staff.

6. Administrative Supplies. Supplies should be furnished for efficient emergency operations and janitorial services for at least a two-week period.

Additional information on supplies and equipment is in Appendix F.

I. EOC Standard Operating Procedures

As part of the planning process, EOC actions and procedures should be described in writing and copies furnished to all concerned. This document is the EOC Standard Operating Procedures (SOP).

SOPS should cover layout and function of the EOC as a whole and duties of major staff groups and individuals. Use of EOC displays, message forms, and other operational forms should be described. SOPS for specific EOCs can be based on FEMA guidance regarding EOC operations, organization, and staffing, including recommendations on wall displays, staff and individual functions, message flow and forms, and other operational procedures.

SOPS should cover actions in the following phases:

1. Mitigation.

2. Increased readiness.

3. Warning.

4. Response and recovery.

As discussed previously, where EOC space is used for other purposes on a daily basis, it is important that the SOP outline increased readiness procedures for rapid conversion to EOC use. This should include conversion actions to be taken by any available personnel, pending arrival of EOC staff members.

Appendix G is a sample Emergency Operating Center Standard Operating Procedure. This SOP should be helpful in planning and writing your EOC's SOP.

J. Providing for EOC Training

Once the EOC has been established, staffed, and the SOP prepared, periodic exercises should be held to familiarize EOC staff with their duties. State emergency management agencies should be contacted to determine if or when an EOC simulation exercise can be conducted. Locally conducted exercises are also recommended. Additional information on training is in Appendix H.