

**STANDARDIZED EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT SYSTEM (SEMS)  
EMERGENCY OPERATIONS CENTER COURSE**

**STUDENT REFERENCE MANUAL**

**I. Course Description**

**A. Instructional Goal**

The SEMS Emergency Operations Center (EOC) course provides participants with the necessary background to function in EOCs at all SEMS levels using the five functions specified in the SEMS regulation.

The course offers nine stand-alone training modules. The first four modules provide information applicable at any EOC level. The next four modules deal with more specific information for EOCs at local government, operational area, region or state levels. Module 9 covers coordination between SEMS EOC levels.

The modules may be presented in any order or combination depending upon student needs. A recommended order for the course is the first four modules in order, plus a module applicable to the EOC level of the jurisdiction and the coordination module.

**B. Module Titles**

- C1 SEMS Overview
- C2 Principles of Disaster Management in EOCs
- C3 EOC Operational Considerations
- C4 General EOC Applications
- C5 The Local Government EOC
- C6 The Operational Area EOC
- C7 The Region EOC
- C8 The State EOC
- C9 Coordination between SEMS levels

**C. General Target Audience**

The SEMS EOC course is designed for support/assistance, supervisory, management and executive personnel, who as part of their job duties or special assignment, will likely perform a SEMS function within an organization's or jurisdiction's (EOC) or at a Department Operations Center (DOC).

These individuals would be expected to respond to their EOC/DOC to initiate the SEMS organization, work within that SEMS organization, and/or supervise one or more of the five SEMS functions within their EOC/DOC (Local, Operational Area, Region, or State).

**Module C1**  
**STANDARDIZED EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT SYSTEM (SEMS)**  
**OVERVIEW**  
**STUDENT REFERENCE MANUAL**

**I. Module Description**

This module provides an overview of the purpose and scope of the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) course. Course materials will review the SEMS law, SEMS terms, the five SEMS response levels, primary SEMS functions found at EOCs and the four levels of EOCs in SEMS.

The materials in this course are applicable to the four SEMS EOC levels (local, operational area, region and state EOCs) as well as to Department Operations Centers (DOCs) functioning in response to emergencies.

The following topics will be covered:

- SEMS law and regulations
- Applicable SEMS definitions and terms
- The five SEMS organizational response levels
- The four levels of EOCs and their relationship to SEMS primary response functions.

**II. Module Content**

**A. Purpose and Scope of the EOC Course**

This is the first of nine modules related to the application of SEMS to Emergency Operations Centers (EOCs). Modules 1-4 of the course provide background on SEMS, disaster management and EOC principles and functions that would be applicable at any EOC level.

Modules 5 - 8 provide concepts and procedures applicable to four EOC levels, i.e., local government, operational area, region and state. Module 9 covers coordination issues between SEMS EOC levels. A typical EOC course would consist of the first four modules, a fifth module corresponding to the jurisdictional level, and the coordination module.

Each student will receive a Student Reference Manual. The manual contains the basic information to be covered by the instructional phase of the course.

**B. SEMS Law and Regulations**

As a result of the 1991 East Bay Hills Fire in Oakland, Senate Bill 1841 was introduced by Senator Petris, and passed by the California legislature and made effective January 1,

1993. The legislation established the Standardized Emergency Management System (SEMS). The intent of the law is to improve the coordination of state and local emergency response in California. The law is found in Section 8607 of the Government Code, and the Regulations governing SEMS became effective September 2, 1994.

The law directs OES, in coordination with other state agencies and interested local emergency management agencies, to establish, implement and maintain the Standardized Emergency Management System (SEMS) by December 1, 1996.

SEMS is applicable to the following five levels:

- Field (On scene at incidents)
- Local Government (includes Special Districts)
- Operational Area
- Region
- State

The basic framework of SEMS incorporates five major elements. These are:

- The Incident Command System (ICS)
- Multi-agency or inter-agency coordination
- The State's Mutual Aid Program
- Operational Areas
- The Operational Area Satellite Information System (OASIS).

The law stipulates that all state agencies must use SEMS in responding to emergencies involving multiple jurisdictions or multiple agencies. Local governments must use SEMS in responding to emergencies involving multiple jurisdictions or multiple agencies in order to be eligible for state funding of response-related personnel costs.

### **C. Review of California Emergency Services Act**

The Act was formally established in 1970. It is found in Chapter 7 of Division 1 of Title 2 of the Government Code. Enactment of the Emergency Services Act brought together for the first time many of the components of California Emergency Services including the Master Mutual Aid Agreement of 1950. Prior to the Emergency Services Act, emergency services in California were defined in the California Disaster Act of 1943 which was part of the Military and Veterans Code.

The Emergency Services Act provides for the following:

1. Confers emergency powers on the Governor and chief executives and governing bodies of political subdivisions of the state.
2. Provides for state assistance in the organization and maintenance of political subdivision emergency programs.

3. Provides for a state Office of Emergency Services (OES) within the Governor's Office and gives OES certain powers and duties.
4. Provides for the assignment of duties to state agencies to be performed during an emergency.
5. Provides for rendering of mutual aid by the state government, departments and agencies and political subdivisions.
6. Provides for three conditions or degrees of emergency within the state.

The Act does not explicitly state the necessity for an EOC. The primary reference to EOCs in the act is the presumption that they exist under the declaration of a state of war emergency, where operational areas... "shall serve as a link in the system of communications and coordination between the state's EOC and the operating centers of the political subdivisions comprising the operational area." (Sec. 8605)

Section 8635 of the act states that ... "the interdependence of political subdivisions requires that for their mutual preservation and for the protection of all the citizens of the state of California, all political subdivision have the power to take the minimum precautions....by which continued function of political subdivision well be assured."

Sections 8637 - 8644 of the act describe the need for establishing a line of succession and provides a list of duties for standby officers. One of these duties is to report for duty in the event of an emergency at the place and in the method previously designated by the political subdivision.

Section 8642 states that when an emergency exists, the governing body of the political subdivision shall meet as soon as possible. It is interesting to note that the place of meeting need not be within the political subdivision. The duties of the governing body (Sec. 8643) are to ascertain the damage to the political subdivision and its personnel and property to reconstitute the governing body.

#### **D. SEMS Definitions and Terms related to EOCs**

An understanding of the most common terms listed below will help to understand and make the most efficient use of this system. A full SEMS Glossary is a part of the guidelines and training curriculum and should be referred to for complete definitions.

##### **1. Action Plan**

The plan prepared in the EOC containing the emergency response objectives of that SEMS level. The action plan should reflect overall priorities and supporting activities for a designated period. The plan is shared with supporting agencies.

## **2. Department Operations Center (DOC)**

A facility used as an EOC by a distinct discipline or agency, such as flood operations, fire, medical, hazardous materials, Department of Public Works, or Department of Health. DOCs can be used at all SEMS levels above the field response level, depending on the impacts of the emergency.

## **3. Emergency Operations Center (EOC)**

A location from which centralized emergency management can be performed. EOCs are located at principal headquarters of state and local agencies as well as the private sector. EOCs will be found at all SEMS levels. They are the facilities used to coordinate the overall agency or jurisdictional response and support to an emergency.

## **4. Multi-agency or Inter-agency Coordination**

Agencies and disciplines at any SEMS level working together in a coordinated effort to facilitate decisions. SEMS Regulations require the use of multi-agency or inter-agency coordination in all EOCs.

## **5. Mutual Aid**

Voluntary provision of services and facilities when existing resources prove to be inadequate. There are several standardized statewide mutual aid systems which function in California. Some of these are coordinated from within jurisdictional EOCs, and others are coordinated by disciplines such as law and fire from other facilities.

## **6. Operational Area**

An intermediate level of the state emergency services organization consisting of a county and all political subdivisions within the county area. It is important to note that while the county will often function as the operational area coordinating facility, that the operational area has a broader meaning, and includes all political subdivisions including special districts.

## **E. SEMS Organizational Response Levels**

The responsibilities of the five SEMS organizational response levels are described below:

### **1. Field Response**

The field response level is where emergency response personnel and resources under the command of an appropriate authority, carry out tactical decisions and activities in direct response to an incident or threat. SEMS regulations require the use of ICS at the field level of an incident.

The Field Response level is described in Part I - B of the SEMS Guidelines, and in the Field Level Approved Course of Instruction.

## **2. Local Government**

Local governments include cities, counties, and special districts. Local governments manage and coordinate the overall emergency response and recovery activities within their jurisdiction. In SEMS, the local government emergency management organization and its relationship to the field response level may vary depending upon factors related to geographical size, population, function, or complexity. The local government level is described further in Part I-C of the SEMS Guidelines.

## **3. Operational Area**

Under SEMS, the operational area is an intermediate level of the state's emergency services organization which encompasses the county and all political subdivisions located within the county. The operational area manages and coordinates information, resources, and priorities among local governments within the operational area, and serves as the coordination and communication link between the local government level and the regional level.

It is important to note, that while an operational area always encompasses a single county area, it does not necessarily mean that the county government itself manages and coordinates the response and recovery activities within the county.

Decisions on the establishment, organization and operation of the operational area is made by the governing bodies of the county and the political subdivisions within the county. The operational area level is described more fully in Part I - D of the SEMS Guidelines. Guidelines on establishing operational areas are included in Part II - C of the SEMS Guidelines.

## **4. Region**

In SEMS, the region level manages and coordinates information and resources among operational areas within the mutual aid region, and also between the operational areas and the state level.

The region level also coordinates overall state agency support for emergency response activities within the region. The region level is described further in Part I - E of the SEMS Guidelines.

Because of its size, the state has been divided into six Mutual Aid Regions. The purpose of a mutual aid region, is to provide for the more effective application and coordination of mutual aid and other emergency related activities. The Office of Emergency Services (OES) provides State OES coordination over the mutual aid regions through three Region Offices.

Insert Mutual Aid Region Map

## **5. State**

The state level of SEMS manages state resources in response to the emergency needs of the other levels, and coordinates mutual aid among the mutual aid regions and between the region level and state level.

The state level also serves as the coordination and communication link between the state and the federal disaster response system. The state level is described further in part I - F of the SEMS Guidelines.

### **F. Four EOC levels in SEMS**

Four of the five SEMS organizational levels employ the use of Emergency Operations Centers (EOCs).

- Local Government
- Operational Area
- Regional
- State

#### **1. Local Government EOCs**

Local Government EOCs include those facilities used by municipalities and special districts. Local government EOCs will coordinate activities among departments and in some situations may have direct communications with Incident Commanders at Incident Command Posts (ICPs).

Local government EOCs must provide for the five primary SEMS functions within their EOC organization. The county will also have local government responsibility for unincorporated areas of the county. Module C5 provides information specific to the functioning of local government EOCs.

#### **2. Operational Area EOCs**

An Operational Area EOC is the facility which coordinates emergency response among local governments within the operational area, and also serves as the coordination and communication link between the local government level and the regional level. The operational area EOC will usually also serve as the county EOC, and thus perform local government functions (in unincorporated areas) in addition to those serving the operational area. Operational area EOCs must provide for the five primary SEMS functions within their EOC organization. Module C6 provides information specific to the functioning of operational area EOCs.



### **3. Region EOCs (REOC)**

There are three State OES operated region EOCs (REOCs). The REOCs support and coordinate a variety of OES services within mutual aid regions. OES Regions provide services to operational areas and local governments which include:

- Planning and preparedness assistance to operational areas and local governments
- Several levels of emergency services mutual aid coordination with operational areas during emergencies and disasters
- Assist in the coordination and monitoring of region disaster recovery operations.

Region EOCs must provide for the five primary SEMS functions within their EOC organization.

Note that some state agencies may also have some form of "region" administrative and/or operational headquarters. CALTRANS, California Highway Patrol (CHP), California Department of Forestry are examples. They may operate regions, districts, divisions, and the boundaries may not coincide with those of state mutual aid regions.

All state agencies involved in emergency response activities at the "region" level should provide for the five primary SEMS functions within their Department Operations Centers at "regions" as well as at State levels. Module C7 provides information specific to the functioning of region EOCs.

### **4. State EOC**

Under the State's Emergency Services Act the State Office of Emergency Services (OES) is part of the Governor's office . State OES will activate and operate a State Level EOC during periods of emergencies and disasters. The State EOC (often referred to as the SOC) will provide for the five primary SEMS functions within their EOC organization.

Other State agencies involved in emergency response activities may also operate Department Operations Centers (DOCs) at their State headquarters facilities. These DOC's should provide for the five primary SEMS functions within their DOC organization. Module C8 provides information specific to the functioning of the state EOC.