Module C3
EOC OPERATIONAL CONSIDERATIONS
STUDENT REFERENCE MANUAL

I.   Module Description

Module C3 provides the student with an understanding of how an Emergency Operations Center (EOC) relates to disaster management and to the Standardized Emergency Management System (SEMS); the diversity in purpose and scope of California EOCs; and some of the basic factors to consider in developing an effective EOC (NOTE: The factors related to EOCs discussed in this module will generally apply to agency Department Operations Centers (DOCs) as well.) At the completion of this Module, the student should be able to achieve the minimum performance objectives listed, through knowledge, skills or abilities relating to the following topic areas:

1.   Purpose of an EOC
2.   Scope of Operational Area, Region and State EOCs
3.   Basic considerations for a well planned/designed EOC
4.   Keys for an effective EOC
5.   EOC Activation Criteria
6.   Mutual aid systems and the EOC

II.   EOCs and EOC Functions

An Emergency Operations Center (EOC) is defined as a location or a facility from which centralized emergency management can be performed for a jurisdiction or organization. The scope of operations in EOCs throughout California will vary, depending upon the size and complexity of the jurisdiction, and the local government, or operational area level that is using the EOC.

The primary functions of emergency response: i.e., management, operations, planning/intelligence, logistics and finance/administration will take place at all local government, operational areas, region or state levels using EOCs.

A.   Basic purpose and scope of an EOC

In general, the scope of the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) is to provide a facility, from which the organization's response to an emergency can be effectively coordinated. The primary role of the EOC is to bring together all relevant information about the emergency in one place, organize that information in a useful format to the jurisdiction's decision making body, and facilitate the coordination of resources needed to mitigate the effects of the emergency. Specific activities conducted within an EOC are to a large extent defined by the organization or jurisdiction in which it is located.

Unless otherwise specified by agency or organization policy, the EOC should not be providing tactical direction to the various incidents which are being conducted in the field using the Incident Command System (ICS). Under SEMS, Field level Incident Commanders (ICs) have clear authority to command and tactically direct the resources under their control. Command responsibility includes determining: the objectives to be achieved for the incident (within the bounds of agency authority); establishing the strategies to achieve those objectives; determining the appropriate tactics necessary for the selected strategy, and applying the assigned resources to perform the tactics.

B.   EOCs in California

The staff in an Emergency Operations Center (EOC) is responsible for overall coordination of resources that are assigned to that jurisdiction.

1.   Local Government

The facilities used as EOCs by local governments in California vary considerably, and there is no established standard. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has developed guidelines for EOCs (Civil Preparedness Guide 1-20), and some of these guidelines are addressed in the next section. The reality for EOCs in California is that they range from established well designed and protected facilities with dedicated communications, back up power and support systems, to essentially ad-hoc facilities which may be temporarily set up in an existing room of a structure with only a minimum of equipment, little or no protection, and with no backup power or support systems.

Jurisdictions also vary considerably in how they exercise their management authority in their EOC. Jurisdictions with a small population base may centralize more management authority and direction and control within the Operations function of the EOC when it is activated at the time of an emergency. In these cases, it is not unusual to find the EOC sharing space in a jurisdiction's co-located or joint dispatch facility and having direct communication to Incident Command Posts and Incident Commanders within the jurisdiction.

Jurisdictions with many departments typically maintain authority for control of departmental resources at Department Operations Centers (DOCs) and exercise tactical control at Field Incident Command Posts. Again there is no set standard. The various ways in which local government EOCs may function is the subject of Module C5.

2.   The Operational Area EOC

The operational area staff in the EOC will normally perform a dual role during an emergency. The EOC staff is responsible for coordinating the jurisdictions making up the operational area, and also for managing the county's local government response to unincorporated areas. An important function of the operational area staff, is the provision of inter-agency coordination as a part of the EOC procedures.

While it is feasible that the county local government and operational area missions could be separated and run from different EOCs, the reality is that they usually are not. Principal reasons are availability of staff to accomplish the tasks required, redundancy of communications that would be required to have separate facilities, and cost of maintaining two separate facilities. The functioning of Operational Area EOCs will be discussed in Module C6.

3.   Region and State EOCs

Under SEMS, EOCs at region and state levels are operated by the Governor's Office of Emergency Services (OES). OES will establish the operating organization, policies and procedures for these facilities. These EOCs will utilize the five primary SEMS functions and multi-agency or inter-agency coordination. The mission of the staff at the region and state EOCs differ from those at local government and operational area levels. EOCs at region and state levels are discussed in Modules C7 and C8.

C.   Basic considerations for a well-planned/designed EOC

Many factors will influence how an EOC is developed within an organization. Some of the factors apply to EOCs at all levels:

1.   Top-level commitment to the successful operation of the EOC, and teamwork to achieve this success
2.   A clear mission statement for the EOC staff
3.   Centralized, safe and accessible location
4.   Well-designed facility that allows for efficient operations
5.   Organization and staffing using the five SEMS functions
6.   Workstation configuration and facility layout based on SEMS functions
7.   Well documented standard operating procedures, including checklists for each functional position
8.   Good communications internal and external
9.   All necessary support systems in place and operating
10.   Training and exercises in EOC operations

FEMA has established Guidelines for EOCs in the Civil Preparedness Guide, CPG 1-20. These guidelines were issued in 1984 and last updated in 1989. They do not reflect how SEMS functions within California. Several of the FEMA guidelines listed in the CPG are included here.

EOC Facility Size - The FEMA guideline recommends a minimum of 50 sq. ft. per EOC staff member assigned to the EOC in an emergency on a sustained 24 hour basis. A range of 50-85 square feet per person is recommended but should be determined based on the EOC concept of operation and extenuating variables.

Facility Location - FEMA recommends that the EOC be entirely below the ground, and the EOC should not be located too close to medium or high rise structures due to the possibility of collapse, or to other high hazard situations.

Emergency Power and Fuel Supplies - One of the minimum requirements for an EOC is an emergency power generator, sized to provide for the maximum demand loads of the EOC. There should be sufficient fuel capacity to furnish the necessary power to maintain the EOC fully operational 24 hours a day for a minimum of 14 days.

D.   General criteria to activate an EOC

Whether EOCs are activated at various SEMS levels will be determined by the requirements of the emergency. At least five general criteria exist to indicate when an EOC should be activated:

- • Resources beyond local capabilities are required
- • The emergency is of long duration
- • Major policy decisions will or may be needed
- • A local or state emergency is declared
- • Activation of an EOC will be advantageous to the successful management of an emergency

In addition, SEMS regulation state additional criteria for each SEMS level. These will be discussed in the appropriate EOC module.

The partial activation and staffing of an EOC, while not required under SEMS, can have several advantages. Under certain conditions, less than full activations will reduce personnel costs, may provide for earlier and more effective monitoring of potential emergencies, facilitate the early tracking of resources, and allow for a more rapid mobilization of staff to respond to the emergency if necessary.

The level of activation, and the associated staffing and organizational development of the EOC will depend on:

- • The nature, scope and expected duration of the emergency
- • The extent of activation at other SEMS levels
- • Functions needed to support EOC activities.

In general, three levels of activation should be considered in jurisdictional EOC planning.

1.   Level One - Minimum Activation

Level One is a minimum activation. Normally, this level would consist of the EOC Director, Section Chiefs and a situation assessment activity in the Planning and Intelligence Section. Other members of the organization could also be part of this level of activation e.g., the Communications Unit, from the Logistics Section.

This level may be used for situations which initially only require a few people, e.g. a short term earthquake prediction at condition one or two level; alerts of storms, tsunamis; or monitoring of a low risk planned event.

2.   Level Two Activation

A Level Two activation would normally be achieved as an increase from Level One or a decrease from Level Three. A Level Two activation would initially activate each functional element of the organization at a minimum staffing level. One person may fulfill more than one SEMS function. The EOC Director, in conjunction with the General Staff, will determine the required level of continued activation under Level Two, and demobilize functions or add additional staff to functions as necessary based upon event considerations.   Representatives to the EOC from other agencies or jurisdictions may be required under Level Two to support functional area activations.

A Level Two activation is used for emergencies or planned events that would require more than a minimum staff but would not call for a full activation of all organization elements, or less than full staffing.

3.   Level Three Activation

A Level Three activation would be a complete and full activation with all organizational elements at full staffing. Level Three would normally be the initial activation during any major emergency.

E.   Mutual Aid Systems and EOCs

California has an extensive mutual aid program which is made up of several discipline specific statewide mutual aid systems. These systems, all of which operate within the framework of the state's master mutual aid agreement, allow for the progressive mobilization of resources to and from emergency response agencies, local governments, operational areas, regions, and state. EOCs are an important element in this program, but vary in how they will interact with specific mutual aid systems.

Two of the more heavily utilized mutual aid systems, fire and law enforcement provide mutual aid coordination through systems which include operational area and region coordinators. Because these systems function on a 24 hour a day, 365 day a year basis, the coordination is normally accomplished within the facilities operated by the elected coordinators rather than at EOCs.

Other mutual aid systems, which are principally used only during declared emergencies may provide the coordination of those systems from within the jurisdictional EOC or from other facilities.

When EOCs are fully activated during a major emergency, representatives from all activated mutual aid systems should be assigned to the EOC for coordination and information transfer purposes.

The California Mutual Aid Program, channels of coordination and mutual aid systems are shown in the following table. Additional material on mutual aid coordination within EOCs is found in Module B18 of the Field Level SEMS course.

CALIFORNIA MUTUAL AID PROGRAM MUTUAL AID SYSTEMS AND CHANNELS OF STATEWIDE MUTUAL AID COORDINATION			
COORDINATED BY STATE OES			**COORDINATED BY EMSA**
Fire and Rescue	**Law Enforcement**	**Emergency Services**	**Disaster Medical**
Fire Mutual Aid System	Coroners Mutual Aid System	All other emergency services mutual aid not included in other systems.	Disaster Medical Mutual Aid System
Urban Search and Rescue System	Law Enforcement Mutual Aid System	Volunteer Engineers Mutual Aid System [1]	
	Search and Rescue Mutual Aid System (non urban)	Public Works Mutual Aid System [1]	
		Emergency Managers Mutual Aid System [1]	
		Hazardous Materials Mutual Aid System [1]	
		Water Agency Response Network (WARN) [1]	

[1]   Systems currently under development

It is important to remember that the implementation and use of SEMS does not alter the makeup or the functioning of existing mutual aid systems. The mutual aid systems work within the SEMS levels of local government, operational area, regional and state levels in the same manner that they worked prior to SEMS.