COVID-19 Best Practice Information: Emergency Operations Centers

Background

- This document describes considerations that state, local, tribal, territorial (SLTT) governments could use to safely operate emergency operations centers (EOCs).
- SLTT emergency managers and/or EOC staffers may take a 4-hour independent-study course on basic EOC functions through FEMA Emergency Management Institute (EMI), found here.
- A FEMA checklist to assist SLTTs in performing the initial assessment of the hazards, vulnerabilities, and risk to existing EOCs can be found here.
- The following is a list of key findings and considerations for jurisdictions and communities regarding the response to the ongoing coronavirus pandemic disease (COVID-19) across the country. These are best practices for consideration and do not constitute and should not be considered as guidance in any way.

Key Considerations

- EOCs can screen individuals prior to arrival at the facility for signs of an acute respiratory illness, elevated temperature, or possible exposure to COVID-19. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has information on maintaining a healthy work environment here.
- Governments using virtual EOCs should conduct regular meetings and check-ins with all participating stakeholders to ensure continuous operational coordination and communication.

Lessons Learned Related to EOCs during COVID-19 Operations

Health and Safety

- Potential Best Practice: SLTT EOCs have implemented enhanced sanitization and cleaning processes for their facilities. This includes extra cleaning and disinfecting measures on common “touchpoints” such as door handles and elevator buttons.¹ The CDC has provided workplace health and safety information that is available here.

**Potential Best Practice:** Personnel arriving at EOC facilities are screened for COVID-19 symptoms prior to entry. Some locations require individuals to take their temperature at the entrance.

**Potential Best Practice:** Wake County, North Carolina, relocated its EOC to a larger county office building. The move enabled staff to sit six feet apart and prevent the spread of germs.

**Potential Best Practice:** Individuals entering the EOC are required to review a list of COVID-19 symptoms and report if they are experiencing any symptoms.

**Potential Best Practice:** EOCs are posting signage to remind individuals to stay six feet apart as recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

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**Emergency Operations Center Structure and Staffing**

**Potential Best Practice:** To ensure coordination, EOCs should follow an established management system consistent with the National Incident Management System (NIMS). NIMS is designed to enable effective and efficient domestic incident management by integrating a combination of facilities, equipment, personnel, procedures, and communications operating within a common organizational structure. NIMS includes the Incident Command System (ICS) which is normally structured to facilitate activities in five major functional areas: command, operations, planning, logistics, and finance and administration. For additional information and resources on ICS, visit the FEMA [ICS Resource Center](https://www.fema.gov/incident-command-system-resources).

**Potential Best Practice:** EOC staff should have a clear, written set of responsibilities and expectations based on their experience and expertise. Additionally, there should be qualified staff in place for all EOC functions, including leadership and management, operations, information management, logistics, media, security, administration, and technology. A series of user guides on EOC skillsets can be found [here](https://www.fema.gov/incident-command-system-resources).

**Potential Best Practice:** EOCs should maintain a roster of trained surge staff, and provide them with necessary training. The surge staff could shadow staff members to learn the positions. Building a bench of capable staff can help balance the workload to prevent primary staff from being over-worked and/or to fill positions if primary staff become sick.

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3. 2020 The Colorado Sun, Worker at Colorado emergency operations center, where governor briefs media, tests positive for coronavirus, [https://coloradosun.com/2020/04/05/colorado-emergency-operations-center-worker-tests-positive/](https://coloradosun.com/2020/04/05/colorado-emergency-operations-center-worker-tests-positive/)
- **Potential Best Practice:** Yakima County, Washington, Office of Emergency Management is double-staffing positions to ensure positions are backfilled if someone is ill.\(^{10}\)

- **Potential Best Practice:** Some EOCs are giving staff an option to join meetings virtually if they are not required to be physically present in order to limit the size of gatherings to ten people or less.\(^{11}\)

**Virtual Emergency Operations Center**

- **Potential Best Practice:** Many local governments have been using software such as Microsoft Teams, Zoom, or Skype to conduct team meetings virtually.\(^{12}\)

- **Potential Best Practice:** Some virtual EOCs are continually updating telephonic and web-based contact information for all officials and staff.\(^{13}\)

- **Potential Best Practice:** Larger jurisdictions with information technology (IT) staff are providing technical support for basic software and connectivity questions.\(^{14}\)

Topics for the “Best Practices” series are generated from crowd sourced suggestions. Have an idea? Let us research it! Organizations and individuals can e-mail best practices or lessons learned to fema-cipsupport@fema.dhs.gov.

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\(^{11}\) 2020 UNC The Well, Darrell Jeter explains the operations of the Emergency Operations Center, [https://thewell.unc.edu/2020/03/24/darrell-jeter-explains-the-operations-of-the-eoc/](https://thewell.unc.edu/2020/03/24/darrell-jeter-explains-the-operations-of-the-eoc/)

