

COOP - CONTINUITY OF OPERATIONS PLANNING FOR PUBLIC ENTITIES

There is no off-season for emergencies - whether man-made or natural. Gulf states can be in the midst of a hurricane season, while arid conditions still plague western states making wild fires a nearly year-round occurrence. From tornados to terrorism, preparations for continuance of your organization's operations during crises are vital.

Your community may depend on your organization for its safety and wellbeing during an emergency. Quite simply, the ability of a public entity to remain operational and to remobilize quickly is imperative.

Continuity of Operations Planning, or COOP, is the guide that you need to ensure that the essential functions of your organization will be operating during and directly following an emergency.

COOP OBJECTIVES

Keys to a successful COOP coincide with, or are related to, your emergency operations plan; however, they are viewed from a slightly different perspective. Your COOP should include the following objectives.

- Be effective with and without warning
- Take an all-hazard approach
- Include alternate facilities
- Have essential functions operational within 12 hours
- Sustain operations for 30 days
- Ensure continued performance of essential functions and operations



- Minimize damage and losses
- Ensure successful succession
- Reduce or mitigate disruptions
- Protect agency assets
- Achieve a timely and orderly recovery from disruptions
- Maintain a test, training, and exercise program to support the implementation of your COOP

Defining your COOP objectives is only the first step. You must also work within your organization to define the elements of the COOP. Items that all continuity of operations plans should include are:

- Essential functions*
- Vital records
- Orders of succession
- Delegations of authority
- Alternate facilities



- Interoperable communications (all offices on same communications system)
- Human resources
- Tests, training and exercises

*What is an essential function? Every organization has a unique set of essential functions, just as each department within the same organization may have various functions. An essential function is an operation within the organization that should not be interrupted for more than 12 hours.

Every organization should consider the following services when determining essential functions.

- Does it provide vital services to the community?
- Does it enforce civil authority?
- Does it maintain safety of the general public?
- Does it sustain the economic base during an emergency?

TESTS, TRAINING AND EXERCISES (TT&E)

As always, practicing for the events that would activate your COOP program will help ensure success. Just as you practice your emergency operations plan through training and drills, your COOP program must include tests, training and exercises. Your training and exercises will:

- Reveal plan weaknesses
- Reveal resource gaps

- Improve coordination and communication
- Clarify roles and responsibilities
- Gain public support

Think of your exercise program as the roadmap to a successful COOP. By planning for and reviewing your purpose, objectives and staff responsibilities, you can create exercises and simulations that will allow your organization to practice operating under extreme conditions.

SUMMARY

Remember, the success of your organization can depend on how it operates under extreme circumstances. Recent events such as Hurricanes Ike and Katrina are occurring more frequently. By planning for these types of events and preparing your COOP program you, your organization will be better prepared and your community will be better protected.