



American Association of
Motor Vehicle Administrators

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strength
HAZARDS
PREPAREDNESS
Continuity
disasters
EMERGENCIES



Emergency Resilience and Response Best Practices Guide



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EMERGENCY RESILIENCE AND RESPONSE WORKING GROUP
DRIVER STANDING COMMITTEE

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Executive Summary

AAMVA convened the Emergency Resilience & Response (ERR) Working Group, a group of members from a variety of roles among AAMVA jurisdictional members. This project is intended to address the need of jurisdiction members to build organizational strength and resiliency through planning and sharing of best practices. This need was particularly highlighted by the COVID-19 pandemic, which impacted all AAMVA jurisdictions. However, the working group considered a wide variety of potential emergencies, including natural and human-made disasters in an all-hazards approach. ERR Working Group members came together to offer different perspectives on the same issue, maintaining operations in the face of an emergency. Each member brings diverse experiences with the unique set of risks facing his or her jurisdiction. This project provides a unique

opportunity for these diverse stakeholders to come together to create a holistic approach to emergency preparedness for motor vehicle and driver licensing administrators.

This best practices document is a foundational document to support jurisdictions as they prepare for emergencies and plan for continuity of operations. It is intended to provide planning basics, invite more nuanced discussions of risks and issues unique to each jurisdiction, and encourage members to proactively prepare for emergencies so they may continue to provide essential services during a crisis. The ERR Working Group has created it as a resource for members in the hope that it will inspire regular and thoughtful conversations about how best to create organization resilience and to make sure jurisdiction is as ready as possible for any future emergency.

Chapter 1 Documented Plan

Building resiliency and operational readiness requires advance action and the willingness to take the first steps toward preparedness. Being ready to face any emergency or disaster begins with creating a comprehensive written plan. This section provides key considerations for each jurisdiction in determining the elements and organization of your Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP). **Jurisdictions should consider each element for inclusion in a comprehensive COOP.**

The COOP

A COOP ensures your agency is able to continue operation of your agency's essential functions throughout emergencies and disasters, including natural, human-made, and technological threats, as well as national security emergencies. It includes sufficient information on key continuity elements, such as leadership roles and communication strategies, for each reader to understand how the organization will operate during a crisis. In short, a COOP is the core and framework of effective emergency response. A COOP is considered a standard practice in both government and private industry.

Benefits of a COOP

Many emergencies strike with little or no warning. During a crisis, there is no time to attempt complex organizational planning. Government agencies, in particular, are critical to community resiliency and safety in a disaster. Like the public and other government entities, a driver license authority, public safety office, or department of motor vehicle can also be impacted by a disaster or emergency. A COOP enables these motor vehicle agencies (MVAs)

to continue providing essential functions during emergencies and disasters in that it allows citizens to continue to rely on government services, perhaps when citizens most need these services.

A well-executed COOP not only protects a jurisdiction's ability to continue to provide services; it may also reduce loss of life and minimize the potential harm to personnel. It can give key information to both staff and citizens who rely on MVA services. It can direct both groups to alternate locations in the events of hazards or help inform them about dangerous situations. For the same reasons, a strong COOP can help protect against or minimize property and equipment loss.

A COOP can also support response and recovery efforts. Other essential organizations may rely on the availability and safe storage of constituents' personally identifiable information. COOPs can specifically address maintaining the confidentiality of personally identifiable information and critical records during an emergency or the aftermath of a disaster. The plan can support the maintenance of data resources, backups, and information retention through a disaster to prevent data breaches that may impact constituents and enable the jurisdiction to swiftly return to a state of normalcy.

A well-structured and thorough COOP is useful for more than emergencies and disasters. It may also be of benefit during other significant events, including changes in leadership, employee turnover, or unforeseeable changes that may impact your jurisdiction. A strong plan allows for smooth transitions during these events and the continued ability of the jurisdiction to support the needs of clients.

COOPs not only support loss prevention and mitigation during an emergency and help minimize operational disruptions; they also help prevent operational backlogs that can delay return to normal operations after the emergency has passed. In all these ways, a COOP can help an MVA avoid budgetary overruns.

Developing a COOP

Although most jurisdictions have some form of COOP currently in place, it is a worthy endeavor to consider the COOP as a blank slate opportunity. The first step in creating or revising any COOP is to think critically about both practical and purposeful considerations.

Planning for a COOP means gathering the right people for the job. Because a COOP is designed to be implemented at the onset of an emergency, the first detail to consider is how the COOP will be triggered and who in the jurisdiction will be responsible for implementing the COOP. For example, COOPs may be activated when there is an incident that occurs requiring the relocation of any essential functions (e.g., approaching weather disaster or security threat), staffing levels are significantly compromised (e.g., during a pandemic), or essential systems are unavailable (e.g., information technology [IT] or power outages or water system failures). Jurisdictions may consider input from a diverse set of stakeholders both inside and outside the organization when information gathering for a COOP.

Prior to drafting or updating a plan, a jurisdiction should identify the person or persons who will be responsible for leading the creation of the COOP. The selection can be based on prior experience or the ability to dedicate the necessary time to the work. Ideally, the candidate or candidates will also be responsible for regularly updating the plan and leading or assisting with implementation exercises.

A COOP should also be considered within the context of likely emergencies for a specific jurisdiction. For some jurisdictions, there may be more significant

weather-related dangers; in others, the risks may be seismic. Urban jurisdictions may need to consider the risks associated with mass protests, but rural jurisdictions may need to consider distances between individual offices. All of this is part of the initial thought that goes in to developing or revising a COOP. This process can help jurisdictions determine the purposes the COOP will serve.

Purpose of a COOP

The primary purpose of any COOP is to establish policy and guidance to ensure an agency can continue essential functions during a disaster or emergency that may otherwise disrupt normal operations. Ideally, COOP plans enable an organization to perform essential functions even with a significantly reduced workforce and diminished availability of resources. Similarly, the COOP can support continuity of operations from home or other alternate work locations should the primary location become unavailable.

As jurisdictions set about drafting or revising existing COOPs, it is important to think about these and the other purposes the plan is intended to serve. This will ensure the inclusion of relevant elements and guidance within the completed plan. It is recommended that the following and any other relevant purposes be considered:

- Implement immediate emergency operations.
- Inform all staff of the command structure in the event of a disaster.
- Detail requisite preconditions for implementation of the COOP and who will be in charge of that decision.
- Support continuation or resumption of normal or near-normal operations with minimal delay and ideally no not later than 12 hours after activation.

- Sustain emergency operations for up to 30 days.
- Facilitate crisis communications with vendor partners, state emergency management agencies, law enforcement, and state government partners, including AAMVA and other state jurisdictions for support, as necessary.
- Minimize the impacts of unforeseen emergency or disaster and safeguard personnel.
- Assist with the identification of known hazards and risks and provide mitigation strategies based on how identified risks relate to specific elements of essential functions.
- Support the regular performance of vulnerability assessments to assist the agency in bolstering physical and cyber security.
- Identify key technological infrastructure that should be protected and prioritized in the event of an emergency.
- Lay out specific operational guidance, if necessary, tailored to likeliest disasters.
- Establish a system by which the COOP will be routinely subjected to annual or more frequent evaluation and revision.
- Specify key personnel, including position titles, responsible for providing essential functions during an emergency.
- Create a contact process for all personnel regarding initiation of the plan and continuing information throughout the crisis.
- Identify alternate locations or methods of operation to be used in various emergency situations.
- List materials and other resources that will be necessary for continuing operations.
- Identify partner organizations able to support operations during an emergency.
- Explain when and how the COOP can be discontinued.
- Provide a post-emergency recovery plan, which may include a detailed plan pertaining to the restoration of critical data needed to resume essential services.
- All of these purposes and more should be considered when thinking about a jurisdiction's COOP. By first deciding what a COOP is intended to do, an organization's planning team can be sure to include or consult all relevant personnel to create a comprehensive and accurate plan.
- Position titles and point-of-contact rosters should be made available with the COOP, and those in leadership should be easily able to identify and contact the responsible people at any time. You may consider including key personnel from every department who may be able to assist with the implementation of the COOP. You should further consider whether you anticipate key personnel being onsite or working remotely during a disaster as may be required by their function with regard to both the office and the COOP.
- The COOP should also include a plan for devolution, or the procedure by which your jurisdiction will transfer statutory authority and primary responsibilities to another governmental agency if your jurisdiction is unable to perform its essential agency functions. Interagency agreements may be needed in advance to ensure the immediate transfer of critical responsibilities.

Essential Elements of a COOP

This best practices guide is designed to provide sections that will align with relevant topics or functions to be considered for inclusion in any COOP plan. Furthermore, a COOP plan should be sufficiently

detailed yet clear and concise so that it may be swiftly implemented for maximum effectiveness.

It may be easiest to consider the elements relevant to the different phases of a disaster or emergency. Jurisdictions drafting a COOP should address each of these basic four phases.

Phase 1—Before the Crisis. In this phase, the focus will be on readiness and preparedness. This is the phase during which risk assessment, mitigation strategies, and the COOP are undertaken and developed. Also within this phase, key personnel will become familiar with the COOP and training as well as implementation practice.

Phase 2—As the Crisis Is Imminent or Beginning. In this phase, the focus is on assessing the need to implement or trigger the COOP. It may be a phase when a jurisdiction moves into an alert status in anticipation of an expected disaster or when a jurisdiction is evaluating the impact of an event that has just occurred or is still occurring. In this phase, a decision to activate the COOP can be made and initial actions, such as relocation of staff or suspension of nonessential operations may occur. Communication to staff and partner organization is key in this phase.

Phase 3—During and Immediately After the Crisis. This phase focuses on the continuity of operations in the phase of a crisis. The COOP has been activated and staff are operating under its provisions. In this phase, the licensing authority will be focused on the uninterrupted and efficient provision of all essential services as well as the ongoing safety of all staff and protection of equipment. Emergency operations may be continued for the duration of the crisis. Communication with staff and external stakeholders remain essential. In addition, communication with the community or client base will become important. In this phase, based on the community impact of the crisis, the organization may move personnel or provide mobile services.

Phase 4—After the Crisis. In this phase, the goal is a swift return to normal or new-normal operations. Depending on the crisis, the recovery period will vary as will the requirements for a return to non-emergency operations. After operations are resumed, this phase should also include an assessment of how well the COOP functioned and whether any adjustments are necessary.

Each phase of the crisis will require specific elements within the COOP. Some, such as communication strategies, will need to be addressed for each phase. Others, such as the need to practice COOP implementation before an emergency occurs, will exist in only one phase.

For every phase, the following essential elements of a COOP should be considered.

Personnel – Identifying the key roles and responsibilities of personnel required to implement the COOP or participate in the tasks required by the COOP, including planning, implementation, and stand-down procedures, will minimize confusion at the time of the emergency.

1. Command and control – Knowing who is in charge of various key decisions, such as triggering the COOP or evacuating personnel, is critical in advance of a crisis. It is important to keep in mind and indicate that some important control and decision making will occur outside the licensing authority. Not only should the COOP specify responsible leaders, but it should also take into consideration inevitable changes in leadership. Succession planning should be completed and make clear who has the authority to delegate tasks and who will take over in the event of a change in internal or relevant external leadership at each step of the COOP.
2. Support roles – In a crisis, leaders will rely on strong supporting personnel such as managers, supervisors, emergency management specialists, or others. These people may be designated as

having the ability to act on behalf of executives or crisis leadership in the event a leader is unavailable or incapacitated. For each role noted in the plan, the COOP should also provide the particular parts of the COOP for which the person(s) will be responsible.

3. Accountability – After the crisis (simulated or real) has passed, it should be clear who will be responsible for assessing the COOP. This person or these people should be able to meet and gather relevant performance information in and to suggest or make changes to the COOP plan based on those observations.

Priority Functions

A COOP need not anticipate fully normal operations during a crisis. Instead, an organization may elect to choose specific functions that will need to continue no matter the emergency. Some other functions may be deemed as preferred but only on a case-by-case basis.

The process of selecting which functions to prioritize, which are preferred by optional, and which can be deferred until a crisis has passed requires careful consideration and whole-organization input. Naming and prioritizing each service a jurisdiction intends to provide during an emergency or in the immediate aftermath of a disaster can better prepare staff for eliminating non-essential tasks and maintaining focus on the goals at hand. Both staff and the public may need to be made aware that any service not deemed essential must wait until the emergency has resolved and the jurisdiction is able to resume normal operations. It is important to remember that tabletop exercises and post-crisis debriefs are opportunities to fine tune prioritization of services.

Knowing the priorities also helps a jurisdiction best prepare by maintaining a checklist of supplies, equipment, and information that may be needed immediately during an emergency. The checklist of supplies, equipment, and information should be routinely audited to ensure none of your

essential needs have become outdated and require replacement or upgrading. When determining what tangible equipment or supplies need to be on hand, a jurisdiction may consider executing cooperative agreements that will allow the immediate purchase of essential items from vendor partners or external government agencies while staying in compliance with the jurisdiction's purchasing rules. This list can also include alternate site relocations to be utilized on an emergency basis in the event of a threat to headquarters. If an alternate or a specific work location is included in the COOP, information regarding whether and to what extent certain personnel will be required to work remotely until the neutralization of the threat should be included.

Deactivating the COOP

It is important that each COOP detail how an organization will resume normal operations after a disruption in service. The goals of the COOP are to minimize delays and to continue to provide essential government services. To these ends, it is imperative that the objective of returning to normalcy be clearly defined so that staff and external partners know what to expect.

As discussed previously, part of deactivating a COOP is planning a new COOP in the future. Careful accounting of what went well and what needs revision should be part of any post-event evaluation process. In addition, cooperative agreements can be revised if needed. Supplies expended should be renewed as appropriate.

Each essential element of a COOP is explored further in the later parts of this document.

Communication and Security of the COOP

Although the COOP itself is likely to be held as a secure, confidential document with key personnel, a communication strategy to the jurisdiction's employees and the public is necessary in the event the COOP is triggered and in effect. Whether a COOP will be held

as a physical document or maintained electronically is a decision to be made by individual jurisdictions, considering what best suits each jurisdiction. These decisions may need to be made in coordination with relevant law enforcement or Homeland Security authorities in the jurisdiction. Jurisdictions must consider how to keep the COOP itself secure and confidential while also determining who will be responsible for communicating what information to essential employees and the public, reassuring these groups that operations are continuing and the jurisdiction remains prepared for every exigency.

Notwithstanding the publication or sharing of a COOP or its communication strategy, plans should be classified as “For Official Use Only.” The COOP may include security vulnerabilities that should be carefully maintained only within the agency. It will likely contain personal contact information for key leadership and should be maintained as personally identifiable information. Agencies should work with legal counsel to ensure that the COOP is done in such a way that it can be exempted from any Freedom of Information Act or sunshine laws applicable in your jurisdiction.

Chapter 2 IT Infrastructure

An often-overlooked part of any COOP plan is how IT plays a role in continuity. This section offers topics for consideration as COOPs are being drafted. Each planning team should include or consult with an IT professional responsible for the jurisdiction's IT needs. **Every COOP should include a section specific to the jurisdictionally relevant IT needs during a crisis.**

IT Considerations

Operational continuity includes a consideration of IT infrastructure necessary to maintain operations in the face of crises and planning with the relevant IT personnel or department. Maintaining operations includes the ability of essential public-facing platforms to remain available and the intra-office systems to function during emergency operations status.

A successful COOP will identify and plan for continuity of all IT-related hardware and systems needed to maintain core functions while considering various threats that could interrupt service or impact communication ability. This requires a thoughtful analysis of both internal IT needs and external needs and realistic and regular risk analysis.

Internal IT needs are those that support personnel in the performance of essential functions that will continue in an emergency operational situation. Essential functions include but are not limited to internal and external communication with coworkers and emergency partners outside the organization, interfacing with internal platforms and servicing those platforms, and accessing information needed to implement and sustain emergency operations.

External IT needs are those relating to the ability to communicate important information outside the

organizations, such as making public announcements about service availability. In addition, this includes considerations of how to connect with other organizations within the state or jurisdiction as needed during a crisis.

For both internal and external IT emergency planning, thought should go into how essential personnel will continue core operations from alternate work locations such as emergency operations centers (EOCs) or home offices. In addition, plans should include discussion of all relevant IT locations, including primary work sites, satellite locations, and locations where servers are housed.

Elements of an IT COOP

When working on the IT portion of an office COOP, it is important to include specific sections that address the following key IT elements.

Key Personnel

IT infrastructure is critical for continuity of operations in a disaster. Therefore, IT personnel are also critical. Every COOP should identify which IT personnel or roles will be considered as essential workers in the event of a crisis. These individuals should be part of COOP planning, part of COOP response exercises, provided with equipment enabling their participation in a COOP deployment, and made aware of their role and need for constant crisis response readiness.

Essential Functions

The COOP should also specify which platforms, services, and functionalities are essential to continued operations during an emergency. It should also identify any that could be suspended during a crisis

situation. Essential functions include those necessary to provide the public with prioritized services or those needed to allow employees to access these platforms or communicate with each other or key external partners.

Hardware and Equipment

Crisis-related IT hardware and equipment are things that permit or support functionality during COOP implementation. For instance, a jurisdiction may consider whether laptops are preferable to desktop PCs in offering more portable workstations or whether smart phones provided to key staff would support basic operations or communications. System redundancies may be considered. In addition, considerations including loss of electricity, cell service, or internet service should inform

As with the whole COOP, the IT section should consider the key personnel for maintaining essential IT support during an emergency and specify their roles within the large command structure and COOP implementation. Even a well-designed plan may require real-time adjustment or support depending on the nature and scope of an emergency. Thought should be given to what services are essential and what support will be required to keep these operational. This is a different role than supporting other front-line workers engaged in ongoing operations. Each person responsible for IT support should understand his or her different duties.

IT is another area where mutual aid agreements with other state agencies or departments may be appropriate. COOP discussions should include the necessity of equipment and data storage redundancies. MVAs may face special security considerations that limit mutual aid in terms of IT support. Crisis operation interconnectivity with partner organizations may be a challenge and is an important consideration. From communication to data transmission, thought should be given to cooperative operations during an emergency.

Loss of the local power supply is common in many disasters. This type of impact is a particularly important consideration in planning for emergencies in terms of IT. The location of IT infrastructure, including telecommunications, network, servers, databases, and end-user stations, will determine some contingency planning. Backup strategies for data and equipment should consider not only likely disasters and their impacts on infrastructure but also on how users will be able to access and interact with the infrastructure components. Because external communications are particularly critical in an emergency situation, particularly if the crisis is protracted or has caused significant damage in the community or to its infrastructure, the IT portion of the COOP should focus on essential MVA communications technologies staff.

Beginning and Ending COOP Implementation

Unlike other aspects of COOP implementation, IT changes may require physical interventions such as distributing new laptops or disconnecting equipment from power supplies. It is critical that IT responsible staff understand their roles and are ready to act in the case of an emergency. In some cases, IT workers will need to travel ahead of other staff to make ready alternate work locations. The advance preparation and maintenance of these locations is a key function that should be ongoing during normal, non-crisis operational status. The staff lead responsible for IT support during a crisis should be notified promptly in case of a crisis and apprised of all decisions regarding essential operations.

Part of the stand-down planning for the COOP, as the crisis ends, should include a return to normal operations in terms of IT. If data created during an emergency need to be retained or maintained by jurisdiction policy, this should be part of the COOP considerations. IT representatives should take part in any after action assessment of COOP implementation to improve the plan for future crises.

Security Analysis

IT departments are normally responsible for regular security and compliance assessments throughout the year. Crisis planning is part of keeping operations secure. Risk assessment should consider the vulnerability of essential network systems and platform that may be the targets of human-made disasters. Redundancies should be built in and systems hardened. This same type of consideration should be made for natural disasters. Any threat to the ability of a jurisdiction to maintain normal operations and provide essential services should be considered and mitigated through planning.

Questions to Consider

IT management and organization leadership will benefit from discussing important questions related to overall IT issues within COOP planning and implementation. The questions include:

- How long can an organization go without performing essential functions? How does the minimum system(s) recovery time impact this timeframe?
- What is the maximum allowable data loss (recovery point objective)?
- Which mitigation strategies will help the jurisdiction address known risks by accepting, avoiding, transferring, or controlling risk?

Chapter 3 Risk Assessment

Although no COOP can specifically address all possible threats, it is important jurisdictions regularly assess likely risks and update plans accordingly. For more information about risk assessments, please refer to the section below.

Introduction

As a best practice, state driver licensing authorities (MVs) should conduct thorough all-hazards risk assessments with sufficient regularity to build resilience against current and emerging risks. A risk assessment is a proactive and preventive measure and should be a regular and systemic part of agency culture. It should identify vulnerabilities prior to an incident and evaluate the effectiveness of emergency preparedness efforts. Risk assessments should support the COOP and drive policy and procedure. Risk assessments are essential to focused continuity planning.

Risk assessments should consider potential vulnerabilities. This type of analysis might consider common weather threats or other natural hazards such as wildfires or earthquakes. Risk assessment might also consider the impacts of such a disaster or emergency. Injuries to the health and safety of people should be the first consideration of a risk assessment. However, natural disasters can also damage important infrastructure from physical structures to the power grid. The protection of physical or digital records is also critical. Human-made hazards, such as cyber threats, can disrupt operations. A comprehensive assessment of risks in terms of potential causes and resulting effects is key.

Federal resources from the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA's) Ready.Gov include a [risk assessment tool](#) that can be used online as part of emergency preparation and COOP design. You may want to consult with your State Office of Emergency Management (OEM) or Office of Risk Management for state-specific policies, forms, and information. You may also want to coordinate and consult with law enforcement agencies regarding the safety and security of facilities.

Types of Assessments

Various risk assessments that can be conducted based on an agency's needs. As an assessment is conducted, it is imperative to look for vulnerabilities or weaknesses. The assessments should be thorough and detailed, utilizing forms if necessary, and include employee participation.

- *Qualitative risk assessment.* This assessment is based on personal judgement and expertise of those making the assessment. The assessors will usually base the information on personal experiences.
- *Quantitative risk assessment.* This assessment measures risk in a numerical value and is usually used with major hazards. Such quantities could be based on the threat.
- *General risk assessment.* This assessment covers common hazards or threats for various tasks. An agency could have multiple assessments throughout its buildings.

- *Site-specific risk assessment.* This assessment is focused on a specific task. The analysis will contain items such as the location, environment, and people in that section.
- *Dynamic risk assessment.* This assessment is not preplanned and conducted instantly. This is commonly used in emergency situations or when an agency's job or routine is fluid.

Risk assessment is an ongoing and organic process. Employees should be encouraged to maintain awareness, striving to recognize an operational risk or danger and trained to report these risks to the appropriate leadership so that the COOP can be modified accordingly and any appropriate mitigation measures taken.

Additional risk assessments may involve identifying what steps would be necessary to resume operations or repair particular damage. For instance, maintaining physical records poses unique challenges, and jurisdictions may consider the risks of particular storage locations and environments and the difficulty of reconstituting the records if they are damaged or destroyed. Risk assessment in this situation would lead to the next step of risk mitigation and allow leadership to consider solutions such as alternative or redundant storage locations or digitalizing records in advance of a disaster. The ability to plan effectively is the key benefit of a thorough risk assessment.

Using the Risk Assessment

After the likely hazards have been identified in a particular jurisdiction, the risk assessment will serve

as a tool to inform budgeting, COOP drafting, and decision making related to mitigation steps and resilience building. Solid and regular risk assessments are the first step.

Jurisdictions can use risk assessments to *become proactive*. A jurisdiction that identifies hurricanes as a likely risk can take the necessary steps to ensure the state driver licensing authority (MVA) building is secure, choosing to install external window or door protections. Similarly, the identified risks will allow for *more effective emergency exercises*. Finally, the risk assessment will best enable the jurisdiction to *follow up on vulnerabilities identified*. Risk assessments support the properly prioritized implementation of mitigations.

When risk assessment shows new or previously unaddressed risks, it is important to update the COOP to reflect the risks and the steps needed to address them in case of emergency.

Risk assessments should be performed annually. New threats could arise, causing vulnerabilities with your previous assessment. Organization structures, processes, interactions, and communications change; therefore, it's imperative the assessment is current.

Resources

- EPA Risk Assessment Guidance | US EPA
- FEMA National Risk and Capability Assessment | [FEMA.gov](https://www.fema.gov)
- Ready.gov <https://www.ready.gov/exercises>

Chapter 4 External Communication Plan

External and internal communications plans have significant overlap and can often be deployed simultaneously. It is important for jurisdictions to review the communications plan on an annual, or more frequent, basis to incorporate new technologies and adapt to changing communication methods.

Jurisdictions should incorporate diverse emerging and existing effective communication strategies to engage critical audiences during crisis operations.

External Communication Planning

The external communications planning, a part of the overall COOP, ensures the jurisdiction is prepared to engage audiences across a broad spectrum utilizing a range of messaging. This plan should include groups affected by the emergency and those involved in the response.

This section provides a matrix to evaluate how and when to respond to disasters through different communication mediums. The plan should outline decision makers, prioritize audiences, and define methods of communication. This plan must include all external parties, not just direct customers of the jurisdictions.

Prioritize Emergency Communications

In the event of an unexpected crisis, it is critical the first priority is notifying appropriate authorities. This could include, but is not limited to, police, fire, and ambulance. This component of the plan should not change how crisis events are reported to authorities.

The jurisdiction's locations should identify and have easily accessible contact information for local and state authorities beyond the 911 operator.

The jurisdiction's locations should contact intra-organizational decision makers only after local authorities.

Crisis Communication Team

In this section, detail building out a communications team dedicated to emergency or disaster response. Determine responsibility and communication methods.

Communication planning should include identifying key participants in the COOP implementation and crisis operations.

Consider making a list of who in your jurisdiction makes decisions on communications. The "who" should be limited to those who have significant decision influence or decision-making abilities. From these individuals, create a communication plan to disseminate directions and information. The COOP should answer key questions.

Who

- Who is ultimately responsible for making the call to put out all the necessary information?
- Are there outside parties that must be engaged prior to a final decision, such as other state agencies or state or local government? Define the escalation path.

How

- When a crisis occurs, define how the team will be engaged. Is one person the point person who contacts others? Is there an established email or text group?

When

- When a crisis occurs, define what level of crisis requires involvement from this team. Are there local versus statewide assignments?

Communication Decision Matrix

For this section of the plan, these activities should be thoughtfully planned prior to dissemination. Recognizing time is a critical part of an emergency, but by walking through a decision tree, the decision makers defined earlier can move quickly to follow best practice and implement a plan.

Customer communication should focus on the status of available services and as appropriate outline when the jurisdiction expects to return to normal operations. Scale and impact must be considered when thinking through these communications. One option when drafting a COOP is to build a decision tree example for communication types and audiences. Planners should consider whether likely audiences will be local, regional, state, province, territory, or nationwide. It is also important to consider what communications will look like during the crisis response. Communication can mean low-tech methods such as signs and face-to-face interactions or more technology-based strategies such as email, texts, social media, or websites. Communication can be based on internal capabilities or it can rely on external platforms such as radio or television.

Ideally, the jurisdiction will know ahead of time how regularly it wants to communicate with its customers and external partners. It will then regularly provide updates to its outward-facing platforms as planned. Communications need to be tailored for the anticipated audience, whether local, regional, statewide, or national.

Some consideration should also be given as to the best communication method. Options include print media such as signs and posters; electronic methods such as email blasts, text messages, social media, or posts on websites; face-to-face communication; or traditional

media such as newspapers, television, or radio.

Additional considerations include communication frequency, meaning how often updates will be shared.

Partner and vendor communication should focus on the status of service and potential interruptions, as well as an escalated need for support. These parties may be needed to facilitate a return to normal operations and may even require their own decision maker to manage communications. It may be helpful to build a decision tree example for communication types and audiences. A potential list for inclusion.

- Audience
 - Partners
 - Vendors
 - Local authorities
- Communication method
 - Intranet site
 - Signs + posters
 - Email or text message
 - Face-to-face communication
 - Social media
 - Websites
 - Traditional media (print, TV, radio)
- Communication frequency
 - How updates will be shared
 - With whom updates will be shared
 - How updates will be shared
- Type of engagement
 - What support is needed
 - Will purpose be to inform or instruct

Communication Templates

In an emergency, information likely needs to be relayed quickly and effectively, while ensuring accuracy of the message. This applies to both internal and external communications. To enable teams to move quickly, prebuild templates for communications and utilize them to standardize messages across all media. Provide examples of templates for all communication methods expected to be used in a crisis.

- Intranet site
- Signs + posters
- Email or text message
- Face-to-face communication
- Social media
- Websites
- Traditional media (print, TV, radio)

Post-Emergency Communications Plan

After the emergency is resolved, it is important to follow up with your audiences as well as debrief them on lessons learned. This is a perfect opportunity to review and update both internal and external communications plans.

This section may appear very similar to the internal communications plan but should be applied to external audiences.

Customer communication should go out informing impacted audiences the jurisdiction has or will on a set date return to normal operations. These communications can include information such as:

- Clarification on requirements to utilize services, especially if there is any change in operations or expectations of behavior for this audience
- Directions on how to get information or ask questions if an item is not covered
- Use of the same communication methods and templates as in previous communications for consistency
- Partner or vendor communication, which should go out informing impacted audiences the jurisdiction has or will on a set date return to normal operations. Include information such as:
 - Clarification on any requirements or adaptations in operations that will impact the engaged party
 - Direct on how to get information or ask questions if an item is not covered

- Use of the same communication methods and templates as in previous communications for consistency

Future action review should evaluate communications executed during the emergency as well as a process to develop and approve these messages.

- Do we have the right decision makers?
- Did the templates match our needs?
- Did the audience understand our messages?
 - Customer?
 - Partner or vendor?
- What were our challenges in communication?
- What was successful in communication?
- What, if anything, could be done differently?

After evaluating the emergency response and feedback, make any necessary changes to the external communication plan.

Future action review should evaluate communications executed during the emergency as well as a process to develop and approve these messages.

- Do we have the right decision makers?
- Did the templates match our needs?
- Did the audience understand our messages?
 - Customer?
 - Partner or vendor?
- What were our challenges in communication?
- What was successful in communication?
- What, if anything, could be done differently?

After evaluating the emergency response and feedback, make any necessary changes to the external communication plan.

Chapter 5 Chain of Command

A COOP, no matter how well designed, will inevitably suffer if an effective chain of command is not established in advance, well understood by all key stakeholders, and followed during a crisis. Chain of command is another way of saying who will be responsible for making various decisions and who will lead the COOP operations. During an emergency, the chain of command may be different than that in place during normal operations. Organizations may adopt a chain of command based on a traditional incident command system or other disaster-based organizational structure. **Chain of command should be recorded in the COOP and shared with all staff and relevant partners.**

Chain of Command Considerations

Not every incident or emergency will require the deployment of the crisis response chain of command. The COOP should make clear when and under what circumstances the emergency operations chain of command will take control. FEMA offers the National Incident Management System (NIMS) as a potential model. One component of NIMS is the Incident Command System (ICS). An ICS is scalable and changeable to suit the size and structure of a particular organization.

Incident Command Systems for Jurisdictions

The ICS offers jurisdictions utility in that it offers organizational structure appropriate to all levels of emergencies from simple to complex. By design, it establishes who will lead an organization or jurisdiction during a crisis and can be scaled up or down depending on the incident's severity.

When planning for emergency operations, the jurisdiction should be aware of local, state, or jurisdictional ICS structures already in place, keeping in mind the purpose of the ICS is to do all the following in a crisis.

- Provide organization structure that can scale up quickly depending on the scope and impact of an emergency or disaster.
- Designate common language for all emergency responders.
- Ensure the best person, based on expertise and ability, has been predesignated as in charge of critical functions, avoiding costly time delays.
- Involve only necessary staff in crisis response operations, promoting time-critical efficiency.
- Support efficient communication by establishing chain of command–based flow through of information.
- Identify responsible parties to help internal and external stakeholder know who to take direction from and offer key information to.

When designing its ICS or whatever command structure the COOP has documented, an organization needs to make key decisions. The organization should determine whether it needs an emergency scene commander and to whom that person should report. For example, the emergency scene commander may have designated employees on each floor to guide staff to shelter in place or exit the building depending on the type of emergency.

When considering who will lead crisis response efforts, jurisdictions should consider that employees tasked with this responsibility may need to be able to assess the incident. This means determining the type of emergency. These could include natural disasters such as dangerous weather, wildfires, or infectious disease and human-made disasters such as chemical, radiological, or biological threats. Incident commanders should be able to identify the type of emergency and respond accordingly.

Anyone in charge of a crisis response must also be capable of communicating with, and if possible, supervising members of the emergency response team during the event. Additional responsibilities could include interacting with first responders or working with leaders from other agencies.

For every aspect of the COOP that needs to be deployed, some person or persons should be assigned and made aware of the relevant responsibilities. Whether working on operational continuity in terms of public services or working more directly on crisis response through building evacuation or equipment deployment, all involved personnel should be adequately aware of their responsibilities and trained for their duties. Members of the established emergency response team as well as those who volunteer to serve in any capacity may be offered CPR, first aid, and active threat training.

For critical functions such as checking buildings for employees or for those who need additional assistance during building evacuations, it is best to have more than one person responsible. This way, even if one team member is not available, someone else will be there to assume the role and responsibilities. All personnel involved in emergency response should understand when and how evacuate a building and know how to reconnect after evacuation or change of work location. The chain of command should be clear about who will order any such move. Commanders should be familiar with the emergency plan and layout of the office space and building.

Note that building evacuation policies often exist outside of the COOP and vary based on the situation. Fire, earthquake, tornado, or active shooter drills may be part of jurisdictional requirements. These procedures can be incorporated by reference into the COOP, simply building on regular practices already in place. These types of drills may be a good time for general COOP exercises within the MVA or in cooperation with other jurisdiction agencies. Whatever the emergency exercises, it is a good opportunity to practice the activation of the COOP command structure. As part of the emergency response plan, include an organizational chart (“org chart”) that denotes the chain of command during an emergency. This org chart is separate and different from the agency’s structural org chart.

Command Structure Flexibility

The MVA may face a variety of emergencies that differ in scale and impact. Emergency situations may be local, such as a power outage; regional, such as a tornado; or state-wide, such as a large hurricane or wildfire. As with COVID-19, some emergencies may affect the whole country or have global implications. For the purposes of COOP implementation, a crisis may be described as any of the following:

- **Isolated impact:** This is an emergency that takes place at a specific office or location, with limited impact to jurisdiction-wide operations. An example of an isolated impact command structure might be:
 - On-site emergency response team leader or team member
 - Location manager or supervisor
 - Administrator
 - Agency director
 - Agency deputy directors
 - Deputy mayor
- **Agency-wide impact:** This is a crisis taking place across a broader area that impacts many or all agency locations. An example of an agency-wide

impact or larger scale disaster command structure might be:

- Agency director
- Agency emergency response team leader
- Agency deputy directors
- Administrators
- Managers
- Deputy mayor

Command structures are intended to be flexible and scalable. Whether a crisis is small in impact

or has significant, wide-ranging effects, the jurisdiction simply needs to follow the established chain of command structure and response and COOP implementation changes. The point of a pre-established command structure is to avoid confusion and delays in response by knowing ahead of time who will be responsible for what and how instructions will be given to essential staff. A well-thought-out command structure will also ensure efficient interaction outside the organization and avoid duplication of efforts.

Chapter 6 Cooperative Agreements

Part of COOP development should include the consideration of what resources can and should be used to supplement existing organization resources in during crisis operations. One method of resources supplementation is cooperative agreement. These agreements may take many forms, including mutual aid agreements, which serve to establish a legal framework for multiple entities to share resources. Cooperative agreements with other state agencies and jurisdictions can allow your agency to maintain operational status in the event of a disaster. **Cooperative agreements should be part of overall crisis readiness and reviewed regularly along with the COOP.**

Understanding Cooperative Agreements

A cooperative agreement may be defined as an agreement between two or more governmental agencies or outside partners designed to allow the parties to reach a common goal. In the case of preparing for an emergency or unknown threat, well-planned cooperative agreements executed in advance of the disaster can allow your agency to maintain its customer services even during the emergency itself.

Cooperative agreements should be tailored to fit the needs of the agency and should take into consideration what services and products are needed during or in the immediate aftermath of an emergency. For example, a master purchasing agreement that meets the legal requirements of your purchasing laws and regulations can allow your agency to begin purchasing emergency supplies without delay and can include both other governmental units and third-party vendors.

Timing of Cooperative Agreements

Timing is key when handling an emergency or recovering from an emergency. To maximize your agency's resiliency, cooperative agreements should be drafted, negotiated, and executed before a particular emergency. Although some emergencies are not easily predicted, your jurisdiction may routinely experience certain weather threats or workforce shutdowns. When you can anticipate an emergency, you can enter into the cooperative agreements that will serve you well when the threat arrives. If a cooperative agreement is not reached prior to an emergency, timing is of the essence, and all attempts should be made to enter into cooperative agreements without delay.

Cooperative agreements should be reduced to writing and executed by all partners in advance of the emergency if possible. Each key player and decision maker listed in your COOP should maintain a physical and electronic copy of the agreement so that it can be implemented as soon as practical at the onset of the emergency.

Effective Cooperative Agreements

Although all jurisdictions may have different needs and face different threats, there are considerations that may be generally considered by all jurisdictions in determining whether and to what extent cooperative agreements are practical.

- Who from your agency needs to be involved? A group or committee designed for this purpose should be appropriately sized and take into consideration that a group or committee that is too large or too small may make efficient progress impractical or impossible.

- What departments need to be consulted? Do you need legal counsel to review the terms of the agreement or a budget and fiscal expert to analyze the potential cost savings and expenditures that would be required in the event of an emergency? The earlier these professionals are pulled into the conversations and negotiations, the easier it will be to quickly execute a cooperative agreement, avoiding legal and fiscal pitfalls.
- Are tabletop exercises necessary to better predict the next emergency or disaster? Certain disasters may be predicted and well known to your jurisdiction (e.g., hurricanes, risks of tornadoes); however, tabletop exercises conducted with a variety of personnel may help your agency

determine other possibilities and how your agency would respond to such an unpredictable situation.

- Do you need legislation or administrative rules to implement your cooperative agreements? Certain cooperative agreements or partnerships among agencies or third-party vendors may require legislative changes. Acting before the emergency begins to draft and negotiate legislation can save your agency time when time is of the essence and customer services are essential to your population.

Helpful Links and Examples

- [New York State Resource Materials](#)

Chapter 7 Employee Communication Plan

Like external stakeholders, employees require clear communication during a crisis, particularly when a COOP has been activated and emergency operations are underway. The purposes of including a plan for communicating with employees in the event of an emergency include efficient operation, reduction of uncertainty, and adherence to crisis-related orders from jurisdiction executives. **A detailed crisis communications should be part of each COOP and shared with employees.**

Leading Through Communication

Employees look to leadership for reassurance and guidance during an emergency. They need direction and answers. A good internal communications plan should be reviewed by management periodically to be sure changes in workplace accommodations, employee directives, and communication strategies are updated. Training is key as well. Employees need to be trained on what types of emergency messaging is available and may be used at any given time. Managers involved in training should be sensitive to different learning styles. Differently abled employees may need to receive key instructions in different methods. Managers should think ahead about necessary accommodations. The key is clear communication based on the needs of the employee.

Whether the workforce is working remotely or onsite, reaching out to employees on a regular basis lets them know they are a priority and establishes communication channels and rapport that may become imperative in an emergency:

- Communicate clearly and often whenever there are changes to emergency planning, implementation, or procedures.
- Consider pre-established communication schedules. For instance, let employees know that in a crisis, they will receive communications first thing in the morning, at the close of business, or at any other appropriate interval. This sets expectation and makes sure employees are looking for communications at the appropriate times.
- Seek opportunities to strengthen relationships and establish rapport with your employees before emergencies happen. This will ensure the lines of communication and employees will be more willing to share key feedback or questions open during a crisis.
- Review COOP employee communications plan regularly to keep it as up to date as possible.
- Schedule new employee and then yearly refresher training for employees to be reminded of emergency management plans.

Management has three key communication priorities:

1. **Reassure:** This is what employees need most of all. They want to know their trusted leadership is in control of the emergency or situation as best as possible.
2. **Inform:** Employees need to know the what, who, how, when, and where of the emergency and what to do next to stay safe.
 - a. **Decision maker:** Who is ultimately responsible for making the call to put out all the necessary information?

3. **Mobilize:** Only express an extreme sense of urgency when it is relevant. Otherwise, employees need identified actions and clear instructions through multiple communication channels.

Methods of Communication

In an emergency, information needs to be relayed as quickly and effectively as possible, while ensuring accuracy of the message. Internal emergency management alerts can be sent using email, building paging/intercom systems, voice messages or text messages to mobile devices, phone tree activation, alerts via computer (including SharePoint) or face-to-face communication.

Jurisdictions must, as part of an effective COOP, shape communication plans based on existing capabilities and with the goal of keeping every employee informed. If all employees do not have work-provided phones, laptops, or email addresses, alternate strategies may need to be in place. For instance, a shared webpage or social media site may serve as a digital message board. In case of server or power grid impacts, phone trees may be activated. Even a phone number employees could call and receive an update via prerecorded message could work. It is a good idea to have multiple communications methods planned in case one or more becomes unworkable.

All these methods of communication need to include instructions or directions. These could include whether employees should report to or stay at the assigned work location, evacuate the building, or relocate to specific assembly points or alternate work sites. The messaging should also include updates on the status of the situation and notification of when it will be appropriate or safe to return to normal operations.

Crisis Messaging

The message itself needs to be tailored to the audience. It should be clear, concise, and easy to understand.

Prioritize communications with employees directly impacted or necessary for COOP implementation.

Note that the method of communication may depend on the nature of the emergency. A post on a website might suffice to let employees know the COOP operations status will remain in place for the next several days. Text messaging or building-wide announcements are more appropriate for evacuating in advance of an advancing wildfire or taking shelter based on a lockdown situation.

Whatever the crisis communication, it should include the nature of the emergency, the immediate steps to be taken, and an advisement of when additional instructions will be coming.

In some crises, email messaging is appropriate. In these situations, more information can be included in the message. For example, an agency may be reporting mandatory shelter in place for residents because of a hazardous materials release. In these situations, communications-responsible leadership may choose to take information provided by local emergency management agencies and incorporate it into their own messaging. In the hazardous materials release example, the message could include advice to take self-protective actions immediately, such as:

1. Go inside immediately and stay inside your office.
2. Close all windows and doors.
3. Turn off air conditioners and heating system blowers.
4. Gather radio, a flashlight, food, water, and medicines.
5. Call 911 only if you have a true emergency. You will be advised when this dangerous condition has passed and it is safe to go outside.

In cases of broader scale emergencies, it may also be appropriate to direct employees to external communications such as local radio or television outlets

or EOC sites where they can find more practical advice on how to deal with broader implications of the crisis not directly related to their work.

Post-Emergency Communications

After the emergency has passed, communication should go out to employees with next steps and directions, including when to return to work, what COOP close-down procedures to implement, the availability of any post-disaster counseling or training, and any other pertinent information.

Post-crisis evaluation of employee communications is also important. Managers should discuss whether there were any issues with communication and whether anything impeded crisis messaging. Part of the evaluation process should include soliciting feedback from employees to determine if they thought the messaging was timely, accurate, and easy to understand. The evaluation will inform changes to be incorporated at the regular updates of the COOP and into future trainings.

Chapter 8 Government Partners

Jurisdictions can consider which other state, provincial, territorial, or federal partners will be integral to continued operations and plan accordingly. This may include oversight organization crisis-specific waivers.

Identifying government partners key to maintaining core vital functions should be done well in advance of emergencies that might disrupt services, and the functions of each partner should be identified to facilitate cooperation through advanced communication and planning.

Regional or State Partners

Regional and state partners include entities within the state, territory, or jurisdiction that are able to work with the organization to assist with direct or support functionality during a crisis. Thorough planning requires thinking through which partners will be needed in various likely emergencies. It also requires working with each entity ahead of time and keeping in regular communication as well as considering incorporating these entities into training exercises. Many state (and local) partners will play leadership roles in incident command structures outside the MVA. It is beneficial to think about exactly what role each partner will play.

Law Enforcement

Law enforcement may work to secure a crime or disaster scene and service as a point of information in an unfolding crisis. They may also be able to assist with risk assessments before disaster strikes. Law enforcement partners may include state, provincial, or local departments. State or provincial Department of Transportation or Department of Motor Vehicles

or public safety entities may also be good partners during crisis operations. They may be able to support staff movement and delivery of emergency supplies, removal of debris, and transport equipment to help deal with the emergency.

Fire Departments

Fire departments, like law enforcement partners, can help to secure disaster scenes and provide other critical services consistent with their mission. Nearby fire departments are often among the first on any disaster to provide medical assistance as well. These departments may be able and willing to assist with any crisis training exercises. Including first responder partner groups in planning and training will help develop strong inter-agency relationships that can benefit communication and cooperation during a crisis.

Human Resources

Human resources, both internal and external, should be considered and included in all COOPs. It may be necessary to partner with jurisdiction human resources or labor management agencies. This can help with gathering employee contact (and in case of emergency contact) information. Additionally, these organizations can help with questions of emergency leave and pay (including unplanned overtime). They can also be helpful with drafting internal policies related to various crises, such as pandemics. With COVID, human resource organizations were critical in developing strategies for testing and vaccination of employees. It is useful to meet with an authoritative human resource agency to walk through the likeliest crises to occur in a jurisdiction and discuss the human resources implications for inclusion in the COOP.

These conversations enable the establishment of agreements and policies with this partner that will streamline keeping staff working and operational in an emergency.

Emergency Management Agency

The jurisdiction may have a local, state, or regional emergency management agency. If so, this entity can be an excellent resource and partner. First, an OEM can assist with planning and drafting the COOP. It is likely they will have templates for this purpose and be able to consult on what should be included for a particular jurisdiction.

In addition, an OEM should be included in the COOP itself as a likely partner able to assist during various crises. The OEM can facilitate training exercises as well, including multi-agency exercises. Some OEMs may have funding available for COOP development and assessment. Developing partnerships with OEMs provides the best opportunity to benefit from all resources on offer, including funding.

OEMs may also have control over disaster scenes or part of the emergency response as a part of the ICS. It is important to understand their likely role. In some cases, OEMs at the state or regional level will have the authority to issue waivers of prevailing statutes in an emergency. This could include waivers or extensions related to driver licenses, vehicle registrations, or handicap placards.

Finance or Budget Oversight Agency

Crisis operations will inevitably incur unplanned expenses and require quick decisions on expenditures that may be novel and outside the current budget. It is important to work ahead of any emergency to develop a partnership with the entity holding authority over the financial decisions of the MVA. This entity may have suggestions related to budgeting or inclusions in the COOP. It may also be able to explain how waiver of procurement process policies can occur, contingent on an emergency.

If employees are likely to incur COOP operations-related costs, consider partnering with related organizations. For instance, if essential personnel will be driving new routes or covering additional shifts, toll or parking costs may be incurred. Consider working with these authorities on waivers or discussing supplemental reimbursement funding ahead of time with these organizations.

Being a Partner

Not only with the MVA or department of motor vehicles (DMV) rely on other partners for full COOP implementation, but it may also be asked to partner with other organizations to provide support during crises that may or may not directly impact the MVA or DMV. For instance, a neighboring jurisdiction may seek a mutual aid agreement. In this case, the organizations would agree to provide assistance with equipment, labor, or task management. In some cases, social service or first response organizations may seek a partnership related to helping citizens replace lost documents during or after a disaster.

Serving as a partner to other organizations is a benefit to the community and may help strengthen inter-agency relationships, which in turn provides better cooperation during large scale emergencies. However, it is important prior to any agreement to make sure roles and limitations are well understood and in writing. Oversight agencies may need to review and approve participation and partnership agreements.

Federal Partners

Although regional or jurisdictional partners are critical to a successful COOP, it is important to remember federal or national potential partners as well. Federal emergency response agencies are instrumental in many ways, including within the ICS of a large-scale disaster or emergency, such as the recent COVID epidemic. In this cases, federal authorities may make decisions that will directly impact the MVA or DMV. In Canada, Public Safety Canada or the Public Health Agency of

Canada may be involved. In the United States, they are the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and FEMA.

FEMA

Using FEMA as an example, it generally takes action from the president of the United States to directly involve FEMA in response to a disaster. The president is responsible for activating the Stafford Act by declaring a disaster. In this case, FEMA will determine and execute the appropriate disaster or emergency response, which can include sending personnel, equipment, and aid to an affected area.

FEMA is a valuable resource for MVAs and DMVs. It provides a host of [resources](#) for COOP and disaster planning. It also [offers grants to states for various disaster-related initiatives](#). Grant agreements may be a good way to partner with federal organizations.

Of note, the Stafford Act includes a provision for waiver of vehicle size and weight requirements on US federal highways for movement and delivery of supplies, removal of debris, and equipment to help deal with the emergency. The Federal Motor Carrier

Safety Administration (FMCSA) may also be involved in issuing these waivers.

FMCSA

During a national crisis, FMCSA may issue waivers related to commercial driver licenses. These waivers could involve requirements from medical certification to third-party testing procedures. During the emergencies, the Secretary of Transportation has the ability to issue waivers without waiting for public comment. It's important to develop a connection with FMCSA to keep track of all waivers during a crisis.

Other Partners

Various federal or national level entities may be useful partners. The US Social Security Administration may issue waivers or exceptions for duplicate or issuance of social security cards during an emergency. The US Internal Revenue Service may issue waivers or variances during crises. Similarly, the United States Citizenship and Immigration Service may issue waivers during emergencies in terms of waiver or exceptions for legal presence approvals (temporary or permanent), which may impact driver license or ID card issuance or renewal.

Chapter 9 Emergency Plan Initiation Process

Although a well-considered and well-crafted COOP is critical, it is equally important to understand when and how this plan will be activated and implemented. It is also necessary for each member of a team to understand their role in this process and from whom initial launch decisions will come. **Jurisdictions should have a clear understanding of how, when, and by whom a COOP will be implemented and terminated in a crisis and share this information with employees.**

Emergency Plan Initiation Basics

Each jurisdiction should clearly define the situations when an emergency operation would be activated. For instance, a jurisdiction might decide the COOP will be activated if any of the following occur.

- Illness or other circumstances impact staff availability to an extent normal operations become impossible.
- A building or buildings necessary for the provision of normal services becomes damaged or otherwise unavailable.
- Public services, such as water, power, or internet, are unavailable.
- Community- or region-wide impacts render essential partner organizations (to include vendors) unavailable.

In each of these cases, a subjective determination of whether it is safe and feasible to attempt normal operations will need to be made. What rises to the level of an emergency may differ from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. In addition, risk assessment can reveal which conditions will precede a plan activation. After

a basic understanding of the conditions leading to an emergency declaration is established, the specific incitation steps will also need to be detailed and recorded for all staff.

This process will include the following:

1. Understanding from where the emergency declaration or emergency operations order will come. It may come from within the MVA or from an external agency. Where the order originates may depend on the scope or nature of the crisis.
2. Identifying what agency acts as the warning point and primary direction and control facility (if any) to coordinate emergency responses. There may be multiple models for emergency response in a jurisdiction or broader region. It is important to make clear to all plan implementers which model will be followed and whether this is dependent on circumstances.
3. Knowing whether (and when) your jurisdiction might opt for a preemptive declaration of disaster or emergency operations order in the face of a known or likely to be imminent emergency event. The inverse may also be true if a jurisdiction chooses to implement emergency operations after a disaster has concluded but where lingering impacts are likely.

Emergency declarations may be made either in advance or in anticipation of an imminent event that threatens destruction and disaster or after a disaster has happened. However, the declaration of a local or regional emergency may or may not automatically trigger the implementation of a COOP. All

responsible parties should be clear about this and know whether the MVA COOP will be triggered by external declarations or require specific internal decisions.

The COOP should specify both under what circumstances the plan will be activated and who will make the decision, either within or outside the MVA.

In accordance with the communications component of the COOP, the document should also explain who will be consulted prior to making a decision and how all relevant internal and external stakeholders will be notified if COOP implementation is required. The COOP should comply with all controlling laws and policies within the jurisdiction regarding emergency operations and official declarations of emergency or disaster. It should incorporate language relating to special emergency provisions such as fiscal rules

regarding expenditures during emergencies. For these reasons, it is a good idea to include finance and legal professionals from the MVA or parent agency in the COOP creation and review.

If cooperative or mutual support agreements are in place, it is a good idea to consider when and why the parties to these agreements will declare emergencies, who makes these decisions, and what the impacts on the MVA would be.

The COOP must also lay out when and how emergency operations will end and normal operations will be resumed. Typically, the same decision makers will be involved in standing down a COOP implementation, and the same external parties will be both consulted and informed on the type of emergency.

Chapter 10 Personal Protective Equipment and Workspace Readiness

As part of readiness planning, jurisdictions can consider what personal protective equipment (PPE), other special equipment, or hardware may be necessary (per the Occupational Safety and Health Administration [OSHA], the CDC, or other guidance) in a crisis based on their own risk assessments. COOPs can include reference to this type of equipment. Leaders should consider the logistics of any equipment needs such as procurement processes or storage needs. If PPE is disposable, the jurisdiction will need to consider how to safely dispose of it in accordance with prevailing rules. This part of the planning can also address potential alternate workspaces or other mitigation strategies. A well-considered and strongly drafted COOP can support these processes as well as budget requests.

PPE

PPE is meant to protect employees from hazards found on the job. There may be standard PPE required related to the duties of a position. In the event of an emergency, it may be necessary to provide alternative or additional PPE for employee safety and health.

In general, there are two categories of PPE.

1. **PPE required by law or regulation** includes all equipment required by federal or jurisdiction law to be provided to employees because of the nature of their duties. Jurisdictions can consult agencies, including OSHA, the CDC, the Department of Labor, and other jurisdiction and federal authorities, for more guidance.
2. **PPE not required by law or regulation.** This could include PPE voluntarily provided by the employer or PPE required by union-negotiated

contract. In this situation, a jurisdiction may provide PPE based on circumstances. Examples include offering respirator-type masks for employees in areas particularly affected by wildfire smoke or providing hand sanitizer to employees who receive documents from the public.

Some PPE is specific to emergency situations, and some is not. In emergencies, it is important to determine what PPE is correct for the hazard and how jurisdictions will receive this information and further communicate it to their employees. Jurisdictions should conduct assessments of current PPE in terms of stock availability and expiration dates. The nature of the emergency will also impact the PPE needs and usage. Long-term emergencies may require restocking of PPE. Looking at historical data will inform future predictions in terms of potential needs and areas of concern during planning.

To learn more about an employer's role and responsibilities in providing PPE to employees, jurisdictions can consult various federal resources, including Personal Protective Equipment ([osha.gov](https://www.osha.gov)).

Other Equipment

Basic emergency equipment for any office includes flashlights, emergency and first aid kits, and vests designating floor monitors or others responsible for emergency office evacuations. Other equipment, however, specifically supports the provision of ongoing services in the event of an emergency. In addition to IT equipment, such as laptop workstations, it may be appropriate to offer other equipment during emergencies. For every person in a leadership role

over a critical function meant to carry on during COOP initiation, the jurisdiction can consider creating a go kit. This kit could include a list of all employees relevant to keeping that service available and their contact information. It can also contain relevant procedures and manuals portion and contact information for relevant IT personnel or vendors. It may include a radio, cell phone, or satellite phone.

If a jurisdiction provides vehicles to employees or employees use jurisdiction owned vehicles in the performance of their duties, this raises other issues. The vehicle may essentially function as a mobile workplace. In that case, the COOP should consider whether the vehicle should be equipped with PPE or other emergency related equipment.

For items that will be reused after a COOP implementation, the COOP should include an explanation of how this equipment will be distributed to and by whom, and how it will be collected and prepared for reuse.

Office Considerations

Mitigation strategies suggested by a risk assessment can include steps to take before an emergency occurs. For instance, areas prone to wildfires or seasonal viral outbreaks, can consider investing in HEPA forced air filtration. If employees can work from home and a large, potentially disruptive event, such as a protest is planned, alternate work schedules or remote work may be allowed.

If an emergency occurs during the workday and poses any danger to employees, the priority should be moving all employees to dedicated safe spaces

within the building or evacuating them depending on the crisis. However, if there is no danger posed by remaining in the building, then focus should turn to maintaining critical operations. The COOP can help identify ways to support crisis operations.

The COOP can also identify alternate work locations if a building becomes unsafe or unreachable because of a crisis. In some cases, the area where the building stands may be safe, but the larger community may still be impacted, and employees may not be able to reach the normal workplace safely. Alternate work locations can include satellite offices, other government buildings, mobile offices, or even space with the local or state EOC. Advance planning and stakeholder communication and agreement are key.

After a crisis is over but before normal operations resume, it may be necessary to clean or sanitize a building or any impacted workspaces. The COOP should consider this as part of a stand-down procedure, and leadership should know who can or will need to inspect the building, if necessary, prior to resuming occupancy. The building is meant to include the parking lot and any common areas used by employees.

Helpful links

- [FEMA's Addressing PPE Needs in Non-Healthcare Setting 3M Worker Health & Safety OSHA Personal Protective Equipment](#)
- [CDC's Emergency Preparedness & Response](#)
- [Institute of Medicine's Chemical and Biological Terrorism: Research and Development to Improve Civilian Medical Response](#)

Conclusion

This document is meant to support jurisdictions as they prepare for emergency situations and encourage the best practice of drafting a comprehensive COOP based on regular all-hazards risk assessments. It lays out the basics while emphasizing the importance of an established command structure, clear COOP initiation process, strong communication strategy, and employee training commitment.

There is no way to overstate the importance of frequent review and revision of a jurisdiction's COOP. Five years ago, it is unlikely a COOP would have included provisions specific to a pandemic. However, modern reality requires such inclusions. Perhaps the most important takeaway is that any COOP is a living document, only as strong as the time, thought, and energy invested in it. Planning and practice inform improvement and prepare a jurisdiction to continue to provide essential services no matter the crisis.

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