

Objective #4	Emergency Operations Center	Demonstrate the ability to utilize an Emergency Operations Center (EOC) to coordinate and support emergency response activities.
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A Basic Intent

In accordance with OAC 3750.20.78, an EOC, as identified in the LEPC plan or the County EOP, must be tested once every 4 years. An EOC is mobile, virtual, or a fixed facility where agencies gather to support the response needs of one or more incident sites and to help coordinate the actions of various off-site organizations. An EOC is commonly activated during a large-scale emergency or a widespread disaster. Each county typically has one location that is designated as the main or primary EOC, and they may have designated a number of sites as possible alternates. This Objective looks at the activation and functional use of such a site and its ability to support field operations.

B Discussing the Points of Review

1. Were planned procedures and/or guidelines followed for activating the EOC?

Each county's local Plan should identify who activates and who staffs the EOC, what equipment is available and setup, and how the EOC is to be operated. Some plans require the full-activation of an EOC regardless of the incident. Some plans establish varying levels of activation and staffing based on the type and size of the incident. In any case, the EOC should be staffed with those agencies that can coordinate actions for the IC(s) and off-site agencies. This includes but is not limited to response agencies, human service groups, utility services, voluntary organizations, and elected officials.

2. Was the activated EOC identified in the plan?

EOC locations need to be pre-planned. Typically, counties have one primary EOC and may have one or more alternate sites. Again, this function may be a mobile or virtual concept.

3. Was an individual clearly identified and effectively in charge of the EOC?

Once activated, the county EMA office is *typically* responsible to operate and coordinate the actions within the EOC. However, partners from other disciplines, or jurisdictions, may act as the EOC Manager as is operationally necessary. Per local plans, this is usually done in conjunction with the EOC's "executive group" or the chief elected officials for the affected area.

4. Were communications established between the EOC and the incident site(s)?

This is one of the EOC's essential functions. In order to coordinate decision-making, the EOC must establish and maintain communications with the field and support agencies. For example, EOC members *must* have direct communications with their respective agencies in the field. The primary EOC must have dedicated telephones and radios in place. Alternate EOC should have some equipment in-place, but responders may have to bring portable communications gear to the site in order to make it operational. This may include positioning a communications van at the alternate site or arrange with private vendors to supply temporary equipment. An EOC may also rely on dispatch centers or amateur radio groups to serve as the communications link between the scene and the EOC.

5. *Was decision-making and information sharing effectively coordinated between the EOC and the incident commander(s)?*

This is an essential function of the EOC. The incident commander(s) will establish the response priorities and notify the EOC for support as needed. EOC members should address and organize that support in a prompt manner. If no input is received from the field, EOC members may need to query the IC or one of the field liaisons to identify what support is needed. EOC members should also try to anticipate what resource needs or response problems may arise. In turn, they should discuss those concerns with the CP to see if those issues have been or should be considered.

6. *Were copies of local plans, SOPs, and/or technical guidance readily available at this location and reviewed (when needed) in support of EOC operations?*

These are essential tools of an EOC. The EOC should have copies of local plans and procedures readily available, or the individual agencies may bring their own. Some plans contain forms used only in a disaster such as emergency proclamations, sample emergency alert messages, or damage assessment forms. Also, EOC members may use these plans to review procedures and thus anticipate response needs. The EOC should also have access to various technical guides. These guides may include computerized programs, chemical handbooks (NAERG, SDS), facility reports/plans, resource databases, county/city/utility service maps, etc. These tools help determine how to best implement or resolve a response issue.

7. *Did the EOC, its equipment and displays, support operations?*

To support operations, the EOC must be equipped to carry out its essential functions. The EOC must have sufficient tables, chairs, and workspace available so as to establish an organized work environment. It must have administrative tools such as paper tablets, pens and pencils, staplers, etc. Dry-erase, chalk, or cork boards need to be available along the walls to allow personnel to display critical information. EOC staff should have pre-scripted forms to document and track essential information. Ideally, the EOC can be equipped with a network/connectivity that allows members to electronically document, print, send, receive, post and monitor incident related information. The technology in the EOC should support these functions. Alternate power and lighting should also be available at the EOC. These are essential tools for an EOC.

8. *Were records kept to document the actions taken within the EOC?*

Each EOC member should maintain a log of actions taken, communications made, and issues resolved. This working ledger will help ensure response issues are being addressed or will act as a reminder as to what actions still must be accomplished. Also, the EOC Controller should have a way to show what key events have occurred. This can be shown on one main status board or by sharing the individual event logs. After the incident, this documentation can be used to critique EOC operations and in turn improve its operational procedures.

9. *Were the actions taken based on existing plans and/or operating procedures?*

The LEPC's plan is required to address the procedures and/or guidelines to open, staff, equip and operate an EOC. These procedures and/or guidelines may be located in the County EOP. The LEPC plan shall clarify how and when an EOC is utilized for chemical incident. It is recognized that the majority of chemical incidents will not require an EOC's activation. But when the event is widespread or occurs along with another emergency (flood, tornado, terrorist act), an EOC will be useful.

C Exercise Design and Control Issues

The LEPC must activate and evaluate an EOC during a hazardous materials exercise once in the four-year cycle per OAC 3750-20-78. **A Tabletop exercise will not fulfill the requirement of OAC 3750-20-78 since Tabletop exercises do not physically use equipment.**

The EOC may be either the Primary or Alternate EOC as *defined in the plan*. This will allow local counties to test those alternate sites that have not yet been tested under simulated or real-life circumstances. The goal remains to “physically” test the principal functions of an EOC facility, its equipment, and its personnel. Note that a Tabletop exercise will only review procedures but will not test the “functional” capabilities of the EOC. Therefore, Tabletop exercises cannot be used to meet the EOC activation requirement.

To adequately test this Objective, the scenario must be severe enough to warrant the activation of an EOC. As a stand-alone Hazmat incident, the scenario must be one that makes managing the event solely from the scene nearly impossible. Such a scenario could be a release that forces the evacuation of an entire city and large numbers of victims that are contaminated or injured. The other option is to have more than one emergency in progress to include a chemical release. Such a scenario could involve a natural or man-made emergency that impacts numerous townships in the county to include one or more chemical releases that were caused by the initial disaster.

Another key concern that the Exercise Design Team must address is that the activated EOC should be fully staffed and equipped. The EOC must be staffed with the appropriate personnel (i.e. Fire, Police, Health, Medical, etc.) who will coordinate the response efforts including elected officials as designated in the plan. When testing this Objective along with Initial Notification, the staff should not be staged in the EOC. They need to be contacted as per the notification process in the EOP or EOC SOP. As for equipment, all EOC equipment needs to be operational in Functional and Full Scale exercises. This includes but is not limited to activating dormant phone lines, and coordinating the use of existing radio networks. If outside equipment is brought in to supplement day-to-day supplies, arrangements must be made and used to mobilize those assets. The Exercise Design Team should not simulate the staffing or equipment; otherwise, the Objective is not being fully tested.

In a Functional exercise, the Exercise Design Team can test an EOC in one of two ways;

- An EOC-only exercise using only messages to simulate field play (similar to a Tabletop exercise), or
- In conjunction with actual field play with limited simulated messages (similar to a Full-Scale exercise).

Using the first type of Functional exercise, all field and external agency information is simulated as done for a Tabletop. In this case, the Exercise Design Team will use multiple Controllers to act as the IC, medical facility, shelter, and any other key agency that is on-scene or actively involved outside of the EOC. These individuals should be situated in a separate room so they can input messages through real phone and radio communications. This exercise will allow EOC Players to fully utilize the equipment in the facility and coordinate decision-making with the field (via the Controllers) in a real-time setting. The Exercise Design Team will need to lay out the scenario and the relevant expected actions (messages) so the individual Controllers input

the problems in a realistic setting.

The second Functional type allows the EOC to be activated and used in concert with actual field play. In this case, the EOC takes all of its direction from the field and would be run just like a Full-Scale (see below).

In a Full-Scale exercise, actual field play should drive the use and function of the EOC. This allows the county to identify if responders understand how to use an EOC and to determine whether or not the scenario justifies an EOC. It will also test how well EOC personnel understand their roles and how they support field operations. The exercise may require some simulated message input in order to fully test the process and interaction among agencies. For example, the scenario may require the EOC to coordinate the activation of two or more shelters. But if shelters are not actually being opened, the Controllers must act as the shelter operators and interact with the EOC as needed.

Here is one last note on exercise design. If Objective #1 is to be evaluated along with the EOC, then EOC members and equipment cannot be pre-staged or pre-setup. The goal is to evaluate how much time and effort is spent physically establishing an EOC.

D Evaluation Needs and Issues

The Evaluator for this Objective should be knowledgeable in how and why an EOC is used to support emergency operations. Typically, this is an EMA official from a neighboring county or a senior response official familiar with an EOC. The Evaluator should also be knowledgeable in the ICS in order to fully understand the relation between the EOC and the incident site(s).

The Evaluator should be looking to see that EOC members are actively pursuing information and anticipating response needs. If there is a lack of activity it typically indicates EOC members are either not receiving/obtaining information from the field, that the scenario does not warrant the use of the EOC, or that EOC members are familiar with the intent of an EOC. The Evaluator will also note how/if the facility is adequately equipped to support EOC operations.

This Objective can be evaluated along with Objectives #1, 5, 6, 8 and 9.