

What Is An EOC?

Introduction

If you ask an administrator what an EOC is, they will tell you that it is a conference room. An Amateur Radio operator will view it as a radio room and most others have absolutely no idea what you are talking about. This document will briefly introduce the reader to an EOC.

An EOC is an Emergency Operating Center. An EOC is the location where response agency leaders meet to coordinate the response to an emergency or a disaster. Obviously, making an uninformed decision or not passing information to the response personnel would make a bad situation worse. A comprehensive communication facility is a key part of an EOC. An EOC can not exist without these two basic components but more is required for efficient operation.

In reality, an EOC is composed of many parts and there are several "levels" of emergency operating centers. Some companies such as telephone and power companies have EOCs, as do cities, counties, regions, provinces and states. Chances are that if you encounter an EOC, it will be a municipal EOC. All EOCs operate similarly so this document will concentrate on the municipal EOC (city, town, village, or regional district) also referred to as the "local authority" in some documents.

The municipality (city) owns the municipal (city) EOC. It may be a permanent facility or a designated location that can be converted for use as an EOC at a moment's notice. It is very common for a city owned facility such as meeting rooms to be designated as the primary EOC. Other buildings in the community may be designated as alternate locations if the primary site has to be evacuated. Letters of agreement are written between the city and the owners of these facilities.

The Parts of an EOC

An EOC consists of one or more conference rooms, a communication room, a media center, a rest area, washroom facilities, kitchen (optional), and a backup power system to supply power for the heating, lighting, and communication equipment.

Conference Rooms

The heads of all the agencies involved in mitigating the disaster use the conference room. The nature of the event will dictate who the participants are. The basic group typically includes the emergency program coordinator, city manager, police, fire, ambulance, public works, one or more elected

officials, and representatives from any other agency that is involved.

The use of radios and cellular telephones is discouraged or forbidden in this room because of the interruptions that they cause during important meetings. This has repeatedly been very difficult to control because the people involved all have a "take charge" type of personality. They should be encouraged to leave their cell-phones and radios with their communicators in the communication room.

Maps, multi-media facilities, AM and FM radio, and television should all be available in the conference room. A clerk will log all significant events on a status board that is visible to all. Another clerk will record in detail all events and decisions to provide a paper trail of the entire emergency response operation.

In some areas, Amateur Radio operators are utilized to transmit live video back to the conference room using their equipment. If so, then provision for video reception and passing instructions to the camera operator must also be provided in the conference room.

Communication Room

The communication room will contain all the communication facilities including radios, telephones, fax machines, copier, cellular phones, satellite phones, radio & cell phone charging stations, etc. Communication room personnel will include the Emergency Communication Coordinator (the room supervisor), radio operators, message clerks, and possibly runners to deliver the messages.

Each agency that is represented in the conference room should have two radio operators per shift in the communication room. Two people are required so they can work together during peak times and give each other rest breaks. The person who is not operating the radio can operate the agencies telephone and cellular phone. Each agency must supply their own radio operators because only their staff knows the methods, procedures and terminology used within that group.

Amateur Radio (Ham Radio) operators will have one or more workstations in the communication room depending upon their job assignments as described in the city's emergency plan. Usually the Radio Amateurs are used to assist with the emergency social services functions, which include the reception centers and non-government organizations (NGO) such as Red Cross and the Salvation Army. Amateur

Radio is also utilized in support of search and rescue activities (both land and air), inter-community, and inter-regional communications, and as a backup to all the commercial radio facilities used by the involved agencies.

All written messages received in or sent from the communication room will be numbered and logged in either the incoming or outgoing message register by the message clerk(s).

All radio operators will maintain a log of messages received and sent by their radio station to confirm when messages were sent and whom they were sent to. This shall include tactical (verbal) messages passed directly between the originator and the recipient.

All radios and telephones should be equipped with headsets. This serves three purposes. It reduces the background noise level, prevents conversations received on one radio from being re-transmitted on another channel, and reduces operator fatigue.

*Messages are **never** created, modified, or interpreted by the communication staff!*

Media Centre

The media centre is a conference room where the media liaison person, also known as a public information officer (PIO), issues press releases and holds press conferences.

The media centre must be located where the reporters can not over-hear conversations between the emergency responders or hear the radios. The media must never have access to written or verbal messages.

Only the authorized media liaison person shall talk to the media.

Rest Area

The rest area is for the exclusive use of EOC staff such as the decision-makers, communicators, etc. It should be in a separate room to provide a distinct restful atmosphere and to eliminate interference to operations caused by casual conversations. The rest area should contain comfortable seating, and a continuous supply of refreshments and snacks. Meals should be served in this room.

The rest area must remain off limits to the media and the public

Emergency Power

An emergency backup power plant is required to operate the heating, lighting, and communication equipment for the entire EOC during a power failure.

Special consideration must be given to the communication room power. In addition to the power plant, a battery based power system is highly recommended to operate the radios and minimal emergency lighting. The batteries will be operated in parallel with the 12 volt power supply / charger. This system will ensure uninterrupted operation of the communication equipment during switchover from one AC power source to another or if the power plant fails or has to be shut down for servicing.

Management and Staff

The quantity of staff and their job assignments will vary depending on the size of the community and the nature of the emergency.

The manager of the EOC will be the city's emergency program coordinator (EPC). Several different job titles are commonly used. This person will be in charge of the overall EOC operation and may also chair the meetings in the conference room.

The emergency communication coordinator (ECC) reports to the EPC and will supervise the staff and operations in the communication room.

There will be additional staff assigned to provide food and drinks to the participants, deliver messages, restock supplies and run various errands.



Related Documents

*Communicating Without The Power Grid.
Surviving A Heating And Power Failure
An EOC Communication Room*

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