

CHOOSING AN EMERGENCY OPERATIONS CENTER LOCATION

OVERVIEW

When picking a site to locate an emergency operations center (EOC), pay close attention to the elements listed below. Based on your own situation, several of these considerations may be important. Of course, it is a given that before picking a site or designing the EOC, the scope, purpose, and functions of the EOC have been identified.

SITE CONSIDERATIONS

If you haven't met with your local city or county Office of Emergency Management, make that your first stop. Share with them the areas you are considering, and use their expert knowledge of natural hazards to gain an understanding about the potential areas.

Floodplain maps are an excellent way to identify potential search areas in the selected vicinity. We suggest the following be considered:

1. Immediate Environment - The site should not be located close to railroad tracks or other businesses that have known hazardous materials incident potential.
2. Access - The site should be located near roadways that provide easy access, with more than one exit or entrance route available. If it is located near a major freeway, alternate roads should also be easily accessible in the event that the freeway is congested or blocked.
3. Neighborhood - The site should not be located in a light manufacturing area or in an area where crime is a significant factor. If the EOC will be activated for 24 hour use, security and easy access at night are important factors.

BUILDING CONSIDERATIONS

Once the site is selected, the following points should be considered in designing the EOC.

1. The EOC should be equipped with emergency power capable of around-the-clock non-interrupted service.
2. Additional electrical outlets should be equipped to accommodate increased electrical requirements to accommodate laptop computers and other electrical equipment.
3. The EOC should be located on the first floor for easy access. However, if space or security is an issue, it can also be located on the 2nd Floor. It is not recommended that it be located in the basement or on floors above the second level.

4. The location of the EOC on the floor should accommodate any telecommunications requirements. For example, if it is located near the center core, cellular phones may not be functional.
5. Pre-wired telecommunications requirements should provide for data ports, etc. (Also, hands-free and multiple channel telecommunications should be considered.)
6. Alternate communications such as satellite or radio transmission should be discussed before design to accommodate antennae and other transmitter/receiver requirements.
7. The EOC should have a fire-proof safe that is unobtrusive for storing certain valuable items or cash.

SPACE AND EQUIPMENT

There are many configurations that have been used effectively in designing an EOC. Below are suggestions based on many different EOCs that have been designed over the years. Inclusion of some or all of these features needs to be evaluated based on how the EOC will be used.

1. If functions to be performed at the EOC include both the Command/Command Support and EOC Team, a floorplan should be designed that facilitates easy access to a common large “strategy” conference room where the Command/Command Support and EOC Team can gather. Several additional smaller conference/work rooms should be included in each of the two areas for team meetings and other work areas. These rooms can be minimally equipped with tables, chairs, and one or two telephones, along with extra electrical outlets.
2. Kitchen, sanitation, and sleeping accommodations (including showers) may need to be included. If hotels are nearby, sleeping accommodations can be eliminated. Also, a small kitchen can be provided if you intend to have food brought in rather than prepared at the EOC.
3. Theater style work areas facilitate easy viewing of information. Command/Command Staff should be separate from the EOC Team but able to view the main work areas if this configuration is used.
4. Each major function should be grouped to provide workstations accommodating two to three people, with partitions no higher than 2-3 feet above the workstation. Space for each function will depend on the number of people expected to report. Operations commonly requires the most workspace. Planning/Intelligence should be equipped with an area that accommodates map displays and other visual aids. Also, each EOC function should have access to its own fax machines and copiers.
5. A totally separate area in the building should be designated for a pressroom, with a completely separate entrance from the EOC. The media should have restricted (or no) access to the EOC.

6. The PIO function should be equipped with monitoring devices for radio and TV, with a VCR to capture TV broadcasts.
7. The furniture should take ergonomics into consideration. It is most important that chairs are comfortable due to the long periods of time they will be used.

ADDITIONAL ENHANCEMENTS

EOCs that have recently been designed include features that promote ease of information flow. The following captures those items.

1. There are several software programs available that can be accessed via the web, providing response management tools and an easy way to disseminate the status of the situation. Not only do they provide information tracking capability, but many can also display information being gathered by other agencies or businesses you choose to partner with who are responding to the event. Also, several Global Information System (GIS) databases are being used by various public agencies and businesses that can provide specific information regarding affected areas.
2. New EOCs have built-in communications capabilities that allow everyone in the EOC to be tuned into a single channel for special announcements, etc.
3. Alternate communications such as satellite networks can bypass the affected public telephone networks, ensuring continuity of communications.
4. Mass call-out configurations are available to quickly alert large masses of people about the situation.