



Learning Objective: The student shall be able to list at least five elements of an Emergency Operations Plan.

On a daily basis we respond to a variety of emergencies, most of which have become fairly routine. Most first response organizations can do their work on those events by rote.

Of course, reaching that level of competence takes a lot of training, exercises and actual events. We have to constantly guard against complacency to ensure safe and effective operations. However, the extraordinary events — such as tornados, earthquakes, hurricanes and conflagrations — can overwhelm the best organizations, and catastrophic losses can stretch anyone’s capacity to the breaking point. So how do we get ready for these “unimaginable events”?

Looking at recent fire department experiences in disasters provides a starting point for preparedness. A sound EOP becomes the basis for successful outcomes in disasters.

By a “sound” EOP we don’t mean one that is just well-crafted on paper. It should include an analysis of threats and risks; specific plans on prevention, mitigation, response and recovery; delegations of authority; resource inventory/typing and coordinating; automatic and mutual-aid plans and communications plans for member, assisting and higher supporting elements; and sections to cover specific types of events. A sound EOP should also be inculcated with the National Incident Management System and be reviewed regularly for accuracy and timeliness, but most importantly, it must be practiced, exercised and improved.

So where is your copy of your community’s EOP? When is the last time you pulled it out and read through it? Some organizational leaders find they have had to dust it off before the book could be opened! Is your EOP something where you can find pertinent sections, or will you have to read through it during an emergency to find out with whom you need to coordinate for housing-displaced survivors from another community?

While many of an EOP’s sections and annexes will not directly pertain to the fire and Emergency Medical Services, remember that you will always be “the agency of last resort,” and citizens will be turning to you for every conceivable service need. So be prepared to tell them where they can get food, fuel, diapers, water and medical care. Have a staff meeting, and go through the EOP, both your specific responsibilities and the document in general. Knowing the EOP will help you help your community better and will keep you engaged in the all-hazards planning process. Go find it, and read through it today!



When a complex incident expands beyond the initial scene, having an effective Emergency Operations Plan in place will help incident commanders make informed decisions. *Photo courtesy Tom Aurnhammer.*