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BEST PRACTICE

Emergency Management Programs for Healthcare Facilities: Emergency Operations Plan: Concept of Operations: Activation

PURPOSE

This Best Practice describes what the activation section of a healthcare facility's concept of operations should include.

SUMMARY

A healthcare facility's Emergency Operations Plan (EOP) should be activated proportionally to the incident.

DESCRIPTION

Once the on-duty staff member with the authority to activate the EOP has been informed of a developing incident, that person must decide whether the available information warrants activation of the EOP. If so, this person must also decide at what level (i.e., pre-determined, phased response) the EOP should be activated.

The EOP should be activated at a level proportional to the information available on the incident. Activating the EOP and setting up an Incident Management Post may incur significant cost to the healthcare facility through business disruption (e.g., canceling elective surgery) and direct financial costs (e.g., overtime pay, staff holdover). However, mobilizing a healthcare facility's resources takes time, and needless delay could greatly impact the facility's ability to respond effectively. A healthcare facility's EOP should:

- Identify the positions that possess the authority to activate and deactivate the plan, including nights, weekends, and holidays; and
- Establish predetermined thresholds and specific circumstances for activation that will help avoid confusion, delay, and possible human error.

It may be helpful for the Incident Manager to have several options to choose from that allow the facility to respond proportionally to the incident as it unfolds, rather than activating the entire EOP for every incident. An EOP should include various stages of activation from which the Incident Manager may choose at the outset. The plan should also be flexible enough to allow the Incident Manager to move the facility's response operations from one level of activation to another. This will allow the Incident Manager to scale the response to the incident as it increases or decreases in magnitude.

The following levels of activation are provided notionally. Individual facilities should decide what type of phased response works best for their circumstances. Nevertheless, facilities should exercise the various levels of activation regularly, including transitioning from one phase to another.

Advisory

An Advisory allows management to communicate to personnel that an incident has occurred or may occur without mobilizing any facility resources. Advisories may also be used in normal facility operations to communicate weather warnings and other important, but routine, messages.

Alert

An Alert status can be used by facility management to communicate to personnel that an incident is imminent, in progress, or has already taken place, and that EOP activation is under consideration. Management should indicate to personnel what measures should be taken to prepare for EOP activation, should it be needed. The first such action that should be taken is set up of the facility Incident Management Post. Additional activities should be indicated by management as appropriate to the actual incident (e.g., staff hold-over, phone tree notification).

Intermediate Activation

An intermediate activation allows management to activate various segments of the EOP without activating the entire plan. This allows management to react to incidents that require immediate operational response while assessing whether a full activation is necessary. This level of activation also allows management to tailor the facility's response to a specific type of incident without wasting valuable resources and incurring unnecessary costs. Management may want to activate the security section of the EOP regardless of the incident to control entry and exit points as more information becomes available.

Full Activation

A full activation sets in motion the entire EOP according to procedures in the plan. As more information becomes available, or as an incident winds down, full activation may be scaled back according to established EOP procedures.

A facility begins to incur emergency operating costs at the point when the Incident Management Post is set up. Because the scope of a no-notice event may not be evident initially, issuing an Alert and initiating setup of the Incident Management Post can save precious time and resources as an event escalates and demands more of a facility's assets. This can be an effective strategy for Incident Managers to use when preparing the facility to respond. The Incident Manager may be able to obtain more information without incurring significant cost to the facility. The Administrative/Finance Section should begin keeping accurate records on expenditures for reimbursement purposes when the Incident Management Post is activated.

RESOURCES

Standards

JCAHO Environment of Care

- EC.4.10.6. "The plan provides processes for initiating the response and recovery phases of the plan, including a description of how, when, and by whom the phases are to be activated."

NFPA 99 Healthcare Facilities

- 12.3.1. "When a facility declares itself in a disaster mode, or when the authority having jurisdiction declares a state of disaster exists, the emergency management plan shall be activated. Planning shall be based on realistic conceptual events and operating capacity thresholds that necessitate activation of the plan."

- 12.3.2. "The decision to activate the emergency management plan shall be made by the authority designated within the plan, in accordance with the facility's activation criteria. The decision to terminate shall be made by the designated authority in coordination with the authority having jurisdiction and other civil or military authorities involved."

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