



FEMA

LESSON LEARNED

State Emergency Operations Centers: Information Management Training for Local Officials

SUMMARY

State emergency operations centers (SEOC) should consider providing ongoing training to local officials on the use of their information management system, such as WebEOC.

DESCRIPTION

During the summer of 2008, the state of Iowa experienced a series of severe storms that produced several tornadoes and a large amount of rainfall. The heaviest period of storms began on May 25, 2008, and lasted until June 25. Rains caused flooding that overtopped levees and dams and inundated Iowa localities near rivers. Over a 4-week period, flood waters moved across Iowa which required the state to undertake extensive preparedness, response, and recovery operations. Overall, the 2008 summer storms resulted in 17 fatalities, forced the evacuation of approximately 38,000 Iowans, and impacted over 21,000 housing units.

The 2008 storms were comparable to the 1993 floods as the most destructive natural disasters in Iowa's history.

The Iowa Homeland Security and Emergency Management Division (HSEMD) activated the SEOC after an EF-5 tornado struck the city of Parkersburg on May 25. Complex emergency operations required the activation of the SEOC's four sections: finance, logistics, operations, and planning. The SEOC remained activated for an extended period of time in order to coordinate complex response and recovery operations.

The SEOC granted county and local officials access to its WebEOC boards to facilitate information management and to maintain situational awareness. The SEOC and county EOCs posted information to the system to create a real-time chronology of events and activities throughout the summer storms. This information included situational awareness such as property and road damage, county EOC activations, shelter operations, and resource requests.

WebEOC is a web-enabled crisis information management software tool that delivers real-time data to emergency managers and first responders. The software enables users to share data through message boards, geographic information system-based maps, resource catalogues, and other tools.

Many county EOC personnel believed WebEOC was intended as a vehicle to submit resource requests to the SEOC. However, SEOC operations section personnel indicated that WebEOC was never intended to function as a resource request tool. They stated that the standard method of requesting resources was by phone. The SEOC did not configure WebEOC to receive resource requests. Consequently, there was no template to ensure that requests entered into the system contained all required information. As a result, operations and

logistics section personnel had to follow up with officials requesting resources to obtain additional details prior to fulfilling their requests. Further, operations officers often missed requests submitted only through the WebEOC Event Log because the message board turned over entries faster than they could identify them.

The 2008 Iowa summer storms after-action report (AAR) recommended that HSEMD establish an ongoing training schedule for county users. The AAR also recommended that the WebEOC training should address the proper process for requesting resources from the SEOC.

For more information on WebEOC training protocols, please refer to the *Lessons Learned Information Sharing* Lesson Learned, Emergency Operations Centers: Ensuring Staff Proficiency on Information Management Systems.

SEOCs should consider providing ongoing training to local officials on the use of their information management system, such as WebEOC.

CITATION

Lessons Learned Information Sharing. *Iowa 2008 Summer Storms After-Action Report*. 27 Apr 2009. <https://www.llis.dhs.gov/docdetails/details.do?contentID=36042>

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