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Critical Infrastructure: Establishing a Common Operating Picture System between State Emergency Operations Centers and Public Utility Companies

SUMMARY

State emergency management agencies should consider developing a comprehensive common operating picture (COP) system that incorporates utility status and outage information from public utility companies. This can help ensure that the state emergency operations center (SEOC) has accurate utility outage information during emergencies.

DESCRIPTION

The Maine Emergency Management Agency (MEMA) sponsored and conducted the Maine Statewide Communication Functional Exercise (FE) in conjunction with 14 county emergency operations centers (EOC) on October 29 and 30, 2009. Participants included state and county EOC personnel, the American Red Cross, and the Maine National Guard. MEMA conducted the FE to test its state and county EOC communications capabilities after a statewide power outage. The primary objective of the FE was to demonstrate EOC continuity of operations, including maintaining communications, after losing power and Internet service. The FE scenario was based upon a major ice storm in 1998 that caused blackouts throughout the state.

During the FE, MEMA experienced good information sharing between the Maine SEOC and some of Maine's key utility companies. The Central Maine Power Company and Bangor Hydro-Electric Company emailed periodic facility status updates to the public utilities liaison at the SEOC. The liaison analyzed this data and contacted utility companies when the SEOC required additional information. However, the liaison encountered difficulties developing a comprehensive statewide utility COP due to insufficient information from Maine's other public utility companies. Further, the information received from the Central Maine Power Company and Bangor Hydro-Electric Company was not in real time or in a format that could be easily incorporated into a COP. As a result, the SEOC had difficulties assessing the status of all key Maine utility services and maintaining situational awareness of the damage to the statewide critical infrastructure.

State emergency management agencies should consider developing a comprehensive COP system that incorporates utility status and outage information from public utility companies. This can help ensure that the SEOC has accurate utility outage information during emergencies.



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CITATION

Maine Emergency Management Agency. *Maine Statewide Functional Exercise After-Action Report*. 01 Apr 2010.

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