



FEMA

LESSON LEARNED

Emergency Operations Centers: Establishing an Alternate Facility

SUMMARY

Jurisdictions should plan for activating an alternate emergency operations center (EOC) that can be used if the primary center is inaccessible or at capacity.

DESCRIPTION

Shortly after 6:00 p.m. on August 1, 2007, the Interstate 35 West (I-35W) Bridge in Minneapolis, Minnesota, collapsed into the Mississippi River. The bridge served as a main artery for the city of Minneapolis and carried a daily average of 140,000 vehicles over 4 lanes of traffic running north and south. When the bridge collapsed, vehicles crashed into each other, became embedded in the mud of the river bank, or plunged into the river. The bridge collapse presented tactical and strategic challenges for the responding jurisdictions, requiring extraordinary response and recovery efforts. Responders from over 75 federal, state, and local agencies rescued individuals from their cars and the water, extinguished vehicle fires, triaged and transported individuals to local hospitals, and contained hazardous materials. In total, 13 people died in the collapse, and 121 others were injured.

The City of Minneapolis, Hennepin County, City of Saint Paul, Ramsey County, Hennepin County Emergency Medical Services, the State of Minnesota, and the Federal Emergency Management Agency Region V activated their respective operations centers within 2 hours of the bridge collapse. The City of Minneapolis EOC served as the lead operations center and acted as the Multiagency Coordinating Center for the incident. The city activated its EOC at 6:20 p.m. on August 1, 2007, and operated on a 24-hour schedule until August 5. On August 5, the EOC shifted to a 12-hour schedule until it deactivated on August 20, 2007.



Minneapolis EOC Activity during the I-35W Bridge Collapse

A large number of agency representatives began arriving at the Minneapolis EOC soon after it was activated. The one-room EOC lacked the space to accommodate staff members and elected officials. Further the EOC facilities could not effectively support essential functions such as planning, logistics, policy coordination, and public information. The US Fire Administration technical report on the I-35W bridge collapse states that “the inadequate size and functionality of the Minneapolis EOC was cited by most respondents as the biggest obstacle in the management of the response.”

Jurisdictions should plan for activating an alternate EOC that can be used if the primary center is inaccessible or at capacity. This can ensure that all essential functions and departments have the space necessary for managing an incident response.

CITATION

US Fire Administration. *Technical Report #166: I-35W Bridge Collapse and Response*. 21 Apr 2008.

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