EFFECTIVE EMERGENCY RESPONSE IN NON-DEDICATED EMERGENCY OPERATIONS CENTERS (EOC'S)

NON-DEDICATED EOC OPPORTUNITIES

by

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The Command College Futures Professional Article is a study of a particular emerging issue of relevance to law enforcement. Its purpose is not to predict the future; rather, to project a variety of possible scenarios useful for strategic planning in anticipation of the emerging landscape facing policing organizations.

This article was created using the futures forecasting process of Command College and its outcomes. Defining the future differs from analyzing the past, because it has not yet happened. In this article, methodologies have been used to discern useful alternatives to enhance the success of planners and leaders in their response to a range of possible future environments.

Managing the future means influencing it—creating, constraining and adapting to emerging trends and events in a way that optimizes the opportunities and minimizes the threats of relevance to the profession.

The views and conclusions expressed in the professional article are those of the author, and are not necessarily those of the CA Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST).

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Public safety personnel are regularly confronted with a myriad of natural and manmade emergency events. Public and private representatives from police, fire, ambulance, public service entities, schools, utility providers, and private sector organizations, to name only a few, can be tasked with ensuring the most fitting conclusions to the most harried situations. Some incidents resolve well, while others do not. Proper incident management can many times make the difference between success and failure. Success relies on a number of factors, one of which is the proper management and maintenance of the Emergency Operations Center (EOC).

Although larger agencies sometimes have full-time or dedicated EOCs, many smaller public safety organizations do not have that dedicated space for this purpose. For those agencies, challenges are presented with regard to the operational characteristics and performance of such centers. On the pages that follow, we will loom at the current state of EOC's in the State, issues presented to smaller organizations with part-time EOC operations, and recommendations for change to optimize how those centers can function using emerging technologies and best-practice outcomes.

Emergency Response:

There are times when multiple public and private sector agencies are involved in a single emergency event. In addition to the number of possible local jurisdictional partners, multi-jurisdictional and multi-disciplinary public and private sector organizations could be involved. With the number of response scenarios encountered over the past few decades, those in public safety have turned to a standardized operational framework to better facilitate management, communication, and service expectations.

According to the Department of Homeland Security, the "best practices" set of protocols currently utilized in the United States is the Incident Command System (ICS).[1] The all-hazards origins of ICS lie with the military; however, as practiced by public safety, ICS was originally built and developed by fire personnel. Protocols were introduced to identify the need for management hierarchies when governing temporary incidents of any size. The initial protocols emerged as a result of catastrophic California wildfires in the 1970's where millions of dollars in damage was suffered, and where many lives were needlessly lost. A subsequent system has evolved to better manage such large-scale events, the result of which has been the evolution of ICS.

In 1991, the East Bay Hills Firestorm in California spawned California Senate Bill 1841 mandating standardized protocols and practices, and in 1993 the Standardized Emergency Management System (SEMS) was born.[2] SEMS was introduced as the fundamental structure for the response phase of California's emergency services and provides response and management standards for emergency services. Standards have since been further augmented on a Federal level with the development of the National Incident Management System (NIMS).

The NIMS standard incorporates Homeland Security and, more specifically, FEMA requirements for response. The proper deployment and utilization of ICS, within the realms of SEMS and NIMS, has

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[1] Federal Emergency Management Agency. (2008). ICS Review Document. In *FEMA Resource Center* (Incident Command System Training, p. 1) [Electronic version]. Washington, DC: Department of Homeland Security. http://www.training.fema.gov/EMIWeb/IS/ICSResource/assets/reviewMaterials.pdf

[2] California Department of Corrections. (Ed.). (June, 2000). *Exhibit 6576, SEMS, ICS, and Agency Representative (6400)*. Retrieved March 16, 2012, from State of California - CA.GOV Web site: http://webmain02.fire.ca.gov/pubs/issuance/6400/e6576.pdf

proven to save lives, a large population of which have been police and fire personnel. The government and public expectations are that we follow ICS protocols

Within the structure of ICS is the provision of EOC's. EOC's are defined as the physical location at which the coordination of information and resources to support domestic incident management activities normally takes place. An EOC may be a temporary facility or may be located in a more central or permanently established facility, perhaps at a higher level of organization within a jurisdiction.[3] The concept of an EOC is to provide a common temporary, and sometimes mobile, physical location for trained representatives from all participating partners to occupy. The close proximity of the partners better accommodates command and control of an incident, provides an avenue for the management of intelligence and information flow, and allows for a single controlled mission and purpose. The EOC structure also provides for a single voice or message to be delivered to the public, to avoid confusion and distrust while better facilitating proper allocation and deployment of resources. Every community, no matter how large or small, urban or rural, will be able to improve its ability to centralize and coordinate the flow of information during an emergency (and the effectiveness of response and recovery operations) by establishing an EOC.[4]

The establishment of an EOC does not require continual staffing or a dedicated operation. The determination to provide a dedicated or non-dedicated EOC is an agency specific decision; however the costs, logistics, and benefit analysis associated with continual occupation can preclude smaller agencies from providing a dedicated operation. CBS Interactive Business Network reports that 87 percent of all

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[3] Federal Emergency Management Agency. . *ICS Resource Center* (Emergency Operations Centers (EOC's)) [Electronic version]. Washington, DC: Department of Homeland Security. http://www.training.fema.gov/EMIWeb/IS/ICSResource/Glossary.htm#E

[4] Federal Emergency Management Agency. (2005). *The EOC's Role in Community Preparedness, Response and Recovery Activities*). p. IS 1-3. Washington, DC: Department of Homeland Security.

police departments in the United States have just a few dozen officers, while in 2003, the US Bureau of Justice Statistics issued a report that there were more police agencies with 10-24 officers, 30 percent, than any other sized organizations. Many EOC's would be expected to remain dormant until an incident requires activation.

EOC's are a resource within the emergency management of an event. Emergency management is the process of coordinating available resources to deal with emergencies effectively, thereby saving lives, avoiding injury, and minimizing economic loss.[5] Proper EOC design will enable EOC occupation by representatives from each public safety and private sector partner that might be of service in the response.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), a division of the Department of Homeland Security, is the oversight agency for Federal response and recovery. FEMA has identified standards of training, notifications, response protocols, documentation requirements, and recovery processes. Without proper preparedness and mitigation efforts, Federal assistance could be delayed or denied. Non-dedicated EOC's are not a convenience but an expectation set by a series of regulated standards.

In addition to governmental regulations are the expectations of society with regard to public safety's response to emergencies. Our country thrives under the assumption and expectation that citizens will be provided a reasonable measure of security and safety. It is generally accepted that emergency services personnel stand at the ready to deal with any and all problems, regardless of magnitude. Should a large earthquake or terrorist attack occur, the expectation is even more profound. This realization has led to conclusions as to future societal expectations regarding public safety response to emergent events from non-dedicated Emergency Operations Centers (EOC's). How do we best address society?

Representatives from public safety agencies, private businesses, community representatives, emergency operations personnel, and representatives of educational organizations were gathered to

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[5] Federal Emergency Management Agency. (2005). *The EOC's Role in Community Preparedness, Response and Recovery Activities*). p. IS 1-2. Washington, DC: Department of Homeland Security.

attempt to identify trends that might influence future expectations of society. Issues of mitigation, education, preparedness, opportunities and challenges, response and recovery, and planning measures were evaluated to better prepare for operational expectations of non-dedicated EOC's, as we progress into the future. Two common themes were identified regarding expected change – Technology Resources and Community Involvement through social media and similar electronic interaction with government.

Technology Resources:

When addressing the topic of non-dedicated EOC's, the cost for ongoing maintenance of hard-room EOC's (dedicated operational locations) has multiplied with advents in technology. In addition, the space otherwise set aside for hard-rooms could be better utilized for other purposes. The world is changing and so too should our evaluation of such resource allocation.

Hard-room EOC's require standard occupancy needs (water, food, long term availability, equipment, technology upgrades, etc.). These little used rooms, usually housed in a secure police or other local government facilities, are expected to stand at the ready. This requires a particular necessity for ongoing maintenance. As the locations are little used, however, the tendency has been, in many cases, to consider them to be of lower priority or forgotten due to more pressing matters. A problem does not arise until an emergency event/disaster occurs and personnel physically move into the location expecting to oversee the issue(s). When the precipitating event occurs, it could be disastrous to find that the technology no longer works, the personnel previously identified as being the contacts no longer are, the food/water supply has spoiled, or a myriad of other problems.

We must question the concept of the single location. The hard-room has become unnecessary or, at minimum, outdated. Numerous web streaming and web conferencing technologies are currently available, such as FaceTime, Cambrosia, Skype and others, to allow real-time audio and video interconnectivity from remote sites. Involved partners could operate out of their respective sites, providing the interaction necessary to properly manage the event.

The opportunity for each partner to operate independently from their respective sites could allow a faster response to the "cyber-scene" as they log in from whatever location they deem appropriate. Information exchange would be automatically captured and documented, accountability measures would be set in place, and activities would more accurately be captured and reported. Food, water, and technology concerns could be maintained at respective worksites, therefore there would be no need for duplication of resources. The need to equip a separate site-specific work environment would not be an issue. Agreements or Memorandums of Understanding (MOU's) could be struck to provide the oversight, maintenance, and auditing procedures necessary to guarantee food/water supplies, technology upgrades, and interoperability.

Community Involvement:

Another area of primary concern was that of underutilization of interactive communications with the public. Qualitative research shows that five factors have been found to drive customers' satisfaction with public services: delivery, timeliness, information, professionalism and staff attitude.[6] Historically, public interaction within the public safety realm has been limited, and generally behind the curve of society's current practices and expectations.

Law enforcement might be slow to respond to public inquiries during events, as they would otherwise be occupied. Public trust however might depend on interactivity. Society wants information on current events as they are happening and the public expects true and accurate information at their fingertips. Public Information Officers (PIO's) will take on new life with multiple personnel serving

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[6] 2020 Public Services Trust at the RSA. (2010). *What do people want, need and expect from public services?* (RSA). London: Ipsos MORI. Retrieved March 11, 2012, from Ipsos MORI Web site: http://www.ipsos-mori.com/DownloadPublication/1345_sri_what_do_people_want_need_and_expect_from_public_services_110310.pdf

Public Information Units (PIU's). Better prepared personnel with access to updated equipment could better guarantee successful information exchange. Preplanning and relationship building with dedicated online followers could better facilitate success during events. Although the focus here is of EOC management, an acknowledged public information program would also augment day-to-day operations to include intervention and public assistance programs.

The current use of Twitter, Facebook, and other social media outlets has prompted layers of information dispersed by the uncontrolled media. Professional bloggers and media groups move information flow; however, depending on individual agendas, the message could be altered through speculation and nuance. The simple message distributed by public safety can be skewed or misinformation developed. When a message lends to public safety, we have an obligation to best manage the issue. With technological innovations occurring regularly, we as public safety professionals must devote resources to social media upgrades and outreach.

Information technologies concerns and challenges are prevalent with any information sharing. The more access provided, the more challenging cyber security can be. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has consolidated cyber security into two focus areas. The first focus area, "Protecting Critical Information Infrastructure," concentrates attention on systems and assets within the cyber ecosystem that are vital to the United States. This is accomplished by reducing exposure to risk, ensuring priority response and recovery, maintaining shared cyber situational awareness, and increasing resilience. The second focus area, "Strengthening the Cyber Ecosystem," is designed to drive fundamental change in the way people and devices work together to secure cyberspace. This evolutionary change in the computing environment will be achieved by empowering individuals and organizations to operate

securely, making and using more cyber protocols, products, services, configurations, and architectures, building collaborative communities, and establishing transparent processes.[7]

Conclusion:

The virtual world is upon us and it contains a wealth of resources and opportunities. It can provide instantaneous links to people and places, offer digital "rooms" to securely operate within, and enable greater accountability measures. Proper internal planning and oversight, enhanced social media capabilities, and the utilization of trained and innovative personnel will enable the most opportune navigation of large-scale chaotic events through non-dedicated EOC's. taking advantage of emerging technologies and real-time interaction with the community through social media are perhaps the best path for the future; our community expects nothing less.

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[7] U.S. Department of Homeland Security. (2011, November). *Blueprint for a Secure Cyber Future* (The Cybersecurity Strategy for the Homeland Security Enterprise). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Homeland Security. Retrieved February 2, 2012, from www.dhs.gov Web site: http://www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/nppd/blueprint-for-a-secure-cyber-future.pdf