

Emergency Management Australia (1992). Operations centres. *Australian emergency manual: Emergency operations centre management* (Draft document, 3.01-3.07). Canberra: Natural Disasters Organisations.

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CHAPTER 3

OPERATIONS CENTRES

INTRODUCTION

- 3.01** The importance of establishing effective operations centres at all levels cannot be overstated. History shows that where an operation has been less than effective, the cause can often be traced to the failure to establish operations centres or because the operation centres which have been established, have not effectively performed their functions.

PURPOSE

- 3.02** The purpose of an operations centre is to provide the management systems which effectively exercise control, coordination and/or command in an emergency.

GENERAL

- 3.03** It needs to be recognised that in major emergencies there will be operations centres controlling and commanding single service operations, while at the same time multi-agency operations centres will be responsible for control and coordination of response organisations.
- 3.04** The size and location of an operations centre will be dictated by the nature of the emergency and the operational responsibilities of the organisation/s involved. The emergency/disaster plan and Standing Operating Procedures (SOP) will define the framework for coordination, task management, organisational responsibilities, chain of command, resource provision etc.
- 3.05** Consistent with paragraph 3.03, operations centres may take the form of a fixed or forward/field facility. Whichever form is used, the functions required by these different centres will have a high degree of commonality. Ideally the operations centre should be a dedicated facility. In the case of low operational usage it may be necessary to accept that such a facility has a dual purpose. While providing for the essential requirements of an operations centre, it may need to be available on a day-to-day basis for non-operational purposes e.g. conferences/training/interviewing etc.

FUNCTIONS

3.06 Commonly identified operations centre functions are listed below. However, this list is neither exhaustive or exclusive.

- a. **Control** - This involves exercising direct control of operations when required.
- b. **Coordination** - This involves the requirement to ensure responding organisations, or elements of a single service organisation, are working together and aware of each others' responsibilities. It also relates to coordinated deployment of resources.
- c. **Decision Making** - This involves decisions which direct the overall response to the emergency. In the case of an operations centre responsible for multi-agency coordination, decisions will tend to relate to policy, whereas in the case of a single service organisation, decisions will tend to be in the form of commands or orders.
- d. **Operational Management** - This relates to actions undertaken to meet emergency generated demands. It encompasses assessment of information, and operational planning/decision making relative to deployment of resources and personnel to counter effects of the emergency.
- e. **Information Management** - This relates to the necessity for the operations centre to maintain records, and collect, interpret and disseminate relevant information.
- f. **Public Information and Official Visitors** This includes the dissemination of information to the general public, the public at risk and the media. There may also be a need to host, escort and brief visitors.

ELEMENTS

3.07 The operations centre is the key to effective emergency response management, with the following elements generally common to all operations centres:

- a. **Control Elements** - Management of the operation is the responsibility of the Emergency Manager. This person is responsible for decisions made in respect of conduct of the operation. The emergency manager is supported in this role by the operations element.

- b. **Operations Element** - This element supports the decision making responsibilities of the emergency manager and provides the control element with the capability to:
- (1) process information,
 - (2) coordinate acquisition and deployment of resources,
 - (3) develop operational plans,
 - (4) conduct operations, and
 - (5) liaise with representatives of response organisations.
- c. **Communications Element** - This element provides the communications necessary to support the control, operational and administrative elements. It is a central part of the planning process and must anticipate the increased need for information transmission, in terms of both technological and personnel needs. It must provide for sufficient capacity to achieve reliable and effective communications.
- d. **Administrative Support Element** - Like any office, the operations centre creates administrative demands through its own activities. These demands are met by the administrative support element.