



MANUAL 31

**Operations Centre
Management**

AUSTRALIAN EMERGENCY
MANUAL SERIES

Part IV

Skills for Emergency Services Personnel

MANUAL 2

OPERATIONS CENTRE MANAGEMENT

Second Edition

EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AUSTRALIA



www.ema.gov.au

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First published 2001

ISBN: 0 642 48790 1

Edited and published by Emergency Management Australia

Typeset and Printed in Australia by Robey Pty Ltd

Amendment List

[illegible]

The Australian Emergency Manuals Series

The first publication in the original AEM Series of mainly skills reference manuals was produced in 1989. In August 1996, on advice from the National Emergency Management Principles and Practice Advisory Group, EMA agreed to expand the AEM Series to include a more comprehensive range of emergency management principles and practice reference publications. The Series is now structured in five parts as set out below.

Parts I to III are issued as bound booklets to State and Territory emergency management organisations and appropriate government departments for further dissemination to approved users including local government. Parts IV and V (skills and training management topics) are issued in loose-leaf (amendable) form to all relevant State agencies through each State and Territory Emergency Service who maintain State distribution/amendment registers. All private and commercial enquiries are referred to EMA as noted at the end of the Foreword on page v.

AUSTRALIAN EMERGENCY MANUALS SERIES STRUCTURE AND CONTENT

PUBLISHING STATUS

—MARCH 02

Part I—The Fundamentals

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Manual 3	Australian Emergency Management Glossary	A
Manual 4	Australian Emergency Management Terms Thesaurus	A

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VOLUME 3—IMPLEMENTATION OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT PLANS

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Manual 11	Vertical Rescue (2nd edn)	A
Manual	Structural Collapse Search and Rescue	D

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Manual 1	Small Group Training Management (2nd edn)	A
Manual 2	Managing Exercises	A

KEY TO STATUS: **A** = Available; **A/R** = original version Available/under Review;
D = under Development; **P** = Planned; **R** = Review/Revision

Foreword

The purpose of this Manual is to provide an information base for operations centre management. It is intended for use in planning, training and operations by all responsible rescue personnel and organisations.

Although its emphasis is on broad principles, the Manual acknowledges that individual States and Territories or organisations may need to provide detailed techniques which address local requirements.

This Manual has been developed by a National Working Party representative of police, fire State and Territory emergency services and ambulance services. The working party was initiated and sponsored by Emergency Management Australia.

The Manual is issued in loose-leaf form to facilitate amendment and insertion of individual organisational supplements.

As situations change and techniques are improved and developed, the Manual will be amended and updated.

The Australian Emergency Manual—Operations Centre Management contains those techniques and skills which are relatively basic in nature and which are common to a large number of emergency services. It therefore serves as a common reference base for the basic training of personnel for operations centre management.

Proposed changes should be forwarded to the Director-General, Emergency Management Australia at the address shown below through the relevant State/Territory emergency management organisation.

The use of trade names in this Manual is not intended to be restrictive, preferential or promotional. Trade names are used where descriptive clarity is required.

This publication is provided free of charge to approved Australian organisations which may obtain copies through their State or Territory Emergency Service headquarters which maintains a distribution/amendment register.

Manuals may be supplied to other Australian or overseas requesters upon payment of cost recovery charges. Consideration is given to requests from developing countries for copies without charges.

Overseas enquiries (for free copies) and all others regarding purpose of this Manual should be sent to the:

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Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

GENERAL

- 1.01** All Australian States and Territories are threatened by a range of hazards, both natural and technological. The impact of these hazards, whether large or small, requires a coordinated counter-disaster response to effectively provide protection of life, property and the environment, and to return the affected community to a state of normality.
- 1.02** The focal point for operations is an operations centre, which is defined here as: a facility, either static or mobile, from which the total operation or aspects of the operation are managed. An operations centre may be given a functional title such as: disaster coordination centre; emergency management centre; welfare operations centre; local disease control centre, etc to more specifically identify its use.
- 1.03** Throughout this Manual the term 'Incident Manager' is used to denote the person responsible for managing the event for which the operations centre is established. Users of the Manual should note that states and territories employ varying specific titles such as controller/coordinator/commander to identify this person.

MANUAL OVERVIEW

1.04 AIM

The aim of this Manual is to provide a guide for the establishment and management of an operations centre.

1.05 OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the Manual are to:

- (a) describe the functions common to all operations centre;
- (b) describe the common requirements of location, facilities and general procedures;
- (c) describe the activities to be performed; and
- (d) suggest the contents of operating procedures.

1.06 SCOPE

The scope of this Manual is confined to addressing functions performed within operations centres. This Manual does not address the issues of response management.

COMPARING OPERATIONS CENTRES

1.07 SIMILARITIES

Operations centres may be established in response to incidents, major incidents, emergencies or disasters. The term used to describe or classify the event is not as important as the recognition of the similarities between operations centres:

- (a) They perform similar basic functions.
- (b) They have common general requirements in terms of location, facilities and procedures.

1.08 VARIATIONS

Although there are similarities between all operations centres, it must be recognised that details of layout, displays, staffing levels, procedures and administrative arrangements may vary considerably to meet the specific needs of the agency involved.

1.09 SINGLE AGENCY OPERATIONS CENTRE

In a single agency operations centre the incident manager commands the personnel and other resources in the centre and committed to the operation. An incident manager:

- (a) sets tasks by directing what is to be done;
- (b) sets times and priorities by directing when the task is to be done; and
- (c) may direct how the task is to be done.

1.10 MULTI-AGENCY OPERATIONS CENTRES

Multi-agency operations centres are established to:

- (a) monitor an operation conducted by another agency or agencies;
- (b) coordinate resources in support of another agency; and/or
- (c) control an operation or part thereof.

Chapter Two

OVERVIEW

GENERAL

2.01 PURPOSE

The purpose of an operations centre is to assist an incident manager to effectively carry out his/her roles.

2.02 FUNCTIONS

Commonly identified operations centre functions are listed below. However, this list is neither exhaustive nor exclusive:

- (a) **Command**—The direction of members and resources of an agency in the performance of that agency's role and tasks.
 - Command relates to agencies and operates vertically within an agency.
 - Authority to command is established in legislation or by agreement within an agency.
- (b) **Control**—The overall direction of emergency management activities in a emergency or disaster situation.
 - Control relates to situations and operates horizontally across agencies.
 - Authority for control is established in legislation or in an emergency plan, and carries with it the responsibility for tasking other agencies in accordance with the needs of the situation.
- (c) **Coordination**—The bringing together of agencies and resources to ensure an effective emergency response.
 - It is primarily concerned with the systematic acquisition and application of resources (organisational, personnel and equipment) in accordance with the requirements imposed by the hazard or impact of an emergency. It operates vertically within agencies as a function of the authority to command, and horizontally across agencies as a function of the authority to control.
- (d) **Information Management**—This relates to the necessity for the operations centre to maintain records and collect, interpret and disseminate relevant information.
- (e) **Decision Making**—This involves decisions which give direction to the overall response to the situation. 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.

- (f) **Operation Management**—This relates to actions undertaken to meet emergency/disaster generated demands. It encompasses gathering and assessment of information, and operational decision making relative to deployment of resources and personnel to meet those demands.
- (g) **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 official visitors.

ELEMENTS/ACTIVITIES

2.03 The operations centre is the key to effective emergency response management, with the following elements which are generally common to all operations centres.

2.04 MANAGEMENT

Management of the operation is the responsibility of the incident manager. This person is responsible for decisions made in respect to conduct of operations. The incident manager is supported in this role by the operations element.

2.05 OPERATIONS

This element supports the decision-making responsibilities of the incident manager and carries out:

- (a) processing of information;
- (b) coordination of the acquisition and deployment of resources;
- (c) development of operational plans;
- (d) conduct of operations; and
- (e) liaison with representatives of response organisations.

2.06 COMMUNICATIONS

This element provides the communication necessary to support the control, operations and administrative elements. It is a central part of the planning process and must anticipate the increased need for information transmission, in both technological and personnel terms. It must provide for sufficient capacity to achieve reliable and effective communications.

2.07 ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT

Like any office, the operations centre creates administrative demands through its own activities. These demands are met by an administrative support element.

Chapter Three

INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

GENERAL

- 3.01** The role of an operations centre is to support an incident manager in establishing control over a situation and conducting an operation. In fulfilling this role, the following aspects of information management are common to all operations centres:
- (a) **Information Gathering**—Initially, this is necessary to define the extent of the situation so as to enable early consideration of the need to activated plans or resources, and to determine appropriate levels of staffing within the operations centre. Information gathering continues throughout the entire operation.
 - (b) **Information Collation**—The is the process of assembling gathered information into usable formats which will allow it to be assessed and interpreted.
 - (c) **Information Interpretation**—This is the evaluation of information to decide its relevance, accuracy, significance and implications, so as to allow the decision making process to proceed.
 - (d) **Reaction to Information**—This is the planning and execution of appropriate responses.
 - (e) **Dissemination of Information**—This is the promulgation of decisions on appropriate responses to involved agencies, and advice to the community on the situation, how they can protect themselves, and any other appropriate instructions.

INFORMATION GATHERING

- 3.02** The most fundamental method of gathering information is physical reconnaissance of the affected area. Reconnaissance must be part of every response operation, and must be conducted at the outset. It becomes even more important if communications are disrupted. Operations centres should have access to trained reconnaissance personnel, with transport and communications. Information may also be gathered from the following:
- (a) **Other Agencies**—These could include other emergency organisations, support agencies and resource suppliers. Contact details should be permanently displayed in the operations centre and such information should be gathered prior to and updated during operations.
 - (b) **Requests for Assistance**—This could include calls from the affected community or other emergency organisations.
 - (c) **Incident Details**—Situation Reports (Sitrep) from any source.
 - (d) **Offers of Assistance**—These may come from any source offering to provide assistance to affected communities.

- (e) **Meteorological Date**
- (f) **Aerial Photographs**
- (g) **Media**

INFORMATION COLLATION

3.03 Information must be collated in simple and accessible methods. Some suggestions are as follows:

- (a) **Incident Files**—These can be created to hold important operational information which is collated in chronological order.
- (b) **Displays**—Items such as whiteboards and mapboards or computer systems can be used to display important operational information to all staff so they are aware of the situation. Displays can become a 'living' log of information. Therefore, currency of displays should be indicated with a date and time. Maps, charts, information boards and similar items can be used as follows:
 - 1. *Maps, Charts, Graphic Plans*—These can be used to record pictorially significant operational information including details of the area or specific locations under threat, and the extent of damage caused. This is an excellent means of establishing an initial assessment of the size and scope of the operation. Other information such as the location of units deployed and resources can also be included. The types and scales of maps, charts and plans used will depend on the situation. For longevity, maps, charts and plans used in the operations centre can be covered with plastic film (laminated or talc overlay). Photographing boards and maps periodically would preserve records for subsequent action arising from debriefings etc.
 - 2. *Information Boards*—These can be used to display both incoming and outgoing information such as the deployment of resources and requests for assistance, as part of maintaining the 'living' log. These boards may vary in size and detail but must be relevant to the task/operation. Displays in this category may include the following:
 - (i) Resources Committed/Requested.
 - (ii) Units Deployed.
 - (iii) Number of Casualties.
 - (iv) Communications Net.
 - (v) Organisational Diagram.
 - (vi) Staff Rosters.
 - (vii) Sitreps.
 - (viii) Often Used Telephone Numbers.

- (ix) Status of Major Routes.
- (x) Status of Welfare Centres.

Photographing boards and maps periodically would preserve records for subsequent action arising from debriefing etc.

- (c) **Forms and Logs**—These can be used to record telephone calls or verbal instruction and directions.

INFORMATION INTERPRETATION

3.04 Once collated, information needs to be assessed and interpreted to convert it to intelligence by asking, among other things, the following:

- (a) Is it relevant to other information, and does this relevance produce further information or change existing information?
- (b) Is its source reliable? Information must not be accepted at face value without assessing reliability of the source and cross-checking with other information. Do not discard what appears to be unlikely without sound reasons.
- (c) Is confirmation required?
- (d) Does the information have urgent implications?
- (e) Is it significant? If the significance of an item of information is not recognised, the resulting response may be deficient. Significance is determined by what may need to be done in response to the information.

REACTION TO INFORMATION

3.05 When information has been gathered, collated and interpreted, it is then possible to consider and plan appropriate responses. Actions to be considered include:

- (a) **Resource Matching**—Allocation of personnel and resources to identified tasks.
- (b) **Preliminary Deployment**—Respond using available resources.
- (c) **Activation of Support Services**—eg Disaster Welfare Service, Department of Health.
- (d) **Request for Outside Assistance**—This aspect needs to be considered where the tasking cannot be matched to immediately available resources, but which may be available from other organisation through existing planning arrangements.
- (e) **Logistic Support**—The following should be considered:
 - 1. Length of self-sufficiency of supporting units.
 - 2. The need for likely responding units to bring a small stock of high usage items where a need has been identified by a hazard analysis.

3. The replenishment of consumables.
 4. Provision of operational equipment.
 5. Repair of operational equipment.
 6. Welfare support to units such as medicine, catering and replacement crews.
 7. Financial assistance or procedures to ensure the quick supply of immediate operational needs.
 8. Provision of support to other agencies.
 9. Provision of immediate relief to persons affected where the appropriate welfare agency is not immediately available to do so.
- (f) **Prognosis**—Forecasting the potential for additional assistance or resources required for the following hours or days as appropriate.
- (g) **Recording**—Accurate recording of all actions and orders is essential to:
1. ensure accountability for the exercise of authority and the use of resources;
 2. facilitate investigations including, coronial, criminal, etc; and
 3. maximise learning through debriefing and subsequent training.

DISSEMINATION OF INFORMATION

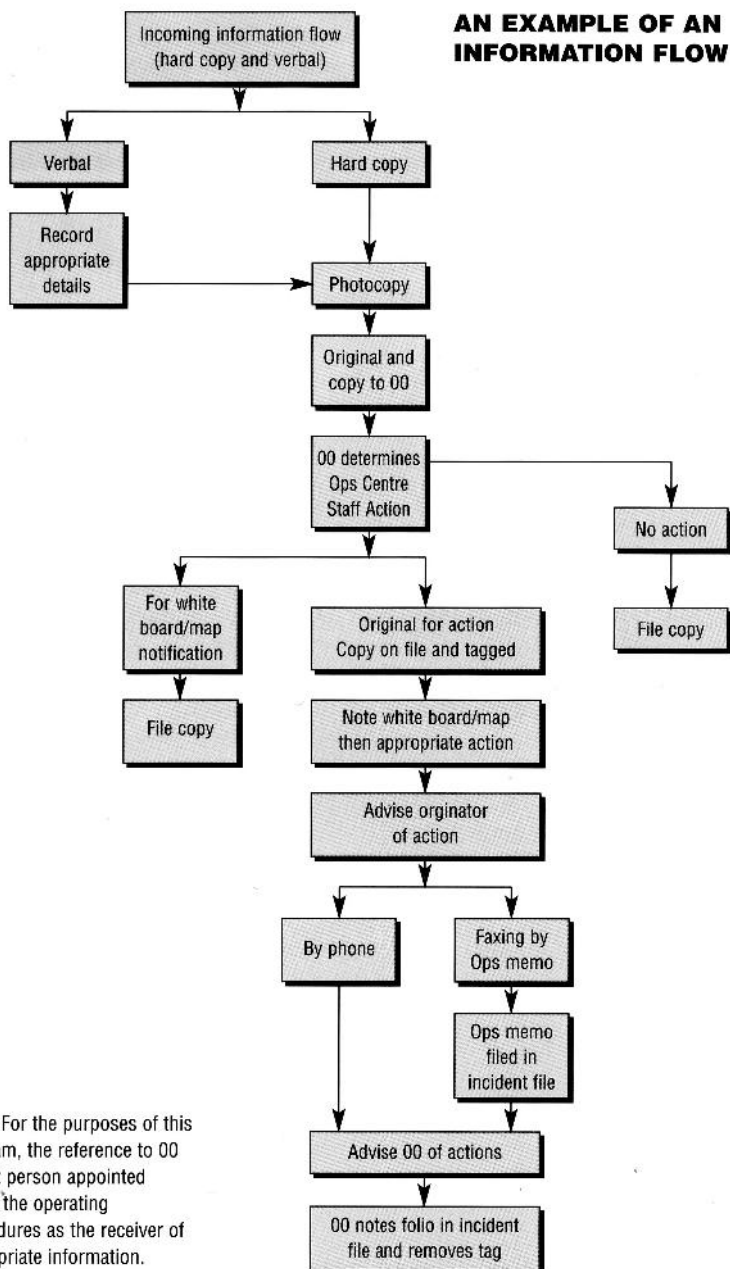
- 3.06** The final process in the operational system is to ensure effective promulgation of the results of actions. Information flow must be upwards to higher headquarters, downwards to field units and outwards to other involved agencies and the community. This is achieved by the following:
- (a) **Orders**—These may be issued verbally or in written form.
- (b) **Situation Reports (Sitreps)**—These keep participating and interested organisations informed. They may be formal written communications or telephone messages. Controversial issues should be advised to the next higher level as soon as possible, rather than waiting for inclusion in the next routine situation report.
- (c) **Public Warnings**—Where appropriate, proved information regarding potential dangers. A number of methods of dissemination may need to be used concurrently to make sure that everyone who needs to be warned is warned. One method is to use the media.
- (d) **Media Releases**—These are designed to ensure that the public is properly informed of the current situation and the organisations involvement. A media release should include a short statement on:
1. what has happened;
 2. what is currently being done about it;
 3. what is intended to be done; and

4. messages of public safety (public warnings) which are of particular consideration for media releases.
- (e) **Briefings**—Briefings give an overview of the situation and may contain operational, administrative, communications and media information.
- (f) **Debriefings**—Are to be conducted at a level appropriate to the incident and accorded suitable level of importance. Debriefings should be treated separately to Dissemination of Information. Elements to be considered are:
 1. lessons learnt;
 2. updating of plans and procedures; and
 3. recognition of critical incident stress factors.

INFORMATION SYSTEM

- 3.07** A system must be established for information flow within an operations centre. Some basic suggestion on information flow are below. Additionally, appropriate staff should be assigned their duties prior to commencement of operations, eg in operating procedures.
- (a) **Incoming Information**—Information will be received by various means and from a variety of sources. It may be recorded on computer systems, standardised forms, or plain paper. Each item of information should be recorded before being directed to the appropriate person for attention.
 - (b) **Out-going Information**—Ideally, out-going information should be written and a copy filed.

An example of an incoming information flow diagram is over the page at **Annex A**.

Annex A (Chapter Three)**AN EXAMPLE OF AN
INFORMATION FLOW**

Note: For the purposes of this diagram, the reference to OO is that person appointed under the operating procedures as the receiver of appropriate information.

Chapter Four

REQUIREMENTS

GENERAL

- 4.01** Operations centres have common requirements which may include:
- (a) an incident manager and operations staff;
 - (b) an integrated communications facility;
 - (c) sufficient workstations to meet determined staffing levels;
 - (d) as many display boards as can be utilised effectively;
 - (e) an appropriate scaled map board covering the area of responsibility;
 - (f) an area for briefings, public information and official visitors; and
 - (g) an administrative area if the number of staff or the likely duration of operations make it necessary.

OPERATIONS CENTRE CONSIDERATIONS

- 4.02** Personnel responsible for the establishment and maintenance of operations centres need to consider key issues such as communications, staffing, liaison officers and administration.

4.03 COMMUNICATIONS

This will be largely-dictated by the level of operation and the system of control being used. The following points may need to be considered:

- (a) Communications links to other operations centres.
- (b) Communications links to the media.
- (c) Communications links to the impact site.

4.04 BRIEFING FACILITY

As the operations centre will be the focus of outside interest, it will need a facility in which to brief visitors and the media, conduct interviews, and possibly answer other general enquiries from members of the public.

ACCOMMODATION

- 4.05** The location, facilities, layout and size of an operations centre will vary with the level at which it will function, the roles of the centre, the nature of its activities, and the size of the staff needed for its effective operation.

4.06 SITING

The correct siting of the operations centre is essential to maximise its effectiveness. The site selection process should identify at least one alternative site. All operations centres should be clearly identified by location in relevant counter-disaster/emergency management plans. Essential elements in site selection include:

- (a) access to telephone/facsimile/telex/data transfer systems;
- (b) radio transmission and reception;
- (c) physical security considerations;
- (d) security from hazards;
- (e) vehicle parking and storage facilities;
- (f) access/egress by road/rail/air etc; and
- (g) proximity to other services/agencies.

4.07 FACILITIES

Basic facilities/equipment required for effective functioning of an operations centre will include:

- (a) maps, charts and information boards;
- (b) furniture and office equipment;
- (c) stationery;
- (d) communications equipment;
- (e) catering facilities;
- (f) emergency power supply;
- (g) an administrative facility;
- (h) store rooms;
- (i) ablutions; and
- (j) separate media/briefing area.

4.08 SIZE AND LAYOUT

Size and layout must allow effective performance of operations centre functions. Factors to be considered that may affect size/layout include:

- (a) their role and functions of the centre;
- (b) the number of staff required;
- (c) equipment;
- (d) space required to display information (which should be consistent with the role);
- (e) facilities available;
- (f) flow of information; and
- (g) future possible expansion of the event and operational demands.

STAFFING

4.09 Incident Managers should consider the range of activities to be undertaken by their operations centre and staff it accordingly. Depending on the level of activity, the duties may be combined. Some of the duties to be considered include the following:

- (a) **Management**—Overall management of the operations centre.
- (b) **SITREP**—Provision of accurate situation reports.
- (c) **Decisions**—Implementation of the incident manager decisions.
- (d) **Plotting**—Maintenance of maps, charts and other displays.
- (e) **Intelligence**—Interpretation of information, provision of appropriate intelligence comment, preparation of overlays, traces and enlargements.
- (f) **Planning**—Preparation of operational plans, orders and/or directions.
- (g) **Public Information and Media**—Preparation and release, after appropriate authorisation, of information to the public through the media.
- (h) **Identification of Available Resources.**
- (i) **Radio Operations.**
- (j) **Telephone/Facsimile Operations.**
- (k) **Keyboard Operations** (computer/typewriter).
- (l) **General Clerical Support.**
- (m) **Administrative Support.**

LIAISON OFFICERS

4.10 The Liaison Officers represent agencies providing support. They may include some or all of the emergency services plus the support services or agencies. Directions to Liaison Officers may be framed as specific tasks allocated to individual agencies. Alternatively they may be framed as general tasks (with times for completion) which are passed to Liaison Officers as a group. In the latter case, Liaison Officers may be required to operate as a planning group to work out how each agency can contribute to the overall achievement of the general task. They would then pass specific details of tasks and coordinating arrangements back to their parent agencies.

4.11 RESPONSIBILITIES

Liaison Officers in an operations centre need to:

- (a) advise the incident manager and operations staff of the capabilities of their parent agency;
- (b) facilitate the provision of their agency's resources to meet the incident manager directives;

- (c) continue to advise their parent agency of developing plans and the likely effect on resource commitment; and
- (d) communicate with their parent agency to receive up to date information on the availability of resources for tasking, to pass on tasking directions, and to receive advice on completion of tasks.

Note: None of the above excludes the agency head from providing this liaison function. In some cases it may be appropriate for the agency head to operate from the operations centre.

OPERATIONS CENTRE ADMINISTRATION

4.12 Regardless of its size, every operations centre will generate its own internal administrative needs. No operation can proceed efficiently without sound administrative planning and support. The following are some considerations:

- (a) **Personnel**—They are perhaps the most important element of an operations centre; it is essential that they be administered efficiently. consideration will need to be given to:
 - 1. staff nominal roles and rosters;
 - 2. staff identification cards;
 - 3. accommodation, including sleeping, recreation, dining and ablutions, etc; and
 - 4. pay and allowances if applicable.
- (b) **Equipment**—This involves the provision and control of all types of stores required by the operations centre. Stores control systems should be as simple as possible.
- (c) **Maintenance**—Buildings, facilities, vehicles and equipment will all need to be maintained. Due to the nature of operation centre functions, maintenance must be timely and effective.
- (d) **Transport**—This will need to be provided for movement of operations centre staff, stores and equipment, and possibly the whole facility.
- (d) **Finance**—Details of all expenditure must be maintained; these records can be fairly simple but must meet local financial control requirements.
- (f) **Legal**—legal advice may be required by the incident manager and other centre personnel. The source of its advice, if not in the centre, will need to be readily available.
- (g) **Compensation/Insurance**—There is a need to ensure that adequate compensation and insurance cover is held and that advice on these matters can be obtained quickly.
- (h) **Administrative Information**—Instructions, orders and rosters, etc, will need to be produced, disseminated and prominently displayed within the centre.

Chapter Five

OPERATING PROCEDURES

GENERAL

5.01 PURPOSE

Operating procedures should be developed for each operations centre to detail the methods by which it conducts its identified functions. Procedures provide a useful mechanism for ensuring that all procedures are:

- (a) standardised;
- (b) available to or known by all staff in the centre;
- (c) capable of being supported by similar operating procedures in subordinate centres;
- (d) easily used as a means of training new staff; and
- (e) form the basis of exercises to confirm and test the functioning of the operations centre.

5.02 PREPARATION

Operating procedures prescribe what, when, how, by whom certain functions and tasks are completed, and a simple guide for their preparation is as follows:

- (a) Identify specific task (what).
- (b) Prescribe when this task should be done.
- (c) Describe how the task is to be done.
- (d) Identify the appointments responsible for each part of the task.
- (e) Operations procedures need to be:
 - 1. clear;
 - 2. precise;
 - 3. concise;
 - 4. written in simple language;
 - 5. widely-available; and
 - 6. reviewed regularly.

5.03 DUTY STATEMENT

Duty statements for various appointments within the operations centre should be included in operations procedures.

Annex A. Suggested Headings for Operating Procedures.

Annex A (Chapter Five)

SUGGESTED HEADINGS FOR OPERATING PROCEDURES

The following is a list of suggested elements to be addressed when formulating operating procedures. It is a guide only and is neither exhaustive or exclusive. It covers the broad phases of activity of an operations centre, namely establishment, operations and stand-down.

Establishment Phase

Activation authority.

Staff call-out.

Activation of communications.

Activation of recording and display systems.

Operation centre staffing.

Operating Phase

Roles and responsibility of personnel.

Lines of communications.

Information recording and flow.

Information processing including:

- collation;
- assessment;
- dissemination; and
- data display.

Resource deployment.

Sitrep preparation, handling, frequency.

Media bulletin preparation and release.

Briefing—attendees—frequency.

Administrative functions

Personnel, equipment, transport, etc

Maintenance of operations centres.

Operations centre staff, welfare, feeding, relief.

Financial management.

Liaison arrangements.

Contact list.

Media liaison.

Liaison facilities

Standown Phase

Filing of records.

Clearing and photographing of data displays.

Staff standown (graduated).

Communications system closure.

Operations Centre closure, cleaning and restoration.

Initial and follow up debrief.

Standardised Formats

Situation Report.

Request for Assistance.

Media Releases.

Public Warnings.

Record of Conversation.

Incident File/Operations Log/Running Sheet.

Standard Displays

Frequently Used Contact Numbers.

Resources Available for Tasking.

Maps.

Clip Boards.

Operational Information (such as flood classifications, location of fire ground, contaminated areas, location of cordons).

Statistics (such as number of casualties, jobs completed, jobs outstanding).

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