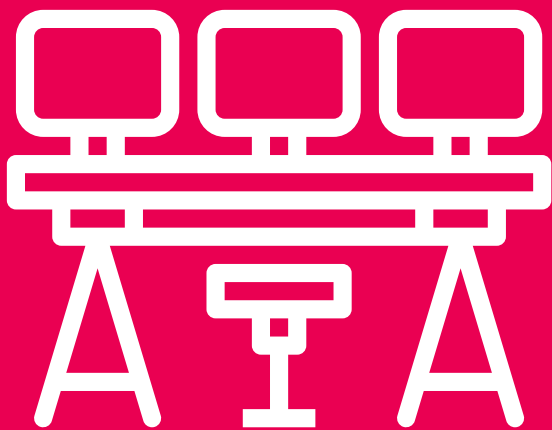# What is an EOC?
(Emergency Operations Centre)

What is an EOC?

When an emergency takes place, responders mobilise. Some responders perform immediate, on-scene stabilisation activities, such as firefighting, assessing damage, and conserving property. Others support that initial group. They report to what's called an emergency operations centre (EOC).

The EOC can be a physical, mobile, or virtual location (or some combination of the three), to which civic and emergency leaders as well as certain responders report and coordinate information and resources in support of on-scene incident management activities.

Physical EOCs have long dominated the space – though virtual EOCs are rising in popularity. Physical EOCs can be temporary or permanent facilities, extensive structures with stadium-like seating and high-tech equipment or humbler in design and execution.

With on-scene work going on, one might ask, why set up an EOC in the first place. The answer is it depends. Government entities, non-profit disaster relief organisations, and private businesses all build EOCs for their own needs. The EOC is usually considered a tactical hub, or eyes, ears, and brains, of the incident response, a means to give on-the-ground personnel the support they need to make the mission a success.

In larger, more established EOCs, the work performed tends to include the collection, analysis, and sharing of emergency information, often large amounts of information from diverse sources. Emergency information comes in to the EOC; it gets distilled by multiple analysts (representing diverse stakeholders) into succinct reports sent out to decision makers, who communicate it out to response personnel in the field. The EOC coordinates plans, determining current and future requirements. The EOC might also be multi-agency, with personnel providing a range of planning services to address current needs, forecast future needs, as well as develop ways to meet them.

Some entities eschew this broader tactical scope, preferring to use their EOCs primarily for resource management purposes, i.e., to locate and deploy resources across the incident zone. The work might include supporting resource needs and requests through allocation and tracking. Of course, most EOCs can analyse data, identify where the shortages are, find and dispatch needed resources, as well as monitor returns. What matters for EOC success, though, is that implementation and deployment match the needs and requirements established by the entity in the first place.

EOC roles and responsibilities

Key to that success will be the personnel staffing the EOC. How, then, to determine EOC roles and responsibilities? How an EOC is staffed depends on what it does; most EOCs provide coordination and policy direction. They also help integrate diverse stakeholders, including senior officials in all levels of government (up to the highest), business, and the non-for-profit world. EOC personnel also have to work with legal counsel, as much of the work they do require legal authorisation. EOCs also disseminate information to the public.

EOC staffing, like the EOC more generally, should support sustained operations. When it comes to staffing specifically, that means outfitting the deepest roster practicable at every available position – not just local personnel either indeed EOCs often also regroup liaisons and representatives that are only present in the facility during incident activations. The precise configuration of the EOC team depends on numerous factors. Those include:

Jurisdictional/organisational authorities

Availability

Representation

EOC facilities and other resource capabilities

Political drivers

Incident complexity

Those factors leave a lot of room to manoeuvre for individual entities. On the other hand, incident management structures, like the Incident Command System (ICS), do provide methods for organising EOC management and operations. As many response agencies adhere to ICS or its country-specific derivatives, such as the Australasian Inter-Service Incident Management System (AIIMS), the agencies tend to follow one of the following EOC organising methods:

1 **Incident Command System (ICS) or ICS-like Structure**.
The primary benefits of this structure include familiarity to those with ICS training; this modular configuration most closely aligns with the structure used for on-scene incident management, where leaders are responsible for the functions of unstaffed subordinate positions.

2 **Incident Support Model**.
A variation of the ICS structure primary, the incident support model provides the primary benefits of streamlining resource sourcing, ordering, and tracking. In it, the EOC director is put in direct contact with those conducting situational awareness and information management.

3 **Departmental Structure.**
The primary benefits of this structure consist in minimal preparation and start-up time; department/agency representatives are already operating in the context of their normal relationships.

For those unfamiliar with ICS, key roles and responsibilities follow below:

Role	Responsibilities
Incident Commander	• In control of the overall management of the incident • Assessing the situation and obtaining a briefing from the previous Incident Commander, if applicable. • Determining the incident objectives and strategy. • Establishing the immediate priorities. • Establishing an Incident Command Centre. • Establishing an appropriate organisation. • Scheduling planning meetings, as required. • Authorizing and approving the implementation of an Incident Action Plan. • Ensuring that adequate safety measures are in place. • Coordinating activity for all command and general staff. • Coordinating with key people and officials. • Approving requests for additional resources or for the release of resources. • Keeping the Policy Group informed of the incident status. • Approving the use of auxiliary personnel, as required. • Authorising the release of information to the news media. • Ordering the demobilisation of the incident when appropriate. • Approving all information prior to release.

Role	Responsibilities
Public Information Officer	• Verifies, coordinates, and disseminates accurate, accessible, and timely information on the incident's cause, size, and current situation, for both internal and external use. • Gathering information about the incident from Incident Command Centre and the response teams. • Gathering information related to the type of incident from professional sources, such as response agencies, technical specialists, and emergency response guidebooks. • Verifying the accuracy of the information gathered by consulting with the Incident Commander, Incident Command System (ICS) team, response agencies, and technical specialists. • Coordinating dissemination of information internally to response teams and related resources. • Coordinating dissemination of information externally to key stakeholders, media, and the public.
Safety Officer	• Identify and mitigate hazardous situations. • Ensure safety messages and briefings are made. • Exercise emergency authority to stop and prevent unsafe acts. • Review the Incident Action Plan (IAP) for safety implications. • Assign assistants qualified to evaluate special hazards. • Initiate preliminary investigation of accidents within the incident area. • Review and approve the Medical Plan. • Participate in planning meetings.

Role	Responsibilities
Liaison Officer	• Act as a point of contact for agency representatives. • Maintain a list of assisting and cooperating agencies and agency representatives. • Assist in setting up and coordinating interagency contacts. • Monitor incident operations to identify current or potential interorganizational problems. • Participate in planning meetings, providing current resource status, including limitations and capabilities of agency resources. • Provide agency-specific demobilisation information and requirements.
Operations Controller	• Managing tactical operations, including: – Interacting with the relevant people in the next lower level of the organization, to develop the operations portion of the Incident Action Plan. – Requesting the resources required to implement the tactics as a part of the Incident Action Plan development. • Assisting in developing the operations part of the Incident Action Plan. • Supervising the execution of the Incident Action Plan for operations, including: – Maintaining close contact with people in subordinate positions. – Ensuring safe tactical operations. • Requesting additional resources to support tactical operations, if required. • Approving the release of resources from their assigned status. • Making or approving changes to the Incident Action Plan during the operational period, as required. • Maintaining close communications with the Incident Commander. • Maintaining the Activity Log.

Role	Responsibilities
Planning Controller	• Collects, evaluates, processes, and disseminates information for use at the incident.
	• Collecting and processing situation information about the incident.
	• Supervising preparation of the Incident Action Plan.
	• Providing input to the Incident Commander in preparing the Incident Action Plan.
	• Reassigning out-of-service personnel already on-site to ICS organisational positions, as appropriate.
	• Establishing information requirements and reporting schedules for the Planning Section units.
	• Determining if specialised resources are required to support the incident.
	• Assembling and disassembling strike teams and task forces not assigned to operations, if requested to do so.
	• Establishing special information collection activities, as required.
	• Assembling information on alternative strategies.
	• Providing periodic predictions on the incident potential.
	• Reporting any significant changes in the incident status.
	• Compiling and displaying incident status information.
	• Overseeing preparation of the Incident Demobilisation Plan.
	• Incorporating the Incident Traffic Plan from Ground Support, and other supporting plans into the Incident Action Plan.
	• Maintaining the Activity Log.

Role	Responsibilities
Logistics Controller	• Supporting incident management operations by:
	– Securing and providing personnel, equipment, facilities, resources, and services required for incident resolution.
	– Coordinating personnel.
	– Assembling and deploying volunteer teams.
	– Facilitating communication among incident responders.
	• Establishing and overseeing the communications centre and activities during the incident.
	• Establishing and maintaining critical incident kits.
	• Coordinating access to and distribution of supplies during the incident.
	• Monitoring the inventory of supplies and equipment.
Finance/ Administration Controller	• Managing all financial aspects of the incident.
	• Providing financial and cost analysis information as requested.
	• Gathering pertinent information from briefings with responsible agencies.
	• Developing an operating plan for the Finance/Administration Section.
	• Fulfilling supply and support needs.
	• Determining the need to set up and operate an incident commissary.
	• Meeting with Assisting and Cooperating Agency Representatives, as required.
	• Maintaining daily contact with the organisation headquarters on finance and administration matters.
	• Ensuring that all personnel accurately complete and transmit their time records to head office or home agencies, according to policy.
	• Providing financial input to demobilisation planning.

Source: U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Federal Emergency Management Agency

What is included in an Emergency Operations Plan (EOP)?

Incident planning, consisting of the collection, evaluation, and dissemination of operational information related to an incident, is one of the most important functions of emergency management; the EOC team, however configured, plays an important role.

Under the ICS model, for instance, it is the responsibility of Planning to maintain information, on both the current and forecasted situation as well the status of resources assigned to the incident. The EOC, in turn, helps to ensure that its capabilities and requirements match those spelled out in the entity's Emergency Operations Plan (EOP).

The focus of an entity's operational planning, the EOP is a plan for responding to hazards; it defines the scope of necessary emergency preparedness and (broader) emergency management activities for both business-as-usual and complex operations. What goes in the document? It includes:

An assignment of responsibilities for the carrying out of specific actions that exceed routine responsibility at projected times and places during an emergency

A delineation of lines of authority and organisational relationships. Shows how all actions will be coordinated

A description of how people and property will be protected

An identification of the personnel, equipment, facilities, supplies, and other resources available to the entity, either within its purview or by agreement with other entities

(If applicable) A reconciliation of requirements with other entities

Emergency operations plan template

The EOP must be sufficiently flexible to suit all emergencies. And so, in format, the EOP will describe the plan's purpose, situation, assumptions, how it was developed and will be maintained, the concept of operations, administration and logistics, as well as authorities and references. For EOPs that service multiple agencies, the plan will predesignate who will be the lead agency and/or functional area representatives to the incident command, unified command, or multiagency coordination entity; this arrangement serves to facilitate responsive and collaborative incident management.

The precise form the EOP takes depends again on the needs and specificities of the entity, a product of governmental structure (for public entities) and/or the results of a risk assessment (for everyone else). Provided it fits the entity's emergency management strategies, policies, resources, and capabilities, the EOP format is a decision taken at the entity level. Incident management structures rarely prescribe compliance with certain EOP template formats, though policymakers might. What are the most common EOP templates? They include:

EOP template structure	Description	What's in its primary sections
Traditional functional structure	Most commonly used EOP format	• Basic plan. Provides an overview of the entity's preparedness and response strategies. Describes expected hazards, outlines agency roles and responsibilities, and explains how the entity's keeps the plan current. • Functional annexes. Individual chapters that focus on missions (e.g., communications, damage assessment). • Hazard-specific annexes. Describe the policies, situation, CONOPS, and responsibilities for particular hazards, threats, or incidents. Explain the procedures unique to that annex for a hazard type.
Emergency support function (ESF)	Used in the National Response Framework (NRF)	• Basic plan. Provides an overview of the entity's emergency management system. Explains the hazards faced, capabilities, requirements, and the entity's emergency management structure. • Unique annexes. Describe the framework through which an entity's departments and agencies, the private sector, not-for-profit and voluntary organizations, and other nongovernmental organisations coordinate and execute the common emergency management strategies. • Individual ESF annexes. Identify the ESF coordinator and the primary and support agencies for each function. • Separate support or incident annexes. Describe the policies, situation, CONOPS, and responsibilities for particular hazards, threats, or incidents.

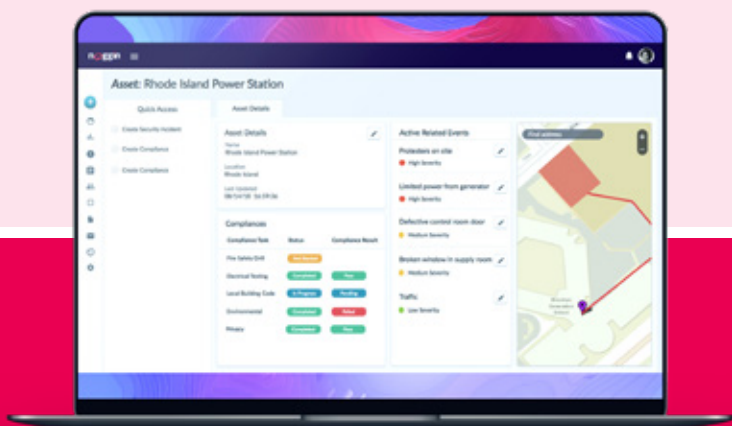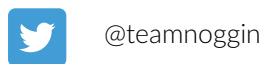| EOP template structure	Description	What's in its primary sections
Agency-/department-focused format	Addresses each department's or agency's tasks in a separate section, enabling EOP users to review only procedures specific to their agency	• Basic plan. Works similarly to the above. • Lead and support agency sections. Discuss the emergency functions completed by individual departments, agencies, and nongovernmental partners. • Hazard-specific procedures. Describe the policies, situation, CONOPS, and responsibilities for particular hazards, threats, or incidents.

Finally, emergency operations differ greatly from the routine work of governments, non-for-profits, and private organisations. Indeed, emergencies necessitate timely decision-making, reliant on a leader's ability to sift through emergency information quickly. Centralising those operations in an EOC, whether physical, mobile, or virtual, has proven one of the best means for entities to coordinate effectively and better direct the emergency efforts crucial to successful response and recovery. Topping it all off is emergency management software, like Noggin Emergency, that operationalises the work of EOCs with virtual EOC functionality.

Citations

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