

Standardized Emergency Management

System (SEMS) Guidelines

Part I. System Description

Section D

Operational Area Level

The contents of this guideline have not been changed from the original document, however, the guideline has been reformatted to meet Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) 508 standards.

1. Role of the Operational Area

The operational area is defined by the Emergency Services Act as an intermediate level of the state emergency services organization consisting of a county and all political subdivisions within the county area. Political subdivisions include cities, a city and county, counties, districts, or other local governmental agency, or public agency authorized by law.

The concept of an operational area was included in the Emergency Services Act in 1970. It was required by that act to be used during a state of war emergency, but its use was optional during a state of emergency or a local emergency. In many counties, the operational area concept has been used during peacetime emergencies. The operational area level has been used by established discipline-specific mutual aid systems including fire and law enforcement. Standardized Emergency Management System (SEMS) regulations now establish the operational area as one of the five SEMS levels for use in all emergencies and disasters involving multiple agencies or multiple jurisdictions.

The operational area is used by the county and the political subdivisions comprising the operational area:

- For coordination of emergency activities within the geographic area of the county,
- To serve as a link in the system of communications and coordination between the OES regional EOC (REOC) and the EOCs of the political subdivisions within the operational area.

All local governments within the geographic area of a county are part of the same operational area. The operational area may establish zones or other subdivisions to improve coordination and communications within the operational area.

SEMS Regulations specify that all local governments within a county geographic area be organized into a single operational area and that the county board of supervisors is responsible for its establishment. The county government serves as the lead agency of

the operational area unless another member agency assumes that responsibility by written agreement with the county government. All local governments should cooperate in organizing an effective operational area, but the operational area authority and responsibility is not affected by the non-participation of any local government. Organizing the operational area is discussed further in Part II of the guidelines.

The lead agency of the operational area is responsible for:

- Coordinating information, resources and priorities among the local governments within the operational area,
- Coordinating information, resources and priorities between the regional level and the local government level,
- Using multi-agency or inter-agency coordination to facilitate decisions for overall operational area level emergency response activities.

The role of the operational area lead agency does not change the coordination of discipline-specific resources, such as fire, law, and medical, through their established mutual aid systems.

2. Operational Area Emergency Operations Center (EOC)

Each operational area should have a designated emergency operations center (EOC) from which the overall coordination role of the operational area will be accomplished. The physical size, staffing, and equipping of an operational area EOC will depend on the size and complexity of the operational area and the emergency situations in which it functions. The level of EOC staffing will also vary with the specific emergency situation.

In most cases, the operational area EOC will also serve as the EOC for county government (or other designated lead agency). This will enable efficient use of available staff. In a combined EOC, some staff may be wearing two hats - coordinating operational area level and county government level functions. As local government coordinators, the EOC staff may be interacting with department operations centers or

Incident Commanders as described in Section C. Local Government Level. The EOC should be designed to enable the lead agency to fulfill both its operational area and local government responsibilities.

The operational area EOC facility should be capable of serving as the central point for:

- Coordination with local governments within the operational area,
- Information gathering and dissemination within the operational area,
- Coordination with the regional EOC and other operational area,
- Reporting information to the regional level using the SEMS forms via the Response Information System (RIMS) or OASIS

3. Operational Area Emergency Management Organization

SEMS regulations require operational areas to provide for five functions: management, operations, planning/intelligence, logistics, and finance/administration. These functions should be the basis for structuring the operational area EOC organization.

<u>Primary SEMS Function</u>	<u>Role at Operational Area Level</u>
Management	Responsible for overall emergency policy and coordination through the joint efforts of governmental agencies and private organizations.
Operations	Responsible for coordinating support to local government's emergency response, coordinating inter-jurisdictional responses, and coordinating countywide activities through implementation of the operational area action plan.
Planning/ Intelligence	Responsible for collecting, evaluating, and disseminating information, developing the operational area action plan in

<u>Primary SEMS Function</u>	<u>Role at Operational Area Level</u>
	coordination with other functions; and maintaining documentation.
Logistics	Responsible for providing facilities, services, personnel, equipment, and materials to support the emergency response.
Finance/ Administration	Responsible for financial and other administrative activities.

The organizational structure for the operational area EOC should provide for:

- Representatives from local governments within the operational area.
- Operational Area Mutual Aid Coordinators or their representatives from discipline-specific mutual aid systems (see below),
- Coordination for other major functions needed for mutual aid and inter-jurisdictional coordination such as the functions defined in the *Emergency Planning Guidance for Local Government*, RIMS, and OASIS Interim Guidelines.
- Other functions as needed to carry out the local government responsibilities of the lead agency (in a combined operational area and county or other lead agency EOC). Examples of such functions are listed in Part I.C. Local Government.

Use of Incident Command System terminology is recommended, but not required, for the hierarchy of functional elements within the EOC:

- Section

- Branch
- Group
- Unit

The five essential SEMS functions would normally be established as sections within the EOC using the above terminology. Other functions, such as, MHFP functions, would be included as branches, groups, or units. It is not necessary to use all four hierarchical levels in the EOC. For example, many EOCs use only sections, branches and units. Functional elements are activated as needed.

It is important that the responsibility for major functions be clearly identified to facilitate coordination with the local government and regional levels. Exhibit D-1 provides an example of an operational area EOC organization.

For purposes of these guidelines, we will use the position title "coordinator" to refer to the lead person of each of the functional elements in the EOC. The term coordinator is used because a primary role of EOC elements is to coordinate. Local governments may use other position titles within their EOC organization. Three options are shown below.

A. Coordinators	B. ICS Position Titles	C. Combined Terminology
EOC Director	EOC Director	EOC Director
Sector Coordinator	Section Chief	Section Chief
Branch Coordinator	Branch Director	Branch Director
Group Coordinator	Group Supervisor	Group Coordinator
Unit Coordinator	Unit Leader	Unit Coordinator

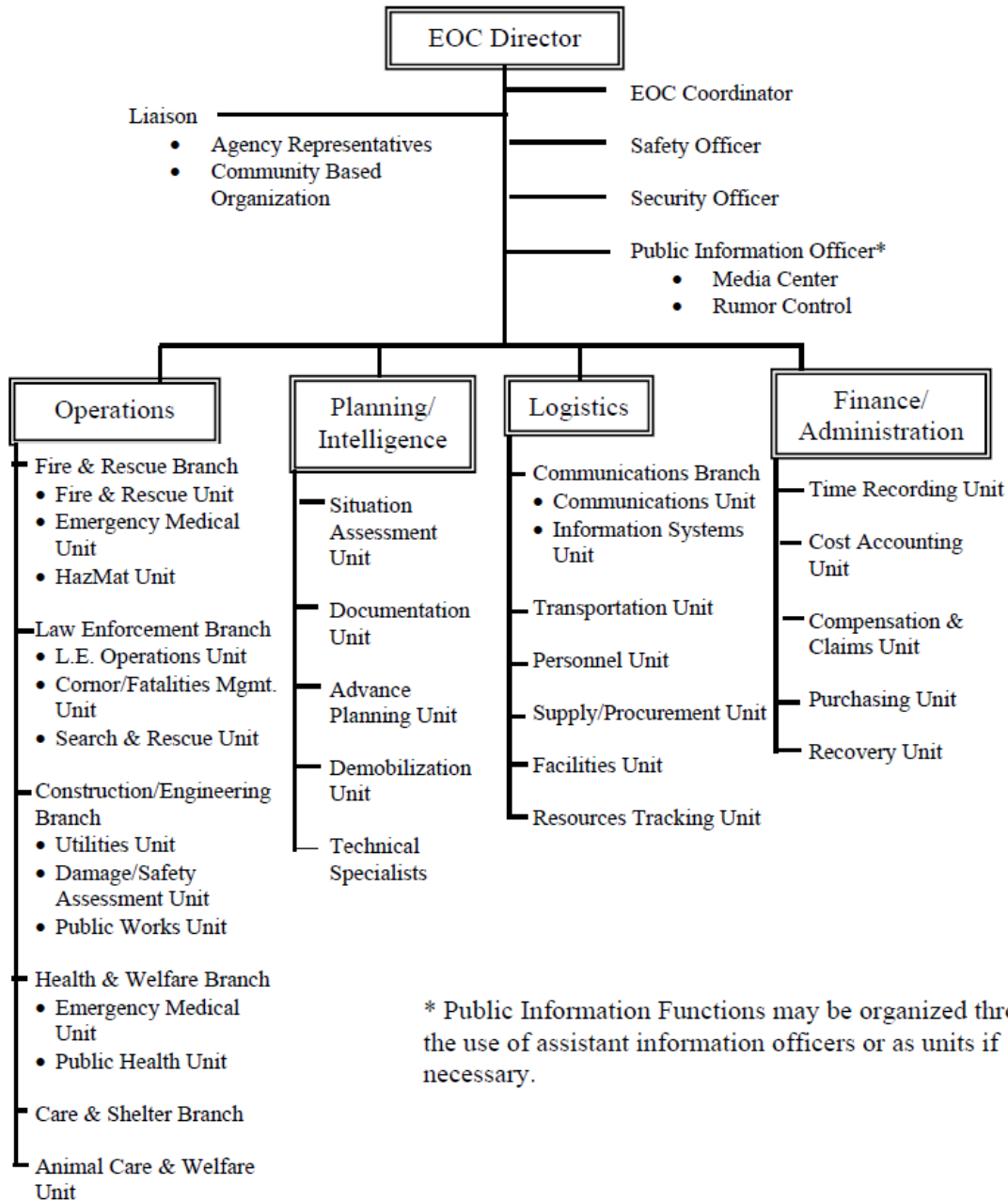
The ICS concept of the General Staff may be useful in the EOC. Using this concept, the Coordinators for Operations, Planning/Intelligence, Logistics, and

Finance/Administration constitute the EOC General Staff. The EOC Director and General Staff function as an EOC management team. The General Staff are responsible for:

- Overseeing the internal functioning of their section, and
- Interacting with each other, the EOC Director, and other entities within the EOC to ensure the effective functioning of the EOC organization.

The EOC Director may wish to establish the functions of Liaison and Public Information at an individual, unit, group or branch level in the operational area EOC and to include the lead persons for these functions as members of the General Staff.

Exhibit D-1
Example
Operational Area EOC Functional Organization



* Public Information Functions may be organized through the use of assistant information officers or as units if necessary.

Each jurisdiction must determine the appropriate organization for the functions to be performed.

An EOC Coordinator may be designated to assist the EOC Director. The EOC Coordinator facilitates the overall functioning of the EOC and coordination with other

agencies and SEMS levels. The EOC Coordinator position would normally be filled by the local government's emergency management coordinator (or emergency services coordinator). The authority, duties, and responsibilities of this individual will vary depending on the size of the jurisdiction and the needs of the organization.

4. Relationship of Operational Area Mutual Aid Coordinators

Discipline-specific mutual aid systems, including fire, law enforcement, and medical, have designated mutual aid coordinators within each operational area. The designated Operational Area Mutual Aid Coordinators should be considered an integral part of the operational area emergency management organization. Operational Area Mutual Aid Coordinators may be located at the operational area EOC, at their normal work location, or at another location depending on the emergency situation, local communications systems, their normal job responsibility, and the level of operational area EOC activation. When the operational area EOC is fully activated, all discipline-specific mutual aid systems should have designated representatives at the EOC to facilitate coordination and information flow.

5. Activation of the Operational Area

SEMS Regulations specify seven circumstances in which the operational area EOC must be activated and SEMS used:

1. A local government within the operational area has activated its EOC and requested activation of the operational area EOC to support their emergency operations.
2. Two or more cities within the operational area have declared or proclaimed a local emergency.
3. The county and one or more cities have declared or proclaimed a local emergency.

4. A city, city and county, or county has requested a governor's proclamation of a state of emergency.
5. A state of emergency is proclaimed by the governor for the county or two or more cities within the operational area.
6. The operational area is requesting resources from outside its boundaries. This does not include resources used in normal day-to-day operations, which are obtained through existing mutual aid agreements.
7. The operational area has received resource requests from outside its boundaries. This does not include resources used in normal day-to-day operations, which are obtained through existing mutual aid agreements.

Operational areas should develop EOC activation criteria that include the regulatory requirements and also identify conditions based on the hazard analysis of the area. The goal should be a rapid activation of the EOC when operational area involvement will be needed. It is recommended that two to three levels of activation be identified that will provide EOC staffing commensurate with the coordination needs of varying emergency situations. Exhibit D-2 is an example of the type of activation criteria that an operational area should consider for its EOC.

**Example
Operational Area EOC Activation Guide**

Event/Situation¹	Activation Level	Minimum Staffing²
-Severe Weather Advisory -Small incidents involving 2 or more county departments -Earthquake Advisory -Flood Watch -Activation requested by a local government with activated EOC. -Resource request received from outside the operational area ³	One	EOC Director Planning Section Coordinator Logistics Coordinator Representatives of responding departments
-Moderate Earthquake -Major wildfire affecting developed area -Major wind or rain storm -Two or more large incidents involving 2 or more departments -Imminent Earthquake Alert -Local emergency declared or proclaimed by: Two or more cities The county and one or more cities -A city or the county requests a governor's proclamation of a state of emergency -A state of emergency is proclaimed by the governor for the county or two or more cities -Resources are requested from outside the operational area ³	Two	EOC Director All Section Coordinators Branches and Units as appropriate to situation Agency Representatives as appropriate
-Major county wide or regional emergency- -Multiple departments with heavy resource involvement -Major earthquake	Three	All EOC Positions

¹Local governments and the operational area should work together to develop consistent activation criteria and levels for hazards that are common to the operational area.

²Minimum staffing may vary with the size of the operational area.

6. Action Planning

Action Planning is an essential element of SEMS at the operational area level. Action planning is an important management tool that involves:

- A process for identifying priorities and objectives for emergency response or recovery efforts,
- Plans which document the priorities and objectives, and the tasks and personnel assignments associated with meeting the objectives.

The action planning process should involve the EOC Director and General Staff along with other EOC elements, local government representatives, and other agency representatives, as needed. The Planning/Intelligence Section is normally responsible for development of the action plan and for facilitation of action planning meetings.

Action plans are developed for a specified operational period, which may range from a few hours to 24 hours. The operational period is determined by first establishing a set of priority actions that need to be performed. A reasonable time frame is then established for accomplishing those actions. The action plans need not be complex, but should be sufficiently detailed to guide EOC elements in implementing the priority actions. Part III of the Guidelines provides further information on developing action plans.

7. Resource Management at the Operational Area Level

Resource requests from local governments to the operational area level and requests from the operational area level to the regional level will be made through one of the following processes:

- Discipline-specific mutual aid systems: Requests for resources that are normally within the inventories of the mutual aid system will go from local coordinator to Operational Area Mutual Aid Coordinator to Regional Mutual Aid Coordinator.

- All other resource requests will be made through the logistics function at each level with emphasis on the need for lateral coordination with other EOC functions.

Resource requests from local governments will be coordinated within the Operational Area to determine if the resource is available from other local governments or other sources within the Operational Area. Available resource will be allocated to the requesting local government.

If requests for a specific resource exceeds the supply within the operational area, the available resources will be allocated consistent with priorities established through the action planning process, and additional resources will be requested from the regional level. The General Staff is responsible for ensuring that priorities are followed.

Resources not available within the operational area will be requested through the regional level by Operational Area Mutual Aid Coordinators or the operational area logistics function. Resource requests should be coordinated internally at the operational area level before being placed to the regional level.

Coordinators of functional elements in operations and logistics are responsible for tracking resource requests. A Resource Tracking Unit may be established in Logistics to facilitate this process. The concept of resource tracking is discussed further in OASIS Guidelines.

8. Multi-agency or Inter-agency Coordination at the Operational Area Level

For simplicity and consistency with the Approved Course of Instruction Multi-agency or inter-agency coordination as identified in the SEMS Regulations, is shortened to Inter-Agency Coordination here. Inter-agency coordination is important for:

- Establishing overall priorities,
- Allocating critical resources,

- Developing strategies for handling multi-agency and multi-jurisdictional response problems,
- Sharing information,
- Facilitating communications.

Inter-agency Coordination in the EOC

Inter-agency coordination is an integral part of the functioning of an operational area EOC. The EOC is staffed by representatives from the departments and agencies who work together at the EOC to coordinate the operational area's emergency response. Agency representatives from local governments (including special districts), volunteer agencies and private organizations should also participate with EOC functional elements in coordinating the operational area response effort. Coordination with agencies not represented in the EOC may be accomplished through telecommunications.

Involvement of the local government representatives in the action planning process at the EOC is essential for effective emergency management and provides an important focus for multi-agency and inter-agency coordination. In addition, the EOC Director or General Staff may convene meetings for multi-agency or inter-agency coordination purposes as needed.

Establishing an Inter-agency Coordination Group

It may be useful to establish formally an inter-agency or coordination group to develop consensus on priorities, resource allocation and response strategies.

An inter-agency coordination group involving representatives of local governments in the operational area may be a standard element of the operational area organization. Such a group may meet regularly during the response or on an as needed basis. Alternatively, inter-agency coordination groups may be established to deal with specific issues that arise during the response.

A formal inter-agency coordination group may be especially useful if a particular response problem or issue requires coordination with numerous agencies not usually represented in the operational area EOC. Such groups may be established through a temporary ad hoc arrangement during an emergency or may be developed through pre-emergency planning for certain contingencies.

An operational area level inter-agency coordination group may function within the EOC or at another location. An inter-agency coordination group may also function through conference calls. Whether physically at the EOC or at another location, the inter-agency coordinating group should remain connected to the operational area EOC, and perform as an extension of an established EOC function. Priorities and objectives developed through the group should be incorporated into the action plans developed at the EOC. Objectives agreed upon by the group should be implemented through the EOC.

Operational area representatives may participate with other operational areas and other agencies in a inter-agency coordination group organized by the regional level.

9. Coordination with Cities and County Government

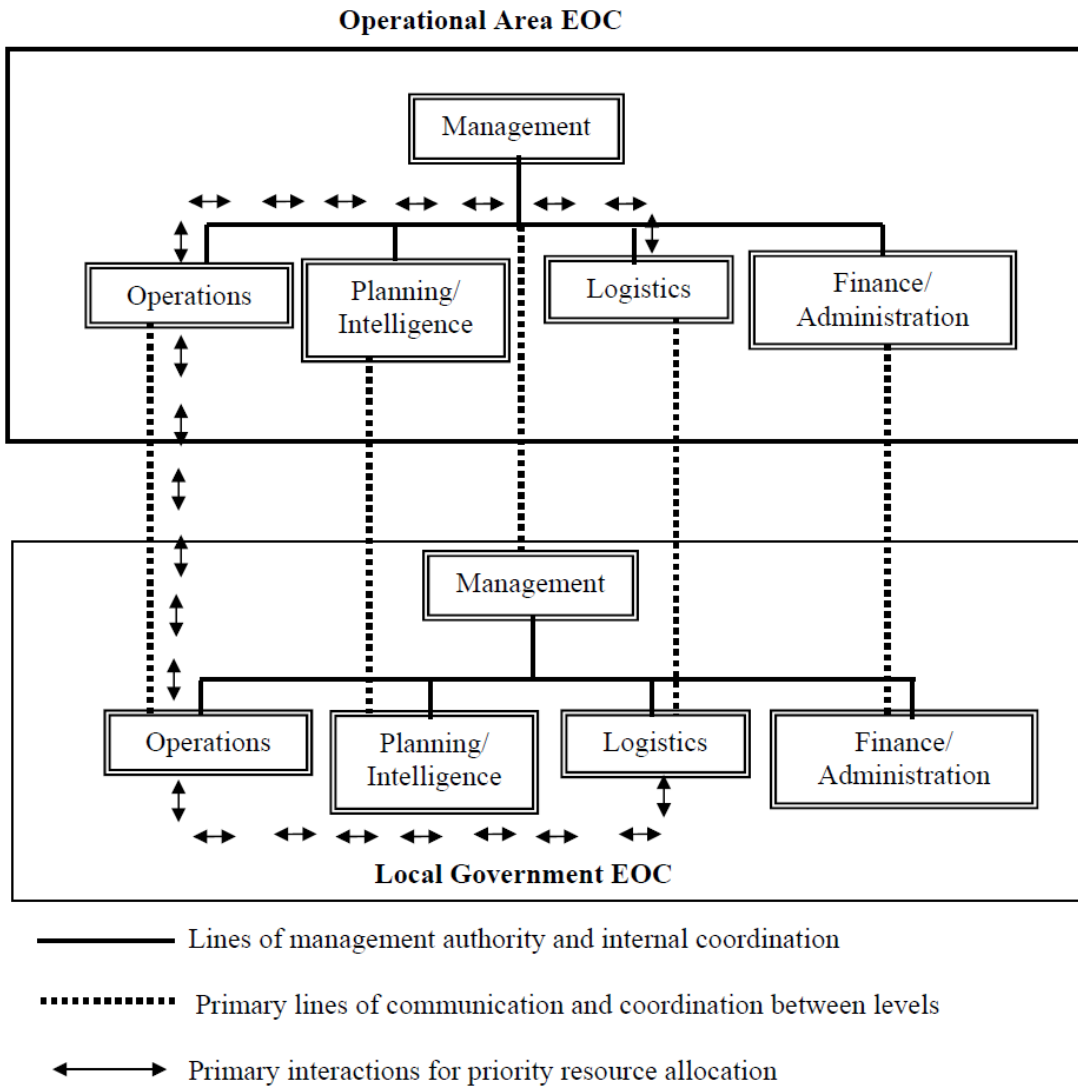
Coordination and communications should be established between the operational area EOC and all activated local government EOCs within the operational area. Direct communications and coordination should be established between any activated city EOC and the operational area EOC when activated. Direct communications and coordination also should be established between the county government EOC and the operational area EOC if they are physically separate.

Communications and coordination should occur along functional lines as illustrated in exhibit D-3. Coordination of resource requests should be done in accordance with agency policy. This requires close communications and coordination between the operations and logistics functions at both the local government and operational area levels. This relationship is vital, particularly when there are multiple requests for similar resources or when resources are scarce.

A representative from every activated city EOC and county government should be at the operational area EOC, whenever feasible. In operational areas with a large number of cities, it may not always be practical to have representatives from every city EOC at the operational area EOC. For cities with very small staff, it may not be feasible to send a representative to the operational area EOC. The operational area and cities should work together to develop arrangements to ensure that adequate coordination and information exchange occurs when city representatives are not present at the operational area EOC.

A combined operational area and county EOC will be functioning as a local government EOC for unincorporated areas of the county. Coordination and communications needed for this role will be similar to that described in Part I.C. Local Government Level.

**Local Government EOC - Operational Area EOC
Primary Interactions**



10. Special District Involvement

Special districts are defined as local governments in SEMS. The emergency response role of special districts is generally focused on their normal services. During disasters, some types of special districts will be more extensively involved in the emergency response by assisting other local governments.

Coordination and communications should be established among the operational area, special districts who are involved in the emergency response, and other local governments. This may be accomplished in various ways depending on the local situation. Relationships among special districts, cities, county government, and the operational area are complicated by overlapping boundaries and by the multiplicity of special districts. The operational area should work with special districts providing services in the operational area to determine how best to establish coordination and communications in emergencies. The following discusses some situations and possible ways to establish coordination.

The operational area should be able to communicate and coordinate directly with the special district that serves more than one city and or serves a city and county unincorporated area. Ideally, a special district involved in the emergency response will have a representative at the operational area EOC, as well as, at all activated city EOCs within its service area. However, this may not be practical when many jurisdictions within its services area are affected. In such cases, the special district's representative at the operational area level may serve as the focal point of coordination and work with other local government representatives at that operational area EOC.

When there are many special districts within an operational area, it may not be feasible for the operational area EOCs to accommodate representatives from every special district during area-wide disasters. In such cases, the operational area should work with the special districts to develop alternate ways of establishing coordination and communications. Some alternatives to consider:

- Representatives at the operational area EOC only from designated key special districts--telecommunications with other special districts
- One representative from each type of special district who would communicate with other special districts of the same type.

- Establish a special district coordination center for a particular type of special district, for example, a water district coordination center that communicates with the operational area EOC.

Some special districts may serve multiple counties and some even have facilities in more than one mutual aid region. Such special districts should be represented at activated operational area EOCs in their service area, or have developed alternate arrangements for effective coordination with the operational areas and local governments in their service area.

11. Coordination with Community Based Organizations and Collaboratives

Community Based Organizations differ in size, name, organizational structure and procedure, but all share a common bond of addressing the disaster concerns of individuals and special needs communities. They are often the best resources for a particular population. They bring a level of expertise and assistance to the community that is not often possible with the larger, traditional emergency services providers.

They assist in providing assurances that the needs of under served populations and the complexity of human service issues in disasters are addressed. They have the capacity to organize teams of volunteers to do the outreach necessary to reach these persons following disasters. In many instances a strong collaboration will lead to better assist individuals recover from personal losses suffered in major emergencies and disasters. Ongoing relationships are essential in building the capacity of Community Based Organizations to respond to client needs in local disasters.

It is essential when the Regional Level is coordinating between the State Level and the Operational Area Level that considerations be given to local Collaboratives and services coordinated. This will assist in ensuring easy transition, non-duplication of resources and the most efficient and effective response to the victims of the emergency.

12. Coordination with the Regional Level

It is essential that direct coordination and communications be established between activated operational area EOCs and the Regional EOC (REOC). Coordination with the REOC can be accomplished in three ways:

1. The REOC sends representatives to the operational area.
2. The operational area sends a representative(s) to the REOC.
3. The operational area and REOC coordinate through telecommunications that include the Response Information Management System (RIMS).

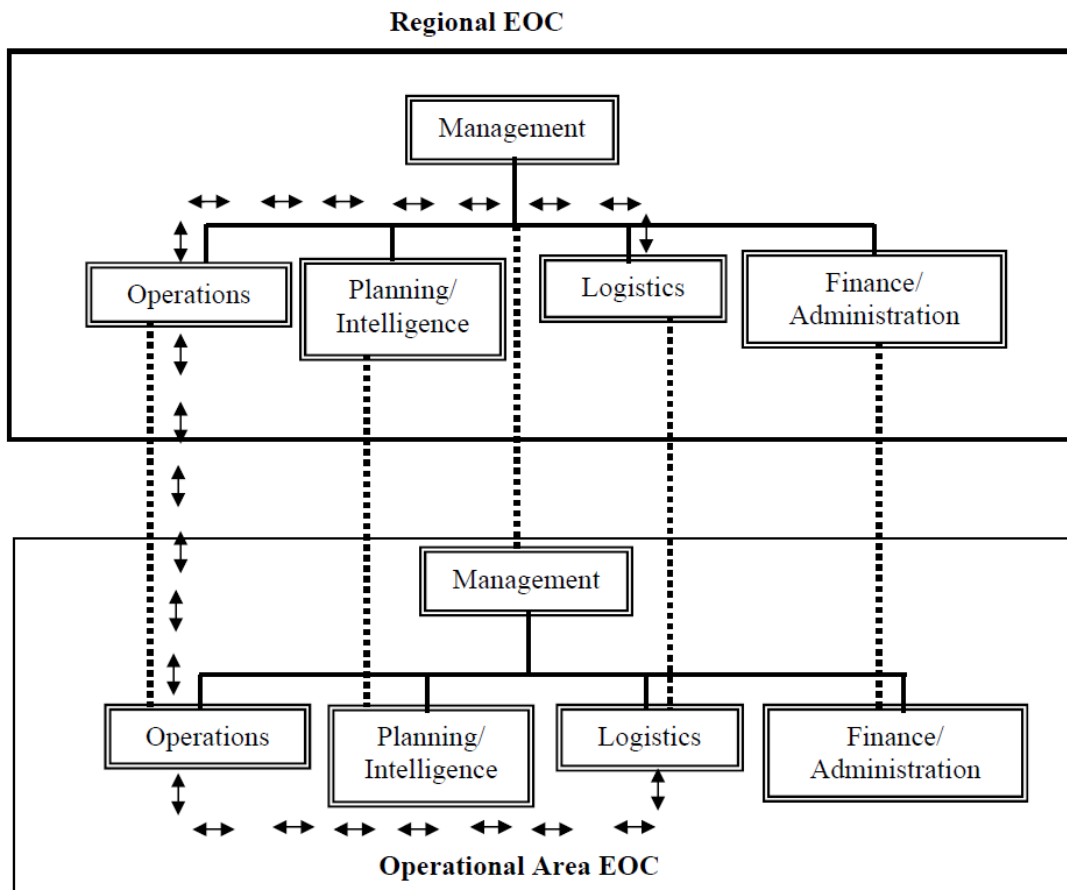
The REOC plan is to send OES Representatives when feasible, to activated operational area EOCs to facilitate communications and coordination. An operational area may provide a representative to the REOC when the presence of a representative would facilitate coordination of information exchange. The REOC Director (OES Regional Administrator) may request that a representative be sent by the operational area. Telecommunications may be a sufficient method of coordination for minor situations that require only limited staffing of the operational area EOC and REOC. Coordination and communication between an operational area EOC and REOC will be primarily along functional lines as illustrated in Exhibit D-4.

Coordination and communications will occur between the five SEMS functions at the operational area level and their counterparts at the regional level. Coordination of resource requests should be done in accordance with agency policy. This requires close communications and coordination between the operations and logistics functional both the local government and operational area levels. This relationship is vital particularly when there are multiple requests for similar resources or when resources are scarce.

In addition, coordination and communication may occur between organizational elements under a SEMS function and counterpart elements at the other level as illustrated in Exhibit D-5.

Exhibit D-4

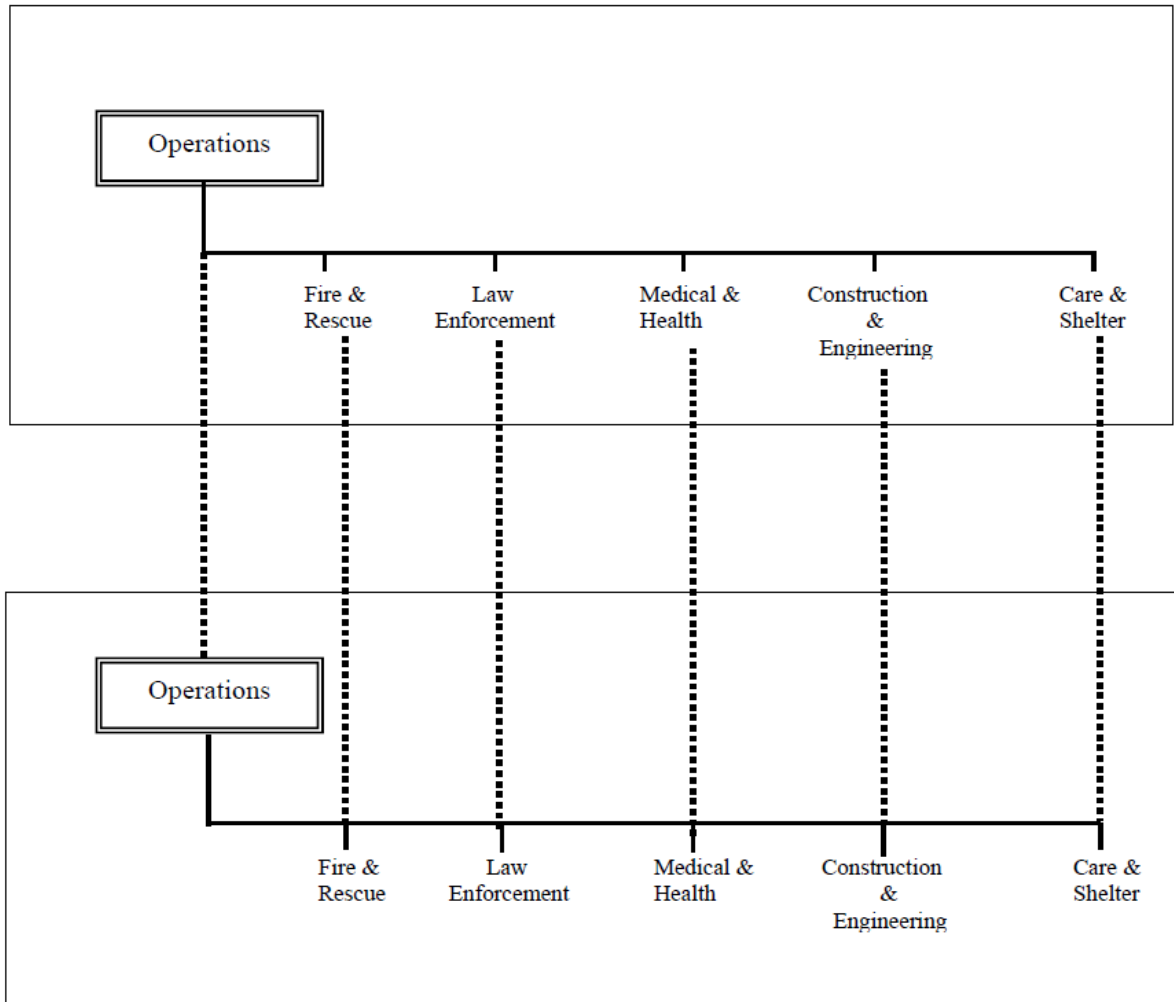
Operational Area EOC - Regional EOC Primary Interactions



- Lines of management authority and internal coordination
- Primary lines of communication and coordination between levels
- ↔ Primary interactions for priority resource allocation for resources coordinated through the operational area EOC and REOC. Coordination must also be established with Operational Area and Regional Mutual Aid Coordinators. Agency Representatives also will facilitate communications and coordination as needed.

Example

**Operational Area EOC - Regional EOC
Functional Interactions within a SEMS Function**



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Lines of communication and coordination

Notes:

Agency Representatives also will facilitate communications and coordination as needed.

This diagram focuses on interactions between EOCs. Interactions among functional elements within an EOC are also essential for coordination.

Direct coordination and communications will also be established between Operational Area Mutual Aid Coordinators and Regional Mutual Aid Coordinators. These coordinators may be functioning from their respective operational area EOC and REOC,

or from other locations depending on the situation and the mutual aid system. Mutual aid requests for resources within the inventories of the mutual aid system will be placed from the Operational Area Mutual Aid Coordinator to the Regional Mutual Aid Coordinator. Requests for other resources will be channeled through the logistics function at the operational area EOC and REOC.

13. Relationship to RIMS

The Response Information Management System (RIMS) will be a key means of communications between operational area EOCs and REOCs. RIMS is a internet based computer system that uses standard forms to provide emergency information such as situation reports, status reports and provides a method for requesting and tracking resources. RIMS is the main vehicle for communicating between operational area EOCs and REOCs.

Operational Area Satellite Information System (OASIS)

OASIS provides a back up to RIMS. OASIS consists of a communications satellite, a communications hub, which controls the system, and remote sites, which include operational area EOCs, REOCs, the State Operations Center, and other selected sites. Remote sites have a dish antenna and an indoor unit that connects to EOC telephones and computers. This enables voice and data communications with other sites. A few operational area, state, and federal agency sites will also have a high frequency radio system to provide backup communications.

OASIS provides a disaster-resistant method of communications between the operational area and regional levels.

OASIS Interim Guidelines outline information needs for reporting between the operational area and the regional levels. These forms were the forerunner of the RIMS forms, which are used throughout the emergency management community.