

CONTINUITY OF OPERATIONS (COOP)

by

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Continuity of Operations (COOP) planning ensures the execution of essential functions for any event that makes it impossible for employees to work in their regular facility. This event could be a fire in the building, a local weather event, a large scale natural disaster, a terrorist attack or any other emergency. Louisiana is also concerned with preparing for and responding to events that impact energy infrastructure and supply disruptions.

At the heart of COOP planning is identifying all functions which must be continued under all circumstances and identifying an alternate facility or facilities which will satisfy an organization's requirements. The alternate facility should provide the capability to perform essential functions within 12 hours, up to 30 days with reliable logistical support, services, and infrastructure systems as well as interoperable communications and computer equipment.

The State of Louisiana Emergency Operations Plan (EOP)¹ lists the Emergency Support Functions (ESFs) and the departments, offices, agencies and organizations of state government with primary and support responsibilities for carrying out the functions. In the EOP the head of each department, office, agency and organization is charged with designating a COOP Coordinator who will prepare and maintain plans to ensure that the organization will continue to carry out its mission in an emergency. The Governor's Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness (GOHSEP) have the responsibility for updating the plan under the direction of the Governor. The plan provides the framework for developing detailed Continuity of Government (COG) plans. All emergency activities will be managed from the state Emergency Operations Center (EOC). All parishes are required to have an EOC at the parish level and communicate with the state EOC.

State government departments agencies and offices which do not have specific ESF responsibilities will provide for resource management, direction and control of their personnel, COG, COOP and situation intelligence and reporting during emergency situations.

The federal government has adopted the National Incident Management System (NIMS)² to manage emergencies and disasters and the State of Louisiana adopts NIMS by reference.

Disasters can interfere with the ability of state or local governments to carry out their functions. Following are continuity requirements:

Essential Functions: Critical activities performed by organizations

Orders of Succession: Provisions for the assumption of agency offices during an emergency in the event any of those officials are or become unavailable

¹ <http://gohsep.la.gov/plans.aspx>

² <http://www.fema.gov/emergency/nims/>

Delegation of Authority: An effective emergency management system depends upon continuity of Government and Continuity of Operations at all levels. Generally, pre-determined delegations of authority will take effect when normal channels of direction have been disrupted and will lapse when these channels have been reestablished.

Continuity Facilities: These are locations other than the primary facility. These alternate facilities refer not only to other locations but also to working from home, telecommuting, and mobile-office situations.

Continuity Communications: Communications that provide the capability to perform essential functions under all conditions.

Vital Records Management: The availability of electronic and hard copy documents, references, records, information systems, data management software and equipment needed to support essential functions.

Human Capital: Emergency employees and other special categories of employees who are activated by an agency to perform assigned response duties.

Devolution of Control and Direction: Capability to transfer statutory authority and responsibility for essential functions from an agency's primary operating staff and facilities to other agency employees and facilities.

Reconstitution: The process by which agency personnel resume normal operations from the original or a replacement primary operating facility.

Four Phases of Continuity of Operations Activation

Phase I – Readiness and Preparation

Phase II – Activation and Relocation: plans, procedures, and schedules to transfer activities, personnel, records, and equipment to alternate facilities are activated

Phase III – Continuity Operations: Full execution of essential operations at alternate operating facilities is commenced

Phase IV – Reconstitution: Operations at alternate facility are terminated and normal operations resume

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has developed a COOP Plan Template and instructions. General guidance and sample information is provided for reference so organizations can tailor the COOP plan for their own needs. The instructions accompany an electronic template that may be downloaded from the FEMA website.³

³ <http://www.fema.gov/about/org/ncp/coop/templates.shtm#0>