

CRISIS

UNIT-4

Establishing an Emergency Operations Centre

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit the learner will be able to:

- ✓ Help their team recover from a crisis
- ✓ Discuss how to apply the process

Unit 4

Establishing an Emergency Operations Centre

EOC Considerations

Your crisis management team will need a place to work, and in the event that your business is under threat or damaged, that place needs to be set up off site. Depending on the nature of the problem, it may be advantageous to set up an Emergency Operations Center (EOC) within your own building so that members have easy access to one another and can coordinate activities without the distraction of usual operations.

Make sure that all documentation and announcements include the address, list of resources available, and anything that needs to be provided to the EOC. For example, if you will be using shortwave radios to contact the team because cell phone and Internet service is interrupted, those radios need to have fresh batteries and an appropriate range.

Depending on the crisis underway, will you use...

- A local community building?
- A legion?
- A place of worship?
- A school?
- Someone's home?
- The area outside of the company's building (i.e. under a tent)?

Something else to consider: do you have an arrangement with your potential EOC, or will other businesses be vying for the same building when you are?

Test Your Knowledge

Generate a list of at least five options for an offsite EOC.

What resources are available at each location?

Site	Resources

Will there be a cost to reserve the space? Will there be an additional cost when it comes time to use the space? If so, that cost must be included in the crisis management plan.

Who is In Charge?

As the emergency operations center comes together, usually the most senior member of the crisis management team is in charge until the team leader arrives. If you are not the team leader, and not the communications leader as identified in the plan, make sure that you are not making statements to the media. Let the communications person, who has been trained in what to say (and not say) look after that function they arrive.

It can be very practical to have **colored vests** for each member of the team, so that other members and employees know who is in charge. You can use vests that match your operation in some way, or coordinate with what your local emergency services use. Think about blue for spokesperson, orange for first aid, yellow for transportation, green for the person in charge, etc. Just make sure that people are visible.

Work with, not against, emergency services personnel who may also be responding to the incident. Regardless of the circumstances, you need to make sure they can complete rescue and recovery, transport injured people, and conduct investigations as needed.

The **chain of command** for your crisis management team (the order of who is in charge) is a necessary part of your crisis management plan.

Building Business Continuity and Recovery

Creating Continuity

When you have determined what urgent and non-urgent aspects of the business need to be restored to maintain the integrity of the business and meet stakeholder expectations, you will know what needs to be done first. Often, we will review each major function of the business to determine what activities are essential and how much time we can tolerate for any function to be unavailable.

For example, a hospital may be unable to tolerate any time at all for an emergency department to be closed. The tolerance for that part of the business to be unavailable is zero. Within the same hospital, though, they may be able to tolerate the kitchen being unavailable for up to three hours and still meet the needs of their patients. However, if the kitchen is destroyed, the expectation is that food could be secured from another location (such as another hospital across town) within the three hour window.

Another example would be that a fast-food restaurant could close for a 24-hour period with virtually no effect on customers, who could go somewhere else. (Shareholders might find it unsatisfactory, however.)

If the local state department building becomes incapacitated, the fact that renewals for drivers' licenses cannot be issued is not as big an issue as the ability to issue checks for welfare or social services benefits.

Test Your Knowledge

What elements of your organizational priorities could be considered urgent, with no downtime at all?

Which elements could be brought back up later, with little to no trouble?

Essential Crisis Plan Elements

Every organization will have different answers to the question, “What is critical for us?” but what’s important is to have the conversation and decide what is important together. The following elements will create a solid crisis plan.

The Book

There needs to be a copy of the plan available for reference at all times and it needs to be up to date. It’s not enough to have the plan stored on a computer server, either: if the power is out and servers unavailable, the plan is not going to be available.

We recommend a three-ring binder. Make the binder a noticeable color so that people can put their hands on it quickly. A nice bright orange or yellow binder should stand out from a desk or shelf full of black, white, and blue reference materials.

Keep a list of updates in the front of each copy so people reading it know they are looking at the most recent version.

Notes

Organization

This book must be easy to read and to use. Have a table of contents at the front and an index in the back. Section tabs will also assist in quickly locating information.

Notes

Preamble

This section will be helpful for members of the crisis management team and anyone who has to fill in on short notice. Introductions, purpose of the plan, statements of scope, policies, and anything else deemed helpful should be included here.

Notes

Details

This should be a living part of the document, where members of the team can keep notes of incidents as they unfold, events that take place, decisions made, meeting minutes and notes, reasons for not implementing policy or decisions exactly as designed, and so on.

Notes

Emergency Operations Center (EOC)

The details of the EOC all need to be here. Key information includes:

- The address
- Members of the team expected to report there
- Available infrastructure and equipment
- How to get access to the building
- What items of support the team needs to bring (computers, phones, water, food, radios, chairs, extension cords, generators, first aid kits, etc.).

Notes

Members of the Crisis Management Team

Keep this up to date. These are the people who will coordinate activities during the crisis and look after all issues of continuity and recovery. Your spokesperson should also be a part of this group.

This section should include all contact details for the entire team (including phone numbers, e-mail address, an alternate address in case work e-mail is unavailable, social media contact information, and a home address). Depending on the size of your company, you may have a core leadership team at the EOC and other members assigned elsewhere.

Notes

Job Descriptions

Include all roles and responsibilities that will be required in response to a crisis. Make sure that these descriptions are also understandable for anyone who has to step into a role unexpectedly. For example, if your spokesperson or CEO is injured or indisposed, someone is going to have to be reassigned or promoted into their role.

Notes

Supplemental Teams

If you have multiple locations, you will need to have teams in place for each place. These can report back to a central team at headquarters or act independently depending on the circumstances. It may be a bit of a challenge to maintain the contact information for these teams; make it a priority so that this section stays up to date.

Notes

Alternate Team Members

Having alternates who are prepared, trained, and capable is essential. According to Jonathan Bernstein, author of *Manager's Guide to Crisis Management*, this is where a crisis plan can overcome a breakdown when someone becomes unavailable or cannot be contacted. You should have an alternate identified for each member of the crisis team.

Notes

Procedures for Each Scenario

This is essential. Don't leave your people trying to decide what to do in the midst of a crisis. Use the information and feedback from previous incidents, drills, and the results of your crisis audits, to develop procedures for whatever threats are present. One tabbed section for each scenario, including procedures and sample statements to issue to the media, is appropriate. Some common threats include fire, flood, power outage, severe storm, flood, bomb threat, and other external or internal threats.

Notes

Spokespeople

Each team needs to have one person who is appointed to speak for the organization during a crisis. This may be the CEO, and in some circumstances or at a certain intensity of crisis should be. However, some CEOs are not strong speakers, or they may be unavailable. This means that other people must be trained and ready to deal with the media, communicate with employees and perhaps their families, and speak to members of the community directly.

Notes

Stakeholders

This section has to define the stakeholders that are important so that you remember to communicate with the people who are essential to your business. This includes employees, customers, contractors, suppliers, and anyone who visits the premises. Whether you are a privately held or a publicly traded company, there can also be investors and shareholders, government regulatory agencies, insurance companies, and more. Each of these people and organizations also need to be identified in your communication plan. Make sure that all of their contact details are updated at least every 90 days.

Notes

Critical Incident Stress Debriefing

This section may include the provision of counseling services for people who are affected by the incident. You may have heard about something like this following a serious incident at a school or workplace.

Notes

Event Debriefing

The last section of the plan should have room for a summary where each member of the crisis management team will make notes about things that are necessary to share after the incident has resolved, or at least the emergency aspects have been dealt with. This should include comments that demonstrate strengths and weaknesses of the plan and recommendations for improvement. This is an important part of the plan, as you should use lessons learned in order to prepare for the next time to the best of your ability.

Notes

Walliallia

Background

In your small town is a pretty remarkable company who has the key to the safety of water systems around the world. This small town is called Roaring Falls, and it is in the midst of the rural state of Wallalooopa. The factory is called Walliallia, which means “water for everyone,” and has been operating since 2015.

Up until the early 2030’s, if there was no access to clean water, people had to put a pot on the stove and boil water for drinking. People in very rural areas and in the developing world often went without clean water for months and even years at a time when there was no access to potable water.

This changed in 2032 when Walliallia, an engineering technology company, launched their water purification filter. They created a round purification disc about three inches in diameter. It was then marketed, sold, and distributed, and is now present at the opening of water pipes in almost every facility and home around the world. This new technology meant that clean water was suddenly available for everyone around the world, whether their water was stored in a town reservoir or brought up from a well.

These discs are relatively inexpensive, especially compared to other purification systems, because of their compact size and availability of the filtering element, carborantorum (a helpful by-product of crude oil purification). The research and development of the product was funded by the big oil companies in cooperation with remediation scientists, and it was discovered in a happy accident.

The product does require delicate production practices to maintain the integrity of the filtering material, and the filters must be replaced every 120 days. Despite these drawbacks, the discs have been distributed around the world and every human being in every community now has clean water.

Early in production, a crisis audit was undertaken at Walliallia. The team recommended that a second factory in another region be built. They explained that there was a significant risk that distribution could be interrupted since there was only a single plant providing the filters to the entire world. The audit team felt that it was highly probable that some kind of disaster could take the original factory out of service, at least temporarily.

There was one delay after another, including ongoing pressure to cease crude oil production. As a result, there has never been a second factory built. The Walliallia board of directors knew about the risk, but they also secretly liked having control of the only factory in the world to make those filters. Distribution remained successful as world governments, non-profit groups, and ecological organizations helped successfully distribute the filters to every corner of the world. Occasionally, someone on the board would mention how impressed they were that in a world continually barraged by acts of war, riots, and unrest, that the water system was unthreatened.

Worldwide, incidents of disease are decreasing, and this result alone was largely attributed to the prevalence of clean drinking water.

Exercise One: Gas Line Explosion at Water Plant

Scenario

- **Date:** Monday, May 18, 2043
- **Time:** 7:45 a.m.
- **Crisis:** Gas Line Explosion at Walliallia

It's early in the morning at Walliallia, as the sun is gaining height and the birds are singing their morning greetings. The night shift, a small crew of ten people, is preparing to leave the plant by 8:00 a.m., and the 50 daytime employees are coming in. It seems just like any other Monday as cheerful hellos are exchanged and people hang up their jackets.

A low rumble starts to vibrate through the building, and people look at one another to see if they have all heard it. The rumble builds in just a few seconds, and all of sudden pieces of the concrete building, equipment, and people are flying about as a deafening roar takes over. A fire starts instantly and can be seen through the hole where the top corner of the building has been blown off. As the debris settles, there are moans, cries for help, and the roar of a fire gaining momentum.

The scene quickly becomes chaotic as the uninjured come to the aid of the fallen. Two of the employees run into the chaos with fire extinguishers, but for now the flames seem to be outside. After a quick look around they head outside to investigate.

The devastation outside is shocking. The initial fireball has scorched the trees nearby and the edge of the woods is consumed in flames that are so hot they are almost invisible. It is easy to see through the wreckage that the incoming natural gas line has blown up, and there is fire coming out of the wreckage as though it is being shot through a flame thrower. Their fire hydrants are no match for this.

One of the men remembers his cell phone and pulls it out to make an emergency call, but there is no line available. He looks around and sees that the cell phone tower that had been on the top of the building has collapsed. The view of what's left of the building stops him in his tracks. The entire north wall of the building has collapsed, and the few pieces of it that are left look ready to topple over. There is a fire inside the building and they need to get their people out. They also need a way to call for assistance from the fire department and get ambulances in.

Inside, the administration area is all but completely destroyed. People are pinned under furniture and a fallen wall. Computers and phones are dangling off the edges of upset desks. The power has gone off, and the few phones that are in one piece are not working.

Within 40 minutes of the explosion, many people have been removed from the building, but some remain trapped. Fire has destroyed 80% of the filter production area, including materials that were stored for distribution.

Test Your Knowledge

Using your local map, identify areas that need isolation and protecting.

Based on the response needed for this incident, identify potentially suitable locations for an Emergency Operations Center.

Based on the incident, list which members of the Crisis Management Team need to be located and to report to the EOC.

What criteria do you need to consider before reassigning staff? How might union agreements effect and reassignments?

Identify who (employees, other area residents, and businesses) may be affected by the incident.

Identify the effects that a shutdown or unplanned production stoppage will have on distribution.

Exercise Two: How are you Feeling?

Scenario

It took a lot of work to get the production back on line at Walliallia after the natural gas explosion, but production and distribution were back in order within a couple of weeks using temporary shelters, until the main building had been reconstructed.

There were several serious injuries and seven people were killed by falling debris and fire. New people who had been hired to rebuild and re-staff the company felt like outsiders, even a year and a half later. They had not experienced the trauma that day, and people who had did not want to talk about it. They did not feel they had much in common with the new staff.

In addition, Walliallia needs staff with special skills, and with the loss of so many employees, they had to recruit from farther afield. The replacement staff did not live in the community for the most part, most of them preferring to commute an hour or longer each way rather than moving into Roaring Falls. This added to the animosity between the old and new staff.

This winter there has also been a lot of influenza to deal with. There is a pandemic underway, and despite rounds of immunization, people washing their hands and staying home when sick, it seems to be unavoidable.

Senior manager Dave thought he had avoided it, and as he returned from halfway around the world where Walliallia II was being built, he felt something that he had not felt for a long time. He had to stop and think about it for a little while before he realized that the feeling, so long absent, was happiness. He was happy! He had recovered from the explosion after several weeks with his leg in a cast and months of physiotherapy, but it had taken a lot longer for his soul to recover. Now, as he was heading back after celebrating the opening of the new production facility he smiled to himself. Then he sneezed. And sneezed again, and again. The people sitting beside him on the plane looked at him warily. No one wanted it to be a case of the 'flu, but they all knew this was how it started.

When Dave arrived home, he greeted his young family at the airport, but his seven year old son was not with his wife and daughter. Roger had a dreadful cold, his wife explained, so he was being looked after by his grandmother at home.

Dave got home and went to check on his son. The boy's eyes were red rimmed, his nose was red, and he had a cough that was so deep it sounded like it came from his toes.

"Has he had a fever?" Dave asked his wife.

"He still does," Maggie replied, "although it's not as bad as yesterday."

It turned out that Roger had the ‘flu, and a very serious case of it. Dave also had the ‘flu, and although they had contracted them in different countries, they turned out to be the same strain that was identified as part of the pandemic.

Maggie worked as a nurse at the community hospital, so she tended to wash her hands a lot more than her children did. She had also been inoculated against the ‘flu and made sure that her booster shots were up to date, as had her family. She did not develop symptoms of this pandemic influenza, but it wasn’t long before both her children were ill, as well as her husband and her parents.

However, the hospital was full, there were staff from the hospital that were off sick, and the beds were filled with people who were too ill to stay at home.

Maggie had to make a decision. Her family needed her. Her hospital needed her. Surrounding communities have been struck with illness too, and all of them were asking for help from Wallalooa.

Test Your Knowledge

What messages need to be sent out to the public about reductions in staff at the hospital?

What information needs to be shared with hospital staff about the community response to the pandemic?

Exercise Three: The Last Question

When it comes to crisis management, it’s difficult to predict everything that will come up. We know, however, that the more we can prepare, the better we can resolve or at least mitigate the effects of a particular event.

With the availability of travel and the movement of goods internationally, the threat of a pandemic is not something to be trifled with. How will your company manage if 10 or 25 or 60 percent of your people are out sick for a prolonged period of time?

Our last question to work through today is drawn from actual examples of ethical issues that impact hospitals and nursing homes around the world.

Scenario

You are on the board of directors with the local health region, and you are observing the number of hospital admissions increase. This form of influenza has not been fussy – people of all ages are succumbing to it. Your small hospital has 12 respirators, and they are all in use today: two for patients who were in car crashes and 10 for patients with influenza. Everyone who gets respirator treatment survives the pandemic, whether they are children, adolescents, adults, or the aged. You know that as the pandemic spreads, you will need more respirators. There are four people in the emergency department right now who need respirators, but yours are all in use and there are none available in the district. Patients who are not able to get a respirator for treatment will most certainly die. The nearest hospital (30 miles away) has sent a request to borrow respirators from you.

Test Your Knowledge

How will you decide who gets a respirator in your own hospital?

Recovering and Moving On

Initial Adjustments

When there is a crisis, each of us handles things our own way. Some people will look for closure and others will try to deny that the incident ever took place. If this is the first time that someone has been involved in a crisis or death, these feelings can be brand new. It’s important that people learn that what they are feeling is normal, and that they are not expected to suppress or deny their emotions about what has happened.

As the employer, you need to be prepared for the range of reactions and emotions that can come with a particular event. An injured or ill person will have their reaction, an emergency responder will have their reaction, witnesses will have a reaction, and people who are uninjured or ill will also have a reaction to what is happening, even if they are not on site. If you think of people who know what they were doing when the 9/11 attacks took place in America, even people who were not there or directly affected, this is a sign of the mark that trauma leaves on someone's psyche.

Have you ever had that experience where you get through a crisis by getting everything done that you need to do? You go hours without sleep, or have super strength, or you recognize that there is adrenaline coursing through your body that is helping you along. Afterward, when the crisis has passed, you suddenly want to sit somewhere quietly and rest, or perhaps you need to eat a massive meal.

These reactions are all perfectly normal and are expected responses to any kind of crisis. Employers will sometimes arrange for counseling on site for survivors or those otherwise impacted by an incident. In the case of a loss, sometimes there is memorial service, or some kind of marking of the event. These gatherings can be very important in helping people to acknowledge that what has happened cannot be changed, and to move towards acceptance of what has taken place. In the case of loss, it can help them to grieve.

Working Things Out

If you or someone on your team has been through a traumatic experience, you may find yourself in the role of offering comfort or support. Here are some suggestions that you may find helpful.

Worrying that a traumatic experience could be repeated is a natural reaction. Remind yourself that even if it does happen again, you have the ability to get through it, just as you did this time.

Accept that you will not feel this way forever. The intensity of the situation that you are feeling now will subside over time.

Survivor's guilt is common. This is when people ask themselves why something happened to someone else but not them. Find something to focus on, such as a problem to solve or a cause to help, and recognize your purpose there.

Reach out to friends and family for help. They will be supportive, although they may not have all the skills that you need. Remember that mental health professionals are also trained to help with critical incident stress debriefings, supportive counseling, cognitive behavioral therapy, and more. Find the right professional to help with the situation.

Further Reading:

