

**Part III. Supporting Documents**  
**Standardized Emergency**  
**Management System (SEMS)**  
**Guidelines**  
**After Action Reports'**  
**(Rev June 22, 2011)**

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.

## I. Introduction

The completion of after action reports is a part of the required SEMS reporting process. The Emergency Services Act, Section 8607 (f) mandates that the California Emergency Management Agency (Cal EMA) in cooperation with involved state and local agencies complete an after action report within 120 days after each declared disaster.

Section 2450 (a) of the SEMS Regulations states that. "Any city, city and county, or county declaring a local emergency for which the governor proclaims a state of emergency, and any state agency responding to that emergency shall complete and transmit an after action report to Cal EMA within ninety (90) days of the close of the incident period as specified in the California Code of Regulations, section 2900(j).

## II. Use of After Action Reports

After action reports are made available to all interested public safety and emergency management organizations and serve the following important functions:

- A source for documentation of response activities and transitional recovery activities
- The AAR captures an overview of response activities through the Close of Incident date, as determined by Cal EMA
- Identification of problems/successes during emergency operations
- Analysis of the effectiveness of components of the SEMS
- Identification of areas for improvement and a description of the actions planned to correct areas needing improvement

The SEMS approach to the use of after action reports emphasizes the improvement of emergency management at all levels. The after action report provides a vehicle for not only documenting system improvements, but also can, if desired, provide a work plan

for how these improvements can be implemented.

### III. Tiered Approach to AAR Development

The method for development of an AAR and the format used for the AAR is based upon the size or scope of the event or incident. The following two tiers have been established:

(a) Tier One: Condensed AAR

- A Governor's Emergency Proclamation is signed
- Only one OA was involved, and
- The response was isolated in nature, with no mutual aid requested and limited state involvement.

Examples: water contamination or utility shut off, road sink hole, snow load, heat or freeze, small weather event, police action, etc.

- An event that is unusual, where we want to capture the challenges or successes for future consideration.

In the case of a condensed AAR, Cal EMA may opt to use a facilitated one day Hot Wash to gather information for development of an AAR.

(b) Tier Two: Full AAR

- A Governor's Emergency Proclamation is signed
- More than one OA is impacted
- Multiple state agency response
- Statewide Mutual Aid systems are used

NOTE: Several proclaimed emergencies that are caused by the same general hazard may be grouped in a single AAR. Grouping or merging proclaimed emergencies is based upon; similarities in events (e.g. multiple storms or fire siege), geographic proximity, and timeframes.

#### **IV. After Action Report Process**

It may be useful to coordinate the after-action report process when multiple agencies/jurisdictions are involved in the same emergency. Jurisdictions are encouraged to work together in the development of after action reports when appropriate and feasible. For example, an operational area may take the lead in coordinating the development of an after action report which involves several jurisdictions. If appropriate, jurisdictional reports may become part of an overall operational area report.

Suggested processes for developing after action reports for local governments, state agencies, and for Cal EMA are described below.

##### **A. Local Government and State Agency Report Process**

###### **1. Assign Responsibility for after action report**

This assignment should be initiated as early as possible during the response phase of any emergency which will require an after action report. Ideally, the person assigned should have a background in the planning function, be familiar with emergency organization functions, and have an understanding of SEMS.

At both the field and EOC levels in SEMS the responsibility for initiating the after action, report process should be assigned to the Documentation Unit within the Planning/Intelligence Function.

At the completion of the emergency period, and after the field ICS and EOC level organizations have been deactivated, the responsibility for the continuance of the after action report process should be assigned elsewhere within the organization. In many

organizations, the same personnel may actually be assigned to the after action report function to provide continuity.

While it may appear to be premature to assign a person to this duty early in an emergency, it actually permits several key things to occur.

- It emphasizes the importance of documentation.
- It allows for early identification of possible system improvements and possible on-the-spot improvements. It allows data to be compiled before too much time has elapsed and participants have returned to their normal duties.
- It allows for establishment of timelines and expedites the preparation of the AAR.
- Early assignment also allows for establishment of timelines and expedites the actual preparation of the after action report.

## 2. Initiate the Documentation Process

Documentation actions should be initiated in the early stages of an emergency. Although it may be tempting to forgo documentation during the emergency response, adequate documentation;

- Is essential to operational decision-making
- May have future legal ramifications
- May have implications for reimbursement eligibility
- Provides the foundation for development of the AAR and Corrective Action

Depending upon the situation, different types of documentation comprise the source documents or "data base" for the after action report. Documentation should not be restricted to those reports or forms used exclusively by the planning function, but should include materials from the entire emergency organization. Ideally, key components of Part III. Supporting Documents Standardized Emergency Management System (SEMS) Guidelines After Action Reports' (Rev June 22, 2011) 6

this data base such as time-keeping procedures, would be identified as part of pre-event planning and would then be used during and actual event.

There are many types of documentation. Some recommended types include:

- Action plans developed to support operational period activities
- Forms used in the SEMS field level Incident Command Systems
- Unit activity logs and journals
- Response Information Management System (RIMS) forms and locally developed "feeder" forms/reports that support the RIMS forms
- Written messages
- Function and position checklists
- Public information and media reports
- FEMA-developed forms
- Other forms or documentation

### 3. Data Gathering Methods

Aside from reliance on documentation developed during emergency operations, other methods for gathering information include:

- Exit interview or critique forms distributed and completed as personnel rotate out of a function.
- Critiques performed at various time frames after an operation. Some critiques may be conducted immediately after an event and may be fairly informal in approach. Others may be conducted substantially later and may employ more formal, carefully structured workshops.

- Surveys distributed to individuals and organizations after the fact which can be used either for direct input to the after action report or as a basis for workshop discussions.
- After action report research teams, whose function is to gather information, and perhaps, write the applicable portions of the after action report.

There are many approaches to structuring and organizing data compilation. Some questions to consider are:

- What is the purpose of the critique or survey?
- Who is the survey's audience?
- Have all key "players" been included in the workshop?
- Does the survey/workshop process permit identification of internal, agency-specific improvements?
- Does the survey/workshop process permit identification of external improvements? Improvements involving the SEMS levels?
- Are SEMS functions (planning/intelligence, logistics, etc.) being assessed?
- Does the critique/survey format mesh with the after action report format?
- Does the research team understand its assignment and tasks?

#### 4. AAR Preparation

A four step process to prepare the after action report for local governments and state agencies is recommended:

- a) Compile the results of surveys, critiques, and workshops and sort the information according to the areas covered in the attached sample after action report.



- b) Use documentation and data to complete the online AAR Survey, as discussed later in these Guidelines.
- c) The AAR can be distributed for review and approval to participating agencies, advisory boards, political bodies, and other appropriate interested parties.
- d) Prepare final after action report and forward it to the city, operational area, Cal EMA Region, or Cal EMA Headquarters, as appropriate.

## **B. Cal EMA After Action Report Process**

To facilitate timely completion of the after action report and to provide assistance for state and local agencies with reporting requirements, Cal EMA may employ various methods of gathering data for AAR development.

Holding a workshop or Hot Wash is one approach Cal EMA could receive the 90-day report required by Section 2450 (a). Hot Washes will include representatives of agencies directly involved with response and early recovery activities, and those agencies providing support. Cal EMA may incorporate surveys and/or interviews as additional data gathering methodology for the after action report.

### **1. Assignment for AAR Development:**

The first activity will be the assignment of staff to develop the AAR. Assignments will be initiated as early as possible. Persons assigned will be familiar with SEMS functions and emergency operations.

### **2. Identify and Contact Key Agencies:**

Cal EMA/EMSU staff will work with the Regions to identify and contact primary responding agencies.

Agencies providing a secondary or support role (sometimes called cooperating agencies) will also need to be identified and contracted.

### 3. Use of Web-based AAR Survey and Follow-up Interviews:

After identifying and contacting the primary and secondary agencies, a web-based AAR Survey will be prepared and distributed to those agencies through the appropriate Region(s). This will be an incident-oriented survey. When the initial data gathering process has been completed, interviews may also be conducted.

### 4. Conducting a Hot Wash:

Cal EMA may opt to conduct a Hot Wash if this process is found to be more expeditious and resource efficient for gathering AAR-related information.

The Hot Wash attendees will include key representatives of involved emergency response agencies. These representatives should be able to address each of the SEMS functions.

The Hot Wash will concentrate on fact finding and discovery of pertinent information related to the emergency response and *early* recovery activities. This will be a facilitated process that will assist with data gathering *and* provide a forum for airing of concerns. Objective information on "what went right" and "what did not" will be encouraged during the workshop.

### 5. Cal EMA After Action Report Preparation

Following receipt of all survey results or the conclusion of the workshop, team members will begin preparing Cal EMA's AAR using the following steps:

a. Compile the results of the electronic survey, Hot Wash, interviews and research according to the specific areas covered in the after action report.

b. Review and analyze documentation to verify and support comments and conclusions reached by participants and team members.

c. Prepare after action report drafts and distribute for review and approval to the appropriate parties (e.g., primary responders).

- d. Prepare final after action report and forward for Cal EMA approval.
- e. Post secured AAR on Cal EMA website at [www.calema.ca.gov/prepare](http://www.calema.ca.gov/prepare).

## V. Sample After Action Report Outline

The automated AAR Survey meets the AAR submittal requirements unless local requirements state otherwise. Where appropriate, OAs and State agencies are encouraged to use the automated AAR Survey for submittal of after action and corrective action information.

If an OA or State agency chooses to submit a written AAR, the following is an example of one way to structure an after action report. Other options are possible. The format of the report should fit the situation, and there is no requirement to force the report into a single structured format.

1. Introduction and Background:
  - a. Type/location of event (describe and attach maps if available)
  - b. Chronological Summary (provide description and list items such as key evacuations, areas destroyed, etc.)
  - c. Date/Time and content of Proclamations/Declarations
2. Discussion of Response at Designated SEMS Levels:
  - a. Cover the levels appropriate to the jurisdiction and situation. Include:
  - b. Summary of response
  - c. Conclusions
3. Recommendations (will be summarized at the end)
  - a. Field Response Level

- a. Command
- b. Operations (includes Air Operations)
- c. Planning/Intelligence
- d. Logistics (includes Communications)
- e. Finance/Administration (if activated)

b. Local Government Level

Emergency Operations Center (EOC)

- a. Department Operations Center (DOC)
- b. Special Districts
- c. Other local government support
- d. Community Based Organizations

(Note: For each item above, discuss Management, Operations, Planning/Intelligence, Logistics, Finance/Administration, and multi or interagency coordination as appropriate.)

c. Interaction with the Operational Area (discuss as appropriate)

d. Interaction with the Regional Level

- a. Regional EOC (REOC)
- b. Other State Agencies (if not part of REOC)

e. Interaction with State above Regional Level (discuss as appropriate)

f. Interaction with Federal Agencies (discuss as appropriate)

4. . Interacting Systems, Agencies and Programs

- a. Mutual Aid Systems (Law Enforcement, Fire and Rescue, Medical and others if used)
- b. Cooperating Agencies
  - a. Utilities (telephone, electric, gas, etc.)
  - b. American Red Cross
  - c. Salvation Army
  - d. Others (as appropriate)
- c. Telecommunications and Information Processing
  - a. Field Level
  - b. Local Government
  - c. Operational Area
  - d. Interface with Region
  - e. Interface with State
- d. Training Needs (Consider all levels)
- e. Recovery Activities to Date
- f. Summary of Principal Recommendations
- g. References
  - a. Maps
  - b. Charts
  - c. Bibliography

- d. Other Items (as appropriate)

### **Corrective Action Plan for Improvements**

This section of the report can be done separately or included as appropriate. Submitting Corrective Action Plan separately may allow the responding agency time to consider the plans for improvement and action needed to bring the improvements to fruition.

Corrective Actions will be entered in the Cal EMA Corrective Action Database and progress on each corrective action will be provided periodically by each responding agency. Cal EMA may develop and disseminate reports outlining the status of the corrective actions taken to date.

It should describe for each of the principal recommendations:

- a. Description of actions to be taken
- b. Associated costs
- c. Timetable for completion