

# **Standardized Emergency Management System (SEMS) Guidelines**

## **Part II. Planning and Developing SEMS**

### **Section C**

#### **Operational Area**

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. Responsibility for Planning and Developing the Operational Area**

This section describes key features of Operational Area development and planning. SEMS Regulations required the establishment of Operational Areas and did not specify the particular method to use. Within the state all counties have established operational areas utilizing a variety of techniques, within the timeframe designated by regulation.

### **Need for Cooperative Planning Approach**

The operational area is one of the five organizational levels of SEMS described in Part I of the guidelines. During emergencies, the operational area will coordinate mutual aid and emergency operations within the operational area and will be the channel for requesting mutual aid from the regional level.

The functioning of the operational area during emergencies will affect all local governments. Therefore, all local governments have a stake in the development of an effective operational area. It is important that local governments within an operational area participate in its development.

The effective functioning of the operational area during an emergency will also depend on the cooperation of the local governments with the operational area emergency management organization.

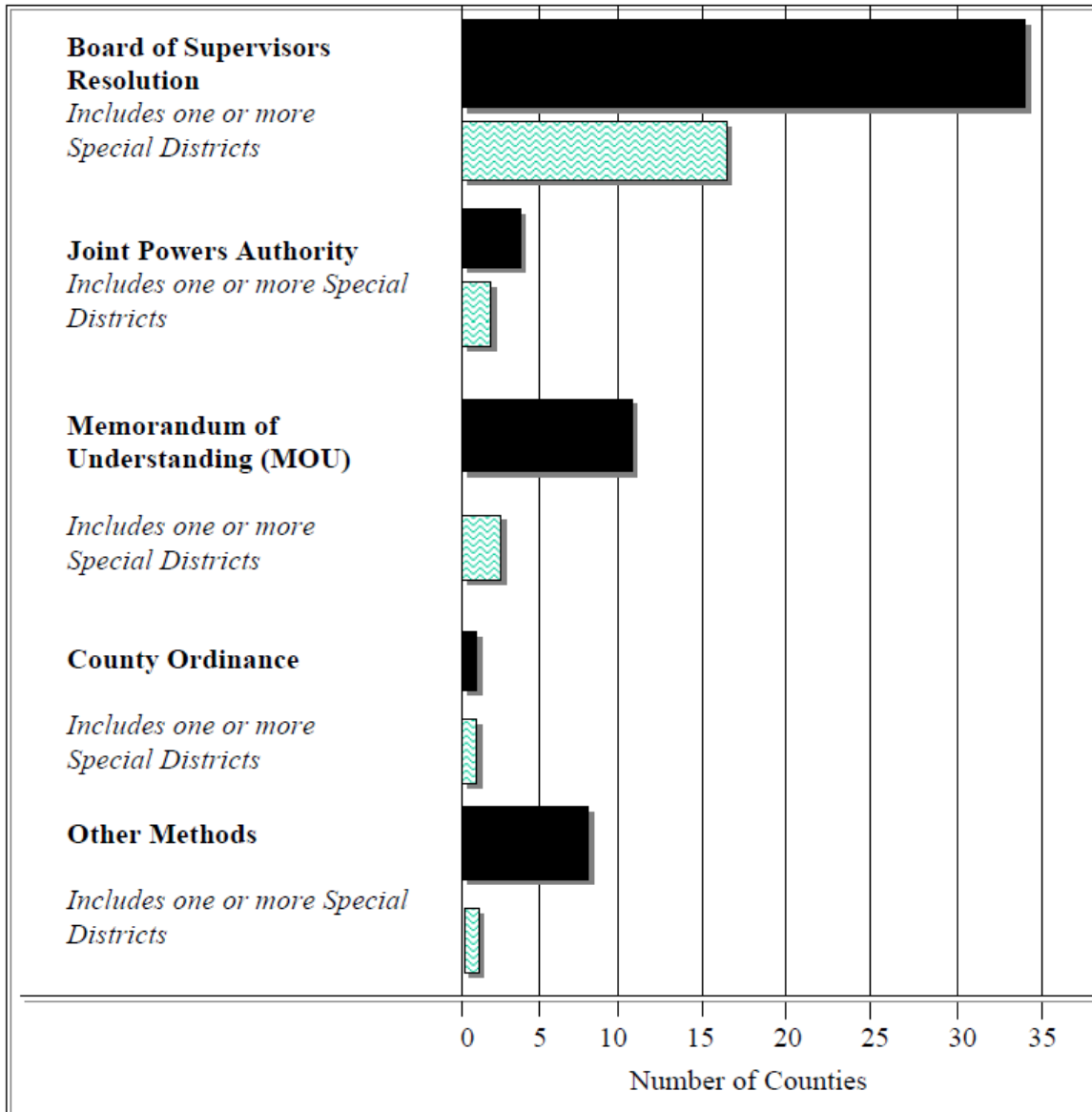
### **Board of Supervisors Responsibility**

The Board of Supervisors is responsible for the establishment of the operational area under SEMS regulations. This was accomplished by adoption of ordinances, resolutions, joint powers authority, memorandums of understanding and other methods establishing the operational area. Exhibit 2C-1 depicts the methods used to meet the regulation deadline.

## **Lead Agency Responsibility**

A lead agency is designated for each operational area. Designated lead agency staff have day-to-day responsibility for administration of the operational area. This includes taking a lead role in the initial planning and development of the operational area in concert with the member local governments.

### Method Used For Forming Operational Areas



Source of chart data: A polling of all counties through the Operational Areas was carried out by OES Regions; data provided was forwarded to OES Preparedness Branch for compilation. The resulting data is displayed in the chart shown above.

SEMS regulations specify that the county government is the lead agency unless another member agency of the operational area assumes that responsibility by written

agreement with county government. However, in all cases the counties have assumed the role of operational area.

## **2. Elements of an Effective Operational Area**

The operational area must develop the capability to carry out its coordination role in an emergency. Among the elements needed for an effective operational area are:

- Established policy for use of the operational area in emergencies
- Agreements among local governments to participate in the operational area (although use of the operational area is not affected by non-participation of any local government)
- Designated lead agency and staff to maintain the operational area
- Designated operational area emergency management organization (EOC staff and Operational Area Mutual Aid Coordinators)
- Adequate EOC facility
- Communications links with member agencies
- Twenty-four hour-a-day answering point for emergency notification from local government and state warning center
- Operational area emergency plan and procedures

## **3. Lead Agency**

The lead agency of the operational area was established formally by resolution or ordinance adopted by the County Board of Supervisors in each of the 58 counties of the state. Methods used for the creation of the operational area varied and included:

- Creation of a lead agency through a joint powers agreement among member local governments

- Designation of the lead agency through a memorandum of understanding between the county and other member local governments
- Designation of the lead agency through joint resolutions of the county and other member local governments
- Assumption of the lead agency responsibility by county government

Counties have taken the role of operational area perhaps because the role of the county is more closely related to that of an operational area than the role of cities or special districts. The county is already responsible for coordinating some emergency functions countywide, not just in unincorporated areas.

While the county has assumed the role of lead agency under SEMS, agreements with local governments may be useful to clarify roles and responsibilities.

### **Joint Powers Agreement**

While one method for establishing a lead agency for the operational area is through a joint powers agreement, very few have chosen that path. A joint powers agreement, authorized by Government Code §6500 et seq., is an agreement between two or more public agencies to jointly exercise any power common to them. The joint powers agreement may establish a new agency or entity to administer the agreement. A new agency established by a joint powers agreement is a separate entity from the county and the other local governments signing the agreement. The joint powers agreement (JPA) agency may be the operational area lead agency or may provide day-to-day support for the designated lead agency.

Each county and its political subdivisions is a distinct operational area and must have a lead agency to meet SEMS requirements. A JPA agency is eligible to be the lead agency provided that it is formed by member agencies of a single operational area. However, a joint powers agency formed for more than one county is not eligible to be a lead agency. A multi-county joint powers agency may assist operational area lead agencies, but cannot serve as a lead agency.

The JPA agency may be the lead agency even if all local governments in the operational area have not joined in the agreement. During an emergency, the lead agency must function on behalf of all local governments in the operational area.

A policy making body, established by the joint powers agreement and typically consisting of representatives from the signatory local governments, oversees the JPA agency. The joint powers agency may hire staff, purchase equipment and supplies, apply for grants, and enter into agreements with agencies for facilities and services. The JPA agency may undertake special projects, such as developing an operational area communications system. The staff of the JPA are responsible to the policy-making body.

The joint powers agreement may include provisions for:

- Establishing a policy-making body for the agreement
- Establishing a JPA administrative agency
- Assigning responsibilities to the JPA administrative agency
- Defining responsibilities of the local governments signing the agreement
- Providing for joint funding of the JPA administrative agency
- Establishing staff positions for the JPA administrative agency

### **Memorandum of Understanding**

A memorandum of understanding (MOU) may be used to develop a cooperative approach to organizing the operational area. This method was used for slightly over 10 counties. The MOU may help clarify the county's role as the operational area lead agency and its relationship to other local governments. Unlike the joint powers agreement, it does not create a separate legal entity. The MOU may provide for sharing of staff, facilities or services among the local governments.

A memorandum of understanding may include the following provisions:



- Establishing an advisory body for the agreement
- Assigning responsibility to a member agency(s) for administering the agreement
- Defining roles and responsibilities of the local government signing the agreement
- Identifying areas of cooperation including sharing of funds, staff or other resources

#### **4. Lead Agency Staff**

Staffing needs for the lead agency will vary depending on the size and complexity of the operational area. At a minimum, one person should be designated as the administrator for the operational area. The operational area administrator will be the lead staff person responsible for day-to-day needs of the operational area.

Operational area administrative staff will typically be the County Emergency Services Office. A joint powers agreement lead agency may have its own staff. Under a joint powers agreement, the operational area administrator and staff may also be the emergency services staff of the county government. The operational area staff may also provide staff services to other local governments' emergency services organizations, under a joint powers agreement or other staff sharing arrangement.

In an emergency, the operational area staff may fill positions in the EOC organization. The operational area administrator may be authorized to coordinate mutual aid resources within the operational area other than resources for which Operational Area Mutual Aid Coordinators have been designated such as fire, law enforcement and medical.

#### **5. Operational Area Disaster Councils**

An operational area disaster council (or emergency services council) may be a useful way to involve elected officials in developing and maintaining the operational area. The council may serve as an advisory body to the County Board of Supervisors and the

county staff, or pursuant to a joint powers agreement, serve as the policy-making body of the operational area lead agency.

## 6. Designated Operational Area EOC

The operational area must have a designated emergency operations center (EOC). The operational area EOC and county government EOC should generally be combined to make efficient use of personnel (assuming the county or joint powers agency is the lead agency). Many county officials have countywide emergency responsibilities that are closely related to operational area responsibilities.

The combined operational area and county government EOC should have:

- Sufficient work space to accommodate staff for operational area and county emergency functions
- Sufficient work space to accommodate local government representatives, a state OES representative, and other liaison representatives
- Procedures for set-up and internal operations including message handling
- Communications links with:
  - Local governments including cities and special districts
  - County departmental operations centers (DOCs)
  - Incident Command Systems in unincorporated areas either directly or through DOCs
  - Volunteer and private agencies involved in emergency response
  - OES Regional EOC and Regional Mutual Aid Coordinators
  - Operational Area Mutual Aid Coordinators (if not a part of the EOC staff)
  - Emergency power

- Pre-stocked supplies and forms for an extended period of operations

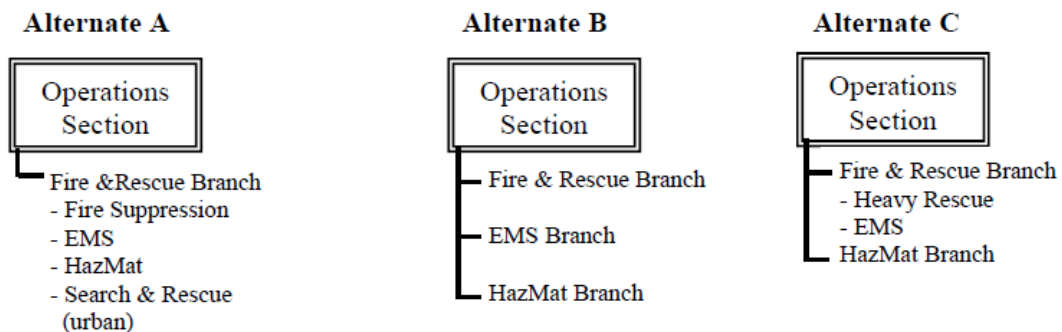
## 7. Developing the EOC Organization

The existing EOC organization should be reviewed as a starting point for developing the operational area EOC organization. Some modification may need to be made to incorporate SEMS concepts including the five essential SEMS functions. Additional elements may need to be added or existing elements redefined or rearranged to provide for all the necessary operational area functions, as well as county government functions.

An example operational area EOC organization is shown in Guidelines Part I.C. There is considerable flexibility in the way that branches and units may be arranged under the five SEMS functions. It is essential that major functions such as those identified in *The Emergency Planning Guidance for Local Governments* be covered, but that can be accomplished in various ways. For example, Exhibit 2C-1 shows how two functions, Medical and Public Health, can be handled by various branch and unit combinations along with other related functional elements.

Exhibit 2C-1

### Example Alternative Ways to Incorporate Functions into the EOC Organization



The existing county departmental or service delivery structure should be a consideration in determining the most effective way to organize the EOC. However, the operational area emergency management organization should be a functionally based, not departmentally based, organization.

EOC staff who will be carrying out operational area responsibilities should be thoroughly briefed. The distinction between county government responsibility and the operational area coordination role should be made clear.

## **8. Plans and Procedures**

The operational area should have an adopted emergency plan. This plan may be combined with the county government emergency plan. A combined plan should include both the operational area and county government roles.

In many cases, the operational area plan can be developed by updating the county emergency plan to reflect SEMS and incorporate the operational area role. *The Emergency Planning Guidance for Local Government* has a model city and a model county plan that takes the MHFP concepts and incorporates them into SEMS compatible plans.

The emergency plan should be supported by detailed procedures needed to fulfill the operational area role. As a minimum, the operational area should have activation procedures meeting SEMS requirements (See Guidelines Part I.C.).

## **9. Training**

All personnel who will be staffing positions in the operational area EOC must maintain minimum training competencies pursuant to the approved course of instruction. The training should be provided to primary and alternate EOC staff. Training should be initiated as soon as feasible after EOC staff are designated. Provisions should be made for an on-going training program to accommodate personnel changes.

Approved SEMS Introductory and EOC Courses are available for personnel who will perform a SEMS function in an EOC. Minimum training competencies are identified in the approved SEMS courses as performance objectives. Operational areas using an alternate training course should be able to demonstrate that the required competencies are being maintained. Further information on the approved training course is in Part III.

The lead agency should ensure that the training provided to operational area personnel is documented. SEMS training documentation may be integrated with agencies' normal training documentation systems. Agencies that do not currently have a training documentation system should establish a record-keeping system for SEMS training.

It is recommended that a SEMS training record-keeping system include:

- An individual training record for each person, kept either in their personnel file or in a separate training record file. The name of the course, instructor, location, and date of the course should be included in the training record.
- Maintenance of the individual training record for as long as the person is employed in a position that involves an emergency response role. Records of personnel involved in an actual emergency should be kept at least until any training compliance issues have been resolved.
- Documentation of the agency's SEMS training program including copies of the training materials used, such as, instructor syllabus, lesson plans, student notebook, exercises, and tests.

## **10. Exercises**

Exercises provide the most effective method of training EOC staff without experiencing an actual emergency. The following exercise program is suggested for operational areas.

First year:

1. Orientation briefing for all EOC personnel

2. Discussion type exercise to walk through EOC procedures with emphasis on operational area coordination role.
3. EOC simulation exercise (functional exercise)

On-going exercises on a four-year cycle:

1. One full-scale exercise during the four-year cycle
2. One functional exercise during each of the remaining three years

The exercises may be conducted in conjunction with local governments and the regional level.

## **11. Planning Checklist**

This checklist is intended as a guide to the initial planning and development of the operational area level.

- Have all local governments in the operational area been identified?
- Have special districts' emergency roles and methods of coordinating with them been determined?
- Have Community Based Organizations and Collaboratives been identified who should be involved at the operational area level?
- Has the board of supervisors established the operational area by policy, resolution or ordinance?
- Have local governments adopted policies to participate in the operational area?
- Has the operational area lead agency been identified?
- Has the operational area disaster or emergency council been formed?
- Has an operational area emergency plan been adopted?

- Has an adequate operational area EOC been identified?
- Have EOC activation criteria and procedures been developed?
  - Does it include the five SEMS functions?
  - Does it provide for functions from the *Emergency Planning Guidance for Local Governments* and other needed functions?
  - Does it include operational area mutual aid coordinators or their representatives?
- Have primary and alternate EOC staff been identified?
- Has a training plan and schedule been developed for EOC staff?
- Has means of communicating with local governments been identified?
- Have means of communicating with the OES REOC and Regional Mutual Aid Coordinators been identified?
- Has an exercise plan been developed?