Part III. Supporting Documents

Standardized Emergency Management System (SEMS)

After Action Reports

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 Office of Emergency Services (OES) 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 OES 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
- Identification of problems/successes during emergency operations
- Analysis of the effectiveness of the components of the SEMS
- Describe and define a plan of action for implementing improvements

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.

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.

III. After Action Report Process

Suggested processes for developing after action reports for local governments, state agencies, and for State OES 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 a luxury 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.

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

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 this data base, such as time-keeping procedures, would be identified as part of pre-event planning and would then be used during an 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
- OASIS forms and locally developed "feeder" forms/reports that support the OASIS 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, there are other methods for gathering information. Among these methods are:

- 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, 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. After Action Report Preparation

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

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

2. Review, analyze and sort documentation according to the areas covered in the attached sample after action report or another format as appropriate to the organization.

3. Prepare after action report drafts and distribute for review and approval to participating agencies, advisory boards, political bodies, and other appropriate interested parties.

4. Prepare final after action report and forward it to the city, operational area, OES Region, or OES Headquarters as appropriate.

B. State OES 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, OES may employ various methods. Holding a workshop is one way OES could receive the 90 day report required by Section 2450 (a). If held, these workshops will include representatives of agencies directly involved with response and recovery activities, and those agencies providing support. OES may incorporate surveys and/or interviews as additional data gathering methodology for the after action reports.

1. Assign Team and Team Leader

The first activity will be the assignment of a team and team leader for OES's after action report. Assignments will be initiated as early as possible. Persons assigned will be familiar with SEMS functions and emergency operations.

2. Development of Work Plan

The team will then develop a detailed work plan. The work plan will include the following:

- Scope of Work
- Work Schedule with Milestones
- Resource Needs

3. Identify and Contact Key Agencies

Once the work plan is completed, the OES team will need 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 contacted.

4. Initial Data Gathering

After identifying and contacting the primary and secondary agencies, a survey may be prepared and distributed to those agencies. This will be an incident-oriented survey. When the initial data gathering process has been completed, interviews may also be conducted.

5. Conducting a Workshop

The next step in the process is conducting a workshop. The workshop attendees will include key representatives of involved emergency response agencies. These representatives should be able to address each of the SEMS functions.

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

6. OES After Action Report Preparation

Following the conclusion of the workshop, team members will begin preparing OES's after action report. Team members will use a four step process:

1. Compile the results of the survey, interviews and workshop and sort the information according to the specific areas covered in the after action report.

2. Review, analyze and sort documentation according to the areas covered in the after action report. The main purpose for analyzing the data is to verify and support comments and conclusions reached by participants and team members.

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

4. Prepare final after action report and forward it to the interested parties.

IV. Sample After Action Report Outline

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.

Executive Summary - Principal Recommendations

1. Introduction and Background

1.1 Type/location of event (Describe and attach maps if available)

1.2 Chronological Summary (Provide description and list items such as key evacuations, areas destroyed, etc.)

1.3 Date/Time and content of Proclamations/Declarations

2. Discussion of Response at Designated SEMS Levels

Cover the levels appropriate to the jurisdiction and situation. Include:

Summary of response

Conclusions

Recommendations (will be summarized at the end)

2.1 Field Response Level

Command

Operations (includes Air Operations)

Planning/Intelligence

Logistics (includes Communications)

2.2 Local Government Level

Emergency Operations Center (EOC)

Department Operations Center (DOC)

Special Districts

Other local government support

Volunteer agencies etc.

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

2.3 Interaction with the Operational Area (discuss as appropriate)

2.4 Interaction with the Regional Level

Regional EOC (REOC)

Other State Agencies (if not part of REOC)

2.5 Interaction with State above Regional Level (discuss as appropriate)

2.6 Interaction with Federal Agencies (discuss as appropriate)

3. Interacting Systems, Agencies and Programs

3.1 Mutual Aid Systems (Law Enforcement, Fire and Rescue, Medical and others if used)

3.2 Cooperating Agencies

Utilities (telephone, electric, gas etc.)

American Red Cross

Salvation Army

Others (as appropriate)

3.3 Telecommunications and Information Processing

Field Level

Local Government

Operational Area

Interface with Region

Interface with State

3.5 Media Interactions

4. Training Needs (Consider all levels)

5. Recovery Activities to Date

6. Summary of Principal Recommendations

7. References

Maps

Charts

Bibliography

Other Items (as appropriate)

Action Plan for Improvements

(This section of the report can be done separately or included as appropriate.)

It should describe for each of the principal recommendations:

Description of actions to be taken

Assignments

Associated costs and budget

Timetable for completion

Follow up responsibility