

Montgomery County, MD Continuity of Operations

Overcoming challenges
by integrating COOP
into the disaster
response system

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Presentation Overview

- About OEMHS
- Local Government COOP Challenges
- Montgomery County COOP Challenges
- Making the Transition from Plan to Program
- Future Steps

About OEMHS

- Coordinate disaster response activities
- Offer preparedness education for residents, organizations, and businesses
- Develop and maintain response plans
- Coordinate exercises and mitigation activities
- Run the hazardous materials permitting program

About OEMHS

The Emergency Operations Center may be activated at one of three levels depending on the situation:

Monitoring: Provides for increased monitoring capability and typically involves OEMHS staff and representatives from key public safety agencies.

Partial Activation: Provides for select activation of ESF primary agencies and key support agencies that may be or will be engaged in the emergency situation.

Full Activation: Includes all primary and support agencies identified within the Emergency Operations Plan (EOP) which could operate 24 hours a day.

About OEMHS

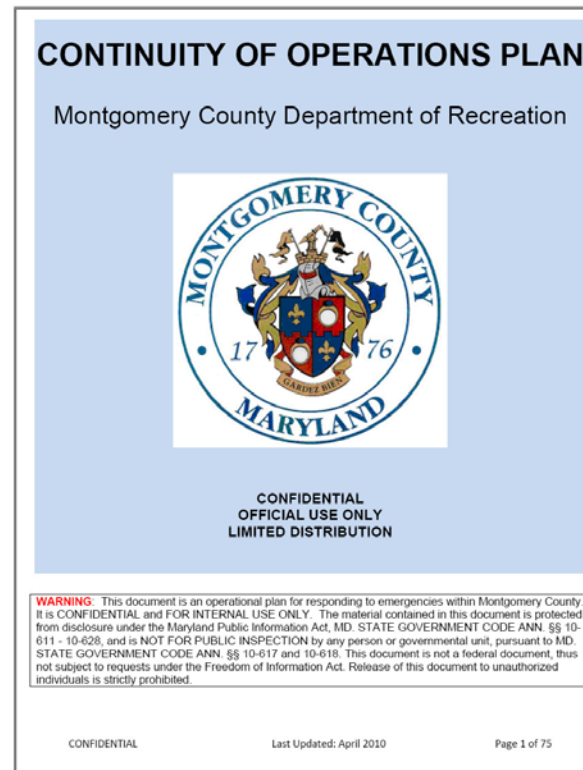
- OEMHS provides notification through a variety of systems:
 - Emergency Alert System (TV and Radio)
 - Reverse 911 (Hard-line Phones)
 - Alert Montgomery (Cell Phones, Pagers, E-mail)
 - <https://Alert.MontgomeryCountyMD.gov>

COOP Challenges in Local Government

- COOP planning falls under “other duties as assigned”
- COOP guidance developed for Federal level
- COOP viewed as a “check in the box”
- COOP needs better buy-in at the top

COOP in Montgomery County

- Plans developed for each department
- The size of the plans presented some challenges:
 - Using the plans in a COOP event
 - Managing the plan for departments that have multiple locations and a variety of essential functions



COOP in Montgomery County

- Additional Challenges:
 - OEMHS driving the process
 - Plans difficult to update
 - Lack of COOP events creates complacency
 - Staff reductions made it difficult to build on plans

COOP in Montgomery County

- Additional Challenges
 - Many COOP program managers also represent their departments in the Emergency Operations Center during a disaster
 - Several large departments require a great deal of time investment to make decisions on the direction of their plans
 - Lack of funds for a stand-alone COOP management system

Overcoming our Challenges

- Simplify the plans by focusing on just the critical information
- Work with departments to break down the plans so they are manageable (by division, by facility, etc)
- Separate role of EOC representative and COOP program manager
- Take information out of the “plan” and put it into a format that’s easy to access and easy to update
- Work COOP scenarios into county-wide exercises

Integrating COOP into WebEOC

- WebEOC is a web-based information sharing and resource management tool used by many jurisdictions during disasters
 - Users can monitor updates, request resources, access a variety of tools to improve the ability to respond to a disaster
 - National Capital Region jurisdictions can share certain information and monitor updates with each other

COOP in WebEOC

- Advantages:
 - System can be accessed anywhere with an internet connection
 - Many employees already trained in WebEOC, making the transition easier
 - Ability to print information in PDF format
 - Version control
 - Ability for OEMHS to better assist departments during an emergency

COOP in WebEOC

- Disadvantages
 - Difficult to customize for individual department needs
 - Some limits on how we can apply the technology
 - Getting out of the mindset of paper plans

Next Steps in COOP Program

- Complete integration with WebEOC
- Testing, Training, and Exercises
- COOP Toolkit