

Continuity of Operations (COOP)

COOP planning is simply a "good business practice"—part of the fundamental mission of agencies as responsible and reliable public institutions. For years, COOP planning had been an individual agency responsibility primarily in response to emergencies within the confines of the organization. The content and structure of COOP plans, operational standards, and interagency coordination, if any, were left to the discretion of the agency.

The changing threat environment and recent emergencies, including localized acts of nature, accidents, technological emergencies, and military or terrorist attack-related incidents, have shifted awareness to the need for COOP capabilities that enable agencies to continue their essential functions across a broad spectrum of emergencies. Also, the potential for terrorist use of weapons of mass destruction has emphasized the need to provide the President a capability which ensures continuity of essential government functions across the Federal Executive Branch.

To provide a focal point to orchestrate this expanded effort, PDD-67 established FEMA as the Executive Agent for Federal Executive Branch COOP. Inherent in that role is the responsibility to formulate guidance for agencies to use in developing viable, executable COOP plans; facilitate interagency coordination as appropriate; and oversee and assess the status of COOP capability across the Federal Executive Branch. Additionally, each agency is responsible for appointing a senior Federal government executive as an Emergency Coordinator to serve as program manager and agency point of contact for coordinating agency COOP activities.

OBJECTIVES: COOP planning is an effort to assure that the capability exists to continue essential agency functions across a wide range of potential emergencies. The objectives of a COOP plan include:

- a. Ensuring the continuous performance of an agency's essential functions/operations during an emergency;
- b. Protecting essential facilities, equipment, records, and other assets;
- c. Reducing or mitigating disruptions to operations;
- d. Reducing loss of life, minimizing damage and losses; and,
- e. Achieving a timely and orderly recovery from an emergency and resumption of full service to customers.

PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS: In accordance with current guidance, a viable COOP capability:

- Must be maintained at a high level of readiness;
- Must be capable of implementation both with and without warning;
- Must be operational no later than 12 hours after activation;
- Must maintain sustained operations for up to 30 days; and,
- Should take maximum advantage of existing agency field infrastructures.

Agencies should develop and maintain their COOP capabilities using a multi-year strategy and program management plan. The plan should outline the process the agency will follow to designate essential functions and resources, define short and long-term COOP goals and objectives, forecast budgetary requirements, anticipate and address issues and potential obstacles, and establish planning milestones.