

An organization should assess those preventative controls that are best for each particular mode of communication and then compare those controls to the protective measures now in place at both primary and alternate work sites.

b. Identify Alternate Modes of Communication

Use Worksheet #36 to complete this task.

When preventative controls fail, an organization should have alternative providers and/or modes of communication in place to fill the gap. This can be handled by having a separate emergency communication system set up or by using communication systems already in place. For example, cellular phones could be an alternative mode of communication for voice lines.

Service providers offer special services for emergencies, such as telecommunications services priority (TSP). This service gives an organization's telecommunications circuits priority allowing communications to get through when all circuits are busy. Check with your organization's service providers for information on any emergency communications services. Consider providing radios, satellite phones or other special communication devices to COOP team members for use in an emergency.

3. Interoperability

Interoperability is the ability of a system or a product to work with other systems or products without special effort on the part of the user.

Because of the need to coordinate efforts with the federal, state, and local governments, organizations with first responder roles have special communications considerations. Interoperable communications systems (i.e., systems that can be used to communicate between departments of a single jurisdiction or different jurisdictions) are critical to allow emergency personnel to communicate with each other.

Unfortunately, one organization's radios often cannot be used to communicate with another organization. Additionally, encryption/privacy protocols can be different and can interfere with incident management. These protocols must sometimes be turned off to allow communication across departments and jurisdictions. Organizations with first responder roles must give serious consideration to interoperability issues.

Another consideration is communication between systems at alternate work sites and the primary facilities. There may be situations where data systems at the primary facility are functional, but the primary work site is inaccessible to humans, e.g., contamination from a biological or chemical agent. Good COOP plans will include arrangements to ensure systems at alternate facilities are compatible with and can communicate with systems at the primary facility.