

Introduction to Continuity of Operations

No one will soon forget the tragedy of September 11, 2001 or the bombing of the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City. The largest power outage in 30 years struck states from Ohio to Connecticut and into Canada for several days in August 2003. In 1996, Hurricane Fran left many North Carolinians with impassible roads, damaged or destroyed homes and without power for as much as two weeks. In 1999, Hurricane Floyd inflicted the worst flooding in history on eastern North Carolina. And North Carolina's mountains suffered significant damage from flooding and mud slides caused by the remnants of two hurricanes in 2004.

The purpose of this document is to provide guidance to North Carolina Executive Branch departments and divisions/agencies in the development of a Continuity of Operations Program for continuation of internal critical services should buildings/facilities and support infrastructure (staff, Information Technology, and business systems) become unusable or unavailable. This program is not intended to include all those functions and agency responsibilities for external public health and safety concerns that are represented in the North Carolina Emergency Operations Plan (NCEOP). However, based on severity and nature of emergency events, both programs could be engaged at once.

A solid COOP program must incorporate multiple components that provide an understanding of an agency's operations critical functions, and a documented continuity plan that explains how to recover these functions in the event of an emergency or disaster. This plan must ensure stability and continuation of essential program services to the public during a wide range of potential events. This program must also incorporate a means to test recovery plans and ensure they will be effective in the event of a disaster. As the plan is documented, security risks may be identified (e.g., non-documented emergency plans, etc.) and must be addressed. COOP Plans should be developed using an all-hazards approach--this being the best way to ensure essential functions persist without regard to emergency type.

Preparation for major disasters is important, but it's just as important to address less severe emergencies that might occur more frequently. A large majority of emergency situations might turn out to be "quiet disasters." These relatively minor events can wreak havoc on an agency's ability to continue operations.

COOP program planning is "good business practice", and, without it, organizations cannot fulfill their missions in the face of crises that disrupt essential functions. The public expects good customer service from the government as much as it does from any business. A fundamental and essential characteristic of every organization is reliability. Historically, the public has been unwilling to overlook lapses in services--even in the wake of disasters. Government has an obligation to provide seamless services,