

Information Sharing at the Seattle Emergency Operations Center

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Background

The Seattle Emergency Operations Center (EOC):

- Acts as the **communication and coordination hub** for the City's response and recovery efforts during an incident.
- Facilitates the **gathering and sharing of information and resources**.
- Creates messaging that **communicates key information to the media and public** through press releases.

Objective

To analyze and model the information sharing process for creating a press release during an activation of the Emergency Operations Center and suggest recommendations for improvement.

Situation

The sponsors identified a need to improve strategic information coordination between the Joint Information Center (JIC), Operations and Plans section in the EOC.

At the initial stages of incident response, responding department Public Information Officers (PIOs) handle media inquiries and public messaging on scene. When the EOC is activated, the JIC, staffed with PIOs from various departments, becomes the centralized and single voice of the city's response.

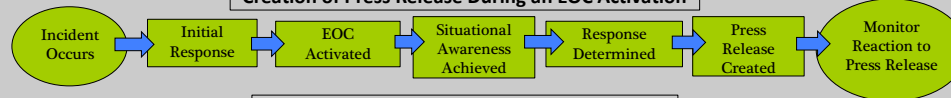
Within the EOC, departmental and agency team members are collaboratively and strategically identifying what has happened and the impacts to the community, systems, and services; actively responding to the impacts and providing support to the field teams; and identifying and planning for future actions and response and recovery needs.

The Operations team is comprised of representatives from several departments (Police, Fire, Transportation, Utilities, City Light, Parks, Human Services, etc.) who meet in the EOC to coordinate and communicate their efforts. The reps receive information from their teams in the field and constantly share information within the EOC and back out to their respective field teams.

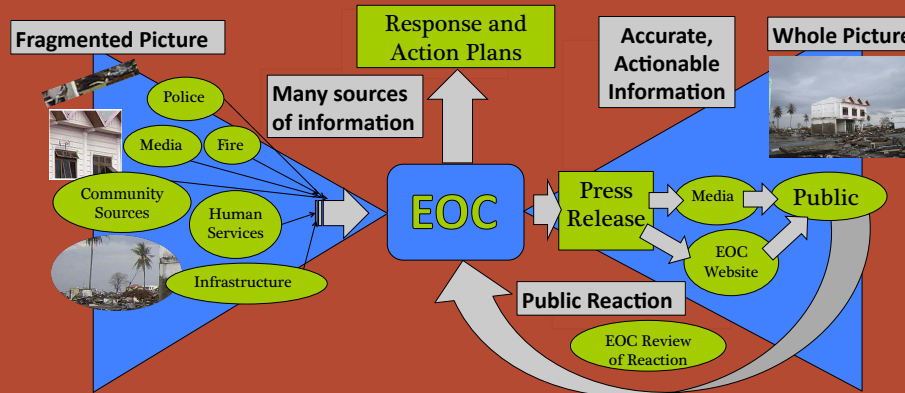
Initial information during an incident can be fluid, fragmentary, incomplete, and might not be for public consumption. Information is shared and discussed among the people in the EOC. All information received is entered into a documentation system called WebEOC.

Analysis

Creation of Press Release During an EOC Activation



Information Sharing During An EOC Activation



The EOC has three core strategic missions: coordinate information, coordinate resources, and develop plans of action. The EOC functional areas of Operations and JIC have differing but complimentary information needs. Operations is responding in real time and they stitch the pieces of information together to create situational awareness to guide actions and priorities. When a PIO is writing a press release, the information released has to be accurate and actionable for the public.

Modeling revealed that improvements could be made in documenting information in WebEOC.

Solution

The expansion of a recently adopted information tagging program for each WebEOC entry from one to three choices could improve the information coordination process. The WebEOC interface would be modified to require the choosing of a tag as part of the creation or updating of an entry.



Seattle Emergency Operations Center

Impact

• Tagging all entries and updates with one of the experimental information status tags could improve the strategic information coordination and authentication between the JIC and Operations.

• Access to tagged information could improve the abilities of Operations to more effectively utilize the information for coordination and response, and assist the JIC in efficiently creating accurate and actionable press releases for the public.

• Modeling this aspect of their overall operations allowed the EOC to look at their processes in a different way and provided them with a starting point for critical examination.

Acknowledgments

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