

**Part III. Supporting Documents**

**Standardized Emergency  
Management System (SEMS)  
Guidelines**

**Action Planning**

The contents of this guideline have not been changed from the original document, however, the guideline has been reformatted to meet Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) 508 standards.

## I. Background

Action Plans are an essential part of SEMS at all levels. Action Planning is an effective management tool involving two essential items:

- A process to identify objectives, priorities, and assignments related to emergency response or recovery actions.
- Plans which document the priorities, objectives, tasks and personnel assignments associated with meeting the objectives

There are two kinds of action plans, Incident Action Plans and EOC Action Plans. EOC Action Plans should focus on jurisdictional related issues. The format and content for action plans at the Incident level and the EOC levels will vary. The process for developing action plans is quite similar for all SEMS levels.

## II. Incident Action Plans

At the field level, action plans developed for use at incidents are called Incident Action Plans (IAP). Incident action plans are required for each operational period. (An operational period is the length of time scheduled for the execution for a given set of operational actions as specified in the incident action plan.) Incident action plans may be either verbal or written.

Written incident action plans are recommended for:

- Any multi-agency and multi-jurisdictional incident
- Complex incidents
- Long term incidents when operational periods would span across shift changes

Special forms are used within ICS to record information for written incident action plans. These forms should be used whenever possible. The format for an incident action plan will generally include the following elements:

1. Incident objectives and priorities (Overall, what do we want to achieve?)
2. Primary and alternative strategies (as appropriate) to achieve incident objectives. (What are the ways in which we can achieve the objectives? How do the strategies compare in safety, speed, environmental impact, cost etc.? Is current resource availability a limiting or dictating factor in strategy selection?)
3. Tactics appropriate to the selected strategy (Given a selected strategy, what are the specific tactics necessary to implement the strategy?)
4. The kinds and number of resources to be assigned (determined by the tactics to be used)
5. The operations tactical organization necessary for the selected strategy and tactics (Can include describing the incident geographically or functionally)
6. Overall support organization including logistical, planning/intelligence and finance/administration functions
7. A communications plan
8. Safety messages
9. Other supporting documentation needed, e.g., and incident map, showing access, key facilities etc., a medical support plan etc.

The Field Level SEMS Approved Course of Instruction (ACI) addresses Incident Action Planning in more detail, describing the forms, and includes an exercise in developing an incident action plan.

## **II. Action Planning at SEMS EOC Levels**

Action planning at all EOC levels, like that of the field length of the operational period for the EOC is determined by first establishing a set of objectives and priority actions that need to be performed. Then establishing a reasonable time frame for accomplishing

those actions. Generally, the actions requiring the longest time period will define the length of the operational period.

Typically, operational periods at the beginning of an emergency are short, sometimes only a few hours. As the emergency progresses, operational periods may be longer, but should not exceed twenty-four hours. Operational periods should not be confused with staffing patterns or shift change periods. They may be the same, but need not be.

The initial EOC action plan may be a verbal plan put together in the first hour after EOC activation. The EOC Director in concert with the General Staff usually does it. Once the EOC is fully activated, EOC action plans should be written.

EOC action plans should not be complex or create a time consuming process. The format may vary somewhat within the several EOC SEMS levels, but the EOC action plan should generally cover the following elements:

1. Listing of objectives to be accomplished (should be measurable)
2. Statement of current priorities related to objectives
3. Statement of strategy to achieve the objectives. (Identify if there is more than one way to accomplish the objective, and which way is preferred)
4. Assignments and actions necessary to implement the strategy
5. Operational period designation - The time frame necessary to accomplish the actions
6. Organizational elements to be activated to support the assignments. (Also, later action plans may list organizational elements that will be deactivated during or at the end of the period)
7. Logistical or other technical support required

## Focus of the EOC Action Plan

The primary focus of the EOC action plan should be on jurisdictional issues - The plan sets overall objectives for the jurisdiction and may establish the priorities as determined by the jurisdictional authority. It can also include mission assignments to departments, provide policy and cost constraints, inter-agency considerations etc. Properly prepared, the EOC action plan becomes an essential input to developing departmental action plans.

### III. The Action Planning Process (EOC and Incident)

The primary responsibility for preparing an incident or an EOC Action Plan is assigned to the Planning/Intelligence Section. Several elements of the organization will be involved in the development of the content for the plan.

1. The Incident Commander or EOC Director and all members of the General Staff must participate in the action planning process.
2. There must be adequate representation of key organizational components, organizations and agencies.
3. Representatives participating in the planning process must have the technical expertise and authority to commit to accomplishing the objectives.
4. Representatives must understand the action planning process and be willing to function according to the process.
5. There must be adequate logistical arrangements and facilities to support the process.
6. There must be adequate pre-event planning, and participants must adhere to the format and timetables related to the planning process.

## Steps in the Planning Process (EOC and Incident)

1. Identify representatives and organizational entities needed for current planning. This will include but is not limited to the Incident Commander or EOC Director. General Staff, Information and Liaison functions as well as key agency representatives essential to meeting the objectives.
2. Establish a cycle for action planning meetings. Initially, these may be every few hours or several times a day. Over time, they will move to twice a day and then to daily.
3. Develop a format for the plan, and use that format in the planning process. Formats will vary depending upon Field or EOC level, complexity of the plan etc.
4. Determine who needs the plan, and establish procedures for publication and distribution of the plan.
5. Establish a procedure for revisions and updates. This could include sections providing suggested written revisions, or provision for making expedient changes during the operational period if required.
6. Prepare and distribute the Action Plan. The plan will be prepared based on information obtained at the planning meeting. Ensure that the plan is approved by the Incident Commander or the EOC Director prior to distribution.
7. Establish a documentation file for incident or EOC action plans. The documentation file will consist of the action plans and any supporting documentation.