

by Steven C. Davis

# Eye of the storm

## A good command centre brings calm to chaos

What can an organization do to successfully address the natural and man-made threats facing its facility? Emergency planning consultant Steve Davis argues that establishing a “command centre” equipped to manage the crisis is an important element of emergency planning.

Emergency planners know that bad things happen. That is why planners plan. They work to save lives, prevent damage, and ensure operational continuity.

One critical part of this planning process is preparing a team to operate an emergency command or operations centre. These command centres are vital to helping your facility successfully manage the potential problems that can crop up during any disaster.

But what, exactly, goes into the creation of a command centre?

### Information management is the key

The command centre is an information management and decision-making hub during a crisis. Its primary purpose is to gather and process all of the information required to plan for and respond to emergency incidents quickly and effectively.

As information arrives, the team should ensure that information flows to the appropriate analysts, both information technology specialists and business managers, who can make the initial assessment as to whether or not the incident is indeed an emergency.

If and when they determine that a disruption is an emergency, then the command centre team must post the incident in an “operations log.” This log

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can be crucial to the command centre’s success. It is a central repository for the team to record all the actions it took and resources it used to respond to the incident. The log is an important management tool, both throughout an incident and after the incident, to establish the procedures employees followed, any procedures that were modified and the results of everyone’s actions.

Once the command centre team establishes the



response teams •

incident in the operations log, it must select the response and recovery plan most appropriate to the incident. If you have not prepared a plan for that particular incident, you should activate and modify another plan with similar types of response activities. This plan should provide the guidance you need to apply the appropriate response personnel and resources.

A good companion to your response and recovery plan is an “operating procedure” checklist. You can activate, modify and use it throughout the incident to help you follow any previously established best practices for this type of emergency. As checklist items are completed, someone must add that information to the operations log. The command centre team, which has been following the incident in the log, can see which checklist items have been completed.

Throughout the entire emergency response operation, the command centre team must track all of the activities and resources the organization is using against the original response plan and the operating procedure checklist. Every movement toward the completion of the task is provided as feedback in the operations log.

### **Understanding the command centre's mission**

The command centre's mission consists of three vital tasks:

- **Communication and intelligence.**

The command centre must be able to effectively communicate and receive information throughout the crisis. It is critical to keep

everyone informed about an event. It is equally important for the centre to gather enough information to manage the incident.

- **Command and control.**

The command centre must provide the command and control functions necessary to put multiple response and recovery plans into action — triggering them as needed, providing the triage structure required to allocate resources and personnel, and assuring effective direction of the response operations.

- **Coordination and documentation.**

The command centre must create a mechanism so it can coordinate all of the steps the organization takes to respond to an event. As well, the centre needs to create a record of those actions to protect employees, infrastructure, and shareholder value.

With the right management approach and tools, your command centre can successfully guide your facility through a crisis, saving your organization time, money and aggravation every step of the way. Whether caused by an employee strike, a snowstorm, a supply shortage, or dozens of other potential incidents, a command centre is absolutely essential to the well-being of your organization. 🟡

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