

Chapter 2: Emergency Operations and Public Health

“This can happen anywhere. Think about your plan.”

– Mayor Buddy Dyer, Orlando FL

Chapter Summary

Emergency preparedness is the creation of organizational structures within government agencies that enable them to provide support, resources, and services needed during and after emergencies. Although you may never be fully prepared for a public mass shooting, you can take steps to ensure your agencies are equipped to handle the specific challenges posed by a mass casualty incident.

In consultation with public safety and emergency management staff and your public health agency, you can review and update your emergency management plans and determine whether a supplemental plan for a mass casualty incident is needed. You can participate in tabletop exercises and training to practice emergency operations specific to a mass shooting. You should ensure your communications infrastructure is equipped to handle such an emergency.

Include public health officials in **preparedness** planning, as they play an essential role in coordinating mental health services and other crisis response in the aftermath of a mass shooting. During this phase, assess emergency alert systems and review or revise emergency operations plans to prepare for a potential mass shooting in your city.

During the **response** phase, law enforcement will establish an Emergency Operations Center (EOC) that coordinates first responders and law enforcement operations. This might be a mobile command unit or a permanent EOC that may have been established in the city. Collecting information will be a top priority. You will monitor all aspects of the emergency response while you work with your staff to coordinate unmet needs.

Emergency management continues after the situation is contained and the crime scene is processed. You can direct a formal evaluation of the emergency response to inform your own agencies and other localities of lessons learned. You can also work with the appropriate agencies to transition from emergency operations to long-term services to help the community “return to normal” during the **recovery**.



Preparedness

Emergency Operations Planning

It is critically important to review your emergency operations plan (EOP) with your public safety director or emergency manager. This plan, often required by law, generally designates authority among agency directors and specifies operational procedures for crisis management, including by coordinating emergency responders. It may not, however, cover specific incidents and hazards such as a public mass shooting. In consultation with your public safety and emergency management staff, determine whether a supplemental plan for emergency operations during a public mass shooting is needed.

In some cases of mass shootings, the all-hazards EOP was never officially activated, nor did elected officials declare a state of local emergency. However, many of the functions described by the local EOP—including establishment of unified command among multiple response agencies, establishment of communications channels between elected officials and law enforcement, and activation of mutual aid agreements with other jurisdictions—will occur. For this reason, it is crucial that you understand your local EOP and its applicability to a public mass shooting.

Emergency operations planning usually utilizes the National Incident Management System (NIMS), which was prepared by Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) for elected officials. One aspect of the NIMS model is Emergency Support Functions (ESFs), a structure used to coordinate between multiple federal agencies to provide support, resources, program implementation, and services needed during an emergency. Review the NIMS guidance and resources below to understand your role as mayor in the NIMS model and guide your planning.

Key Resource: National Incident Management System (NIMS) Guidance



FEMA, National Incident Management System (2017, 3rd edition): guidance for using the National Incident Management System (NIMS) at all levels of government, including commentary on the roles of local elected officials in incident management.

https://training.fema.gov/emiweb/is/is700b/6ho/national_incident_management%20system_third%20edition_october_2017.pdf

Alert Systems and Capacities

Emergency Notification Systems (ENS) send mass notifications via phone, text, social media, and email to the public in an emergency. In the case of a mass shooting, they can alert the public of immediate safety concerns, order the public to shelter in place, or to avoid a specific area if a shooter is still at large. As part of your preparedness planning, you should consider whether your city would be best served by establishing an ENS. See Chapter 1 on Communications for more information and resources.





Image 4: An example of an Emergency Operations Center in action, showing coordination among a Public Information Officer and officials during a simulated mass casualty incident (Photo by Shannon Arledge, The U.S. National Archives).

Emergency Preparedness Training

Training is an important component of emergency preparedness. The trainings FEMA recommends for elected officials are detailed below. In addition, mayors we interviewed strongly recommend tabletop exercises. Make time to schedule a tabletop exercise for your staff and relevant agencies and attend tabletop exercises and trainings (such as active shooter trainings) conducted by city officials and/or law enforcement. These may cover crisis communications, emergency operations, IT systems and needs, and other actions, usually in the context of a specific scenario. For more on tabletop exercises and a compilation of all training opportunities and recommendations, see Appendix A.¹

Key Resources: Recommended FEMA Training

G-402 Incident Command System (ICS) Overview for Executives/Senior Officials: FEMA recommends elected officials complete this course, which covers the basics of what you need to know about the National Incident Management System, Multiagency Coordination Groups, Incident Command Systems, and Emergency Operations Centers. The course also summarizes the chief elected official's role in emergency preparedness, which may be applied to preparedness for a public mass shooting.

[https://training.fema.gov/gstate/downloadmats.aspx?rd=1&course=G0402%20-%20ics-402%20-%20incident%20command%20system%20\(ICS\)%20overview%20for%20executives%20and%20senior%20officials](https://training.fema.gov/gstate/downloadmats.aspx?rd=1&course=G0402%20-%20ics-402%20-%20incident%20command%20system%20(ICS)%20overview%20for%20executives%20and%20senior%20officials)





G-191 Incident Command System/Emergency Operations Center Interface:

According to FEMA, this course reviews Incident Command System and Emergency Operation Center responsibilities and functions and provides an opportunity for participants to begin developing an interface between an Incident Management Team and EOC personnel. FEMA recommends this course for elected officials. The course is not available online as of this writing.

<https://training.fema.gov/emiweb/is/icsresource/trainingmaterials/> <https://training.fema.gov/emiweb/is/icsresource/trainingmaterials/>

Public Health Resources

Public health officials, especially mental health and behavioral health experts, should help plan emergency operations for a mass shooting. They provide mental health communications expertise and can assist in the delivery of emergency response functions, such as providing psychological first aid (PFA) to victims, witnesses, and first responders. In some cases, they can activate large groups of volunteers such as the Medical Reserve Corps (MRC). They can also help plan for the recovery phase, which is often overlooked.

Key Resources: The Public Health Agency Role

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Public Health Emergency Response Guide for State, Local, and Tribal Public Health Directors: Actionable and accessible guidance for local public health agency staff in all phases of an emergency incident. The guide explains how to coordinate with existing emergency operations plans and management frameworks and does not replace or duplicate these plans. The checklists for each phase are easy to follow and are geared toward public health staff specifically.

<https://emergency.cdc.gov/planning/responseguide.asp>



National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) Resource list for PHAs: A list of active shooter trainings and psychological first aid resources tailored to be especially relevant for local public health agencies.

<https://www.naccho.org/blog/articles/san-bernardino-shooting-incident-community-preparedness-resources-for-active-shooter-incidents>

NACCHO, Public Health's Roles in Active Shooter Events (Webinar): Speakers from local public health agencies discuss their roles in responding to public mass shootings in Las Vegas, NV and Aurora, CO, and provide lessons learned for other public health agencies as well as further resources. Access slides and handouts in addition to the webinar recording using the above hyperlink.

<https://www.pathlms.com/naccho/courses/13368>

NACCHO blog:

<https://www.naccho.org/blog/articles/the-role-of-public-health-in-terrorism-and-active-shooter-preparedness-and-response>



Response

Emergency Operations Center (EOC): Activation and Access

Law enforcement staff provide information management, resource allocation and tracking, as well as advanced planning support at the EOC.² The EOC may be a mobile command unit set up by law enforcement (as happened in Orlando), or located in a permanent structure that also integrates the Joint Information Center (JIC). In Dayton, the EOC was located at the Convention Center.

Best Practice Tip

Request a designated law enforcement officer in the EOC whose sole responsibility is to provide updates to the mayor and city manager.



In many cities, the EOC is reserved for law enforcement personnel. Elected officials operate from the JIC and receive briefings from the EOC or command unit. The challenge can be obtaining timely information from the EOC. Daniel Gilman, Chief of Staff to Pittsburgh Mayor William Peduto, recommends having a law enforcement designee in the command unit whose sole job was focused “outward” to communicate the mayor and his or her chief of staff.

Emergency Declarations

Consider whether to declare a local emergency or local disaster. There is no downside to making the declaration, which can be terminated at any time. The implications of the declaration vary state by state, but the declaration may authorize you to³:

- Activate local EOP and mutual aid agreements with nearby jurisdictions, county law enforcement, the FBI, and other resources.
- Activate local EOC and national incident management system (NIMS).
- Suspend or temporarily waive union rules or other labor laws and deploy responders for longer work shifts.
- Activate immunities and liability protections for staff who respond.

You may also ask the governor to declare a statewide emergency, depending on the scope of the incident and whether state resources are needed. Local declarations of emergency may require you to assess whether local emergency response resources would be exhausted before allowing the declaration of a statewide emergency and/or requesting state aid.

A state or federal emergency declaration for an incident that meets the criterion of a “major disaster” may provide access to federal funding, including SBA disaster loans and FEMA funding authorized by the Stafford Act.⁴ See Chapter 8 for more on the legal and financial considerations in making an emergency declaration, including opportunities for reimbursement of local costs. See Appendix C for more information about FEMA and other funding sources.





Mayors in Action: Emergency Declaration

In consultation with Mayor Buddy Dyer, Florida Governor Rick Scott declared a local state of emergency in Orange County and the City of Orlando following the Pulse Nightclub shooting. According to the Mayor, this declaration relaxed certain rules in Orlando related to police overtime and allowed full deployment of law enforcement and other emergency management staff for the response by suspending paid time off (PTO) during the emergency. In some cases, an emergency declaration may also help the city to obtain funding to defray the costs of response, such as law enforcement overtime, or obtain FEMA assistance for small businesses that were impacted.⁵

Receive Briefing on Emergency Response

During the first 24 hours, you should be briefed on the emergency response, including the operations of the EOC and any services delivered by first responders (*e.g.*, psychological first aid (PFA). For more information on PFA, see Chapter 10 on Mental Health). Based on this briefing, begin planning for the closeout of emergency services, the de-escalation of the EOC and incident response teams, and begin planning for recovery. Consult FEMA's NIMS, 3rd Edition and its resources cited earlier in this chapter to learn more about de-mobilizing first responders from other jurisdictions and deactivating mutual aid responses. Request regular updates from your emergency response staff until the mobilization of resources is complete.

Recovery

Obtain Funds to Cover Costs of Emergency Response

Federal and state funding sources are available to help your city cover some municipal costs incurred from response to a mass shooting incident. These expenses may include police overtime and costs of operating the EOC. See Appendix C for a detailed explanation of potential funding sources.

Program Evaluation of Emergency Response

A key aspect of emergency response is evaluating the response after the incident. While the police and/or the FBI will provide an "after action" report of the law enforcement response to the shooting, it is equally important to evaluate the emergency response of your office and other agencies. Doing so will help the city plan for future emergencies.

Response evaluation has other benefits: your report can justify resources allocated to emergency preparedness and response and demonstrate the contributions of emergency management to public safety, including the important role of public health agencies.⁶ Your report could also be an invaluable resource for other mayors.



Endnotes

¹ FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY, *NIMS Training Program FAQs*, 2011, https://www.fema.gov/pdf/emergency/nims/nims_training_program_faqs.pdf.

² FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY, *National Incident Management System*, 2017, available at https://training.fema.gov/emiweb/is/is700b/6ho/national_incident_management%20system_third%20edition_october_2017.pdf (last visited Apr 8, 2021).

³ ASSOCIATION OF STATE AND TERRITORIAL HEALTH OFFICIALS, *Emergency Authority & Immunity Toolkit*, <https://astho.org/Programs/Preparedness/Public-Health-Emergency-Law/Emergency-Authority-and-Immunity-Toolkit/Emergency-Declarations-and-Authorities-Fact-Sheet/>.

⁴ CONGRESSIONAL RESEARCH SERVICES, *Stafford Act Assistance and Acts of Terrorism*, 2019, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/homsec/R44801.pdf>.

⁵ CONGRESSIONAL RESEARCH SERVICE, *Stafford Act Assistance and Acts of Terrorism*, 2019, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/homsec/R44801.pdf>.

⁶ Daniel Henstra, *Evaluating Local Government Emergency Management Programs: What Framework Should Public Managers Adopt?*, 70 PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION REVIEW 236–246, 237 (2010).



EMERGENCY OPERATIONS CHECKLIST

Preparedness

- Review local EOP for applicability to a public mass shooting.
- Consider/complete supplemental EOP if needed.
- Review FEMA materials and consider training for yourself and team.
- Include public health agencies in your planning.

Response

- Activate Emergency Operations Center.
- Request regular briefings from designated EOC official.
- Consider whether to declare a local declaration of emergency.
- Consider whether a state declaration of emergency is needed to activate further resources. If so, call the governor to request.
- Consult emergency management staff from state agency about available resources.
- Receive briefing on emergency response, including psychological first aid.
- Begin planning for recovery phase.

Recovery

- Evaluate emergency response to complement police after action report.
- Apply for grants for reimbursement of response costs.

