

THE SHOW MUST GO ON

ECC personnel use planning, ingenuity and improvisation to maintain routine operations in an environment that is anything but routine.

By Julie Heimkes

Every year during the national APCO, Conference the Editorial Committee meets to brainstorm topics for the next year's magazines. One idea during the 2019 meeting was "The Show Must Go On" about how emergency communications centers must deal with a major event even while handling routine business during the event and immediately afterward. Little did we know at the time that we would all be involved in a major event, the COVID-19 pandemic, and that keeping the show going would change routines for all ECCs.

We compiled a "panel discussion" – via email – about how ECC personnel made sure the *show did go on*. Participants represented centers of all sizes and disciplines across the U.S. Answers have been lightly edited.

DID YOUR CENTER HAVE A CONTINUITY OF OPERATIONS PLAN (COOP) IN PLACE THAT COVERED PANDEMICS? IF YES, HOW DID IT HELP? IF NO, HOW LONG DID IT TAKE TO DEVELOP ONE?

ANONYMOUS IN VIRGINIA

We already had a COOP in place. Honestly it didn't help much, mainly because things just kept changing, at least weekly and sometimes daily. I understand the need for things like a COOP, but really it comes down to reaction time and taking each and every situation seriously, and then making sure to take appropriate steps. We ended up enacting parts of our COOP based on information provided prior to reaching the "official" activation points listed in the COOP. Again, flexibility is key.

CHERYL BLEDSOE, CLACKAMAS COUNTY 911, OREGON

Our 9-1-1 center has had a COOP plan for a number of scenarios, including a pandemic. We activated it March 16 and began daily leadership team meetings at 8 a.m. (which included director, tech/ops managers, supervisor on duty, training coordinator, QI coordinator and our union) and end-of-day meetings at 4 p.m. (for director, managers and supervisors). In addition to daily meetings, the director wrote a daily email to staff about changes on the national, state/county and center level. These regular communications helped us to flexibly deal with and address all employee concerns and adapt to all recommendations of the CDC, OSHA and local public health agencies.

LESLIE WHITHAM, CHINO POLICE DEPARTMENT, CALIFORNIA

We did not have an existing COOP when the California "stay-in-place" orders were authorized March 20. Comm center managers in San Bernardino County recognized the need for a plan and began discussions regarding how we could organize a regional dispatch

center if it became necessary to deploy. We started officially collaborating March 23. Each agency defined "trigger" points that would present a need for a regional dispatch option. Thankfully, none of our surrounding agencies ever experienced any of the trigger points.

BETH TODD, SALT LAKE CITY EMERGENCY COMMUNICATIONS CENTER

Yes, we have a pandemic plan that we put in place during the 2009 H1N1 situation. It was very helpful as not much has changed in the 11 years since, so we already had plans and responses in place. The biggest changes were updating the CAD to the protocol system that we used and updating the software and the CAD codes to match.

DID YOUR CENTER HAVE A FUNCTIONING BACK-UP CENTER IN PLACE? IF YES, DID YOU USE IT?

DEBORAH WESOLOWSKI GROSS, MIAMI DADE POLICE DEPARTMENT, FLORIDA