

Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for Corporate Executives on Preparedness and Response



Introduction

The ever-increasing vulnerability of the society to various natural and manmade hazards is a serious issue in developing countries. Globalisation, development patterns, population explosion, poverty and environmental degradation have increasingly placed more people at risk. In various international and national fora, there has been a constant realisation that effective and holistic disaster mitigation requires greater multi-sectoral collaboration. Tackling complex disaster situations have raised the need for an effective private sector participation in disaster management.

Till now, the involvement of the private sector in mainstreaming the mitigation process has been unsatisfactory. The sector is a major tour-de-force by way of having organised, disciplined, skilled and trained workforce and possesses tremendous resources. Notwithstanding these strengths, only piecemeal efforts have been made by the government, community and the sector itself. The private sector is already beginning to play more engaged roles in disaster response and recovery on a voluntary basis, yet limited understanding currently exists about their activities in this area due to lack of concentrated efforts.¹

The World Conference on Disaster Reduction, held in Mumbai (Bombay), India, in November 2005 addressed this need, by specifically focussing on corporate sector role and involvement in mainstream disaster management. It was an initiative of Global Forum for Disaster Reduction, co-sponsored by United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction and organized by New Media, in association with CMP Media. The conference theme was – ‘Disaster Reduction - The Role & Responsibility of the Corporate Sector’. It was a follow-up of the UN World Conference on Disaster Reduction (WCDR) held in Kobe, Japan, in January 2005 where an all-stakeholder approach for disaster management was identified and reinforced.

The conference initiated the process of development of certain key documents. These are:

1. **A diary of Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) for corporate executives on preparedness and response.** SOPs will draw from vast knowledge of key participants, disaster managers on the latest technology and best practices available in the world to meet disasters
2. **Guidelines and checklist for CEOs**
3. **Reference Manual for Corporate Executives**
4. **A Corporate Community Interface (CCI) handbook on disaster and environmental management²**

¹ http://www.wcdr.gfdr.org/corporate_sector.asp

² <http://www.wcdr.gfdr.org/usp.asp>

While the ground work on CCI handbook has begun in collaboration with Kyoto University, GFDR seeks to initiate the developmental process for the SOPs. This base paper serves as the background material for brainstorming and deciding the scope, vision and devising the matrix of issues being addressed in the output.

Standard Operation Procedures (SOPs) are currently used in the military, and is primarily meant to reduce response time to a minimum. The entire exercise of putting in place a SOP (alternatively known as *trigger mechanism*), therefore, essentially comprises of determining the intensities for each type of disaster at the district, the state, and the national level and developing/devising actions that need to be followed before, during and after an emergency. Like stated before, there is a will among the corporate sector to lend a helping hand to the government and assist the society amongst which they operate. It is seen as furthering their social responsibility (CSR) and makes good business sense in the long run. However, the lack of standardization of processes and ‘what-to-do’ and ‘how-to-do’, creates confusion among the corporations and adds to the prevailing pandemonium.

The present document aims to develop a standard procedure for preparedness and response as well as individual emergency procedures for the various corporate sectors at the operatives’ level. It gives a guideline on what an SOP comprise of and what are its various aspects. The learnings from a developed and in-practice document would percolate and in turn substantiate or help in revising the Corporate Disaster Response Planning. These SOPs would draw from the vast knowledge of the professional disaster managers (their own experience) and corporate players on the latest technology and best practices available in the world to meet the disasters.

Definition

Standard Operating Procedures (or Emergency Procedures) are documents where the activities of a specific person or organisation to face a specific situation (in this case the impact of a hazard) are described in a clear, logical, sequential and methodical manner. The terms standard operating procedure and emergency procedure will be used interchangeably.³

Objectives

1. To describe the components of a standard operating procedure for disaster preparedness and response.
2. To clearly distinguish and standardize the roles and responsibilities for different stakeholders in disaster preparedness and response.
3. To provide action checklists for key staff members for different levels of disasters
4. To provide a base template for developing SOPs for different disasters/ industries
5. To make the understanding easier to design, write, understand, revise, use, execute, evaluate and update for disaster managers and disaster management organisations.

³ Arturo López-Portillo

Components of the Standard Operation Procedure

1. Activity

Every emergency procedure responds to an activity that has to be done during an emergency caused by the threat or impact of a natural or man-made hazard. The identified activities include:

❖ ***Preparedness (non structural measures):***

- Operational readiness of facilities, infrastructure and equipment in the face of an emergency
- Setting up of Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) and the requirements for the same (infrastructure, communications, staffing, inventory, logistical support)
- Regular updating of resource inventory after a stipulated time period
- Updating on the world disasters, their response and incorporating learning from the best practices.
- Awareness generation and capacity building
- Incorporation of training for skill enhancement for those responsible in emergency situations

❖ ***Response:***

- Overall direction and coordination for the authority in-charge with the government administration
- Emergency warning and its dissemination through pre-identified channels
- Rapid damage assessment and effective reporting
- Search and Rescue (including that from the collapsed structures)
- Assessment of medical need and response
- Temporary shelter management – (requirements for clothing and food)
- Law and order maintenance
- Logistical arrangements
- Coordination with local, national and international NGOs, GOs as well as multilateral and bilateral agencies to avoid duplication of work.
- Media management
- Animal care
- Handling of fatalities

2. Name of the Procedure

The name of the procedure is determined by the activity it is written for. For instance: evacuation procedure, communication procedure, media management procedure, SAR procedure etc. The name can also be more specific by including the names of geographical zones, organisations, disasters etc.

3. Number and Revision of the Procedure

All the procedures must have a number (assigned at random or according to a sequential order) of its version and the date when it was written and/or last revised. For example:

Procedure 007/ Disposal of the Dead

Version 1, 23rd May, 1998; Version 2, 11th June, 1999⁴

The name of the person, group or committee that wrote, revised and/or approved the procedure must be stated as well.

4. Objective of the Procedure

An emergency procedure must have an objective: *i.e.*, what is the procedure intended for. For instance, in the case of an evacuation procedure, its general objective would be to take the population and specific belongings (*e.g.*, important documents, food, water, toys, etc., as determined beforehand) out of certain area at risk in order to protect them and avoid their partial or total damage due to a hazard threat or impact.

If the area to be evacuated is known along with the areas where the evacuees would be taken, then it can be stated that the objective of the emergency procedure is to take all the population of the area X and take them safely to the area Y. The procedure will describe how this has to be done (points 5-6 below).

5. Responsibility for the Procedure

All procedures must specify which organisation or person is responsible for its execution in order to avoid confusion and chaos, only one organisation or one person (position) within an organisation must be responsible for it.

The responsibility is usually assigned according to the activities done permanently by that organisation or person. Medical Attention is the responsibility of the health sector. Environmental health is the responsibility of the health sector and within the health sector there must be a specific area responsible for environmental health to which the responsibility for the procedure must be assigned. Security must be responsibility of the army or the police force, depending on the country and the existing organizations therein. These responsibilities are generally assigned according to responsibilities already assigned by existing Laws and/or Regulations.

The responsibility includes not only the execution of the procedure during an emergency, but its permanent revision, testing, updating and improvement, as well as the procurement of whatever resources are needed for its adequate execution.

6. Steps of the Procedure

A procedure describes step by step, and chronologically (sequentially), all the activities that have to be done by an organisation or person to attain its objective (the procedure's

⁴ <http://www.disaster-info.net>

objective). According to the characteristics (predictability, duration, scope of impact, etc.) of the hazard whose effects are to be avoided or diminished through the procedure, the steps can be divided into the steps done before, during and after the impact of a hazard. Thus the activities can be divided to be performed as:

- 6.1. *Steps to be taken before the impact of the hazard*
 - 6.1.1 *Permanently*
 - 6.1.2 *Immediately before the impact of a hazard*
- 6.2. *During the impact of a hazard*
- 6.3. *After the impact of the hazard*

In the case of predictable hazards the previous approach is applicable, but, in the case of non-predictable hazards, such as earthquakes, point 6.1.1 (immediately before the impact of the hazard) would be omitted from the procedure. Also point 6.2, would be applicable only in specific hazards such as fires or oils spills, but would not apply for hurricanes for instance.

It must be noted here that without permanent steps the rest of the steps CANNOT be executed satisfactorily. In other words, without preparedness both emergency response and disaster relief are completely ineffective and, most of the times, useless and chaotic.

7. Description and Sequence of the Steps of the Procedure

7.1 Description.

The description of each of the steps (activities) that have to be done must be in the imperative form of the verb, not in the infinitive or in any other that may cause confusion or ambiguity. The use of the imperative form ensures command and an obligation to do what the procedure says.

7.2 Sequence

All the steps have to be written in a sequential order; i.e. they have to be written as they have to be implemented through time: from the first step to the last one with all the intermediate steps in between.

8. Special Situations

Not all the activities (steps) are done one after the other (linear steps), some are cyclical (repeat themselves) and others are exceptions (If ...Then) due to different situations that can occur that would alter the normal and sequential flow of the steps of the procedure.

9. Attachments to the Procedure

Every resource that is mentioned in the procedure such as equipment, specific personnel, material, and vehicles should exist and be listed as an attachment of the procedure itself in the form of a directory, list of personnel, inventory, etc. Thus, the attachments should include, depending on the case, the following items:

- Directories

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- Inventories
- Lists of vehicles, equipment or materials
- Flow charts
- Checklists
- Forms/formats
- Maps
- Lay-outs
- Charts
- Figures
- Tables
- Appendices
- Etc.



10. Updating the Procedure