

COMPREHENSIVE EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

- 1. REASON FOR ISSUE.** This Handbook revises Department-wide emergency management procedures and operational requirements. It updates VA Handbook 0320, Emergency Preparedness Planning Procedures and Operational Requirements, dated October 18, 1999.
- 2. SUMMARY OF CONTENTS/MAJOR CHANGES.** This Handbook addresses emergency management regarding planning, mitigation, response and recovery, including the continuation and rapid restoration of the Department's vital functions under all conditions.
- 3. RESPONSIBLE OFFICE.** The Office of Policy, Planning, and Preparedness is responsible for the content of this Handbook.
- 4. RELATED DIRECTIVE.** VA Directive 0320, Comprehensive Emergency Management Program.
- 5. RESCISSION.** VA Handbook 0320, Procedures and Operational Requirements, dated October 18, 1999.

/s/

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Secretary

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DISTRIBUTION: Electronic Distribution

COMPREHENSIVE EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

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COMPREHENSIVE EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

1. PURPOSE. The purpose of this Handbook is to describe the procedures for administering and implementing VA's Comprehensive Emergency Management Program. The primary objectives of the program are:

- a. To ensure the continuous performance of the Department's essential functions and operations.
- b. To ensure and validate Continuity of Operations (COOP) readiness through a dynamic, integrated test, training, and exercise program to support the implementation of COOP plans.
- c. To provide for the health and safety of veterans, employees and visitors.
- d. To protect essential facilities, equipment, records, and other assets.
- e. To achieve a timely and orderly recovery from an emergency and reconstitute normal operations allowing resumption of essential functions for both internal and external clients.
- f. To reduce disruptions to operations.
- g. To execute as required, VA's succession plan with accompanying authorities in the event a disruption renders VA leadership unable, unavailable, or incapable of assuming and performing.
- h. To ensure that VA has an alternate facility where essential functions can be performed during a COOP event.

2. SCOPE. This Handbook applies to all levels of Departmental management and addresses situations to include:

- a. A national emergency such as a war involving U.S. Armed Forces, an attack on the United States, or any threat to the continuity of the Federal Government;
- b. Natural and technological disasters such as radiological accidents or emergencies, hazardous materials accidents, and environmental disasters;
- c. Events declared by the President to be major disasters or emergencies under the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act, Public Law (P.L.) 93-288, as amended; or
- d. Civil disorders, terrorism, or other violent acts.

3. ASSUMPTIONS.

- a. VA Central Office (VACO) is vulnerable to a broad range of potential man-made, natural, and technological emergencies capable of disrupting and seriously degrading the ability of VACO staff to perform its mission and functions.
- b. Emergencies could occur with little or no warning; therefore, a high state of readiness must be maintained to be able to activate this plan.
- c. This Directive/Handbook will work in concert with the VA Master Continuity of Operations Plan. This companion document includes a Master COOP, and all Administration and Staff Office's COOP plans.

4. DEPARTMENTAL ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES.

- a. In the event of an emergency that may constitute a threat to national security, VA, together with other departments and agencies of the Federal Government, ensures the continuity of the Federal Government. In addition, VA ensures its ability to perform essential functions through a Continuity of Operations (COOP) Plan.
- b. VA protects the life and safety of people in VA facilities by developing and implementing a comprehensive emergency management program and plan.
- c. VA may provide assistance, under applicable authorities, to affected State and local jurisdictions. This may include emergency medical treatment provided to injured persons regardless of statutory eligibility, as necessary to save lives and prevent suffering.
- d. In accordance with P.L. 97-174, in a period of war or national emergency involving U.S. military forces in armed conflict, VA may provide increased access to medical services to active duty military personnel.
- e. VA recognizes that the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Operations Center is the primary national-level hub for operational communications and information pertaining to domestic incident management. VA maintains communications links between the VA Readiness Operations Center and the Homeland Security Operations Center (HSOC), and provides representatives to the HSOC with requisite subject matter expertise and reach-back capability, as required. VA reports incidents to the HSOC and provide information on emerging/imminent threats as appropriate.
- f. VA stands ready, upon request, to provide senior representation to the Interagency Incident Management Group (IIMG) when it is convened. These representatives will have appropriate subject matter expertise and reach-back capability to address the particular incident at hand, facilitate response actions, as appropriate, and accelerate access to VA resources.
- g. VA provides input on policy matters, through the IIMG and/or Secretary of Homeland Security, clarifying issues.

h. VA supports the Principal Federal Official (PFO), when designated, in recognition of the PFO's role as the Secretary of Homeland Security's local representative for overseeing and coordinating Federal activities relevant to an incident. While maintaining authorities and responsibilities specified in VA plans, key VA coordinating officials collaborate with the PFO in coordinating the deployment and application of Federal resources.

i. VA co-locates field operations, when feasible, with the Joint Field Office (JFO). If not feasible, VA provides a representative to the JFO.

j. VA has adopted the National Incident Management System (NIMS), as directed by Homeland Security Presidential Directive #5 (Management of Domestic Incidents). Under NIMS, the Incident Command System (ICS) establishes common terminology and procedures related to the management of an incident. VA emergency operations, during COOP and/or when managing an incident, will function under the ICS. This provides a modular structure, based on the size and complexity of the incident.

5. GENERAL RESPONSIBILITIES OF UNDER SECRETARIES, ASSISTANT SECRETARIES, AND OTHER KEY OFFICIALS.

- a. Identify and prioritize the essential functions of their organizations during emergencies.
- b. Develop an organizational emergency management plan and provide a copy to the Office of Policy, Planning, and Preparedness.
- c. Ensure resources, materials and equipment are readily available and key personnel are identified and trained to support organizational emergency management plans to include sufficient personnel with appropriate National Security level clearances.
- d. Ensure the organizational emergency management plan is exercised at least annually.
- e. Establish standing delegations of authority and maintain a current list of successors for their own organizations; provide copies to the Office of Policy, Planning and Preparedness.
- f. Designate an Emergency Planner and an alternate who can effectively represent the organization regarding the comprehensive emergency management program. The Emergency Planner should have direct access to their respective office directors and have the authority to speak on behalf of their organizations.
- g. Designate an individual to serve on the Crisis Response Team (CRT) with the necessary authority to speak on the principals' behalf.
- h. Ensure applicable vital emergency operating, financial and legal records are identified and available.

6. SPECIFIC RESPONSIBILITIES.

a. Under Secretary for Health, Veterans Health Administration (VHA):

(1) Ensures that VA medical facilities develop and exercise site specific emergency plans to provide for the health and safety of patients, visitors and staff, and continuity of care to eligible veterans in the event of war, national emergencies, and natural, technological or man-made disasters including terrorist events. Current copies of these plans will be maintained as Category "A" records at the VHA relocation site.

(2) Assists in the development of VA-DoD contingency plans, and has the overall responsibility for the execution of VA-DoD contingency plans.

(3) Develops plans for the provision of emergency health care services, as resources permit, to civilian victims of disasters in accordance with the National Response Plan (NRP) mandated by P.L. 93-288, as amended.

(4) Promotes, in cooperation with the Secretary of Health and Human Services, the development of state and local plans for the provision of disaster medical services, as well as the development of national plans to mobilize the health care industry during national security emergencies in accordance with E.O. 12656, Assignment of Emergency Management Responsibilities, November 18, 1988.

(5) Manages the National Disaster Medical System Federal Coordinating Centers at designated VA locations.

(6) Develops policy and procedures for the protection and storage of vital legal and financial records as well as Emergency Operating Records.

(7) Conducts annual VHA emergency medical preparedness training and education.

b. Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs, National Cemetery Administration (NCA):

Develops plans for the increased need of burial services for eligible veterans and dependents, and advises on methods for mass interment during national security emergencies.

c. Under Secretary for Benefits, Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA):

(1) Develops and maintains plans to make habitable housing assets available, to which VA has title and possession, available for use by disaster victims. See NRP, Emergency Support Function #6, Mass Care, for VA responsibilities.

(2) Develops policies and procedures for the protection and storage of vital legal and financial records as well as emergency operating records.

- (3) Coordinates with the Assistant Secretary for Management and the Department of the Treasury in planning for the continuation or restoration of VA loan, insurance, and benefit programs.

d. General Counsel:

(1) Provides legal advice on proposed and ongoing VA emergency policies and directives, to include identifying and acquiring additional legal authorities needed to assist the Secretary, Deputy Secretary, Administration Heads, Assistant Secretaries, and Other Key Officials in performing their duties during emergency operations.

(2) Provides legal concurrence in, and coordinates the Department's process for review of, proposed rule changes and internal or other Federal emergency management policy documents. Drafts, furnishes comments on, or provides changes to, applicable emergency management legislation.

e. Assistant Secretary for Policy, Planning, and Preparedness:

(1) Ensures the development, dissemination and implementation of the Department's Comprehensive Emergency Management Program.

(2) Directs the VA's comprehensive emergency management program, operations, and activities.

(3) Serves as the Department's representative to senior Federal emergency preparedness councils and committees.

(4) Ensures that a senior VA Official is designated as Director of the Crisis Response Team (CRT).

(5) Ensures that plans and procedures are developed in cooperation with Federal requirements.

f. Assistant Secretary for Management:

(1) Ensures that the costs associated with carrying out the Department's approved multiyear plan for emergency preparedness, including exercise participation, are included in annual budget requests.

(2) Develops plans for the identification of costs related to any declared emergency response and recovery for reimbursement under the provisions of P.L. 93-288 or other authorities.

(3) Develops policies and procedures to ensure uninterrupted employee pay and the protection and storage of financial records.

(4) Coordinates with the Under Secretary for Benefits, and the Department of the Treasury in planning for the continuation or restoration of VA loan, insurance, and benefit programs.

(5) Directs acquisition programs, coordinates materiel management emergency initiatives, coordinates national transportation initiatives and interagency agreements.

g. Assistant Secretary for Congressional and Legislative Affairs. Develops emergency management plans and procedures relative to congressional relations and congressional communications.

h. Assistant Secretary for Public and Intergovernmental Affairs:

(1) Develops plans for achieving functional liaison with other agencies to ensure maximum cooperation.

(2) Provides representation to the FEMA Joint Information Center, as appropriate, during national emergencies involving VA.

(3) Develops public affairs policy and provides guidance for all organizational levels.

i. Assistant Secretary for Information and Technology:

(1) Develops plans and procedures to coordinate with Department offices and administrations in developing and supporting requirements for National Security Emergency Preparedness Telecommunications.

(2) Develops policies and procedures for the protection and storage of legal and financial records and Emergency Operating Records.

(3) Cooperates with General Services Administration, Department of Defense, Department of Homeland Security and communications common carriers in the management and operation of elements of the National Communications System available to VA under emergency conditions.

(4) Establishes policies reflecting the minimum information security requirements or critical/mission-essential Automated Information System's critical infrastructure in the Department.

(5) Assists VA organizations in accessing critical/essential automated records from VA relocation sites.

(6) Coordinates with Under Secretaries, Assistant Secretaries, and Other Key Officials in the development of their contingency plans for the retrieval of records during or after emergency situations.

j. Assistant Secretary for Human Resources and Administration:

(1) Provides human resources support to the Secretary, Deputy Secretary, Under Secretaries, Assistant Secretaries, and other key officials in performing their duties during a national emergency.

(2) Advises on policy, operational issues, and procedures for sharing staff, services and human resources knowledge within VA and with other agencies to ensure availability of such resources in a national emergency.

k. Emergency Planners: Emergency Planners coordinate the organization's emergency management program.

(1) Coordinate organizational plans, personnel and resources to ensure operational readiness.

(2) Provide counsel regarding emergency procedures, authorities and recommended action.

(3) Ensure the dissemination of emergency management policies, procedures or guidance appropriate to their respective organizations.

(4) May be detailed to serve on the staff of the VA Readiness Operations Center and/or on other bodies, as directed.

(5) Maintain an updated list of prioritized, essential functions and personnel within his/her respective organization that would relocate during COOP activations or would be otherwise available in the event of a national emergency, and advise such personnel of their responsibilities on a quarterly basis.

(6) Provide updated lists of emergency personnel to the Office of Policy, Planning and Preparedness. Lists of emergency personnel should be updated as changes occur to ensure plans remain current, but at a minimum quarterly.

(7) Represent their organization in the preparation, exercise and evaluation of emergency management programs.

(8) Ensure that legal, financial, and emergency operating records are accessible.

(9) Ensure their respective organization's line of succession is kept up to date and provided to the Office of Policy, Planning, and Preparedness.

DEVELOPMENT OF CONTINUITY OF OPERATIONS (COOP) PLANS

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DEVELOPMENT OF CONTINUITY OF OPERATIONS (COOP) PLANS

1. INTRODUCTION.

a. Based on Federal Preparedness Circular (FPC) 65, the following is provided to organizations of the Department of Veterans Affairs for the development of their respective Continuity of Operations (COOP) Plans. COOP Plans shall be developed and documented by each organization to minimize disruption of business operations and provide for continued performance of essential functions under all circumstances. Comprehensive COOP plans should include appropriate provisions and lists developed in advance of COOP activation to ensure viable COOP capability. The operative timeframe for continuity of essential functions is 12 hours to 30 days.

b. When identifying essential functions for COOP plans, organizations will consider those functions that must continue with minimal disruption or cannot be interrupted for more than 12 hours without compromising the organization's ability to perform its mission. The organization's COOP plans must provide for capability to sustain essential functions until normal business activities can resume which may be up to 30 days.

2. COOP PLAN ELEMENTS. At a minimum, COOP plans must address and/or incorporate listings for the following elements:

- a. Essential functions and other critical activities.
- b. Identification and preparation of alternate operating facilities for continuity of operations.
- c. Vital records, databases and systems; where and how they are stored; when they are updated.
- d. Orders of succession for key organizational leadership positions.
- e. Delegations of authority.
- f. Decision process for determining appropriate actions in implementing COOP plans and procedures.
- g. Responsibilities of the individuals who have COOP roles (leadership, planners, COOP personnel).
- h. Recommended content and maintenance of drive-away kits.

- i. Interoperable communications systems and contact numbers.
- j. COOP personnel and other employee contact lists.

3. ESSENTIAL FUNCTIONS DEVELOPMENT. All organizations will identify their critical functions and prioritize them based on criticality and time sensitivity. Organizations should establish staffing, resource requirements, and other supporting activities needed to perform these critical functions within 12 hours, or less, of COOP activation and until normal business activities can resume which may be up to 30 days. Critical function review should proceed as follows:

- a. Identify essential functions.
- b. Prioritize these functions.
- c. Establish personnel requirements necessary to conduct these functions.
- d. Identify mission critical systems necessary to conduct these functions.
- e. Defer functions not deemed essential to immediate agency needs.
- f. Integrate supporting activities to ensure essential functions can be performed as efficiently as possible during emergency relocation.

4. DELEGATIONS OF AUTHORITY. Organizations will pre-delegate authorities for making policy determinations and decisions at Central Office, field level, and other organizational locations. Delegations of authority specify who is authorized to act on behalf of organizational leadership and will:

- a. Document the legal authority for officials, including those below the organizational head, to make key policy decisions during a COOP situation.
- b. Identify programs and administrative authorities needed for effective operations at all organizational levels having emergency responsibilities.
- c. Document the necessary authorities where essential functions may be required, delineating the limits of authority and accountability, and identifying the circumstances under which the authorities would be exercised.
- d. State explicitly the authority of designated successors to exercise agency direction, and ensure that officials who may be delegated authorities understand their duties and responsibilities.
- e. Indicate circumstances under which delegated authorities would become effective and when they would terminate.

f. Specify responsibilities and authorities of individual agency representatives designated to participate as members of interagency emergency management committees, teams, or groups.

5. VA ORGANIZATIONAL ORDERS OF SUCCESSION. Succession to office is critical in the event leadership is debilitated or incapable of performing their legally authorized duties, roles, and responsibilities. Orders of succession allow for an orderly, and pre-defined, transition of leadership within the organization. Orders of succession are an essential part of a COOP plan and should be of sufficient depth to ensure the agency is able to perform its essential functions. To the extent possible, describe orders of succession by positions or titles, rather than names. At a minimum, organizations must:

- a. Establish orders of succession to Under Secretaries, Assistant Secretaries, and Other Key Officials.
- b. Establish orders of succession to regional and facility directors.
- c. Identify limitations of delegated authority.
- d. Include orders of succession in essential records.
- e. Revise orders of succession as necessary and distribute revisions promptly.
- f. Include in procedures the conditions under which succession will take place; method of notification; and any temporal, geographical, or organizational limitations of authorities.
- g. Conduct orientation programs to prepare successors for their duties.

6. ALTERNATE FACILITY/SITE OPERATIONS. Organizations will identify and prepare alternate operating facilities as part of their COOP plans. Personnel should be prepared for unannounced relocation to these facilities. The Office of Policy, Planning and Preparedness maintains the primary alternate facility and adheres to the guidance of FPC 65, to include:

- a. Development of immediate capability to perform essential functions under various threat conditions including threats involving weapons of mass destruction.
- b. Ensuring sufficient space and equipment to sustain the relocating organization.
- c. Ensuring interoperable communication capability with all identified essential internal and external organizations.

- d. Ensuring reliable logistical support.
- e. Development of the ability to re-establish operations within 12 hours of COOP activation.
- f. Development of the ability to sustain operations for a period of up to 30 days.
- g. Take into consideration the health, safety, and emotional well being of relocated employees.

7. INTEROPERABLE COMMUNICATIONS. When identifying communications requirements, organizations should take maximum advantage of the entire spectrum of communications media likely to be available and needed in any emergency situation. These services may include secure and non-secure voice, video, fax, data connectivity, internet access and e-mail. Elements of a viable interoperable communications program may include:

- a. Communications capability commensurate with the organization's essential functions, and in a quantity appropriate to the number of personnel required to perform those functions.
- b. Capability to communicate with COOP contingency staffs, management, and other organizational components.
- c. Capability to communicate with the FEMA Operations Center and the Homeland Security Operations Center, other Federal agencies and their COOP sites, and critical stakeholders.
- d. Access to data, systems, and services necessary to conduct essential functions and support activities; redundant IT equipment measures that provide access to data systems and services to conduct essential functions and support services.
- e. Redundant communications systems for use in COOP implementation; available within 12 hours of COOP activation and to be sustained for up to 30 days.
- f. Interoperability with existing field infrastructures.

8. VITAL RECORDS AND DATABASES.

The identification, protection, and ready availability of vital records, databases, and hardcopy documents needed to support essential functions across the full spectrum of emergencies are critical to the success of COOP plan activation. To the extent possible, organizations should pre-position and update on a regular

basis duplicate records or back-up electronic files. As a minimum, categories of these types of records are:

a. **Emergency Operating Records.** Vital or essential records, regardless of media, essential to the continued functioning or reconstitution of an organization during and after an emergency. Included are emergency plans and directives, orders of succession, delegations of authority, staffing assignments, records of a policy or procedural nature that provide agency staff with guidance, and information resources necessary for conducting operations during an emergency and for resuming formal operations at its conclusion.

b. **Legal and Financial Records.** Vital records, regardless of media, critical to carrying out an organization's essential legal and financial functions and activities, and protecting the legal and financial rights of individuals directly affected by its activities. Included are records having such value that their loss would significantly impair the conduct of essential agency functions, to the detriment of the legal or financial rights or entitlements of the organization or of the affected individuals. Examples of this category of vital records are accounts receivable, contracting and acquisition files, and official personnel files. Social Security, payroll, retirement, and insurance records; and property management and inventory records.

As soon as possible after COOP activation, but in all cases within 12 hours of COOP activation, personnel at the alternate facilities must have access to:

- (1) Local area network;
- (2) Vital electronic records;
- (3) Critical information systems and data;
- (4) Internal and external email and archives; and
- (5) Vital hard copy records.

9. HUMAN CAPITAL CONSIDERATIONS. Each organization is responsible to design, update, and carry out comprehensive plans to take into account and respond to the threats that its employees are most likely to face. Managers and supervisors should be familiar with the many human capital resources and flexibilities that exist to assist managers and employees in an emergency. Each organization head has the authority and responsibility to designate those personnel that are critical to operations in any given emergency situation. There are no standard definitions or categories for designating emergency employees. Managers make such determinations based on their mission requirements; designations may vary according to the nature of the incident. Managers should:

- a. Be fully informed and understand human capital tools, flexibilities and strategies;
- b. Review and update human capital information and resources;
- c. Ensure employees have a clear understanding of what they are to do in an emergency;
- d. Maintain specific protocols for designating and activating special needs employees and ensuring sufficient personnel have National Security level clearances to accomplish the Comprehensive Emergency Management Program; and
- e. Develop, review and update emergency guides.

10. TESTS, TRAINING AND EXERCISES. Testing, training and exercising of COOP capabilities is essential to demonstrating, assessing, and improving the ability of an organization to execute their COOP plan.

- a. Organizational COOP test programs must include:
 - (1) Quarterly testing of COOP alert, notification, and activation procedures;
 - (2) Semi-annual testing of plans for the recovery of vital classified and unclassified records, critical information systems, services and data;
 - (3) Quarterly testing of COOP communications capabilities; and
 - (4) Annual testing of primary and backup infrastructure systems and services at the alternate facility.
- b. Organizational COOP training programs must include:
 - (1) Annual COOP awareness briefing for the entire workforce;
 - (2) Annual team training for COOP personnel;
 - (3) Annual team training for personnel assigned to activate, support, and sustain COOP operations at the alternate facilities;
 - (4) Annual exercise that deploys COOP personnel to the alternate facilities; and
 - (5) Comprehensive after-action reports to identify weaknesses in plans and procedures and recommended revisions.

c. Organizational COOP exercise programs must include:

- (1) COOP personnel to demonstrate their familiarity with COOP plans and the capability to continue essential functions;
- (2) Deliberate and pre-planned movement of COOP personnel to alternate facilities;
- (3) Communications capabilities and inter/intra agency dependencies; and
- (4) Joint agency exercising of contingency plans should occur at least annually.

11. VACO COOP PLANNING AND REVIEW PROCESS:

a. Under Secretaries, Assistant Secretaries, and Key Officials will ensure completion of the COOP plans.

b. COOP plans are living documents and will be reviewed at least annually.

c. Each organization will present their plan to the Office of Policy, Planning, and Preparedness to ensure consistency and compatibility with other COOP plans.

d. Each organization's COOP participants will annually exercise their plan in conjunction with the Office of Policy, Planning and Preparedness, and lessons learned will be incorporated into COOP plans.

DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS CRISIS RESPONSE TEAM (CRT)

1. PURPOSE. The purpose of this Appendix is to describe the responsibilities, functions, and composition of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Crisis Response Team (CRT).

2. SCOPE. This Appendix applies to all levels of Departmental comprehensive emergency management. It addresses VA CRT responsibilities and functions to integrate a wide range of activities. The CRT coordinates the Department's comprehensive emergency management program, including:

a. **Awareness.** These activities include but are not limited to: threats identification, vulnerability assessments, inventories, and situation assessments and reporting.

b. **Prevention.** These activities include but are not limited to: maintenance of personal, physical resource and information security, as well as incident avoidance, intervention or mitigation.

c. **Preparedness.** These activities include but are not limited to: planning, training, equipping, organizing, testing and exercising.

d. **Response.** These activities address immediate and short term effects, focusing primarily on VA actions necessary to save lives, protect property and meet basic needs, including but not limited to: assessing situations, assessing VA delegations of authority and succession, prioritizing requirements to relocate and deploy VA personnel and resources, ensuring communication and coordination of VA operations, maintaining VA vital records and databases, and developing optional courses of action. CRT activation may be organized at any time to facilitate and coordinate VA operations and resources relative to a specific domestic incident.

e. **Recovery.** These activities restore normalcy. They include but are not limited to: restoring VA assets and services to pre-incident condition, redeploying resources to their home stations, rehabilitating equipment and teams to readiness status, replacing used physical and financial resources, conducting after-action reviews, and paying outstanding bills.

3. RESPONSIBILITIES.

a. Secretary:

(1) Ensures that an effective comprehensive emergency management program and continuity of operations plan are established.

(2) Designates the Assistant Secretary for Policy, Planning, and Preparedness to provide oversight for the implementation of VA's Emergency Management Program.

b. Assistant Secretary for Policy, Planning, and Preparedness:

(1) Ensures a senior VA Official is designated as Director, CRT, and that the Director provides oversight for ongoing emergency management activities.

(2) Develops courses of action, provides recommendations and reports to the Secretary and Deputy Secretary.

c. Under Secretaries, Assistant Secretaries, and Other Key Officials:

Under Secretaries, Assistant Secretaries, and Other Key Officials comprise the CRT. They may designate a primary and alternate individual to represent the organization on the CRT.

d. Designated/Alternate CRT Representatives: Designated/alternate individuals, representing Under Secretaries, Assistant Secretaries, and Other Key Officials (e.g., Emergency Planners), provide counsel regarding emergency procedures, authorities and recommended actions. They ensure the dissemination of emergency management policies, procedures, or guidance appropriate to their respective organizations. This requires that they have direct access to their respective office directors and the authority to speak on behalf of their organizations.

4. FUNCTIONS. The CRT meets on a regularly scheduled basis to coordinate various activities related to the management and oversight of the Department's comprehensive emergency management program. Accordingly, the CRT:

a. Serves as the focal point for VA headquarters-level operational coordination of an incident;

b. Provides threat assessments and recommendations on actions to take in response to credible threats, including changes in the National Homeland Security Advisory System alert level;

- c. Synthesizes information and frames issues for the Secretary or other appropriate officials;
- d. Recommends priorities for the use or allocation of VA resources in support of incident management;
- e. Provides general oversight of the application of VA resources in support of incident management in coordination with existing agency and interagency resource management and private sector entities;
- f. Provides strategic situational awareness and decision support; and
- g. Anticipates evolving VA resource and operational requirements according to the specifics of the situation at hand.
- h. Designated CRT representatives may also serve on the staff of the VA Readiness Operations Center, on the Interagency Incident Management Group, and/or on other bodies, as directed.

5. COMPOSITION. The CRT is composed of the following:

- a. Under Secretary for Health
- b. Under Secretary for Benefits
- c. Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs
- d. Assistant Secretary for Management
- e. Assistant Secretary for Congressional and Legislative Affairs
- f. Assistant Secretary for Public and Intergovernmental Affairs
- g. Assistant Secretary for Information and Technology
- h. Assistant Secretary for Human Resources and Administration
- i. Chairman, Board of Veterans' Appeals
- j. General Counsel
- k. Inspector General
- l. Chairman, Board of Contract Appeals

VA TESTS, TRAINING, AND EXERCISE PROGRAM

1. PURPOSE. This annex outlines the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Tests, Training and Exercise (TT&E) program. It provides procedures and guidance for oversight and evaluation of the Departmental exercise program. The TT&E program encompasses and applies to all levels of the Department, including central office, regional and field functions and personnel. This exercise program directly supports VA's Comprehensive Emergency Management Program.

2. AUTHORITIES.

- a. Executive Order (EO) 12148, *Federal Emergency Management*, dated July 20, 1979, as amended.
- b. EO 12472, *Assignment of National Security and Emergency Preparedness Telecommunications Functions*, dated April 3, 1984.
- c. EO 12656, *Assignment of Emergency Preparedness Responsibilities*, dated November 18, 1988, as amended
- d. Federal Preparedness Circular (FPC) 65 – Federal Executive Branch Continuity of Operations (COOP), FEMA, June 15, 2004
- e. Presidential Decision Directive (PDD) 67, *Enduring Constitutional Government and Continuity of Government Operations*, dated October 21, 1998.
- f. The National Security Act of 1947 dated July 26, 1947, as amended.
- g. National Response Plan, 9320.1-PL, January 2003 (Interim).

3. BACKGROUND.

- a. PDD-67 specifically outlines a requirement for federal agencies to have in place a comprehensive and effective emergency management program, that ensures continuity of essential Federal functions under all circumstances.
- b. The primary function of the departmental-level program is to evaluate and improve VA's ability to conduct efficient contingency operations. The Department's exercise program will determine the agency's ability to appropriately respond to contingencies that include, but are not limited to, war,

natural disasters, and acts of terrorism. In addition, the program will provide training for all VA employees regarding procedures and actions necessary in response to these emergencies. The objectives and benefits of the program are to:

- (1) Provide a means to identify, evaluate and proactively respond to operational weaknesses and crisis,
- (2) Evaluate employees' ability to appropriately respond to catastrophic events (natural or man made), national and local emergencies, and formulate viable plans,
- (3) Identify limited resources (i.e., equipment and personnel) prior to actual contingencies, and
- (4) Provide training and experience in tactical and strategic decision-making for senior personnel, as well as, for interoperability training between VA, DoD, and other government and non-government agencies.

c. The exercise program will include: policy, guidance, and standards; training courses and materials; exercises of varying types and scope designed to improve the overall organizational response capability to emergency situations; a multi-year training schedule; and evaluation and remedial action programs.

d. Quarterly COOP orientation and training exercises will be accomplished. Annual COOP functional/full scale exercises will be performed. Regularly scheduled testing of agency equipment, systems, processes, and procedures used to support the agency during a COOP event. This testing program will provide for quarterly evaluations of alert and notification procedures and systems, including instructions for relocation to pre-designated facilities, with and without warning, during duty and non-duty hours.

4. RESPONSIBILITIES. The Assistant Secretary for Policy, Planning, and Preparedness (PPP) is responsible for oversight of VA's Exercise Program. This program encompasses a Comprehensive Emergency Management (CEM) concept, in which a wide-range of exercises are performed. Specific COOP exercises make up only a portion of the overall program. The various VA organizations (Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA)/Veterans Health Administration (VHA)/National Cemetery Administration (NCA) have integral CEM exercise programs, which are managed internally. The Office of PPP, Operations and Readiness (O&R) coordinates and optimizes the activities of these organizations. It is the direct responsibility of PPP, O&R to ensure that a viable exercise program is in place, and functioning properly, to meet the needs of VA and the nation. This monitoring and evaluation responsibility is outlined in the Exercise Planning Matrix (Attachment A).

5. EXERCISE REQUIREMENTS. Exercise requirements for the Department have been developed to address key COOP initiatives, Joint Commission for the Accreditation of Healthcare Organization (JCAHO) requirements, emergency operations requirements and response, support to the Department of Defense and other external mandates, and internal VA administration and organizational requirements.

	VA Minimum Exercise Requirements
VA Hospitals	• Conduct an annual internal and external exercise. This may be a Tabletop (TTX), Command Post (CPX) or Full-Function (FTX) exercise.
VBA	• Participate in CPX or FTX as directed by department. • Annual participation in COOP exercises.
NCA	• Participate in CPX or FTX as directed by department. • Organization participates in yearly COOP exercises.
VA Federal Coordinating Centers (FCCs)	• Conduct one major FTX every three years with local NDMS Community that includes patient reception.
CRT	• Participate in all COOP/COG exercises. • Participate in national and interagency exercises of opportunity. • Initiation of TTX prior to a Special Event.
VA Central Office (Corporate Headquarters)	• Participate in national level interagency exercises. • Participate in CPX or FTX as directed by Department. • Participate in scheduled COOP and emergency response exercises. • Participate in quarterly alert and notification exercises.
VHA	• Participate in CPX or FTX as directed by Department. • Organization participates in yearly COOP exercises. • Exercise national pharmaceutical caches on a yearly basis.
VA Primary Receiving Centers (PRCs)	• Conduct one major FTX every three years that includes patient reception.
VACO COOP and Emergency Operations	• Conduct annual order of successor orientation and training. • Conduct VACO shelter in place exercises (TTX or above) once every six months. • Conduct COOP Site A, B, and C orientation and deployment exercise yearly with planning staff representatives • Conduct COOP Site E re-certification exercise once per year • Conduct quarterly communications tests of secure and non-secure equipment. • TTX exercise to insure access to and availability of vital records. • Quarterly alert and notification tests • Involvement in joint agency exercises (when applicable)

7. EVALUATION. The exercise evaluation process will identify systemic weaknesses and suggest corrective actions that will enhance and refine agency preparedness. Following a Departmental level (VACO) exercise, a comprehensive debriefing and After-Action Report (AAR) will be completed. VHA, VBA, and NCA will be responsible for their administrations' AAR program, which should be detailed in their respective VHA, VBA and NCA 0320 Handbooks and annexes. All data collected will be incorporated into an AAR that provides input for revisions and updates to emergency plans. After action findings will be included as part of an overall monitoring and evaluation program, administered by Policy, Planning and Preparedness.

Attachment A

Office of Policy, Planning and Preparedness

Training and Exercise Planning Matrix

Originator	Type of Exercise/Training	Frequency	PPP Role: <i>C – Plan, Conduct & Evaluate</i> <i>P – Participate</i> <i>M – Monitor the evaluation</i>
PPP Execution (COOP)			
	<i>COOP – Full</i>	<i>Annually</i>	<i>C</i>
	<i>COOP – Partial</i>	<i>Annually</i>	<i>C</i>
	<i>COOP Planner exercises</i>	<i>As called</i>	<i>C</i>
	<i>Site E certification</i>	<i>Annually</i>	<i>C</i>
	<i>Successor Training</i>	<i>As Required</i>	<i>C</i>
National Exercises			
<i>(joint opportunities)</i>	<i>TOPOFF</i>	<i>Biennially</i>	<i>P</i>
	<i>Interagency Terrorism Response and Awareness Program</i>	<i>Quarterly</i>	<i>P</i>
	<i>NDMS – WMD Pharmacy Cache EX</i>	<i>Annually</i>	<i>P</i>
	<i>Forward Challenge 04 – COG/COOP EX</i>	<i>Annually</i>	<i>P</i>

	<i>HHS/DVA sponsored Pharmaceutical Tabletop EX</i>	<i>Annually</i>	<i>C/P</i>
VHA (as they occur)			
	<i>Decontamination Exercise</i>	<i>Biannually per site</i>	<i>M</i>
	<i>Triage/Mass Casualty</i>	<i>Per JCAHO</i>	<i>M</i>
	<i>Pharmacy cache exercise</i>	<i>TBD</i>	<i>M</i>
VACO			
	<i>Campus COOP (Shelter in place)</i>	<i>As called</i>	<i>M</i>

VBA			
	<i>Campus COOP (Shelter in place)</i>	<i>As called</i>	<i>M</i>
	<i>Regional Offices COOP EX</i>	<i>Annually</i>	<i>M</i>
	<i>Senior-level call back rosters (VBA Central and Area Offices)</i>	<i>As called</i>	<i>M</i>

NCA	<i>Campus COOP (Shelter in place)</i>	<i>As called</i>	<i>M</i>
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	<i>Emergency Alert Network (EAN)</i>	<i>Quarterly</i>	<i>M</i>
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