

Developing an Emergency Operations Plan

The only functional practices and shelters that will exist after a disaster are those with good contingency plans before the disaster. Therefore for veterinary practices and animal shelters to become “critical facilities” in disasters they must have good local disaster preparedness plans.

Effective planning is a team effort. Emergency Operations Plans (EOP) must be developed in the context of everyday occurrences. Therefore an all-hazards approach should be adopted.

The purpose of an EOP is to provide a systematic way of responding to an emergency situation. There are several approaches to developing EOPs for the care of animals and their owners in disasters. These approaches focus either on the hazards that may occur or on the issues likely to arise in disasters. Hazard-based plans often originate from official agencies, such as emergency management, state veterinarians, and departments of animal control. Issue-based plans often originate from volunteer organizations, such as humane groups, agriculture industry groups, the American Red Cross (ARC), and other disaster relief organizations. These plans focus on such issues as sheltering of owned pets, environmental protection, and animal welfare.

EOPs can deal with animal-related issues by including an animal care annex, a section that addresses specific activities critical to emergency response and recovery for animals (in some states this section is called an emergency support function [ESF]). Another possibility is to include the care of animals and their owners as an appendix to an existing annex. Annexes that may be suitable to append are public health or mass care annexes. However, experience has shown that the better solution is to develop a separate annex or ESF for animal care and to have appendices that address the individual issues arising in disasters.

The following steps are recommended in the development of an EOP. The order of the steps takes into account that the original development of a plan takes a long time. If a disaster strikes before the plan is complete and rehearsed, at least a network of people and groups will be in place to work together. Thus the steps should be followed in order:

- Gaining of a solid understanding of emergency management
- Assurance of official support
- Gathering of a planning team
- Hazard identification
- Risk and vulnerability assessment
- Capability and resource assessment
- Plan review and testing
- Plan maintenance.

The plan should provide an organizational structure and offer a definite course of action to meet emergencies or disasters. Here are several of the characteristics on which a good EOP is based:

- Existing organizational structure
- Available community resource inventory
- Coordination rather than control
- Substantiated facts and valid assumptions
- Simple language.

These characteristics generally are present only if the plans are developed by those who have to implement them (management by objectives). Plans that are not developed and approved by the persons who will be implementing them can be dangerous, as well as detrimental to the

community and to the credibility and enthusiasm of all involved.

The planning process is just as important as, if not more important than, the final plan itself. The same way that the response to disasters is a team effort and needs to have coordination from all involved, plan development is a team effort. Although on occasion the development of a plan may seem to be stagnant, this should be viewed as part of the team-building process, in which the different people and groups involved learn how each participant deals with cooperative efforts.

Formal plans are the formal goal of disaster preparedness. In many communities emergency managers are short on time and resources and will not be able to prioritize the care of animals and their owners. In these communities informal meetings between important contributors are also helpful in preparing for the care of animals in disasters. These meetings should involve the official agencies that would deal with the various issues in disasters and other persons willing to help. Participants should learn how each group's representatives are appointed, what each group's official role is in day-to-day work, and what resources (personnel and physical) each would be able and willing to provide in a disaster. Sharing this information is the important first step toward an effective response to a disaster.

Recommended Sequence for Plan Development

There are three circumstances under which plans will be developed:

- In the absence of immediate or recent threat from disaster: the preferred method
- Immediately following a disaster: the common method
- At the time of a disaster: the necessary method

The latter two should be avoided because the plans that evolve in these situations are often biased toward special issues that arose in the most recent disaster. Major issues of past disasters may not be representative of the major concerns in future disasters.

Time Frame for Plan Development

Persons or agencies often begin work on a disaster preparedness plan without considering the time it takes to develop these plans. Personal experience has shown that state plans take approximately 3 years to develop and local plans about 1.5 years. At the end of the development period the document will have been prepared and accepted by the appropriate legal and financial authorities and will progress into the maintenance phase.

Hazard Analysis

Federal, state, and local EMAs generate and maintain information on all foreseeable hazards in the United States. This is referred to as all-hazards identification and is available through the HAZUS system.

Writing the Plan

The Emergency Operations Plan can be written as meetings are taking place, but only once all the steps have been accomplished should the plan be considered ready for implementation. The only exception are SOPs (Appendix I), which often take considerable time and experience to work out. SOPs also have to be modified frequently when experience shows how they can be improved.

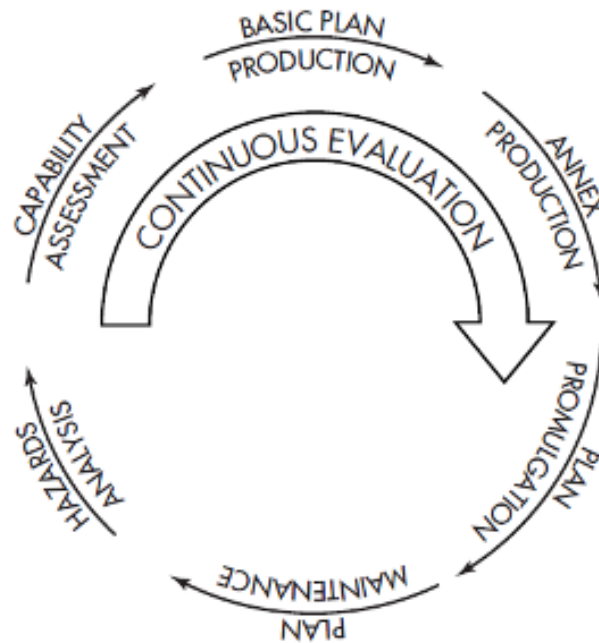


FIG. 20-1 The planning cycle.

Adding the annex to the community EOP often generates considerable community interest and support. Local planning groups should take advantage of this. For example, the plan can be reinforced by public and official awareness programs, such as the following:

- Invitation of the community's chief elected official to the formal adoption of the plan
- Press conferences
- Fund-raising events
- Public awareness programs
- Enrolling volunteers.

Committee Effectiveness

Research on emergency management committees has shown that the greatest success comes when members have experience in disasters, such as evacuations, and when the committee's work receives community support. Ways of generating support include preparing and announcing official resolutions, receiving media coverage, and becoming involved in community groups' actions (e.g., public speaking). Other factors that contribute to successful outcomes are managerial and include delegation of specialty issues to subcommittees, frequency of meetings, and having a paid member who can prepare documentation of progress made.