VIRTUAL EOC ACTIVATIONS - READINESS ASSESSMENT

A VEOC is defined as an Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) activities and functions carried out in a virtual or remote environment. These were the findings that were identified by Canadian Emergency Management professionals, and documented in the study *More than Technology: Experiences of Virtual Emergency Operations Centers (VEOCs) during the COVID-19 pandemic response in Canada*. This checklist is designed to support programs in assessing their VEOC readiness.

TECHNOLOGY REQUIREMENTS	Met	Not Met	N/A
Equipment: Do staff have the proper technology and equipment to work from home? Considerations: desk, chair, laptops, monitors, keyboards, printers, headsets, web camera, and cellphone.	☐	☐	☐
Business Needs: Has the organization determined technology and equipment requirements needed to run a VEOC? Considerations: teleconferencing, video conferencing, messaging, file sharing, common operating pictures, and role-specific email profiles.	☐	☐	☐
Program Access: Do staff have access to the required programs/documentation available to them while working from home? Considerations: email, Microsoft, Video Conferencing (Teams, Zoom), specialized EOC platforms, and shared drives.	☐	☐	☐
Security: Are there guidelines for staff to properly secure and safeguard information and equipment while working from home? Considerations: dedicated and secured workspace, VPN access for remote files, password protected laptops and cellphones.	☐	☐	☐
External Partners: Has organizational pre-planning resolved any barriers with programs and security requirements? Considerations: unique login credentials, or support from their local IT department to download required programs.	☐	☐	☐
Bandwidth: Do staff have enough home bandwidth to support business requirements? Considerations: minimum requirements for video calls is 8 Mbps download / 1.5 Mbps upload.	☐	☐	☐
Fair Use Policy: Have potential challenges associated with consistent bandwidth (due to scale back from the internet provider) been considered? Considerations: bandwidth needs to keep up with business requirements during peak internet times (holidays and weekends).	☐	☐	☐
Connectivity: Has the organization shared with staff some simple tips and tricks to increase their connectivity at home? Considerations: turn off video during teleconferences, turn off other devices connected to their local wifi, turn off VPN during teleconferences to decrease bandwidth draw, close browsers and programs not actively being used.	☐	☐	☐
Notes:			

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PROCESS REQUIREMENTS	Met	Not Met	N/A
Activating the (V)EOC: Has the organization determined a set of criteria for activating a virtual or hybrid EOC? <u>Considerations:</u> are there geographical or weather-related criteria that will prompt a shift to a virtual EOC?	☐	☐	☐
Dedicated (V)EOC Supports: Are on-site and dedicated IT supports available to assist activated resources, both in-person and remote? <u>Considerations:</u> tutorials on using virtual software, mentoring on an expedited and as needed basis.	☐	☐	☐
Information transfer: Have regularly scheduled and informal meetings been established to ensure situational awareness and to avoid information transfer challenges and duplication? Are business continuity issues addressed in the event of outages/loss of connectivity? <u>Considerations:</u> morning briefings/situational feeds, weekly updates, check-ins.	☐	☐	☐
Pre-event preparedness: Are tools and resources available for staff to seamlessly transition into a virtual environment? <u>Considerations:</u> updated software, document sharing tools, briefing feeds.	☐	☐	☐
Training: Are skills and competency training (including just-in-time training) available to all personnel expected to operate in a VEOC? Have exercises been developed focusing on skills and competencies (i.e. *how* ICS functions should be performed as opposed to *what* the functions are). <u>Considerations:</u> ICS protocols, information transfer/documentation, IT and data security, stress resilience.	☐	☐	☐
Collaboration with external partners: Are required external and partner agency contacts up-to-date and easily accessible before an activation? In a virtual environment, are organizational security protocols set to seamlessly allow for external partner access? <u>Considerations:</u> have a pre-planning meeting prior to activation to identify the challenges with collaboration prior to an incident.	☐	☐	☐
Notes:			

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PEOPLE REQUIREMENTS	Met	Not Met	N/A
Introductions: Are processes in place to help staff know which EOC positions are staffed and whether physical or remote? Considerations: introductions via chat during virtual meetings, or set display name to name plus EOC function.	☐	☐	☐
Support the learning curve: Do Supervisors/Section Chiefs have tools for helping staff acclimatize to the virtual EOC environment, tools, and processes? Do remote staff have an identified go-to person/buddy other than their supervisor who they can ask questions? Considerations: identify super-users to help/support others, develop a FAQ, chat channels	☐	☐	☐
Readiness for remote work: Have Supervisors/Section Chiefs inquired whether remote staff are properly equipped to meet OH&S requirements, and are they connected with necessary equipment? Are staff made aware of workplace programs for equipping their remote workspace? Have supervisors reviewed virtual/remote work policies and resources with staff including OH&S requirements? Considerations: borrowing/purchasing ergonomic supports, borrowing an extra computer screen or other equipment.	☐	☐	☐
Mental health and wellness support: Are supports available to staff in the physical EOC also available for EOC staff working virtually, and are staff working virtually made aware of these? Do Supervisors/Section Chiefs 'model' wellness behaviours? Considerations: online or telephone employee assistance programs, enforced quiet hours, wellness reminders and tips	☐	☐	☐
Virtual support and check-ins: Do Supervisors/Section Chiefs regularly check-in with EOC staff/team members working virtually? Considerations: quick one-on-one chats or virtual team coffee breaks.	☐	☐	☐
Preferred communication: Are preferred communication methods identified and established with in-person and remote staff? Considerations: chat channels vs video calls vs phone calls	☐	☐	☐
Informal communication: Are virtual forums/methods for asking questions or gaining situational awareness readily available and shared? Considerations: prepare guidelines for both formal and informal communication methods.	☐	☐	☐
Managing expectations: Does a response policy outline operational periods including acceptable lead time or response delays? Are these reviewed with staff during an activation? Considerations: expectations for evenings, weekends, holidays. Are quiet hours established and maintained as much as possible? Considerations: no email/chat messages during XYZ hours.	☐	☐	☐
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