

Appendix III Review of the Region's Pandemic Experience

1. Event Tracking and Record Keeping

With previous significant events and emergencies, full tracking of actions, decisions, figures and resource usage have proven difficult. Given the much-expanded scale and duration of the Region's COVID response, ad-hoc solutions have been developed to address these same issues but are simply not as fulsome as existing software and enterprise solutions used in various Emergency Operations Centres in Ontario.

Solutions used by other jurisdictions are both scalable and customizable to the needs of the organization and, dependent on the licensing, can be extended to key stakeholders such as municipal and first responders so that information sharing, and situational awareness is enhanced. Generally, software and enterprise solutions of this nature leverage an organizations existing infrastructure such as document storage, finance, payroll and GIS systems.

As these solutions are customizable, there is an opportunity to develop event specific modules and dashboards to further promote situational awareness across an organization. As an example, customizable dashboards for Personal Protective Equipment resources and availability could be developed.

With software of this nature, there is normally an archiving function to store and retain transactions, decisions, documents and event logs for future reference.

Thus, further investigation of emergency management software or enterprise solutions is recommended, particularly if both physical distancing, working remotely and limitations on gathering sizes are to remain in effect.

2. Increasing Response Capacity

Never has a single event drawn on the number of departments, divisions, programs and individuals as the COVID response thus far. While several individuals have previous experience supporting significant events and emergencies and a larger number have received training in the Incident Management System, there will always be a need to build further organizational capacity.

Traditional methods for delivering training have been based on classroom style training to between 15 to 25 individuals with group tasks and tabletop exercises being interspersed in the day and a half of training. Exercises have generally been no more than a day in duration and normally take the route of tabletop exercises or discussions.

Currently, a small number of Regional staff have been approved facilitate the Incident Management System curriculum developed by the Office of the Fire Marshall and Emergency Management. That curriculum only provides a medium to high level overview of key IMS positions and functions. There is no provincially approved training available for specific IMS positions such as the Command and General staff, nor the supporting positions.

In addition to having to reevaluate and modify the traditional training approaches to meet physical distancing, safe gathering sizes and other mitigation measures, Regional Emergency Management will be looking to work with municipal partners to develop function

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and position specific IMS training in the absence of similar curriculum from the Office of the Fire Marshal and Emergency Management.

With respect to future exercises, Regional Emergency Management will be developing a multi-year exercise plan as part of the updates to the Region of Peel Emergency Plan which will be completed in early 2021 and brought to the Emergency Management Program Committee. This plan will address exercises of various levels ranging from departmental and divisional scale exercises to broader exercises spanning beyond regional and municipal stakeholders.

3. Corporate Business Continuity Planning

Formal expansion of Business Continuity Planning efforts across all departments and divisions is warranted and should be sustained at a corporate level indefinitely. Efforts to date have focused on the loss of workforce, loss of workplace or the loss of workplace infrastructure scenarios that occur individually within an individual department or division. These parameters have been exceeded since the middle of March and are not likely to reverse for the foreseeable future.

As most every municipal and regional government service in Ontario has implemented business continuity strategies based on their individual COVID experiences, there is an opportunity to survey the approaches used and best practices. Where appropriate, the strategies will be adopted and applicable approaches will be implemented into a Regional Business Continuity strategy.

Ideally, legislative changes will result in the requirement for municipalities to formalize and implement business continuity programs and provide robust provincial supports to ensure a common approach by regional, municipal and ministry organizations.

4. Information Sharing and Collaboration

With most events, information sharing and collaboration with other stakeholders is often identified as an improvement area for future events. The span of information needs that our stakeholders, internal and external, have identified and sought over the course of this response has continually evolved and expanded. Overall, both the REOC and Public Health have been able to effectively support these needs and expectations, however there will always be ways of improving our supports.

Ideally, future information sharing platforms will be organizationally seamless and available in real-time. These solutions maybe achieved through further leveraging of our existing technology platforms or through the implementation of new technologies such as emergency operations centre software.

With respect to collaboration, a tenant of the Incident Management System is to ensure interorganizational collaboration is achieved and maintained throughout all event phases. To the extent possible, REOC and Command Staff have worked diligently with our stakeholders to ensure alignment of activities and efforts. In some cases, the priorities of external stakeholders did not align to those of Public Health and the REOC and guidance was provided to the stakeholder to consume and operationalize on their own. These instances were few and were often addressed by key individuals agreeing to meet outside of normal business hours to provide support.

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Throughout the ongoing response, every effort will be made by the REOC and REOC Command and General Staff to ensure the collaboration and information sharing needs of internal and external stakeholders are met to the extent possible.

5. Continued use of the Regional Policy Group

The role and function of the Regional Policy Group has been a part of the Region of Peel Emergency Plan since December of 2015 but has been used sparingly with previous events. This is due to the smaller corporate scope and significantly shorter durations of previous events and absence of significant strategic implications. With these previous events, individual Regional Policy Group members were consulted as necessary and appropriate based on which departments were involved in the response.

The guidance and direction provided by the Regional Policy Group to the REOC and individual REOC Command and General staff has been invaluable and should be utilized with future events should the scale and complexity move beyond the scope of individual departments. To further reinforce this recommendation, through amendments to the Region of Peel Emergency Plan, guidance will be expanded to include general criteria for involving the full Regional Policy group.

In addition, training for Regional Policy Group members should be expanded to include those who may provide coverage to Regional Policy Group members during absences. This training will need to be updated and amended based on our COVID experiences and will likely be in place following the adoption of the updated Region of Peel Emergency Plan.

6. Integration of Departmental EOCs

Largely due to the scale of the response across all departments, several Department and Division level EOCs were initially established in addition to the REOC. For the most part, their actions and priorities aligned with those of the REOC, however there were occasions where inconsistent guidance and direction existed. While these variances were addressed, future REOC activations would benefit from reinforcing the relationship and reporting structure between the Regional Policy Group, REOC and EOCs at the department and division levels. As such, the revised Region of Peel Emergency Plan will provide guidance and direction should there be a need to concurrently activate the REOC and other EOCs.

In early September, the REOC was reorganized to both provide respite for individuals who had served in Command and General Staff roles for several months as well as position the REOC to support the implementation of recovery efforts, carry out previous logistics recommendations, provide REOC experience to expand response capacity and prepare for a potential second wave of COVID impacts.

As part of this reorganization and in an effort to further support and align with the Public Health COVID response, an additional Operations Section Chief (COVID Health Operations) was added to the REOC Command and General Staff with the specific function of providing situational awareness and guidance to the REOC related to the Public Health response. Thus far this move has proved beneficial in understand both the current and expected affects of COVID and informed both ongoing response and recovery actions.

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With future REOC activations of this scale and scope, a similar approach may be undertaken wherein departments and division level EOCs have lead representative tied to the REOC. For smaller events the use of departmental and divisional level EOCs should be avoided if possible.

7. Coordinated PPE and Procurement Strategy

Prior to the activation of the REOC, it was readily apparent that there was a shortage of available Personal Protective Equipment across North America and ultimately globally. Further, the procurement of PPE resources had been traditionally done at a divisional level and independent of the needs of other divisions. As such, efforts to coordinate the procurement of materials at a corporate level were undertaken in the first few days of the REOC activation and eventually this was expanded to take into consideration the needs of our municipal partners.

In late June and early July, a recommendation was approved by the Regional Policy Group to further streamline and coordinate both the procurement and storage of PPE materials. Since that time several efforts have commenced to implement a long term coordinated solution with a handful of key objectives being achieved at this point in time.

While the intent of this effort is to secure appropriate levels of PPE to support a 90 day supply and manage it's distribution effectively, following the conclusion of the COVID response, these solutions may be used to support the procurement and storage of other materials that may be used for future significant events or emergencies such as sand bags and booming equipment.

8. Legislative Improvements

Currently, the *Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act* outlines the processes for declaring and terminating both a Provincial and Municipal emergency in Ontario. Further, the Act is augmented by *Ontario Regulation 380/04* which details the technical and annual requirements for emergency management programs in Ontario.

Both, documents were written prior to the last pandemic experienced in Ontario (H1N1) and have requirements that do not currently align with measures such as physical distancing and limitations for gathering numbers. Further, while there is a requirement for Ministries to have Business Continuity plans, there is no requirement for municipalities to have Business Continuity plans. Lastly, valid concerns by both Public Health Units and First Responders associated with the sharing of COVID positive locations with selected individuals required a Provincial Order to resolve (*Ontario Regulation 120/20 - Access to COVID-19 status information by specified persons*), as current privacy legislation does not include provisions for the sharing of personal public health information during a pandemic.

Updates to the above legislation and other supporting acts, are both necessary and warranted at this time. Definitive guidance for municipalities on the procedures for declaring and terminating Emergencies along with the legislative requirement for municipalities to have business continuity programs (with fulsome provincial supports and detailed requirements) will help ensure further the alignment of municipal, regional and provincial contingency plans.

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Lastly, as part of legislative updates, the requirement that all municipal and ministry emergency management plans be based on the Incident Management System should be included. This recommendation has been made following the review of several significant provincial and local events as well as part of a Provincial Auditor General's report issued in December of 2017. Specifically, the Auditor General recommended the following;

“To ensure that the Province is ready to respond to emergencies effectively, we recommend that the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services through the Provincial Emergency Management Office (EMO):

- approve and mandate a standardized emergency response approach for the Province; and*
- work with ministries to develop a strategy for lengthy, large-scale emergency staffing requirements within EMO's and the ministries' emergency operations centres.”*