



# Municipality Continuation of Service Plan\*

BY VICTOR J SORDILLO PE, CSP

**The environment appears to be getting significantly more dangerous. It seems like only a few weeks pass by before we hear of a hurricane approaching, a major forest fire, floods, tornadoes, a pandemic warning, or an earthquake. In addition, man initiated potential disasters like terrorism, war, and cyber-attacks are reported daily. As elected officials and community leaders, it is our responsibility to identify potential exposures that can affect our town, city, county or state and be prepared.**

The devastation we experienced by the terrorist's acts on September 11, 2001 brought a heightened awareness of the need to plan for potential disasters. Leadership was motivated to examine their emergency management programs, update, and test them. Since that time, many municipalities have lost focus on planning for an emergency. We tend to react to events rather than assess the potential exposures and prevent or mitigate them.

In general, state and county offices of emergency management do a good job in the identification of potential disasters, planning and preparing. These levels of government can be very effective for geographically confined emergencies and in the organization of resources when a large region is affected.

When disaster strikes an entire state or very large areas and many communities, the first line of defense is the local municipality. Experience has shown that municipalities need to be self-sufficient as limited resources are available in major disasters.

A community must develop a Municipality Continuation of Service Plan\* (MCSP). It is a written document that outlines how to resume government services in the event of a disaster. This document should continually evolve and become part of day to day administration.



The first step in a plan is the assessment of exposure. Municipalities must know their vulnerabilities such as wind

and flood potential, targets for terrorists, transportation systems, et al. Government officials must ask themselves many questions in order to determine what is needed to mitigate the impact of a disaster. These include but are not limited to the following:

- **What properties, services and personnel are essential to the maintenance of local government?**
- **Can staff work remotely and are they equipped for remote operation?**
- **Are all essential facilities protected from a security as well as fire, flood, etc. standpoint?**
- **Have backup locations been identified?**
- **Is there a redundant communications system?**
- **How vulnerable are power sources such as the electrical grid?**
- **Are backup generators available and is the fuel supply sufficient?**
- **Are evacuation plans practical and what is the capacity of shelters?**
- **Is there sufficient medical services capacity?**
- **How do we obtain and distribute food and water?**
- **Is an evacuation plan in place?**

Weaknesses need to be identified so that improvements can be made to ensure that government services do not slow down or cease. For example, if a municipality has their own water supply there should be a security program to prevent and detect vandalism and the potential for contamination. This should include fencing, police patrols, testing, inspection, etc. Even with the best security, a hurricane or flood could contaminate the supply. Therefore, we must determine how to obtain and distribute water if the pumping stations, well or reservoir is compromised.

Remember to Prepare and Practice!

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\* EDITOR'S NOTE: Also known as a Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP) or by other names depending on region or State. The plan is a written document prepared by a local government describing how the local government will resume services following a disaster.



**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:**

*Victor Sordillo has over 35 years of experience providing risk engineering services and has served on the Town Council and as Mayor of Warren Township NJ for 17 years. He has held senior global leadership positions at two major international insurance organizations, as well as experience with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. He is currently a senior vice president leading the loss control operation for Sompo International.*

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*Mr. Sordillo has been a guest speaker on the topic of risk analysis at many different venues including AICPA CFO's annual meeting in 2017 and the ASSE seminar program. His topics cover innovative approaches in safety and security. Recent publications included the cover story, "What are the Odds" for Risk Management Insights and "Supply Chain Risks" for QBE.*

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