

Continuity of Operations in an Influenza Pandemic

The Department of Energy (DOE) established the Biological Event Monitoring Team (BEMT) to ensure Department readiness in the event of a pandemic or other biological threat. The Chief Health, Safety and Security Officer, Glenn Podonsky has primary responsibility for the BEMT, which provides medical, epidemiologic, and public health expertise to the Department. The National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA), responsible for the Department's Continuity of Operations (COOP), provides advice and direction on COOP activities related to pandemic planning. In addition, the BEMT includes representatives from the Office of the Chief Information Officer, Office of Management, Office of the Chief Human Capital Officer, General Counsel, Science, Environmental Management, Fossil Energy, Intelligence and Counter Intelligence, and Electricity Delivery and Energy Reliability.

The BEMT Executive Steering Group provides direction and reviews work products and priorities of BEMT on matters involving the health of DOE Federal and contractor employees. The HSS Deputy Chief for Operations, William Eckroade, and the NNSA Deputy Advisor, Carl S. Pavetto, co-chair the BEMT Executive Steering Group. The DOE Chief Medical Officer, Michael J. Ardaiz, serves as an advisor to the steering group. Senior Epidemiologist, Dr. Bonnie Richter, chairs the BEMT Working Group.

The BEMT supports the following four main functions outlined in the National Strategy: (1) ensures the safety and well-being of the Department's workforce; (2) ensures the Department's continuing performance and mission-essential functions (MEF); (3) supports the Federal response to a pandemic or other outbreak; and (4) communicates with stakeholders.

Given the unanticipated scenario with the H1N1 influenza virus, the BEMT continues to work on its pandemic planning on behalf of the entire Department. Implementation of the plan by all DOE elements and by individual employees is essential to ensure the protection of the DOE workforce and the continued performance of the Department's essential functions in the event of a pandemic.

Continuity of Operations (COOP) Planning

Pandemic Influenza presents a unique challenge for Continuity planning and implementation. While many of the basic Continuity concepts (e.g. Orders of Succession, Essential Functions, Vital Records, etc.) are applicable, the traditional idea of relocating personnel to an Alternate Operating Facility may not be an effective response; the best course of action may be social distancing or telework.

COOP Options

The traditional COOP plans of relocating personnel to another facility may not be a viable option. Nevertheless, MEFs must still be performed. Therefore, a more flexible approach to ensuring the continued performance of Essential Functions should be considered. A flexible plan, implementing a number of approaches may be necessary.

- Personnel directed to work from home (telework):

- Work hours are adjusted or rotated (shift work) to minimize the number of people in the work space at a given time (social distancing);
- Essential Functions are transferred to facilities that are not experiencing severe absenteeism (devolution); and
- Selected personnel who must be at work (classified work or work requiring specialized equipment) quarantine themselves for some period of time.

Additional Planning Considerations

There are numerous factors to consider in advance of an influenza pandemic. Individual Program Offices and staff must evaluate work requirements, essential functions, staff requirements, and flexibilities in order to choose the options that best suit their work needs. Considerations should include:

- Where will the leadership work?
- Have required telework agreements been signed?
- What work must be performed in the office?
- Where applicable, has sufficient cross training occurred to limit dependence on one or two key individuals?
- Have Orders of Succession and Delegations of Authority been prepared and are ready for implementation?
- Are vital records available for up to 60 days of sustained operations?
- Has devolution been coordinated?
- How will communication among the various Program and Staff Offices and Field Elements be coordinated?

When to Activate COOP

Every organization within DOE/NNSA that performs departmental MEFs will individually determine the threshold for continuous performance (trigger). What is the realistic minimum number of personnel required to perform assigned MEFs? If your personnel numbers fall below your target trigger, and you can no longer perform your MEFs, COOP activation should be considered.

More information on pandemic planning, as it relates to Continuity Planning is contained in the DOE Continuity of Operations Plan. Contact your Program/Staff Office and Field Element/Field Site Continuity Program Coordinator for further information on Continuity planning or to obtain a copy of the plan.

For additional information, contact Alan Cerrone, Continuity Program Manger at (301) 903-5886.