



Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologists

CSTE Preparedness Concept of Operations Plan

June 2018

Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologists

Concept of Operations Plan

Introduction

The Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologists (CSTE) is an organization which represents professionals practicing applied public health epidemiology within state, territorial, local and tribal public health agencies in the United States. CSTE provides two main services in support of applied public health epidemiology. CSTE works to establish more effective relationships among state and other health agencies. It also provides technical advice and assistance to partner organizations and to federal public health agencies such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). CSTE members have surveillance and epidemiology expertise in a broad range of areas including occupational health, infectious diseases, environmental health, chronic diseases, injury control, maternal and child health, and more. CSTE supports effective public health surveillance and good epidemiologic practice through training, capacity development, and peer consultation.

Health department epidemiologists are frequently involved in preparing for and responding to health emergencies and disasters, both natural and man-made. CSTE often plays a central facilitating role among epidemiology resources and assets during emergencies. This document, a Concept of Operations Plan (ConOps), provides guidance to the CSTE National Office for a coordinated emergency response that is integrated with partner plans of action.

Purpose

CSTE developed this ConOps plan in support of the organization's capacity to support applied public health epidemiologists in governmental health agencies, federal partners, and other response stakeholders. The plan provides the CSTE National Office with operational guidance for response to natural disasters, disease outbreaks, environmental catastrophes and other public health emergencies. Because each event is unique, CSTE's involvement in response activities may vary widely. Often, a request of support from federal partners, or needs identified by member states and territories will dictate the level of response required of CSTE.

A useful way to organize response activities is to consider response efforts before, during and after an emergency or disaster.

Before an Emergency

CSTE operations are normal when there is no emergency event. CSTE facilitates communication among state and territorial members as well as with federal partners. Conference calls, webinars, website updates (www.cste.org), email communications, regional meetings and the CSTE Annual Conference are examples of on-going communication activities.

In preparation for an emergency response, all CSTE staff should become familiar with the guidance in this ConOps plan. It should be provided to all staff once approved and to new staff during orientation. Updates to the plan can be shared at staff training events.

Vital to the organized approach of a complex public health crisis is the implementation of the Incident Command System (ICS). The ICS is a standardized management tool for meeting the demands of small or large emergency or nonemergency situations, represents "best practices" and has become the standard for

emergency management across the country. The ICS is a management system designed to enable effective and efficient domestic incident management by integrating a combination of facilities, equipment, personnel, procedures, and communications operating within a common organizational structure, designed to enable effective and efficient domestic incident management. There are a variety of on-line training courses regarding ICS provided by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), part of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS). <https://training.fema.gov/is/crslist.aspx?page=1>

While every emergency will not require CSTE to utilize ICS, every staff member should be familiar with the basics of incident command. To that end, all staff are required to successfully complete two on-line courses. IS 100.b provides an introduction to the Incident Command System and IS 700.a introduces and overviews the National Incident Management System (NIMS). NIMS provides a consistent nationwide template to enable all government, private-sector, and nongovernmental organizations to work together during domestic incidents. Completion of these two required courses will be tracked for each staff member by the Human Resources Coordinator. Additional coursework with specific training objectives are available at the link above and may be required for specific staff members covering a response. Annual exercises that focus on communication and deployment of Incident Command System, and “after action” evaluations should be integrated into training efforts.

Occasionally, CSTE may be requested by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to provide a liaison to the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) should they activate their center. Staff members who have been identified as being potentially deployed to the CDC should receive training regarding EOC operations and activities. Such training, including roles and responsibilities, may be provided by CSTE and CDC staff and the successful completion will be tracked by Human Resources.

During an Emergency

No two “emergencies” are of the same incident complexity, so the exact timing of declaring an emergency for CSTE headquarters will vary and be dynamic. The CSTE Executive Director, or his/her designee will convene staff subject matter experts (SMEs) and other key staff to develop the landscape of the emergency and determine what level of response best fits the current situation. Members that participate in CSTE Steering Committees aligned with the nature of the crisis (outbreak, disaster, toxic exposure) may be requested to provide input into declaration of an emergency. The Chair of the CSTE Public Health Emergency Preparedness subcommittee will be invited to participate.

The incident complexity considers a wide array of event characteristics including:

- Pathogen characteristics including pathogenicity, virulence, communicability, others
- If first noted internationally, estimates of timing/likelihood to reach US population
- Availability and effectiveness of treatment, vaccine, prophylaxis
- Estimates of population impacted (weather, microbes, toxic/radiologic material)
- Logistics of response, including resources needed to respond and length of response
- Member and partner expectations or requests for assistance
- Political considerations including whether event is natural, man-made, including terrorism

With the advice and guidance of the staff and advisors in hand, the Executive Director will decide if a response is required from CSTE and what level of response will be appropriate at the time.

Based on the factors listed above, CSTE will determine the level of the response from the general categories below.

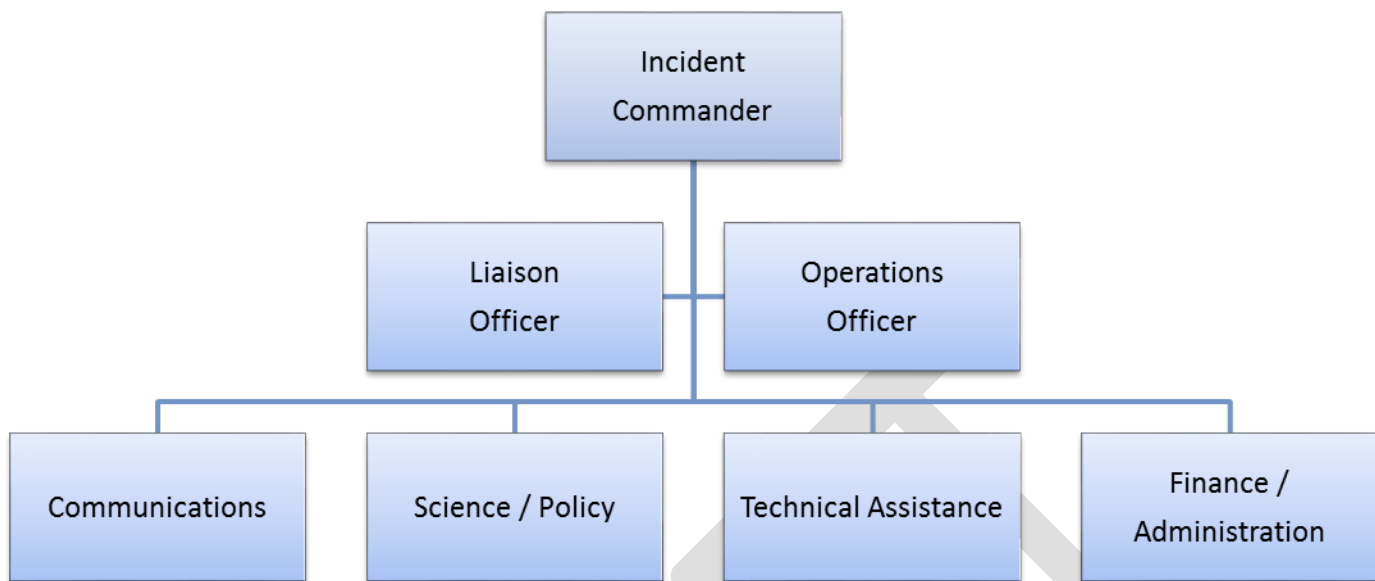
Level 1 Activation: A minor (or far distant, case numbers low) incident that requires slightly elevated attention and monitoring by CSTE preparedness and the programmatic area associated with the nature of the event (e.g., infectious disease program for a Lassa fever case in New York City). Careful monitoring of informational emails and web postings is required for assigned staff. The CSTE Executive Director is given situational awareness reports on a timely basis, as needed. Informational, policy or recommendations requests are monitored to detect increasing trends. Alternate staffing schedules or diversions from regular work tasks are not required.

Level 2 Activation: An incident that requires an active response from CSTE. The Incident Command System is activated, an Incident Commander is selected and the ICS structure is deployed to a limited degree. Programmatic staff, as well as members in appropriate Steering Committees will provide advice and counsel to the response. Conference calls or webinars will be scheduled with members and federal partners as needed. CSTE staff in other areas may be requested to assist with emergency response activities on a limited basis. Otherwise, only minimal shifting of staff duties or additional hours will be required.

Level 3 Activation: A significant event has occurred and a significant CSTE response is required. More of the ICS command structure is utilized with more CSTE staff involved in response activities. Roles and responsibilities of ICS positions are outlined in Appendix 1. “Just in time” training is provided to staff, as needed. The virtual emergency operations center (vEOC) is established. Regular conference calls with CDC, other key non-profits, and members will be held to receive and provide guidance. Agencies with which CSTE has contractual obligations may be requested to allow delay or modification in routine project deliverables. CSTE staff may be assigned to the CDC EOC. Additional funding for response activities may be solicited. At the discretion of the Incident Commander, some staff travel and leave may be postponed or cancelled.

CSTE will establish a virtual emergency operations center (vEOC) to plan and operate the CSTE Level 3 Activation. Staff members who are part of the CSTE response effort will work from their offices with meetings held in a conference room. CSTE leadership will help establish a vEOC tool for situational awareness so response team members can share information, make decisions and deploy resources without being physically present in the same room (typically using web-enabled software, a vEOC allows participants to work from their normal workstation, from home or from the field). Emergency data, plans and reports are available from any secure location. IT support will insure that all information can be securely maintained in a central database that is available to CSTE vEOC participants from anywhere in the world.

During a Level 3 Activation (and to a limited degree, a Level 2 Activation) the Incident Commander will appoint staff to the Incident Command according to the Incident Command structure outlined below. The primary roles and responsibilities may vary depending on the incident complexity and other factors; not all positions may be needed in some emergencies, and in others there may be a need for more staffing. For a general description of roles and responsibilities of Incident Command staff, see Appendix 1. Job action sheets are found in Appendix 2.



Each position can be filled by one individual or several, depending on the incident complexity and the needs of the organization. The top three command positions (Incident Commander, Liaison Officer and Operations Officer) can be a single person or have a team of assistants assigned to the position. The Communications, Technical Assistance, Science / Policy, and Finance Teams can be staffed with multiple team members, again, depending on the needs and available staff resources.

Following an Emergency - Recovery

As the crisis begins to subside (slowing of incidence rates, removal of toxic exposure), CSTE will begin the transition towards recovery. ICS activities will be reduced and if warranted, staff will return to normal, pre-emergency activity levels. CSTE staff will continue to respond to requests from state, territorial, local and tribal epidemiologists as they are received. Technical advice and recommendations are provided to federal partners and to other key non-profit organizations as requested. The transition to recovery must be balanced with the continuing intensity of requests for service received at the CSTE National Office.

Once the response phase is over, an internal evaluation of CSTE's response should be conducted. This "hot wash" will focus on the response in general, what went well, what challenges were faced and what could be improved in the next emergency response. The U.S. Department of Homeland Security Exercise and Evaluation Program (HSEEP) provides guidance on exercise and evaluation methods.

https://www.fema.gov/media-library-data/20130726-1914-25045-8890/hseep_apr13_.pdf

Appendix 1: Roles and Responsibilities

Role	Responsibility	Examples
Incident Commander	Coordinate response activities. Establishes response objectives, strategies, and priorities. Assumes overall responsibility for the response.	Directs members of ICS and coordinates response activities.
Liaison Officer	Provides bi-directional linkages to all federal partners, key non-profits (APHL, ASTHO, NACCHO), and members. Provides trained staff to a position at the CDC EOC, if requested.	Edits and distributes call notes to members and partners, as appropriate. Checks in with other section chiefs to address staffing and other needs as they evolve.
Operations Officer	Responsible for activities CSTE will undertake according to priorities set by the Incident Commander. Responsible for all activities and decisions related to staffing and internal CSTE support. Provides resources and needed services to support the achievement of the response objectives.	Executes activity plan. Takes notes on stakeholder calls. In collaboration with Communications Team, monitors communication and addresses needs from members, federal partners, other key NPOs. Develops process for collecting and tracking member feedback.
Communications Team	Monitors federal/partner web sites, newsfeeds, listservs, etc. In collaboration with Science / Policy Team, compiles and disseminates informational updates to staff, members and affiliates. Monitors and coordinates requests for interviews. Creates and distributes press releases Monitors federal/state media briefings.	Monitors public information and all is responsible for all CSTE communications regarding the emergency.

	Assures use of PH Emergency Preparedness Communication Decision Making Algorithm (Appendix 3)	
Science / Policy Team	Provides guidance on public health content in positions taken, planning, and communications written to members by Communications Team staff.	Provides guidance related to specific recommendations and policies.
Technical Assistance Team	Provides IT and telecommunications support for response, including vEOC.	Assures uninterrupted secure IT capabilities for response.
Finance / Administration Team	Monitors costs related to the response. Provides accounting, procurement, time recording, and cost analyses.	Tracks spending associated with response. Tracks additional funds received by CSTE designated for the response.

Appendix 2. Job Action Sheets

DRAFT

CSTE Incident Commander

Reports to: CSTE Executive Director

Mission: Organize and direct CSTE emergency response and operations.

Immediate:

- Read this entire Job Action Sheet.
- Obtain a full briefing of the incident.
- Determine the response level necessary to manage the current emergency situation.
- Activate the vEOC, if necessary.
- Notify all CSTE staff of the current response level.
- Appoint all Command Staff and General Staff who are required for this response.
- Confer with CSTE Senior Management to identify essential CSTE services that must continue during this event.
- Determine key information to communicate with agency staff, external agencies, the general public and the media.
- Assure that contact has been established and information shared with relevant external agencies.
- Conduct initial incident briefing with command staff.

Ongoing:

- Schedule and deliver timely staff briefings, as appropriate.
- Authorize resources as needed or requested by ICS Team leads.
- Schedule routine briefings with ICS Team leads to receive status reports and update the incident action plan regarding the continuance and/or termination of continued Operational Periods.
- Maintain contact with relevant agencies through Liaison Officer(s).
- Approve media releases submitted by the Communications team lead.
- Plan for the possibility of extended response.
- Deliver regular situational updates to CSTE's Executive Board via email.
- Determine if any staff leave and/or travel should be cancelled and/or postponed.
- Reassess CSTE's current response level and make changes as necessary.

Extended:

- Observe all staff for status and signs of stress.

Liaison Officer

Reports to: CSTE Incident Commander

Mission: Serve as the link between CSTE response teams, partner agencies, state and territories, and federal agencies.

Immediate:

- Read this entire Job Action Sheet.
- Obtain a full briefing of the incident from the Incident Commander.
- Recommend key information to communicate with agency staff, external agencies, the general public and the media to the Incident Commander.
- Assure that contact has been established and information shared with relevant external agencies.
- Notify CSTE members, federal agencies, and partner agencies how to submit information requests and or questions.

Ongoing:

- Develop talking points for the Incident Commander's timely briefings, as needed.
- Deliver timely situational updates to CSTE's Executive Board via email and in-person when requested.
- Receive and triage calls/requests from CSTE members, federal agencies, and states and territories to the Operations Officer.
- Monitor inquiries received in CSTE's Command Center Mailbox (commandcenter@cste.org) and triage them to the relevant ICS Team leads or subject matter experts, as appropriate
- In collaboration with Communications Team, monitor the need to develop additional methods of communication such as additional email addresses or phone banks.
- Participate in partner agency calls to provide updates on CSTE response as necessary.

Extended:

- Observe all staff for status and signs of stress.
- Provide rest periods for staff.

Operations Officer

Reports to: CSTE Incident Commander

Mission: Manages the daily operations of ICS response, including the vEOC.

Immediate:

- Read this entire Job Action Sheet.
- Obtain a full briefing of the incident from the Incident Commander.
- Recommend staffing assignments to the Incident Commander.
- Review all EOC documentation and ensure appropriate staff receives section packets including job action sheets and pertinent job aids.
- Conduct Just-in-Time training as needed.

Ongoing:

- Coordinate general staff updates for the incident commander and liaison officer's briefings.
- Develop talking points for the Incident Commander's timely briefings.
- Develop information to include in the Liaison Officer's timely situation updates to CSTE's Executive Board.
- Receive and triage calls/requests from the Liaison Officer and appoint tasks to section leads for response.
- Participate in CDC partner calls to provide updates on CSTE response as necessary.
- Coordinate vEOC operations and logistics with section lead in Communications, Information, Technical Assistance, and Finance.
- Coordinate with and support any CSTE staff detailed to CDC EOC.
- Develop staff rotation for long-term staff deployment to CDC EOC. Consider use of consultants.

Extended:

- Observe all staff for status and signs of stress.
- Provide rest periods for staff.
- Develop staff rotation schedule for EOC staffing.

Communications Team Lead

Reports to: Operations Officer

Mission: Monitors public information and CSTE emergency communications.

Immediate:

- Read this entire Job Action Sheet.
- Obtain a full briefing of the incident from the Operations Officer.
- Recommend staffing assignments to the Operations Officer.
- Review all vEOC documentation and ensure appropriate staff receives section packets including job action sheets and pertinent job aids.
- Conduct Just-in-Time training for all Communication Team Staffers.

Ongoing:

- Assign staff to monitor all pertinent federal/partner websites, newsfeeds, listservs, and other information sources.
- Provide a report of the information found on federal/partner websites, newsfeeds, listservs, and other information sources to the Operations Officer as requested.
- Assign staff to take notes during the twice daily briefing and supply to staff that were not in attendance via email.
- Monitor and coordinate all public information requests from the media.
- Coordinate the development of press releases with appropriate subject matter experts.
- Distribute press releases as necessary, including information on social media.
- Assign staff to monitor federal and state media briefings.
- Assign staff to monitor social media.
- Immediately notify the Operations Officer of any potentially damaging or inflammatory public information regarding CSTE's or any partner agency's response to the emergency.
- Immediately notify the Operations Officer of any blatantly false information or rumors that are widely circulating in the public regarding the incident and develop public information to address the rumors that provide truthful information.
- Develop information for communication with CSTE's Executive Board, State/Territorial epidemiologists, and partner agencies at a frequency determined by the Incident Commander.
- Update the CSTE website with emergency response information.
- Determine the need to develop additional CSTE webpages for response specific information.

Extended:

- Observe all staff for status and signs of stress.
- Provide rest periods for staff.

Science / Policy Team Lead

Reports to: Operations Officer

Mission: Serve as subject matter experts for CSTE's emergency response.

Immediate:

- Read this entire Job Action Sheet.
- Obtain a full briefing of the incident from the Operations Officer.
- Recommend staffing assignments to the Operations Officer.
- Review all vEOC documentation and ensure appropriate staff receives section packets including job action sheets and pertinent job aids.
- Conduct Just-in-Time training as needed for staff.

Ongoing:

- Provide timely situational updates, as needed, regarding the latest science and information on the emergency to information team staff.
- Assign staff to monitor all pertinent federal/partner teleconferences.
- Maintain situational awareness of the emergency at federal, state, and regional levels.
- Provide a report of the information presented on federal/partner teleconferences to the Operations Officer as requested.
- Assign staff to reach out to pre-determined sets of states to determine their operational and response status.
- Monitor/triage assistance requests from partners and members through phone calls and email.
- Provide member questions to CDC on a rolling basis.
- Develop state-related tools and resources to assist in emergency response.
- Assign staff to coordinate the development of public information and press releases with the Communications Team.
- Assign staff to maintain a visual display (chart/map) of response status and/or critical needs of states.

Extended:

- Observe all staff for status and signs of stress.
- Provide rest periods for staff.

Technical Assistance Team Lead

Reports to: Operations Officer

Mission: Serve as IT and telecommunications support for vEOC and all response needs.

Immediate:

- Read this entire Job Action Sheet.
- Obtain a full briefing of the incident from the Operations Officer.
- Recommend staffing assignments to the Operations Officer.
- Review all EOC documentation and ensure appropriate staff receives section packets including job action sheets and pertinent job aids.
- Conduct Just-in-Time training as needed.

Ongoing:

- Ensure all technical and telecommunications needs of the vEOC are met.
- Suggest innovative and/or new technology that is available that may make the job of the vEOC staffers easier.

Extended:

- Observe all staff for status and signs of stress.
- Provide rest periods for staff.

Finance/Administration Team Lead

Reports to: Operations Officer

Mission: Manage grants and financial issues that occur during emergency response and vEOC operation.

Immediate:

- Read this entire Job Action Sheet.
- Obtain a full briefing of the incident from the Operations Officer.
- Recommend staffing assignments to the Operations Officer.
- Review all vEOC documentation and ensure appropriate staff receives section packets including job action sheets and pertinent job aids.
- Conduct Just-in-Time training as needed.

Ongoing:

- Ensure all procurement needs of the vEOC are met.
- Reach out to funders to request additional time to meet deliverables or other grant stipulations as necessary, at the discretion of the Incident Commander.
- Ensure tracking of staff time is occurring during overtime situations.
- Direct staff on how to charge their time to emergency preparedness when operating outside of their normal job duties.
- Postpone normal financial requirements of staff that are activated, on a case-by-case basis, as necessary (credit card statement explanations, travel forms, etc.).

Extended:

- Observe all staff for status and signs of stress.
- Provide rest periods for staff.