



One Municipality's Example of A Municipality Continuation of Service Plan*

BY VICTOR J SORDILLO PE, CSP

Planning for a potential disaster can ensure the greatest level of control in the event of an actual emergency. The building and maintenance of a well thought out and tested Municipality Continuation of Service Plan* (MCSP), is necessary to maintain essential government services. This plan must be endorsed by all elected officials with the engagement of fire, police, and rescue services. The goals must include the protection of lives and property and the delivery of those essential services.

One of the most common mistakes that are made by municipalities, that have written a MCSP, is a lack of updates. For example, as staff changes the "calling tree" needs to be updated. Without these changes being made, we could have a potential void in the notification process or a critical function may not be accomplished.

During an emergency, we may have very little time to make a critical decision. The wrong decision could be disastrous or might hinder recovery. For example, do we evacuate City Hall when a bomb threat is called? If not, under what circumstances would it be necessary? Where does the staff evacuate to and how do we account for each person? And, if a bomb is found, is it left in place? If removed, where is it taken? Also, where are the skills to assess and potentially disarm or detonate?

The MCSP provides the details regarding the principles and procedures for dealing with emergencies and forms the basis of the foundation for good planning.

The following discusses how Warren Township New Jersey responded to super storm Sandy. This storm was one of the most damaging in the history of the United States. Its financial impact to New Jersey was



estimated at around \$30 billion. As it was moving up the coast, FEMA held a conference call to discuss preparations and resilience. As the loss of power was a critical consequence of the winds, electrical crews were being directed toward the East Coast for restoration in anticipating significant power outages. By the end of the storm, over 2 million homes and businesses were without power and most were not restored for over seven days.

Within Warren, volunteers delivered fuel for generators, visited the elderly and handicapped, established pickup locations for drinking water, set up shelters, and maintained communication lines in our emergency control center. This was all part of the plan that had been updated and practiced. Vulnerable citizens were previously identified, volunteers were trained, and shelters were prepared. It was a difficult time but we got through the difficulties with as little stress to the community as possible.

After the hurricane, the Township committee met with the volunteers to analyze our efforts and plan for the future. It was decided that we must do more in a proactive fashion to determine that another storm event does not impact our electrical systems. Therefore, we established a team of volunteers for a utility hazard inventory and remediation project. With the help of Rutgers University, a software application was developed to plot and categorize the potential weaknesses in our grid. Our team reviewed over 250 miles of electrical systems and identified 351 hazards that were reported to the utility companies. Over time, the hazards such as damage trees, weak poles, and stretched lines were eliminated.

The Township received the 2014 Sustainable Jersey Creativity award for our work.
Remember to Prepare and Practice!

* 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.

Mr. Sordillo is a Tufts University graduate where he studied structural engineering. He is a registered professional civil as well as a fire protection engineer. In addition, he is a Certified Safety Professional and has a Master's degree in Business Administration.

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.

He has held board level positions on charitable organizations such as United Way and the Red Cross, and is currently on the advisory board of the fire science program at Worcester Polytechnic Institute, on the Society of Fire Protection Engineers Foundation and a trustee of the New Jersey Manufacturing Extension Program.



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