

## **Part I. System Description**

### **Section A**

# **General System Description**

## **1. What Is SEMS?**

The Standardized Emergency Management System (SEMS) is the system required by Government Code §8607(a) for managing response to multi-agency and multijurisdiction emergencies in California. SEMS consists of five organizational levels which are activated as necessary:

- field response
- local government
- operational area
- regional
- state

SEMS incorporates the use of the Incident Command System (ICS), the Master Mutual Aid Agreement, existing mutual aid systems, the operational area concept, and multi-agency or inter-agency coordination. Local governments must use SEMS to be eligible for funding of their personnel related costs under state disaster assistance programs.

## **2. Purpose of SEMS**

SEMS has been established to provide an effective response to multi-agency and multijurisdiction emergencies in California. By standardizing key elements of the emergency management system, SEMS is intended to:

- facilitate the flow of information within and between levels of the system,
- facilitate coordination among all responding agencies.

Use of SEMS will improve the mobilization, deployment, utilization, tracking, and demobilization of needed mutual aid resources. Use of SEMS will reduce the incidence of poor coordination and communications, and reduce resource ordering duplication on multi-agency and multijurisdiction responses.

SEMS is designed to be flexible and adaptable to the varied disasters that occur in California and to the needs of all emergency responders.

### **3. Organizational/Response Levels and Activation Requirements**

The five SEMS organizational/response levels are described briefly below. Each level is discussed in detail in Guidelines sections I.B through I.F. The levels are activated as needed for an emergency. Minimum activation requirements from SEMS regulations are shown in the matrix on the following page.

#### **Field Response Level**

The field response level is where emergency response personnel and resources, under the command of an appropriate authority, carry out tactical decisions and activities in direct response to an incident or threat. SEMS regulations require the use of ICS at the field response level of an incident.

#### **Local Government Level**

Local governments include cities, counties, and special districts. Local governments manage and coordinate the overall emergency response and recovery activities within their jurisdiction. Local governments are required to use SEMS when their emergency operations center is activated or a local emergency is declared or proclaimed in order to be eligible for state funding of response-related personnel costs. In SEMS, the local government emergency management organization and its relationship to the field response level may vary depending upon factors related to geographical size, population, function, and complexity.

#### **Operational Area**

Under SEMS, the operational area means an intermediate level of the state's emergency services organization which encompasses the county and all political subdivisions located within the county including special districts. The operational area manages and/or coordinates information, resources, and priorities among local governments within the operational area, and serves as the coordination and communication link between the local government level and the regional level.

It is important to note, that while an operational area always encompasses the entire county area, it does not necessarily mean that the county government manages and coordinates the response and recovery activities within the county. The decision on organization and structure within the operational area is made by the governing bodies of the county and the political subdivisions within the county.

Exhibit A-1 Minimum Activation Requirements per SEMS Regulations					
Situations Identified in SEMS Regulations:	SEMS LEVELS:				
	Field Response	Local Government	Operational Area	Regional	State
Incident involving two or more emergency response agencies §2405(a), 2405(b)	Use ICS				
Local emergency declared or proclaimed * §2407(a)(2)		Use SEMS			
Local government EOC activated §2407(a)(1)		Use SEMS			
Local government activates EOC and requests operational area EOC activation §2407(a)(1)		Use SEMS	Activate EOC	Activate EOC	Activate EOC
Two or more cities within an operational area declare or proclaim a local emergency §2409(f)(2)			Activate EOC	Activate EOC	Activate EOC
County and one or more cities declare or proclaim a local emergency §2409(f)(3)			Activate EOC	Activate EOC	Activate EOC
City, city and county, or county requests governor's state of emergency proclamation §2409(f)(4)			Activate EOC	Activate EOC	Activate EOC
Governor proclaims a state of emergency for county or two or more cities §2409(f)(5)			Activate EOC	Activate EOC	Activate EOC
Operational area requests resources from outside its boundaries** §2409(f)(6)			Activate EOC	Activate EOC	Activate EOC
Operational area receives resource requests from outside its boundaries** §2409(f)(7)			Activate EOC	Activate EOC	Activate EOC
An operational area EOC is activated §2411(a)				Activate EOC	Activate EOC
A regional EOC is activated §2413(a)(1)					Activate EOC
Governor proclaims a state of emergency §2413(a)(2)					Activate EOC
Governor proclaims an earthquake or volcanic prediction §2413(a)(3)					Activate EOC

Notes: This matrix highlights the flow-through nature of SEMS activation requirements. Activation of an operational area EOC triggers activation of the regional EOC which, in turn, triggers activation of the state level EOC.

\* The EOC is usually activated, but in some circumstances, such as agricultural emergencies or drought, a local emergency may be declared or proclaimed without the need for EOC activation.

\*\*Does not apply to requests for resources used in normal day-to-day operations which are obtained through existing mutual aid agreements providing for the exchange or furnishing of certain types of facilities and services as provided for under the Master Mutual Aid Agreement.

§ Indicates sections in the California Code of Regulations, Title 19, Division 2, Chapter 1 (SEMS)

Situation is not applicable to the SEMS level.

## **Regional**

Because of its size and geography, the state has been divided into six mutual aid regions. The purpose of a mutual aid region, is to provide for the more effective application and coordination of mutual aid and other emergency related activities.

In SEMS, the regional level manages and coordinates information and resources among operational areas within the mutual aid region, and also between the operational areas and the state level. The regional level also coordinates overall state agency support for emergency response activities within the region.

## **State**

The state level of SEMS manages state resources in response to the emergency needs of the other levels, and coordinates mutual aid among the mutual aid regions and between the regional level and state level. The state level also serves as the coordination and communication link between the state and the federal disaster response system.

## **4. Features Common to all Organizational/Response Levels**

SEMS has several features based on the Incident Command System (ICS). The field response level uses functions, principles, and components of ICS as required in SEMS regulations. Many of these field response level features are also applicable at local government, operational area, regional and state levels. In addition, there are other ICS features that have application to all SEMS levels.

Described below are the features of ICS that are applicable to all SEMS levels. Their application at each SEMS level is discussed further in Guidelines sections I.B-F.

### **Essential Management Functions**

SEMS has five essential functions adapted from ICS. The field response level uses the five primary ICS functions: command, operations, planning/intelligence, logistics and finance/administration. At the local government, operational area, regional and state levels, the term management is used instead of command. The titles of the other functions remain the same at all levels.

### **Management by Objectives**

The Management by Objectives feature of ICS as applied to SEMS, means that each SEMS level establishes for a given operational period, measurable and attainable objectives to be achieved.

An objective is an aim or end of an action to be performed. Each objective may have one or more strategies and performance actions needed to achieve the objective. The operational period is the length of time set by command at the field level, and by management at other levels to achieve a given set of objectives. The operational period may vary in length from a few hours to days, and will be determined by the situation.

## **Action Planning**

Action planning should be used at all SEMS levels. There are two types of action plans in SEMS:

- **Incident Action Plans:** At the field response level, written or verbal incident action plans contain objectives reflecting the overall incident strategy and specific tactical action and supporting information for the next operational period. Incident action plans are an essential and required element in achieving objectives under ICS.
- **EOC Action Plans:** At local, operational area, regional, and state levels, the use of EOC action plans provide designated personnel with knowledge of the objectives to be achieved and the steps required for achievement. Action plans not only provide direction, but they also serve to provide a basis for measuring achievement of objectives and overall system performance. Action plans can be extremely effective tools during all phases of a disaster.

The action planning process and action plan contents are discussed further in Guidelines Part III.

## **Organizational Flexibility--Modular Organization**

The intent of this SEMS feature is that at each SEMS level: 1) only those functional elements that are required to meet current objectives need to be activated, and 2) that all elements of the organization can be arranged in various ways within or under the five SEMS essential functions.

The functions of any non-activated element will be the responsibility of the next highest element in the organization. Each activated element must have a person in charge of it, however one supervisor may be in charge of more than one functional element.

## **Organizational Unity and Hierarchy of Command or Management**

Organizational Unity means that every individual within an organization has a designated supervisor. Hierarchy of command/management means that all functional elements within each activated SEMS level are linked together to form a single overall organization within appropriate span-of-control limits.

## **Span of Control**

Maintaining a reasonable span of control is the responsibility of every supervisor at all SEMS levels. The optimum span of control is one to five, meaning that one supervisor has direct supervisory authority over five positions or resources. The recommended span of control for supervisory personnel at the field response level and all EOC levels should be in the one-to-three to one-to-seven range. A larger span of control may be acceptable when the supervised positions or resources are all performing a similar activity.

## **Personnel Accountability**

An important feature of ICS applicable to all SEMS levels is personnel accountability. This is accomplished through the Organizational Unity and Hierarchy of Command or Management feature along with the use of check-in forms, position logs and various status keeping systems. The intent in bringing this ICS feature into SEMS is to ensure that there are proper safeguards in place so all personnel at any SEMS level can be accounted for at any time.

## **Common Terminology**

In ICS, common terminology is applied to functional elements, position titles, facility designations and resources. The purpose of having common terminology is to rapidly enable multi-agency, multijurisdiction organizations and resources to work together effectively. This feature, as applied to all SEMS levels, would ensure that there is consistency and standardization in the use of terminology within and between all five SEMS levels.

## **Resources Management**

In ICS, resources management describes the ways in which field level resources are managed and how status is maintained. At all SEMS levels, there will be some functional activity related to managing resources. This will vary from level to level in terms of directing and controlling, to coordination, to resource inventorying. Procedures for effective resources management must be geared to the function and the level at which the function is performed.

## **Integrated Communications**

This feature of ICS relates to: hardware systems; planning for system selection and linking; and the procedures and processes for transferring information. At the field response level, integrated communications is used on any emergency. At all EOC levels, and between all SEMS levels, there must be a dedicated effort to ensure that communications systems, planning and information flow are being accomplished in an

effective manner. The specifics of how this is accomplished at EOC levels will be different than at the field response level.

## **5. Mutual Aid**

### **What is Mutual Aid?**

Incidents frequently require responses that exceed the resource capabilities of the affected response agencies and jurisdictions. When this occurs mutual aid is provided by other agencies, local governments, and the state. Mutual aid is voluntary aid and assistance by the provision of services and facilities including but not limited to: fire, police, medical and health, communications, transportation, and utilities. Mutual aid is intended to provide adequate resources, facilities, and other support to jurisdictions whenever their own resources prove to be inadequate to cope with a given situation.

Mutual aid is provided between and among local jurisdictions and the state under the terms of the California Disaster and Civil Defense Master Mutual Aid Agreement. This agreement was developed in 1950 and has been adopted by California's incorporated cities, all 58 counties, and the state.

### **Mutual Aid Systems**

The mutual aid program in California has developed statewide mutual aid systems. These systems, operating within the framework of the Master Mutual Aid Agreement, allow for the progressive mobilization of resources to and from emergency response agencies, local governments, operational areas, regions, and state with the intent to provide requesting agencies with adequate resources. The general flow of mutual aid resource requests and resources within mutual aid systems are depicted in the diagram on the following page.

Several discipline-specific mutual aid systems have been developed, including fire and rescue, law, medical, and public works. The adoption of SEMS does not alter existing mutual aid systems. These systems work through local government, operational area, regional and state levels consistent with SEMS.

Mutual aid may also be obtained from other states. Inter-state mutual aid may be obtained through direct state-to-state contacts, pursuant to inter-state agreements and compacts, or may be coordinated through federal agencies.

### **Mutual Aid Coordinators**

To facilitate mutual aid, discipline-specific mutual aid systems work through designated mutual aid coordinators at the operational area, regional, and state levels. The basic role of a mutual aid coordinator is to receive mutual aid requests, coordinate

the provision of resources from within the coordinator's geographic area of responsibility, and to pass on unfilled requests to the next level.

Insert Exhibit A-2

Mutual aid Systems Concept

Illustrator file

Mutual aid requests that do not fall into one of the discipline-specific mutual aid systems are handled through the emergency services mutual aid system by emergency management staff at the local government, operational area, regional, and state levels. The flow of resource requests and information among mutual aid coordinators is illustrated on the following page.

Mutual aid coordinators may function from an EOC, their normal departmental location, or other locations depending on the circumstances. Some incidents require mutual aid but do not necessitate activation of the affected local government or operational area EOCs because of the incident's limited impacts. In such cases, mutual aid coordinators typically handle requests from their normal work location. When EOCs are activated, all activated discipline-specific mutual aid systems should establish coordination and communications with the EOCs:

- When an operational area EOC is activated, operational area mutual aid system representatives should be at the operational area EOC to facilitate coordination and information flow.
- When an OES regional EOC is activated, regional mutual aid coordinators should have representatives in the regional EOC unless it is mutually agreed that effective coordination can be accomplished through telecommunications. State agencies may be requested to send representatives to the regional EOC to assist OES regional staff in handling mutual aid requests for disciplines or functions that do not have designated mutual aid coordinators.
- When the State Operations Center (SOC) is activated, state agencies with mutual aid coordination responsibilities will be requested to send representatives to the SOC.

Mutual aid system representatives at an EOC may be located in various functional elements (sections, branches, groups, or units) or serve as an agency representative depending on how the EOC is organized and the extent to which it is activated.

### **Participation of Volunteer and Private Agencies**

Volunteer agencies and private agencies may participate in the mutual aid system along with governmental agencies. For example, the disaster medical mutual aid system relies heavily on private sector involvement for medical/health resources. Some volunteer agencies such as the American Red Cross, Salvation Army and others are an essential element of the statewide emergency response to meet the needs of disaster victims. Volunteer agencies mobilize volunteers and other resources through their own systems. They also may identify resource needs that are not met within their own systems that would be requested through the mutual aid system. Volunteer agencies with extensive involvement in the emergency response should be represented in EOCs.

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## Mutual Aid Coordinator

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Some private agencies have established mutual aid arrangements to assist other private agencies within their functional area. For example, electric and gas utilities have mutual aid agreements within their industry and established procedures for coordinating with governmental EOCs. In some functional areas, services are provided by a mix of special district, municipal, and private agencies. Mutual aid arrangements may include both governmental and private agencies. For example, public and private water utilities are currently developing a mutual aid system.

Liaison should be established between activated EOCs and private agencies involved in a response. Where there is a need for extensive coordination and information exchange, private agencies should be represented in activated EOCs at the appropriate SEMS level.

### **Emergency Facilities used for Mutual Aid**

In-coming mutual aid resources may be received and processed at several types of facilities including: marshalling areas, mobilization centers, and incident facilities. Each type of facility is described briefly below.

Marshalling Area: Defined in the Federal Response Plan as an area used for the complete assemblage of personnel and other resources prior to their being sent directly to the disaster area. Marshalling areas may be established in other states for a catastrophic California earthquake.

Mobilization Center: Off-incident location at which emergency service personnel and equipment are temporarily located pending assignment, release, or reassignment. For major area-wide disasters, mobilization centers may be located in, or on the periphery of, the disaster area.

Incident Facilities: Incoming resources may be sent to staging areas, other incident facilities, or directly to an incident depending on the circumstances. Staging areas are temporary locations at an incident where personnel and equipment are kept while awaiting tactical assignments. Incident facilities are discussed further in section I.B. Field Response Level.

## **6. Overview of SEMS Response**

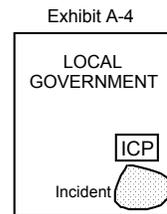
The following describes generally how SEMS is intended to work for various emergency situations. The situations are described in terms of the involvement and interactions of the five SEMS levels, and are intended to apply to all types of disasters that may occur in California, such as, earthquakes, floods, fires, and hazardous materials incidents. Not all possible situations and interactions are described.

This discussion assumes that appropriate emergency declarations and proclamations are made. It also assumes that multi-agency or inter-agency coordination is

accomplished at each level as required by SEMS regulations. The responses at each level are discussed in more detail in sections I.B. through I.F. of the guidelines. Note that SEMS may be activated and resources mobilized in anticipation of possible disasters. Such anticipatory actions may be taken when there are flood watches, severe weather, earthquake advisories, or other circumstances that indicate the increased likelihood of a disaster that may require emergency response and mutual aid. The extent of actions taken will be decided at the time based on the circumstances.

### Local Incident within Capability of Local Government

**Field response:** Field units respond as needed using the Incident Command System. Resources are requested through local government dispatch centers.

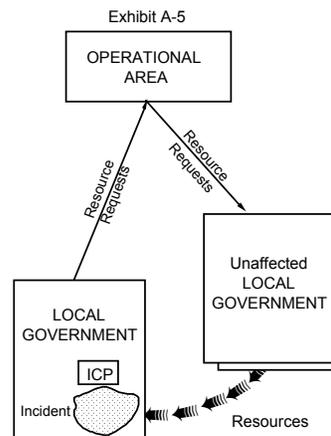


**Local government:** Supports field response as needed. Small incidents generally do not require activation of the local government emergency operations center. Emergency management staff may monitor the incident for possible increase in severity. Larger incidents may necessitate activation of the EOC. Local government will notify the operational area if the EOC is activated.

**Operational area:** Activation of the operational area EOC is generally not needed for small incidents, but consideration should be given to possibility of the incident becoming larger. The operational area EOC would be activated if the local government activates its EOC and requests operational area EOC activation.

### Single Jurisdiction Incident--Local Government Requires Some Additional Resources

**Field response:** Field units respond as needed using the Incident Command System. Resources are requested through dispatch centers, department operations centers, or in some cases the EOC. (Relationships among Incident Commanders, department operations centers, and EOCs are discussed further in Sections I.B. and I.C. of the guidelines.)



**Local government:** Supports incident commanders with available resources. The local government emergency operations center is activated. Local government notifies the operational area lead agency. Resources are requested through operational area emergency management staff and appropriate mutual aid coordinators. (In some cases, mutual aid may be obtained

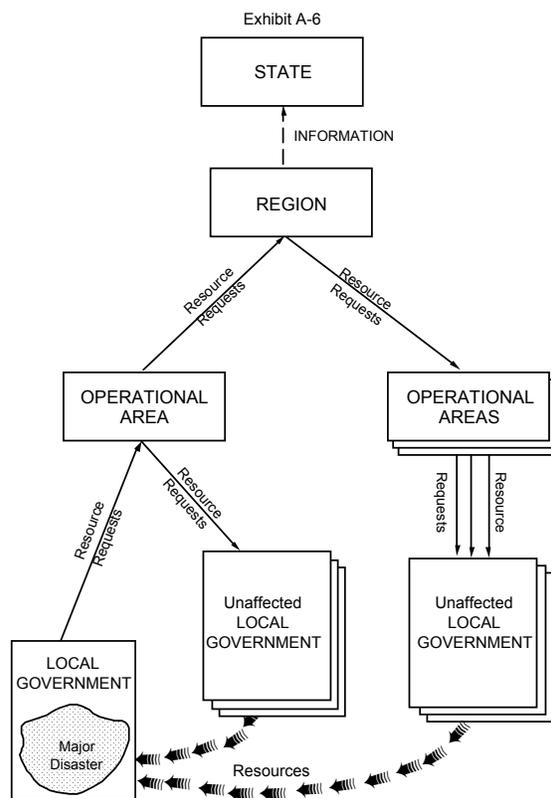
directly from neighboring local governments under local mutual aid agreements.) Local government retains responsibility for managing the response.

**Operational area:** Operational area emergency management staff and mutual aid coordinators locate and mobilize resources requested by local government. Emergency management staff and mutual aid coordinators generally operate from normal departmental locations for handling limited resource requests, and the EOC is not activated. Emergency management staff and mutual aid coordinators will communicate with each other as needed to coordinate resource mobilization. If requested by the affected local government, emergency management staff will activate the operational area EOC and notify the OES Regional Administrator.

### Major Single Jurisdiction Disaster--Local Government Requires Additional Resources

**Field response:** Field units respond as needed using the Incident Command System. One or more Incident Commands may be established depending upon the size and nature of the disaster. Resources are requested through dispatch centers, department operations centers, or EOC.

**Local government:** Supports Incident Commanders with available resources. Local government activates its emergency operations center and notifies the operational area lead agency. Resources are requested through operational area emergency management staff and mutual aid coordinators. Local government retains responsibility for managing the response.



**Operational area:** Lead agency activates operational area emergency operations center. Operational area emergency management staff and mutual aid coordinators locate and mobilize resources requested by Local government. Mutual aid

coordinators go to the EOC or send representatives depending on circumstances. Resources not available within the operational area are requested through the OES Regional Administrator and regional mutual aid coordinators.

**Regional:** OES Regional Administrator activates regional emergency operations center (REOC) and notifies OES headquarters. OES Regional Administrator and regional mutual aid coordinators locate and mobilize resources requested by the operational area.

**State:** State Operations Center is activated. State OES staff monitor situation.

### **Major Area-Wide Disaster--Damage in Multiple Operational Areas**

**Field response:** Field units from the affected jurisdictions respond as feasible using the Incident Command System. Incident Command Posts may be established at various sites throughout the disaster area. Resources are requested through dispatch centers, department operations centers, or EOCs.

**Local governments:** Ability to respond may be severely impaired. Local governments assess capability and report situation to operational area. Local governments mobilize all available resources. EOCs establish priorities, allocate available resources to support the field response, and request assistance through the operational area. Local governments retain responsibility for managing the response within their jurisdictions.

**Operational areas:** Lead agency activates emergency operations center and notifies OES Regional Administrator. Emergency operations center assesses situation and reports information to the regional emergency operations center (REOC). The emergency management staff and mutual aid coordinators mobilize available resources in the operational area, request additional resources through the REOC and regional mutual aid coordinators, and provide overall situation information to local governments.

**Regional:** OES Regional Administrator activates regional emergency operations center (REOC) and notifies state headquarters. REOC staff and regional mutual aid coordinators locate and mobilize resources available within the region and from state agencies. Additional resources are requested through the State Operations Center. State agency representatives are requested for the REOC to assist in coordinating support to the disaster area. REOC monitors situation and updates State Operations Center.

**State:** State Operations Center (SOC) is activated and state agency representatives are requested to staff the SOC. SOC coordinates state agency response and mobilization of mutual aid resources from unaffected regions. SOC may direct activation of other OES REOCs to assist in resource mobilization. State agency department operations

centers are activated. Federal assistance is requested, if needed. SOC continuously monitors situation.

Exhibit A-7

