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Virtual Emergency
Operations Centers (VEOC):
The Wave of the Future

May 2011



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Why have an Emergency Operations Center?



- Why have one? - The answer is the Six C's
 1. **Command**
 2. **Communication-** constant and consistent.
 3. **Collaboration-** amongst people and departments.
 4. **Coordination-** of people and resources. Also local authorities.
 5. **Control-** manage and control response and recovery efforts.
 6. **Consistency**



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VEOC Advantages

- What are the advantages to not having “four walls?”
Let me count the ways...
 1. **No waiting** – The VEOC allows you to begin managing the event immediately rather than waiting for a team to physically assemble in a brick-and-mortar location.
 2. **Flexibility** – Plans, teams, and processes can be changed more easily in a virtual world and meet the fast changing demands of a disaster.
 3. **Location, location, location** – Team members can participate regardless of where they are, as long as they have access to the VEOC tool.



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VEOC Advantages

4. **Redundancy** – If the physical EOC is damaged, response is not delayed.
5. **Cost effective** – The cost of a virtual EOC may be less than maintaining a physical space.
6. **Efficient communication** – Senior management, employees, and all EOC teams can get updates in real time and view “live” status boards and briefings.
7. **Timely resource deployment** – Resources can be deployed quickly and more efficiently, thereby reducing response time and making for a faster recovery.
8. **Safe in times of disease outbreak** – In the event of a pandemic, key managers are not physically located together, minimizing the spread of disease.



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VEOC Disadvantages

- **Requires Utilities**
 - In the first few days following a major regional disaster, **utilities** are likely to be affected including loss of
 - Electricity
 - Telecommunications (landlines, high-speed connections)





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VEOC Disadvantages

- **Technology**
 - A VEOC is, in all practicality, dependent on phones, computers, networks, and the company's data center to bring it all together.





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VEOC Disadvantages

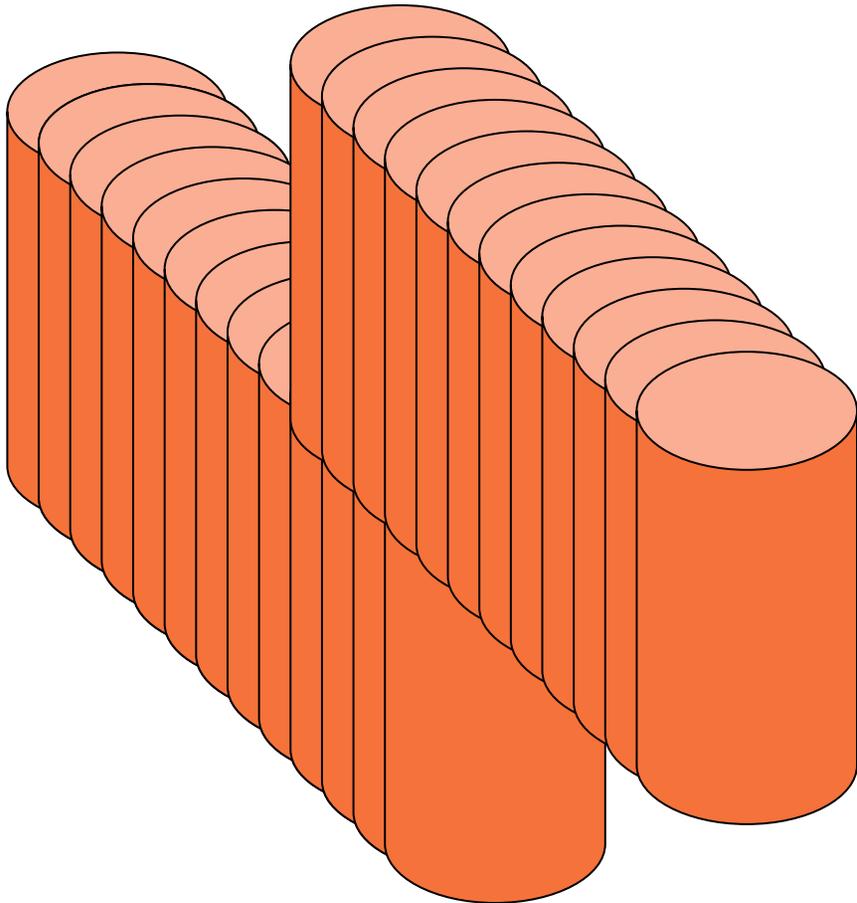
- **Ill-defined process**
 - Migrating the physical process of the EOC into a virtual world may present difficulties for many companies who have not carefully thought out how their EOC functions in the “real-world.”





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VEOC Disadvantages



- **Isolated silos and independent action**
 - A virtual world may allow for individuals and teams to act separately, thereby violating the operating principles of the six C's.



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VEOC Disadvantages

- **Training** – There are two main issues in training:
 - Virtual operations are very different than from physical operations.
 - It can pose a challenge to those not comfortable or familiar with that style of working.
 - Training on the technology.
 - Since most companies don't (thankfully) activate very often, software training can be problematic.
 - This is particularly true if the software is cumbersome and not intuitive to the end user.



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Are the Physical & Virtual Ever Combined?

- Absolutely! A “brick and mortar” EOC can work well in concert with a VEOC.
 - All processes must be well documented
 - All work be clearly assigned, in order to avoid overlaps or gaps.
- A combination model can allow the best of both worlds
 - The use of subject matter experts who might be geographically dispersed, along with a concentration of support in the physical EOC.



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Word of Warning...

- A virtual EOC will not cure all ills.
 - If your EOC processes and procedures were not well thought-out or well developed in the “real world,” the road to a virtual world will be fraught with obstacles.
 - In other words, if the current EOC is a train-wreck, the virtual one will be a nightmare!



AP / Gene Blevins



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EOC/VEOC Software - 18 Ideal Features

1. Intuitive - minimal training.
2. Centralized command and control.
3. Messaging/communications function with tracking (notification system).
4. Secure data sharing over the Internet and other networks (LAN, WAN).
5. Event tracking and logging.
6. EOC plan check-off lists – automated checklists for all team positions.
7. Document response actions.
8. Resource management (with full database functionality).
9. Store multiple contact lists (employees, team members, critical vendors, key stakeholders).
10. Accessible via Internet, Intranet/VPN, wireless.
11. Able to restrict member participation as necessary.
12. Access to plans, maps, photographs.
13. Linking capability to access Internet sources for weather and event intelligence.
14. Hand-held compatibility.
15. Fully configurable and scalable (can grow and change with you).
16. Compatible with existing infrastructure, databases, software, and e-mail.
17. Status boards (static general board and team boards).
18. Able to accommodate Executive briefings.



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THANK YOU!

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