



TOWN OF WARRENTON

Office of Emergency Management

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TO: The Honorable Mayor and Members of the Warrenton Town Council

FROM: Johnny H. Switzer, Emergency Management Coordinator

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SUBJECT: Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP) Overview

Our Town Continuity of Operations (COOP) plan is a vital document that outlines how our organization will continue to function during and after a disruptive event, whether it's a natural disaster, technological failure, or public health emergency. Its core purpose is to ensure the continued performance of essential functions, protect vital records and resources, and facilitate a swift and orderly recovery. For our locality, COOP planning is not just a good practice but a legal requirement.

The primary purpose of our COOP is to maintain essential services and operations during any emergency that disrupts normal operations. This includes:

- **Ensuring Mission Continuation:** Identifying and prioritizing essential functions and outlining how they will be performed during a disruption.
- **Protecting Vital Records and Resources:** Safeguarding critical data, documents, and equipment necessary for continued operations.
- **Facilitating Communication:** Establishing clear communication channels with employees, stakeholders, and the public.
- **Delegating Authority:** Defining clear lines of succession and delegation of authority in case of leadership incapacitation.
- **Relocating Operations:** Identifying alternate work sites or procedures if the primary facility is unavailable.
- **Recovering Operations:** Establishing a plan for restoring normal operations as quickly and efficiently as possible.

Legal Requirements (Virginia)

Virginia's COOP planning requirements are rooted in several key legal frameworks:

- **Disaster Law of 2000 (Virginia Code Title 44):** This foundational legislation establishes the Virginia emergency management framework. It mandates that state agencies and localities develop emergency plans, which implicitly include COOP planning as a critical component. While it may not explicitly use the term "COOP," the requirements for ensuring essential services and continuity of government operations are embedded within its provisions.
- **Virginia Emergency Services and Disaster Law (VESDL):** Chapter 3.2 of Title 44 further details the responsibilities of state and local governments in emergency preparedness and response. This reinforces the requirement for COOP planning by emphasizing the need for agencies to maintain essential functions during emergencies.
- **Executive Orders and Guidance:** The Governor may issue executive orders related to emergency management that further define COOP requirements and provide guidance to state agencies. The Virginia Department of Emergency Management (VDEM) also plays a crucial role in providing guidance and support to state agencies and localities in developing and implementing COOP plans.

Title 44 and COOPs:

Title 44 is particularly relevant as it provides the overarching legal authority for emergency management activities in Virginia. While the specific requirements for COOPs may be detailed in other regulations or guidelines, Title 44 establishes the fundamental obligation for state and local governments to prepare for and respond to emergencies, which inherently includes maintaining the continuity of essential operations. For instance, provisions related to resource mobilization, emergency declarations, and the powers of the Governor during a state of emergency all have implications for how a COOP plan will be activated and implemented.

Other Relevant Information:

- **VDEM Guidance:** VDEM provides extensive resources and guidance to assist state agencies and localities in developing and implementing effective COOP plans. This includes templates, best practices, and training opportunities.
- **Federal Guidance:** While Virginia law provides the framework, federal guidance, such as Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Continuity Guidance, can also be a valuable resource for best practices and standards.
- **Plan Maintenance:** COOP plans are not static documents. They must be regularly reviewed, updated, and tested to ensure their effectiveness. Regular training for personnel is also essential.
- **Interoperability:** COOP plans should be coordinated with other agencies and jurisdictions to ensure seamless collaboration during emergencies.

In summary, COOP planning is a legal mandate and a critical component of emergency preparedness in Virginia. By developing and maintaining robust COOP plans, we can ensure the continued delivery of essential services, protect vital resources, and facilitate a swift and orderly recovery from any disruptive event. This is all grounded in the overarching legal framework of Virginia's Disaster Law of 2000 and Title 44, which establishes the state's commitment to emergency preparedness and response.