

DATE: September 23, 2020**FILE:** 7130-03/CV**TO:** Chair and Directors
Regional District Board**FROM:** Russell Dyson
Chief Administrative OfficerSupported by Russell Dyson
Chief Administrative Officer***R. Dyson*****RE: COVID-19 Phase 1 - After Action Report****Purpose**

To provide the Comox Valley Regional District (CVRD) Board the Comox Valley Regional Emergency Response COVID-19 Phase 1 - After Action Report (ARR) that contains potential considerations for implementation to enhance response and recovery.

Recommendation from the Chief Administrative Officer:

THAT the Board endorse the findings of this Phase 1 - After Action Report for emergency response to COVID-19 that have no net financial impact (recommendations 1 – 5, 7, 11, 12, 14 – 17 of the staff report dated September 23, 2020).

AND THAT the Board refer the findings that have a financial impact (recommendations 6, 8, 9, 10, 13 and 18 of the staff report dated September 23, 2020) to the budget 2021 – 2025 financial planning process.

AND FURTHER THAT the COVID-19 Phase 1 - After Action Report be shared to local authorities to consider for review and implementation.

Executive Summary

The purpose of the AAR:

- Provide findings from a debrief conducted with COVID-19 regional Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) participants, stakeholders and Comox Valley Elected Officials between March 17 and June 30, 2020 (Phase 1)
- Provide recommendations intended to enhance response and recovery as we move forward

When the pandemic is over, there will be a final debrief (Phase 2)

Input was captured through surveys offered to all participants involved in and/or supporting the EOC. This included EOC personnel, support agencies, community organizations and Elected Officials. The report identifies lessons learned, what went well, and next steps for consideration. Some of these recommendations may be implemented in time for a 2nd wave of COVID-19.

The full ARR can be found in Appendix A, but the following are themes and suggested changes that emerged:

1. Policies and procedures
2. Training
3. EOC Enhancements
4. Communications
5. Balancing Emergency Management and Business Continuity Responsibilities

Prepared by:

Concurrence:

Concurrence:

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| | |
|---|---|
| City of Courtenay, Town of Comox, Village of Cumberland | ✓ |
| K'ómoks First Nation | ✓ |
| EOC participants and external stakeholder | ✓ |
| EMBC and other Local authorities | ✓ |

Background/Current Situation

The purpose of this staff report is to provide more background on what is an AAR review, how its process is critical part of the cycle of emergency management and serves to provide quality improvement process relating to emergency management activities such as activation, response and recovery. The process also serves to recognize the efforts of those involved in the event while avoiding the placement of blame on individuals or organizations.

Debriefs are an excellent way to collect current and relevant information and to capture operational opportunities for future events. They help improve coordination and communication with all stakeholders and contribute to more effective emergency management operations and activities.

The goal of any debrief is to highlight the successes and challenges encountered in managing an emergency and make recommendations that can be used to determine the actions and activities required for post-event organizational learning.

Typically a formal debrief process occurs after the event is over and personnel and facilities have been demobilized. However this event was not typical and not over, so it was vital to proceed with a debriefing now to ensure lessons learned were captured while the information was still relatively fresh in the minds of those involved.

The ARR covers the operational period of the EOC between March 17 and June 30, 2020. It also offers findings that identify lessons-learned, what went well, and potential considerations, some of which may be implemented in time for a 2nd wave of COVID-19. Themes and suggested changes that emerged are as follows:

Policies, Procedures and Training

1. Work closely with Emergency Management BC (EMBC) to gain better clarity regarding what costs are reimbursable and what resources may be provided.
2. Clarify decision-making process and providing a map of who is doing what (agencies, EOC, Policy Groups, etc.) for everyone involved in the response.
3. As a short term goal, acknowledge the need for the four individual policy groups but with one regional leadership or joint-decision group with representation from Elected Officials and K'ómoks First Nation supported by the CAO's of each jurisdiction.
4. Recall EOC participants in advance of Phase 2 to prepare for reactivation and establish EOC priorities and objectives and keep these posted for easy referral.

5. Involve more community groups (i.e. Coalition to End Homelessness, Salvation Army, Food Banks, Soup Kitchens, etc.) either in the EOC as before or maybe more appropriately reporting as incident sites to the Operations Section to receive information updates regarding public messaging, directives, funding initiatives (i.e. United Way), etc.
6. Provide EOC training for internal and external organizations as well as for the Policy Group. Incident Command System 100 and other emergency management training and workshops to build a more robust and cohesive emergency response.
7. Encourage more regular participation in the EOC from Provincial Health (as they are the lead agency responsible for pandemic), and other identified key response agencies.

EOC Enhancements

8. Develop orientation workshops and documentation on processes to help bring EOC participants up to speed and keep them on track.
9. Develop better virtual security to prevent unauthorized access to meetings.
10. Develop Harmston EOC so that the core EOC personnel (Management Team and key support functions) can work together in a physical facility with appropriate technology and physical distancing measures in place.
11. When Collaboration Teams need support beyond providing information updates regarding COVID-19 safety measures, it would be best that their requests come into the Operations Section to be tracked electronically and vetted along with all other support requests with the EOC determining where to direct them for potential assistance.

Communications

12. Ensure that all local government personnel are kept informed of decisions and public messaging so that they are kept in the loop even if they are not in the EOC (use of decision outcomes tracking is encouraged).
13. Utilize technology to ensure internal EOC communications are separate from day to day business of those involved in the EOC. E.g. email addresses specific to EOC functions.
14. Provide consistent messaging throughout the region while allowing for some specific unique decisions within jurisdictions.

Balancing Emergency Management and Business Continuity Responsibilities

15. There were real concerns from staff that they were torn between their work and EOC responsibilities. Especially those working from home found it challenging to keep the two functions separate. Suggest helping management understand that EOC work is the priority when staff are filling a shift in the EOC and allowing that uninterrupted attention is critical.
16. Keep business and essential services going is business continuity and is certainly a priority so working together, local authorities need to determine what their essential services are, staff those and then free up other staff, if available, to assist in the EOC.
17. Consider having a leaner staffing in the EOC and perhaps prioritizing the Action Plan so functions do not get overwhelmed.
18. Consider retaining legal advice now to gain better perspective on what local authorities are/are not legally responsible for and what choices may need to be made in the future to meet potential new requirements

Policy Analysis

In October, 28, 1991, Bylaw No. 1341 being “Electoral Areas ‘A’, ‘B’, and ‘C’ Emergency Program Extended Service Establishment Bylaw, 1991” was adopted by the Comox-Strathcona Regional District to establish an extended service for Electoral Areas A, B, and C to provide for preparation for emergencies. In January, 29, 1996 Bylaw No. 1816 being “Comox Valley Emergency Disaster

Program Policy Agreement Bylaw No. 1816, 1996” authorized the CVRD to enter into an agreement for Emergency Program services with the City of Courtenay, Town of Comox and the Village of Cumberland to jointly exercise powers conferred pursuant to the *Emergency Program Act*, R.S.B.C. 1993, Chapter 41. The municipal agreements were renewed in 2017. This service meets the Board’s current interests as a core service in emergency planning as required under the *Provincial Emergency Program Act* for the Comox Valley.

Financial Factors

The debriefing process costs are usually covered under the event’s EMBC task number as part of eligible recovery costs for local authorities to claim. However, EMBC deemed they would not be moving into the recovery phase for this COVID-19 event as the pandemic is not over. Therefore indicate no provincial recovery eligible funding will be made available at this time.

To ensure this valuable process was not left until the end of the COVID-19 event, which has still not been clearly defined and could be another six to 12 months, the Comox Valley Emergency Program decided to proceed with developing a two phase approach for debriefing. Phase 1 created the ARR with funding coming from the Emergency Program function 270 budget. Phase 2 will be a final debriefing process when the pandemic is deemed over. Final costs for Phase 2 will be determined when it is known from EMBC what local authorities may claim as eligible recovery costs.

After Action Phase 1 and 2 Costs Estimates:

Phase 1

Completed by August 2020 - debriefing and ARR delivered, presented and received by Board \$3,750 - \$4,500 (function 270)

Phase 2

Completed at end of the COVID-19 even – second and final debrief and ARR

\$3,500 - \$4,000*

* Final costs will depend on what EMBC will allow local authorities to claim as eligible recovery costs.

Image 1: Steps for Phase 1 and Phase 2 Debriefings

| | Description |
|----------------|---|
| Phase 1 | |
| 1 | Collaborate to develop and finalize questions for two surveys – one for EOC Personnel and one for Elected Officials |
| 2 | Identify appropriate survey tool and implement the two surveys |
| 3 | Review all survey submissions and provide a detailed summary of the responses |
| 4 | Develop initial After-Action Report with recommendations for consideration |
| Phase 2 | |
| 5 | Prepare to facilitate debriefings |
| 6 | Facilitate face-to-face or Zoom Debriefings once Health Order measures have been completed (2 sessions) |
| 7 | Provide Summary Notes for each debriefing session |
| 8 | Collaborate to develop a comprehensive After-Action Report |
| 9 | Facilitate presentation of the After-Action Report to EOC Personnel and Elected Officials (2 sessions) |
| 10 | Provide summary report including feedback received from AAR Presentations |

Intergovernmental Factors

The AAR has been created through the process of two debriefing surveys focused at the COVID-19 event and operations of the regional EOC. These were offered to all Comox Valley Local Authorities, their personnel engaged with EOC and/or Collaboration Groups as well as their Elected Officials / Councils.

Interdepartmental Involvement

The AAR, once received by the board, will be shared to all local authorities to review and implement any of the considerations the report offers and as they feel required. CVEP will continue to collaborate with each local authority to support them through this process.

Citizen/Public Relations

The CVRD encompasses a geographic area of approximately 1,725 sq. kms and a population of 66,195 as per the 2016 census. The AAR will offer considerations that can provide more guidance and be implemented by Comox Valley local authorities and /or EOC to better prepare for the 2nd wave of COVID-19 and their continued efforts to support residents and tourists of the Comox Valley with following Provincial Health Order measures. Also, some of the considerations will have the further ability to enhance CVEP's response and recovery processes and procedures for other hazards, risks or threats events, such as an earthquake, that will impact the Comox Valley.

Attachments: Appendix A – “Comox Valley COVID 19 Phase 1 After Action Report”

Comox Valley Regional Emergency Response

COVID-19 Phase 1 - After Action Report

August 19, 2020

Prepared by: Sybille Sanderson Collaborative Consulting



Executive Summary

The purpose of this After-Action Report is to review the Comox Valley response to COVID-19 Phase 1 between March 17 and June 30, 2020 and identify what went well and suggest potential next steps for consideration, some of which may be implemented in time for a 2nd wave of COVID-19.

The Comox Valley Emergency Program has made great strides in training staff how to work in an Emergency Operation Centre (EOC) and was preparing to launch a major Earthquake Exercise in the Fall of 2020. The regional approach to emergency management was being introduced and support was developing as discussions revolved around disasters that would affect all local jurisdictions, so working collaboratively was seen as a potential benefit.

When the COVID-19 pandemic erupted worldwide, provincial and federal Health ministries became the lead agency and worked separately and together to determine how best to deal with a disease with significant uncertainties. As knowledge of the disease grew, health directives, orders and guidelines were prepared, and local authorities worked hard to interpret how to effectively implement these locally. The Comox Valley regional EOC did well creating regional public messaging that became an important tool and process for ensuring less confusion for residents as well as for other local authorities within the Comox Valley.

Using a regional approach to emergencies that impact multiple jurisdictions, the Comox Valley Regional Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) was activated to coordinate effective communications and offer collaborative support to the local jurisdictions impacted by this event. Together the Comox Valley Regional District, Town of Comox, City of Courtenay, Village of Cumberland and the K'ómoks First Nation identified ways to communicate jointly and consistently across the region to help residents clearly understand how COVID-19 was impacting communities and individuals.

Throughout the Comox Valley response to COVID-19, significant progress was made developing decision-making processes for issues such as: facility, park and playground closures; and establishing Collaboration Groups made up of all local authority representatives that were supported by the EOC. One of the many challenges that arose was the new role of working with community organizations directly in the EOC to meet the needs of the community's most vulnerable populations. This work is usually achieved through a Community Recovery committee that is external to the EOC and reports into the EOC through the Liaison Officer.

The Comox Valley local authorities worked hard to follow the provincial directives and implemented many departmental renewal and restart plans and processes. These enabled continuity of operations, kept more staff employed by establishing work from home options as well as supporting staff wellness. These successes are very important for sustainability.

Emergency Preparedness needs to be strongly promoted at all levels! The more prepared our communities are, the less help they will require, which frees up local authority capacity to assist those seriously impacted by an event. Whether planning, responding or recovering, the role of the emergency program is primarily to identify and bring together the skilled personnel, agencies, organizations and ministries and help guide/coordinate working together to build the emergency plans and then to implement them in the unfamiliar environment of an EOC. COVID-19 has highlighted the need for business continuity for every organization to prepare to mitigate their economic losses and ideally implement appropriate safety measures now and potentially reinvent themselves, if necessary, to continue to provide the essential services the community requires.

Local Authorities should also look to Emergency Management British Columbia to obtain their lessons learned and the changes to emergency management brought about as a result of COVID-19. Local authorities are encouraged to engage in strategic discussions to identify clearly how the Comox Valley's regional emergency program plans to move forward, especially once the new Emergency Management Act and its changes are unveiled.

Next steps to prepare for a 2nd wave of COVID-19 are outlined for potential implementation to promote a smooth transition and set the region up for a focussed and effective response to further waves of COVID-19.

Some considerations for a smooth COVID-19 Phase 2 response are:

Policies, Procedures and Training

- Work closely with Emergency Management BC to gain better clarity regarding what costs are reimbursable and what resources may be provided.
- Clarify decision-making process and providing a “map” of who is doing what (agencies, EOC, Policy Groups, etc.) for everyone involved in the response.
 - As a short term goal, acknowledge the need for the four individual policy groups but with one regional Leadership or Joint-Decision Group with representation from the Mayors, Chair, Electoral Areas Chair and the K'ómoks First Nation Chief Councillor, supported by the CAO's of each jurisdiction.
- Recall EOC participants in advance of Phase 2 to prepare for reactivation and establish EOC priorities and objectives and keep these posted for easy referral.
- Involve more community groups (i.e. Coalition to End Homelessness, Salvation Army, Food Banks, Soup Kitchens, etc.) either in the EOC as before or maybe more appropriately reporting as incident sites to the Operations Section to receive information updates regarding public messaging, directives, funding initiatives (i.e. United Way), etc.
- Provide EOC training for internal and external organizations as well as for the Policy Group. Incident Command System 100 and other emergency management training and workshops to build a more robust and cohesive emergency response.
- Encourage more regular participation in the EOC from Health (as they are the lead agency responsible for pandemic), and other identified key response agencies.

EOC Enhancements

- Develop orientation workshops and documentation on processes to help bring EOC participants up to speed and keep them on track
- Develop better virtual security to prevent unauthorized access to meetings
- Develop Harmston EOC so that the core EOC personnel (Management team and key support functions) can work together in a physical facility with appropriate technology and physical distancing measures in place
- When collaboration teams need support beyond providing information updates regarding COVID-19 safety measures, it would be best that their requests come into the Operations Section to be tracked electronically and vetted along with all other support requests with the EOC determining where to direct them for potential assistance.

Communications

- Ensure that all local government personnel are kept informed of decisions and public messaging so that they are kept in the loop even if they are not in the EOC (use of decision outcomes tracking is encouraged)
- Utilize technology to ensure internal EOC communications are separate from day to day business of those involved in the EOC. e.g. email addresses specific to EOC functions
- Provide consistent messaging throughout the region while allowing for some specific unique decisions within jurisdictions

Balancing Emergency Management and Business Continuity Responsibilities

- There were real concerns from staff that they were torn between their work and EOC responsibilities. Especially those working from home found it challenging to keep the two functions separate. Suggest helping management understand that EOC work is the priority when staff are filling a shift in the EOC and allowing that uninterrupted attention is critical.
- Keep business and essential services going is business continuity and is certainly a priority so working together, local authorities need to determine what their essential services are, staff those and then free up other staff, if available, to assist in the EOC.
- Consider having a leaner staffing in the EOC and perhaps prioritizing the action plan so functions do not get overwhelmed.
- Consider retaining legal advice now to gain better perspective on what local authorities are/are not legally responsible for and what choices may need to be made in the future to meet potential new requirements from Health, Emergency Management and WorkSafeBC legislative changes.

The Comox Valley regional emergency response for Phase1 COVID-19 experienced many successes:

- Great internal communications between EOC, Policy Groups and Leadership Group was facilitated by the creation of an EOC Situation Unit Update form that collected information from many sources and brought them together in one place, reducing frustration and wasted time for personnel and stakeholders having to search out all the information separately.
- Public messaging was clear and consistent and having the Comox Valley Regional District's media sources become the main locations for public seemed to assist the public to easily locate and not hunt for both local and provincial information.
- As the situation ramped up, Action Plans were developed to provide clear guidance on current priorities and helped the EOC function as an effective team.
- Collaboration Teams met regularly to share best practices and develop protocols to help each local authority to find the best solutions for dealing with the many issues and concerns raised by the pandemic.

A final section of the After-Action Report outlines suggestions and issues to consider to promote future discussion regarding pandemic planning and emergency program enhancements overall.

Undertaking a Phase 1 After-Action Review shows great leadership and allows the region to capture lessons learned and potential best practices and become better prepared for a 2nd wave of COVID-19 and other emergency or disaster event that could occur.

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List of Appendices:

Appendix 1 – Comox Valley COVID-19 Response – Survey Summary - Updated

Appendix 2 – Elected Officials Survey

Appendix 3 – EOC Participants Survey

Background

COVID-19 – Initial Timeline¹

- 31 December 2019 – the World Health Organization (WHO) became aware of a cluster of pneumonia cases in Wuhan City
- 12 January 2020 – WHO provides extensive information package regarding the severe acute respiratory syndrome - novel coronavirus SARS-CoV-2 known as COVID-19
- 22 January 2020 – Major Canadian Airports in Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver added new screening measures for passengers returning from China with flu-like symptoms
- 25 February 2020 – 12 confirmed cases in Canada
- 5 March 2020 – Dental Conference demonstrates local transmission of the virus
- 11 March 2020 – World Health Organization declares COVID-19 to be a pandemic

Province of British Columbia and Comox Valley Response:

- 17 March 2020 – Public Health Emergency declared in British Columbia
 - Comox Valley Regional Emergency Operations Centre activated
- 18 March 2020 – British Columbia declares a provincial state of emergency
- Mandated physical distancing and provided hand hygiene and cleaning guidelines for people, businesses and essential services to follow
- [Banned mass gathering of more than 50 people](#)
- [Essential services were allowed to operate](#) but closed dine-in options, non-essential personal services, and reduced in-classroom and childcare numbers
- Required travellers to [implement a 14-day isolation plan](#) when arriving from abroad (supported by federal emergency orders that closed air, land and sea borders)
- Restricted visitors to health care and assisted living facilities to protect vulnerable people
- Postponed non-urgent and elective surgeries but maintained emergency procedures
- Closed all B.C. provincial parks, including overnight camping
- Comox Valley Facility and Outdoor amenities closed to the public to stop the spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) with a focus on education and enforcement of physical distancing
- Launched the BC COVID-19 Action Plan to help individuals and businesses
- 1 April 2020 – CVRD Board approves Funding to Assist in Community COVID-19 Response by approving \$148,279 in grant-aid support for homeless and marginalized populations and an additional \$55,100 for 12 non-profit organizations to support community initiatives
- 11 May 2020 – Reopening of some Outdoor Recreation Facilities
- 1 June 2020 – Public Playgrounds Reopening
- 10 June 2020 – Comox Valley Sports Centre Reopening Fitness Facility

¹ World Health Organization. Timeline of WHO's Response to COVID-19. Retrieved 14-July-2020 from <https://www.who.int/news-room/detail/29-06-2020-covidtimeline>.

CBC News. The COVID-19 pandemic: A timeline of key events across British Columbia. Retrieved 14-July-2020 from <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/covid-19-bc-timeline-1.5520943>.

Phase 1 After-Action Review Process Outline

1. Previous feedback provided to EOC Planning Chief Dave Carmichael has been reviewed and the results incorporated into the After-Action Report.
2. Two surveys developed and distributed (for Elected Officials and for EOC participants).
3. Survey results were reviewed and summarized.
4. Small group discussions facilitated as needed (via Zoom or in person as appropriate) to clarify and review significant themes or issues and identify potential solutions.
5. A detailed After-Action Report was developed summarizing what went well, what needs consideration, and recommendations for potential solutions.
6. After-Action Report will be reviewed by the EOC to identify and prioritize next steps in consideration of a second COVID-19 wave.
7. The report will go to the CAOs for review and to determine how/when this report will be shared with the EOC participants and with the Policy Groups and Elected Officials.

Survey Preamble and Questions can be found in the Appendices and will be reviewed to identify how to improve for the future and to prepare for debriefing the 2nd wave of COVID-19 if it occurs.

After Action Review

COVID-19 is not just a pandemic; it is rewriting how we define emergency management. One key example that has challenged all levels of government and community is redefining what we are responsible for. In a typical disaster event such as a wildfire, flood, or earthquake, there is some definition about who is impacted (those that have been evacuated).

So what happens when people do not have to evacuate but many are significantly impacted while remaining in their homes? What happens when the services, agencies and businesses that support our residents cannot operate? What about the provincial legislation and policies that have long established mandates and were not prepared for such worldwide consequences? Rethinking how British Columbia defines disasters, impacts and vulnerabilities requires all levels of government as well as business, individuals and communities to rethink our expectations for assistance and the need for better preparedness.

In recent years, hard lessons have been learned, demonstrating that widespread devastation can come from multiple scenarios such as: the wildfires of 2017 that saw whole communities like Williams Lake evacuated; the December 2018 Windstorm that caused massive damage and lengthy power outages to much of the west coast; and now a pandemic that shut down so much of what was considered “normal” life. Each of these events brought “life as we know it” to a standstill and left long-lasting impacts to individuals and communities in its wake. The extent of the long-term psychosocial impact to individuals and communities is still unknown and will continue to provide challenges long into the future.

How do we respond to these widespread events? First we respond as best we can, appreciate everything that went well, and then step back to assess what could be done better.

COVID-19 identified some serious challenges for emergency management:

- Emergency management generally focused on dealing with one major event at a time with some minor incidents mixed in. Even when anticipating a major earthquake, it was difficult to fathom such widespread major impacts with so much economic and social loss.
- Business Continuity tended to focus on keeping staff safe and evacuating them in a major fire or earthquake. COVID-19 clearly identified the need to plan for how to keep business, organizations and communities working and moving forward when a situation lasts for months and requires extensive new safety measures. In some cases this also resulted in a loss of staff that may or may not return to work once the organization can reopen.
- Few scenarios took into consideration a worldwide pandemic that affects every country and the whole global economy. Recovery may take years and some communities may never be the same but now the whole world has an opportunity to re-evaluate what is important and together build back a better world that promotes safety and sustainability and is better able to rise above potential new waves of disease and other hazards like floods and wildfires that don't just stop because we have a pandemic.

The Comox Valley is to be commended for not just breathing a sigh of relief as the BC Restart Plan gets phased in, but taking a good look at how the communities fared during this first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Using a regional approach to emergencies that impact multiple jurisdictions, the Comox Valley Regional Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) was activated to coordinate effective communications and offer collaborative support to the local jurisdictions impacted by this event. Together the Comox Valley Regional District, Town of Comox, City of Courtenay, Village of

Cumberland and the K'ómoks First Nation identified ways to communicate jointly and consistently across the region to help residents clearly understand how COVID-19 was impacting communities and individuals.

So, what has British Columbia learned about this pandemic?

- COVID-19 spreads easily and quickly
- The elderly and those with underlying health issues are the most vulnerable to developing serious complications requiring hospitalization and potentially ending in death.
- The best preventative measures are washing our hands properly, not touching our faces and physical distancing a minimum of 2 meters and wearing non-medical masks to reduce the spread of infection.
- Outdoors is safer than indoors.
- Many buildings do not have appropriate fresh air intake and filtering and spread the virus droplets more easily so part of our business continuity plans needs to incorporate making the buildings we live and work in safer.
- Even as we loosen up our restrictions, we are encouraged to keep our close bubbles small, get together outside if possible and maintain physical distancing whenever possible.
- The restrictions implemented by the Province created significant economic impact and many businesses are uncertain they will be able to survive.
- The homeless and marginalized populations in our communities lost many of their necessary support systems such as food banks, public washrooms, and soup kitchens and sometimes were required to relocate which added significant stress.
- Isolation, a perceived lack of freedom and major economic impacts are leading to increases in abuse, violence and drug overdoses.

What Went Well:

Decision-Making Process(es)

- Collaboration between local governments within the EOC worked very well
- Most Elected Officials shared appropriate community feedback into the EOC
- The collaboration teams were a great success and helped those areas of responsibility to formulate plans for consistent implementation of provincial orders and guidelines
- Finance Collaboration Team helped each other identify what to do, but tracked their costs individually by jurisdiction to make it easier to claim for reimbursement

Communications (Internal)

- Information flowed well via conference calls, meetings and daily reports
- Elected Officials unanimously stated that they received enough information from the EOC

Communication (External)

- Public information was clear and easy to understand
- Elected Officials were kept informed and many shared the information updates with their community groups via social media or through more formal networks they were attached to
- Most Elected Officials shared appropriate community feedback into the EOC

- Having a regional and a municipal Information Officer working together provided broader perspective for joint messaging

Role & Responsibilities

- COVID-19 response was well organized
- Collaboration between local governments within the EOC worked very well
- EOC Participants found that there was lots of support and mentoring available to help them understand their roles and responsibilities
- As Action Plans, Status Reports and regular meetings were established, EOC participants found they were able to work better within the EOC
- Engagement with the Medical Health Officer made a big difference
- Excellent teamwork of the EOC personnel, great communications, and responsiveness!
- EOC staffing was just right most of the time with some challenges with variable needs at times

Training and Experience

- EOC Personnel with training generally had a positive experience in the EOC while those with little or no EOC training, struggled somewhat until they were mentored into their roles.
- In-house EOC training was well received and very beneficial
- EOC experience was helpful but there was a wide range of experience vs non-experience

Business Continuity

- Local governments worked hard to enable some staff to work at home to support daycare needs and found ways to keep as many staff as possible working while ensuring safety measures were in place
- As safety measures were developed provincially with WorkSafeBC and Ministry of Health, these were implemented as quickly as possible and local authorities are already looking at ways to adjust should safety measure requirements change for the 2nd wave of COVID-19
- Staff that were freed up from regular work duties were brought into the EOC either in person or virtually to help all the local governments to brainstorm together on how to move forward safely

Considerations for a smooth COVID-19 Phase 2 Response

Policy Group Considerations

1. Ideally the goal would be for one Policy Group comprised of an Elected Official from each of the local authorities including: Comox Valley Regional District; Town of Comox; City of Courtenay; Village of Cumberland and the K'ómoks First Nation. This group would be supported by the CAO's of each jurisdiction.
2. As a short term goal, acknowledge the need for the four individual policy groups but with one regional Leadership or Joint-Decision Group with representation from the Mayors, Chair, Electoral Areas Chair and the K'ómoks First Nation Chief. This Group would focus on:
 - electing a chair and spokesperson, and confirming each communities support for EOC communications and actions;

- receiving EOC Director updates;
 - receiving updates from technical experts (i.e. Dr. Enns, WorkSafeBC, etc.); and,
 - bringing information and appropriate issues for consideration to the four Policy Groups.
3. Focus primarily on strategic policies
 - setting expenditure limits;
 - approving grant applications;
 - approving grant funding; and,
 - approving changes to bylaws that need adjusting for the new realities of pandemic safety.
 4. Working with the EOC Information Officer(s) to ensure consistency and a trusted message, the policy group may want to consider rotating the Spokesperson role between the CVRD Board Chair and the Mayors. Sticking to the official public messaging is critical – no adlibbing!
 5. When considering strategic policies, consider what local authorities will have to change in the way they do business:
 - Identifying essential services that need to function regardless of the type of emergency or disaster
 - Identifying what services may need to be withdrawn and determining how long the community can safely continue without these services and setting appropriate goals for reinstating these services.
 6. Example of how to split up the Policy Group and EOC decision-making authority:

It is critical to note here that the EOC makes recommendations but that the individual jurisdictions generally implement the recommendations and bear the costs of those.

| Policy Group | Individual Jurisdiction | Emergency Operations Centre |
|--|--------------------------------|---|
| Legislation (regional bylaws) | Declarations | Operational Decisions |
| Spokesperson(s) | Financial Spending Limits | Financial Spending within established limits |
| Provide overall strategic policy direction | Approving Grant Aid | Safety Measures |
| | Facility Closures | Public Messaging |
| | Local Bylaws | Supporting local jurisdictions |
| | | Liaising with agencies (i.e. RCMP, School District, Island Health and Department of National Defence) |

Emergency Operations Centre Enhancements

1. Keep EOC activated at a Level 1 to monitor the situation on a regular basis, including:
 - Provincial briefings (Dr. Bonnie Henry's, Minister Adrian Dix, etc.);
 - EMBC Updates and Conference Calls (<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/safety/emergency-preparedness-response-recovery/covid-19-provincial-support>);
 - Ministry of Health Directives (<https://www.healthlinkbc.ca/health-feature/coronavirus-disease-covid-19>);
 - Changes in WorkSafeBC Directives (<https://www.worksafebc.com/en>);
 - Changes in all relevant legislation;
 - Connecting with other local authorities to compare lessons learned and best practices; and,
 - Connecting with Economic and Social agencies and organizations within your region to stay informed about how communities and vulnerable populations are faring as well as how these organizations are adapting to the new realities;
2. Continue to share changes in directives and legislation with all the CAOs with a clear understanding that this must be shared with all management staff so that they can stay current and prepare to implement any new changes.
3. Work closely with Emergency Management BC to gain better clarity of what costs are eligible for reimbursement and what resources the province can provide.
4. Build relationships with agencies (i.e. RCMP, Island Health, Ministry of Health, BCAS, School District, etc.) and encourage them to participate more regularly within the EOC to ensure that communications between agencies is clear and building a cohesive response.

Communication

1. Ensuring that all local government personnel are kept informed of decisions and public messaging so that they are kept in the loop even if they are not in the EOC
2. Utilize technology to ensure internal EOC communications are separate from the day to day business of those involved in the EOC.
3. Providing consistent messaging throughout the region while allowing for some specific unique decisions within jurisdictions

Public Information

1. Meet weekly to determine whether any public messaging is required (i.e. Village of Cumberland expressed concerns regarding too many visitors coming to town and how to promote social distancing and safety measures regularly)
2. Prepare and share public messaging as required (not just responsive but also consider proactive messaging reminding individuals about personal preparedness including planning for safe return to school/work, etc.

Information Technology

1. Keep all COVID-19 related information in one folder of the Sync.com directory with appropriate folders to divide up the information appropriately.
2. Provide EOC function email addresses that are available on the internet to ensure that as staff change, the email dialogue is secure, stays constant with the function and is easily accessible (work with IT to ensure it is separate from the regular email server)
 - Ensure that all EOC staff know the procedures for accessing the EOC email addresses
 - When not working in the EOC they should not be responding to any EOC emails
 - When their next shift starts, they can sign on and review the EOC emails to help them get caught up on their function communications
 - One suggestion is to activate only the EOC Core Functions (EOC Director, Information Officer, Liaison Officer, Risk Management Officer, Operations, Planning, Logistics and Finance Section Chiefs) in the Harmston EOC with appropriate safety measures and have the Collaboration Teams that are working more on business continuity issues stay in the loop through virtual briefings and meetings.
 - Provide passcode changes periodically for conference call and Zoom meetings to increase virtual security without impeding progress (may need to remind people to go to the most recent invitation for the new information)

EOC Level 2 Enhancements

1. Continue with everything listed under EOC Level 1.
2. Consider activating the Risk Management function to ensure safety measures in the EOC, and more importantly to provide understanding regarding the legal risks and exposures of potential decisions.
3. When preparing to ramp up to a level 2 EOC, bring all EOC participants together for a quick refresher and to introduce any changes to how the EOC will function (provide a roadmap that clarifies who is responsible for what (EOC? Policy Group? Individual Jurisdictions? Outside Agencies? etc.).
4. Review EOC responsibilities for COVID-19 (public information, communications regarding changes in COVID-19 orders, directives, and guidelines etc. and supporting site response agencies such as the Collaboration Teams)
5. The EOC needs to focus on the big picture and is an Emergency Management TEAM that needs to be discussing, sharing, and brainstorming together to ensure that “all the puzzle pieces are on the table”!
6. Implement a regular EOC Orientation and Function Handoff Process.
7. Collaboration Teams need to be in the EOC information exchange loop (providing and receiving regular updates) and may have representation in the EOC Operations Section as a response agency.
 - Local Government Collaboration Teams need the authority to make operational decisions including facility and park closures, re-openings, etc.
 - Consider creating a Community/Food Security Collaboration Team that consists of all the social service agencies and stakeholders to work together to maintain their essential

services throughout the next wave. As such they would be a site response agency with representation in the EOC.²

- These representatives could be a valuable source of information regarding how the most vulnerable populations are impacted by the situation and propose ways to assist which their organizations could then implement at the site level.
 - When collaboration teams need support beyond providing information updates regarding COVID-19 safety measures, their requests would come into the Operations Section to be vetted along with all other support requests, with the EOC determining priorities and where to direct them for potential assistance.
8. Ensure the EOC receives regular (frequency to be determined) status reports from each Collaboration Team to ensure that updates are monitored and appropriate public messaging is developed and distributed.
 9. Establish a process for capturing best practices as they are developed (could be a documentation unit function) so that these great ideas are not forgotten and can be included in the EOC documentation for future activations.

EOC Level 3 Considerations

1. Identify the types of triggers that might determine the need for a Level 3 EOC (i.e. major wildfire, flood, or earthquake) and determine how the EOC could perhaps work totally virtually if that is required.
2. Especially in an earthquake, consider what kind of support and assistance First Responder agencies might need (i.e. coordination of transportation, setting priorities for dispatching equipment, etc.).
3. Post the BCEMS Response Goals to help prioritize where help goes first.
4. Public messaging about what help is or is not available and how residents can best help each other in such a crisis is critical (plan now for what that messaging would be and ensure that the first message is always empathy!).
5. Prepare to continue to work in a lean EOC environment as many staff and responders may not be available and instead may need help themselves.

EOC Information Handling Process

1. Every function uses the electronic or paper Position Logbooks to detail information coming in to the function
2. Action Plans, Status Reports and Briefing Notes are inserted where appropriate within the flow of the Position Log
3. When receiving external information:
 - Ask:
 - Has the information been verified?
 - What needs to be acted on?
 - Who is responsible for the action (EOC or outside agency)?

² Provincial Health Order Letter to Social Sectors, March 18, 2020. Retrieved 14 July 2020 from: https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/health/about-bc-s-health-care-system/office-of-the-provincial-health-officer/covid-19/covid-19_pho_letter_to_social_sectors_march_18_2020.pdf?bcgovtm=20200506_GCPE_AM_COVID_9_NOTIFICATION_BCGOV_BCGOV_EN_BC_NOTIFICATION

- Who needs to be consulted (in and out of EOC)?
 - Who needs to be informed (in and out of EOC)?
 - When does action need to be completed?
 - How are actions/information recorded/tracked?
 - What information needs to be displayed?
4. Use forms as provided in Sync.com and review examples provided.
 5. Status Reports are completed by each activated function and provided to the appropriate Section Chief to amalgamate into one Status Report for the Section. Status Reports are shared at EOC Management Team Briefings and copies provided to Planning for preparation of the next Action Plan. Status Reports are internal to the EOC only!
 6. A hybrid developed by Comox Valley Emergency Program is a Situation Unit Update that is used to provide situation updates to the broader audience as defined by the EOC.
 7. Situation Reports summarize the Status Reports and Action Plans and are forwarded to EMBC along with any resource requests and Expenditure Authorization Forms. Situation Reports are prepared by Planning, approved by the EOC Director and provided to Emergency Management BC as requested.
 8. All EOC documentation (paper and electronic) must be turned into Documentation Unit during demobilization for permanent recordkeeping.

Action Planning Process

1. Especially for COVID-19, the EOC needs to develop an overall big picture vision of the purpose of the EOC for this event. Please ensure that vision is posted for all to see and be reminded of the purpose of the EOC and what everyone is working towards.
2. Main purpose should be information analysis and dissemination (perhaps with explanations and recommendations around how health directives could be implemented locally)
3. Action Plans are prepared by Planning, approved by the EOC Director and distributed to every EOC participant.

Request Tracking Process

1. As requests for information, updates, or resources, come into the EOC, determine who is responsible (EOC – if so, which function? OR an outside agency → refer request to them and ask for updates on progress)
2. Use an EOC Request Tracking System to identify every request coming into the EOC along with who is responsible and whether it should go into the EOC Action Plan or should be referred to another agency.
3. Ensure that Planning is monitoring progress on the EOC Request Tracking System so that no requests coming into the EOC are dropped/lost.
4. Ensure that communications is two-way and that external agencies receive updates on how their request is being handled.

Balancing Emergency Management and Business Continuity Responsibilities

1. Consider legal advice now to gain better perspective on what local authorities are legally responsible for or not (internally for business continuity and externally for the EOC). Provincial mandates are changing and their expectations of local authorities are also changing so it is critical to identify what WorkSafeBC legislative requirements must be implemented; what Emergency Program Act requirements must be implemented and how those are currently being interpreted; and seriously look at our current capacity to meet these requirements and what would need to change (i.e. hire more staff, create new positions, re-evaluate our current strategic goals and services to determine what, if anything, could be set aside to meet the upcoming requirements).
2. Ensuring that all local authority personnel are kept informed of decisions and public messaging so that they are kept in the loop even if they are not in the EOC.
3. Balance organizational business continuity needs with those of the EOC to reduce stress for those caught between competing workloads.
4. Increase understanding that when personnel are in the EOC, they need to be able to focus solely on EOC responsibilities.
5. If EOC participants are working virtually, ensure that their work and EOC responsibilities are easy to keep separate (especially email and documentation).
6. Consider identifying suitable positions to fill EOC functions (smaller communities may need to train more staff so that Senior Managers can continue to oversee essential services).

Future Considerations for Emergency Program Enhancement

Developing a truly regional Emergency Program takes considerable effort and requires long-term buy-in from all the partners both at a political and an operational level. The following questions and suggestions are meant to foster discussion and build strong, long-lasting relationships where every partner contributes and benefits.

Two key recommendations are:

1. Review Pandemic Contingency Checklist and update appropriately with lessons learned from COVID-19. Compare notes with Mid Island Emergency Coordinators and Managers and share best practices.
2. Review Virtual EOC developments and identify potential improvements to facilitate communications, security and document recordkeeping.

Training Suggestions

All local authority personnel and key community agency representatives should receive basic emergency management training and exercises.

- Incident Command System (JIBC Accreditation or Workshop format)
- EOC Essentials (JIBC Accreditation)
- In-house training workshops on EOC functions, forms and processes
- Policy Groups and Leadership Group need yearly orientations to emergency management and how to work with and support the work of the EOC, the local authorities and the public.
- Create a Training Matrix that identifies EOC functions and appropriate training requirements

- Consider developing a 5-year Training and Exercise Plan which allows Emergency Program personnel to build on one scenario per year and provide a series of increasingly complex workshops and exercises relevant to the scenario on a regional and municipal level

Questions to Promote Discussion Regarding Pandemic Planning

The following questions are raised to encourage future discussion and research as the world continues to change in regards to pandemic planning and response. The discussion that ensues will ensure that the Comox Valley Emergency Program is better prepared for potential future pandemics and other emergencies.

- With a much better understanding of what the Phases look like in British Columbia, local authorities can begin to anticipate what to plan and prepare for depending on how high the infection numbers go!
- Is it possible that the safety measures that communities and businesses have put in place are sufficient to keep them open and recovering financially?
- Most schools are waiting until September to restart on a bigger scale. Will the safety measures now being implemented, keep the schools open? What percentage of parents in our community will send their children to school or will they be looking for other options?
- What parts of our community experienced infections? Can Island Health help us to identify the source (i.e. restaurants, care homes, hospitals, etc.) so that we can promote further safety measures there rather than everywhere?
- Will a 2nd wave of COVID-19 take us right back to Phase 1 provincially or perhaps just back to Phase 2? Will communities have more of a say in how they implement these restrictions?
- What have local authorities done internally to improve business continuity plans so that the EOC can focus on consequence management rather than grappling with business continuity?
- What signage could be implemented to keep more facilities open while encouraging/reminding the public to take the appropriate precautions?
- What triggers have been identified that will cause the EOC to reopen? (Comox Valley Emergency Program is already working on checklists which identify potential triggers and an EOC Orientation Package to assist in preparing for reopening Harmston EOC with core functions)
- No community wants to be the one that gets the fingers pointed at it because it has one or more outbreaks. Is there a balance to be maintained so the region “isn’t the bad example” but also isn’t so strict that people are lost in other ways?

Some frustrations are unlikely to change:

- Information will continue to come to us via Ministry of Health media briefings. One job of the EOC will be to stop every day and as a group listen and take notes from these public briefings and then take the time to work through all the updated information to determine how to implement the directives and orders and guidelines locally.
- Guidelines regarding what is reimbursable via Emergency Management BC will continue to fluctuate. Just like local authorities, each new directive, order or guideline brings policy decisions that are reactive for the most part. Changes to the Emergency Program Act will likely reflect lessons learned from COVID-19.

Return to Phase 1 considerations:

- If the province goes back to Phase 1 restrictions, what local community services have implemented sufficient safety measures to be able to continue providing their services?
- What essential services do our communities require? Let's be proactive to work with them now instead of waiting until they close again to make reactive decisions?
- How well are local authorities implementing WorkSafeBC requirements, especially if Phase 1 restrictions are once again required?

Technology:

- What would be the ideal mix of virtual and office work to balance safety with effectiveness?
- How can EOC and regular workload be kept more separate, especially for those working from home so that they are better able to focus on the current responsibilities?
- How will EOC documentation be captured – paper and electronic - and kept together for future reference (a legal requirement)?

Policy Group:

- Decision-making was sometimes a challenge – how can the process be streamlined for making decisions?
- What are true strategic policy issues for the Policy Groups to work through and which are operational and should be left to the EOC and jurisdictional staff?
- Information sharing needs to go beyond the Policy Groups to the Boards/Councils/staff of each jurisdiction. What is the best way to ensure that this happens consistently?
- Every event brings with it new lessons learned, best practices and challenges. Provincial legislation (i.e. Emergency Program Act, WorkSafeBC, etc. is subject to significant “interpretation” and each major event results in some changes to provincial policies that are based on the legislation. This presents challenge to Local Authorities who then need to learn about these changes (usually within an event) and try to adjust. This is where the Policy Group working with senior management needs to discuss and determine how to work within the new “interpretations” and sometimes may even need to consider pushing back.

Community Groups:

- COVID-19 has identified the need for additional types of site responders including:
 - Ministry for Social Development and Poverty Reduction
 - Coalition to End Homelessness
 - Food Banks & Soup Kitchens
 - Non-governmental Agencies
- Since these agencies were deemed to be essential services, how can we support them so that they can better support the most vulnerable in our communities (see footnote 2)?

Emergency Operations Centre

- What authority does the EOC Director need to effectively make decisions that support all the jurisdictions as they work to implement the provincial directives?
- How will local authorities determine whether a decision should be made at the Policy Group level or within the EOC or within the operational departments of each jurisdiction? Now that some of the potential directives are understood, it would be beneficial to clearly delineate who has the authority to make various types of decisions.
 - For example, if the province closes parks, who makes the local decision to close public areas like parks, beaches and playgrounds, is this a policy decision, an EOC decision or

a jurisdictional decision? (Closing parks, beaches and playgrounds is really an operational decision which could be left to the various jurisdictions to determine). The EOC would provide information regarding the provincial directives and then ensure that appropriate messaging goes out to community regarding closures.)

Conclusion

Overall, the Comox Valley regional emergency response to COVID-19 went very well. As often happens with new situations, it took a little while to develop processes, teamwork and documentation. Public messaging was primarily clear and easy to understand. Once these processes were developed, the EOC and Policy Groups functioned better and found their rhythm.

With each event, there are lessons to learn and best practices to incorporate into EOC operational guidelines. With COVID-19 being such a major departure from the usual emergencies and disasters, there were lessons and best practices being learned at all levels of government. The economic impact was huge and something that few agencies and organizations had planned for.

Hopefully this Phase 1 After-Action Report has captured some of these lessons learned and provided suggestions for consideration, some of which might be implemented before the 2nd wave of COVID-19 appears on the horizon.

The Province of British Columbia has outlined a 4 Phase approach to dealing with COVID-19. Although there may be adjustments to these phases, it would be beneficial for the region to jointly review all the provincial phases in detail and identify potential ways to implement the restrictions that may be imposed; especially should it become necessary to backtrack to a previous phase due to additional outbreaks. This process would greatly enhance the region's ability to implement the appropriate safety measures when those Orders and Directives are given.

Future considerations include reviewing existing plans and operational guidelines and including new processes developed during this extensive pandemic response. Training suggestions including development of a five-year training and exercise program have also been outlined for consideration to prepare not just for pandemics but for all hazards. A series of questions were posed for further discussion as much legislation is open to interpretation and local authorities can benefit from developing greater clarity and alignment with legislative requirements, strategic goals and essential services.

APPENDIX 1

Comox Valley COVID-19 Response Survey Summary - Updated

On June 23 & 24, 2020, two debriefing surveys were launched. One was for Elected Officials and the other for Regional EOC Participants. Three Zoom discussions and one face-to-face discussion were held to provide more opportunities for feedback. This report provides a brief summary of the survey findings and is an interim report. The After-Action Report will delve further into the themes identified here and provide additional recommendations based on current emergency management best practices.

This brief summary includes:

- Response Statistics
 - Elected Officials Survey
 - EOC Participant Survey
- What Went Well
 - Decision-Making Process(es)
 - Communications (Internal)
 - Communication (external)
 - Role & Responsibilities
 - Training and Experience
- Areas Needing More Consideration
 - Balancing Business Continuity with EOC Responsibilities
 - Decision-Making Process(es)
 - Communications (Internal)
 - Communication (external)
 - Role & Responsibilities
 - Training and Experience
 - Technology
- Considerations for Implementation Prior to 2nd Wave of COVID-19
 - Policies, Procedures and Training
 - EOC Enhancements
 - Balancing Emergency Management and Business Continuity Responsibilities
- After-Action Report Focus

Response Statistics:

Elected Officials Survey (sent to CVRD Board, municipal CAOs for Council distribution and to K'ómoks First Nation:

| Viewed | Started | Completed | Drop-outs (After starting) | Average time to Complete Survey |
|---------------|----------------|------------------|-----------------------------------|--|
| 17 | 11 | 6 | 5 | 11 minutes |

| Attended Zoom or In Person Discussions | Average time to Complete Discussions |
|---|---|
| 3 | 40 minutes |

Respondents were from:

- Comox Valley Regional District
- Town of Comox
- City of Courtenay
- Village of Cumberland

Specifically, in regard to a Regional vs Local Response from the Elected Officials perspective:

- Most saw the benefit of collaboration and consistent messaging
- A couple voiced concerns regarding challenges making decisions that worked for everyone when some communities may have been better served by local decisions

This issue may need some further discussion and exploration to determine what, if any, adjustments should be made.

EOC Participants Survey (sent to 68 people):

| Viewed | Started | Completed | Drop-outs (After starting) | Average Time to Complete Survey |
|---------------|----------------|------------------|-----------------------------------|--|
| 53 | 48 | 27 | 21 | 15 minutes |

| Attended Zoom Discussions | Average Time to Complete Survey |
|----------------------------------|--|
| 13 | 60 minutes |

Respondents were from:

| | |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comox Valley Regional District • Town of Comox • City of Courtenay • Village of Cumberland | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • K'ómoks First Nation • RCMP • External non-profit organization |
|---|--|

Important to Note:

There was some mention of people preferring to debrief in person or not having the time to provide complete answers and this may provide some rationale for having so many participants start but not complete the survey.

Although we received a good mix of information from those who did complete the survey, it may be worthwhile to explore other ways to gather feedback to ensure everyone has an opportunity to share their perspective prior to finalizing the After-Action Report.

Several Zoom meetings and one in-person meeting were set up to offer further opportunity for discussion. For Elected Officials we focussed on four questions and for EOC Participants, we focussed on five questions regarding what went well and areas for future consideration.

What Went Well:

Decision-Making Process(es)

- Collaboration between local governments within the EOC worked very well
- Most Elected Officials shared appropriate community feedback into the EOC
- The collaboration teams were a great success and helped those areas of responsibility to formulate plans for consistent implementation of provincial orders and guidelines
- Finance Collaboration Team helped each other identify what to do but tracked their costs individually by jurisdiction to make it easier to claim for reimbursement

Communications (Internal)

- Information flowed well via conference calls, meetings and daily reports
- Elected Officials were unanimous in stating that they received enough information from the EOC

Communication (External)

- Public information was clear and easy to understand
- Elected Officials were kept informed and many shared the information updates with their community groups via social media or more formal networks they were attached to
- Most Elected Officials shared appropriate community feedback into the EOC
- Having a regional and a municipal Information Officer working together provided broader perspective for joint messaging

Role & Responsibilities

- COVID-19 response was well organized
- Collaboration between local governments within the EOC worked very well
- EOC Participants found that there was lots of support and mentoring available to help them understand their roles and responsibilities
- As Action Plans, Status Reports and regular meetings were established, EOC participants found they were able to work better within the EOC
- Engagement with the Medical Health Officer made a big difference
- Excellent teamwork of the EOC personnel, great communications, and responsiveness!
- EOC staffing was just right most of the time with some challenges with variable needs at times

Training and Experience

- EOC Personnel with training generally had a positive experience in the EOC while those with little or no EOC training, struggled somewhat until they were mentored into their roles.
- In-house EOC training was well received and very beneficial
- EOC experience was helpful but there was a wide range of experience vs non-experience

Areas for Consideration:

Balancing Business Continuity with EOC Responsibilities

- EOC participants generally found that their regular workload suffered significantly, and this created additional stress
- Consideration should be given to making it easier for EOC Participants to step away from their everyday roles while working in the EOC (whether virtually or in-person)
- Consider reducing the number of individuals in the EOC versus those that are focussed on keeping essential services functioning
- Information coming out of the EOC needs to filter back into the organizations to help them be informed and implementing the necessary adaptations

Decision-Making Process(es)

- Need to clarify what the scope of local government is in a pandemic, what our authority is and isn't, what provincial support and resources we can tap into, and how we can work more effectively with the provincial government and other agencies and organizations
- Need to improve our understanding of the provincial orders and guidelines, and how we need to implement them locally
- Need clarity around what costs are reimbursable and which ones are not (need an EOC process to work through these and shared with the other local authorities to prevent wasted effort)
- Need to work on economic collaboration to encourage business community to prepare for effective restart
- Need to identify triggers for moving back into "response" mode

Communications (Internal)

- The communications process needs clarification – perhaps only one policy group and a simpler communications process
- Provide clarity about the appropriate audience for each document/briefing that is shared (i.e. for public / for internal communications only)
- Ensure that all staff of all local governments received the internal and public communications so that they can stay informed and determine what if any action the information requires from them or their department or organization

Communication (External)

- CVRD website needs to make it easy to find the COVID-19 related information and perhaps point people to the official information sources such as the BC CDC, Provincial and Federal COVID-19 sites

Role & Responsibilities

- A greater clarity in roles and an orientation process could help significantly in the EOC, especially with those with little or no EOC training or experience
- Provide brief training sessions for EOC participants and Policy Group at the beginning of each activation

- Identify more community service agency representation to include in the EOC
- Remind everyone of the Chain of Command for request, report and decision-making processes
- Develop a process for tracking requests through completion
- Increase security on Zoom
- Consider moving to Microsoft Teams as a collaborative tool (better for the military)

Training and Experience

- Further training is desired with a preference for both JIBC and information workshops, trainings and exercises to network and keep information fresh
- Have all the EOC forms in one place with examples of how to complete them and what their purpose is (review periodically)
- Just in time training as part of orientation to the EOC

Technology

- Moving to a Virtual EOC created some challenges for those that were not already prepared for the virtual environment as well as for some who were working from home
- Provide login for Sync.com site and ensure that everything is captured there and easy to find

Considerations for Implementation Prior to 2nd Wave of COVID-19:

Policies, Procedures and Training

- Working closely with Emergency Management BC to gain better clarity of what costs are reimbursable and what resources may be provided
- Clarification of decision-making process and providing a “map” of who is doing what (agencies, EOC, Policy Groups, etc.)
- Establish EOC priorities and objectives and keep these posted for easy referral
- Recall EOC participants in advance of Phase 2 to regroup and prepare for reactivation
- Involving more community groups in the EOC
- Providing EOC training for internal and external organizations that may be required in the EOC

EOC Enhancements

- Develop orientation and support processes to help bring EOC participants up to speed and on track
- Develop better Virtual Security to prevent unauthorized access to meetings
- Develop Harmston EOC so that the core EOC personnel can work together from there with appropriate technology and physical distancing measures in place

Balancing Emergency Management and Business Continuity Responsibilities

- Consider legal advice to gain better perspective on what we are legally responsible for or not

- Ensuring that all local government personnel are kept informed of decisions and public messaging so that they are kept in the loop even if they are not in the EOC
- Balance Organizational Business Continuity needs with those of the EOC to reduce stress for those caught between competing workloads

After-Action Report Focus

In summary, networking and collaboration between jurisdictions and agencies within the EOC were by far the most valued part of the experience. Everyone learned a great deal and there are some good processes and connections in place that will help a COVID-19 Phase 2 response go much more smoothly.

The After-Action Report will delve further into the survey results and provide recommendations for consideration. Ideally, the After-Action Report will also include findings from the EMBC Debriefing. It is important to remember that each event provides opportunity for development or identification of best practices and that a key priority of any emergency program is continuous improvement.

This brief summary provides a snapshot of information gathered through the debriefing and surveys and only represents findings from Phase 1 of the COVID-19 Response.

Moving forward, we can anticipate further considerations to be identified as a result of lessons learned from response to a 2nd Wave of COVID-19. We also need to keep in mind that Emergency Management BC recently reminded us that the legislative changes to the Emergency Program Act are proceeding and are targeting a new Act by Spring 2021. The “What We Heard” Report will not be released as anticipated however “EMBC remains committed to engaging with partners and stakeholders on the modernized legislation. We’re developing a new approach to engagement that reflects the new timeline of Spring 2021 legislation, and we will provide further updates as that takes shape.” (Stan Bates, 2020, as provided in a statement to [BCAEM](#)). As local governments, we will likely need to make further adjustments to our Emergency Programs to meet requirements of the new Emergency Program Act.

Estimated timeline for delivery of Draft 1 of the After-Action Report is now scheduled for:
Monday, August 3, 2020.

Prepared for the Comox Valley Regional District by:



Sybille Sanderson Collaborative Consulting

APPENDIX 2

Elected Officials Survey

Email Preamble:

Good afternoon,

The Comox Valley Emergency Program is undertaking Phase 1 of a facilitated Debriefing and After-Action Report process relative to the Comox Valley Regional Emergency Operations Centre. To help us capture best practices, lessons learned and identify recommendations for improvement, we are conducting a brief survey of both elected officials and EOC participants. The link below will take you to the 'Elected Officials' survey, which covers March 17 to the present. (Phase 2 of our review will be implemented at the end of this event.)

Your participation is key to improving our response. If you need additional information about the survey and the process, details are included in the 'backgrounder' that follows. Please note we **need your feedback by Monday, June 29, 2020.**

Thank you for your participation!

Comox Valley Elected Official Survey (link)

Backgrounder:

Sybille Sanderson Collaborative Consulting has been contracted to facilitate this process. Sybille has over 22 years' experience in emergency management with the Cowichan Valley Regional District. Sybille presented at our recent workshop on the function of the EOC.

Phase 1 Process Outline:

1. Previous feedback provided to EOC Planning Chief Dave Carmichael has been reviewed and the results will be incorporated into the After-Action Report.
2. Two surveys have been developed and distributed (one for Elected Officials and one for EOC participants).
3. Review and summarize the survey results.
4. Facilitation of small group discussions as needed (via Zoom or in person as appropriate) to clarify and review significant themes or issues and identify potential solutions.
5. Develop and provide a detailed After-Action Report summarizing what went well, what needs improvement, and recommendations for potential solutions.
6. After-Action Report will be reviewed by the EOC to identify and prioritize next steps in consideration of a second COVID-19 wave.
7. The report will go to the CAOs for review and to determine how/when this report will be shared with their Policy Groups and Elected Officials.

EOC's typically are activated for local emergencies such as fires and floods. A pandemic is a provincial emergency, led by the Ministry of Health and supported by Emergency Management BC. Together they provide direction and support to Local Authorities on emergency response.

Not being a typical emergency event, the regional EOC was less action oriented and more focused on effective collaboration, communication and providing support to Provincial Health.

Each local authority has a Policy Group, consisting of Elected Officials and the CAO. The role of the Policy Group is to provide strategic policy direction to the EOC Director.

Information on the regional EOC was provided to EOC participants and Elected Officials early on in the response through an EOC Orientation document (backgrounder – see attached) created by the EOC Information Officers.

If you have any questions regarding this survey or need additional information, please contact:

Howie Siemens, Emergency Program Coordinator – hsiemens@comoxvalleyrd.ca

Jennifer Steel

Manager of Corporate Communications
Corporate Services Branch, Comox Valley Regional District
770 Harmston Avenue, Courtenay, BC V9N 0G8
Tel: 250-334-6063

Elected Official Survey

Thank you for taking the time to provide us with constructive and reflective feedback. All responses will remain anonymous. Information will be summarized into the After-Action Report.

We appreciate getting your feedback so that consideration can be made for implementing improvements prior to the potential second wave of COVID-19.

1. What local government do you represent?

Note: All text boxes for open-ended questions had lots of space in the survey

2. Within the Comox Valley Regional EOC, what has worked well from your perspective (please provide examples)?
3. Not every jurisdiction across the province used a regional approach, some municipalities acted independently. Would you see any potential benefits from having EOCs operating with an independent approach?
4. The EOC communications to Elected Officials for COVID-19:
 - a. Provided too little information
 - b. Provided enough information
 - c. Provided too much information
 - d. Did not provide the information needed
5. What would you consider to be the right amount and kind of information you need to make informed decisions (please provide examples)?
6. The communications process between Policy Groups and the EOC for COVID-19 was:
 - a. Easy to understand
 - b. Somewhat easy to understand
 - c. Unclear, needs extra explanation
 - d. Difficult to understand
 - e. Too cumbersome
7. What was your experience with the internal communications process? Please provide examples of your experience and any suggestions you have for improvement:
8. How often did you share EOC public messaging to your community members or groups?
 - a. Every message
 - b. Most messages
 - c. Some messages
 - d. No messages
9. How did you determine what to share and what not to share? Please explain:
10. Did you receive feedback from your community members or groups?
 - a. Yes – positive
 - b. Yes – negative
 - c. Yes – positive and negative
 - d. No

11. If you received feedback from your community members or groups, did you share that with the CAOs so they could provide appropriate information to the Comox Valley Regional EOC?
- a. Yes – shared all feedback
 - b. Yes – shared appropriate feedback
 - c. Yes – shared only positive feedback
 - d. Yes – shared only negative feedback
 - e. No – shared no feedback
12. As we prepare for a potential second wave of COVID-19, could you provide one or two potential improvements that you would like to see implemented for this second wave?

Thank you for all your efforts to support the EOC and your communities during this prolonged COVID-19 event. We also appreciate your time responding to this survey as it will help us to gain a better understanding of what is working well or not so that we can continue to progress towards our goal of continuous improvement.

APPENDIX 3

EOC Participant Survey

Email Preamble:

Good afternoon all,

The Comox Valley Emergency Program is undertaking Phase 1 of a facilitated Debriefing and After-Action Report process to help us capture best practices, lessons learned, and identify recommendations for improvement. The link below will take you to the 'EOC Participants' survey, which covers March 17 to the present. (Phase 2 of our review will be implemented at the end of this event.)

Your participation is key to improving our response. **Please complete the survey by Monday, June 29, 2020.**

If you need additional information about the survey and the process, details are included in the 'backgrounder' that follows.

Thank you for your participation!

Comox Valley EOC Participant Survey

Backgrounder:

Sybille Sanderson Collaborative Consulting has been contracted to facilitate this process. Sybille has over 22 years' experience in emergency management with the Cowichan Valley Regional District.

Phase 1 Process Outline:

1. Previous feedback provided to EOC Planning Chief Dave Carmichael has been reviewed and the results will be incorporated into the After-Action Report.
2. Two surveys have been developed and distributed (one for Elected Officials and one for EOC participants).
3. Review and summarize the survey results.
4. Facilitation of small group discussions as needed (via Zoom or in person as appropriate) to clarify and review significant themes or issues and identify potential solutions.
5. Develop and provide a detailed After-Action Report summarizing what went well, what needs improvement, and recommendations for potential solutions.
6. After-Action Report will be reviewed by the EOC to identify and prioritize next steps in consideration of a second COVID-19 wave.
7. The report will go to the CAOs for review and to determine how/when this report will be shared with the EOC participants and with the Policy Groups and Elected Officials.

EOC's are typically activated for local emergencies such as fires and floods. A pandemic is a provincial emergency, led by the Ministry of Health and supported by Emergency Management BC. Together they provide direction and support to Local Authorities on emergency response. Not being a typical emergency event, the regional EOC was less action oriented and more focused on effective collaboration, communication, and providing support to Provincial Health.

Information on the regional EOC was provided to EOC participants and Elected Officials early on in the response through an EOC Orientation document (backgrounder) created by the EOC Information Officers.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this survey, please contact:

Howie Siemens, Emergency Program Coordinator – hsiemens@comoxvalleyrd.ca

Selena Speed
Branch Assistant – Executive Management
Comox Valley Regional District
770 Harmston Avenue, Courtenay, BC V9N 0G8
Tel: 250-334-6073

Comox Valley Regional EOC Survey – EOC Participants

Thank you for taking the time to provide us with constructive and reflective feedback. All responses will remain anonymous. Information will be summarized into the After-Action Report.

We appreciate getting your feedback so that consideration can be made for implementing improvements prior to the potential second wave of COVID-19.

1. For context, please tell us which EOC Function(s) you held during the COVID-19 response:

Note: All text boxes for open-ended questions had lots of space in the survey

2. Which local government or organization are you affiliated with?
3. What level of EOC Training do you have (none, EOC Level 1, EOC Essentials, EOC Level 3 – Operations, Planning, Logistics and/or Finance)?
4. Did you participate in one of the in-house EOC specific workshops provided in Spring 2019 through the Emergency Program?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Not applicable (outside agencies)
5. If you participated in one of the in-house EOC specific Workshops, what did you find most helpful?
6. What Emergency Management training would you like to see offered in the future? Please check all that apply:
 - a. Incident Command System
 - b. EOC Essentials / EOC Level 2
 - c. EOC Level 3 Operations
 - d. EOC Level 3 Planning
 - e. EOC Level 3 Logistics
 - f. EOC Level 3 Finance
 - g. Other (Please list ideas):
7. What format do you prefer for training?
 - a. Online (virtual)
 - b. In Class
 - c. Informal Workshops
8. Did you have previous EOC Experience or related Emergency Management training? Was your EOC role based on this and/or your current job? Please provide brief examples (i.e. EOC level ? for type of event):
9. Describe your experience being activated (requested/directed) to participate in the Regional EOC?
10. Where did you work throughout the event?
 - a. From home
 - b. At the office

- c. Combination of home and office
11. What was your experience with technology?
 - a. Everything worked smoothly
 - b. Experienced some challenges
 - c. Experienced many challenges
 12. If you experienced challenges with technology, please share your challenges (i.e. phone, computer, EOC connectivity, etc.):
 13. How did you experience the EOC staffing?
 - a. Not enough staff – work was overwhelming
 - b. Just the right amount of staff – work was manageable
 - c. Varied – sometimes there were too many and other times too few
 - d. Too much staff – work was minimal
 14. Within the Comox Valley Regional EOC, what worked well from your perspective (please provide examples)?
 15. The Regional EOC organizational structure for COVID-19 was:
 - a. Easy to understand
 - b. Somewhat easy to understand
 - c. Unclear, needs extra explanation
 - d. Difficult to understand
 - e. Too complicated

In a physical EOC, discussion between functions is encouraged while any formal requests follow chain of command. In a virtual EOC, discussion between functions may be challenging but this can also encourage more formal sharing of information to keep everyone in the loop.

16. What was your experience with information sharing within the EOC?
17. What was your experience with specific information/direction for your function to act on?
Please rate on a scale of 1-10 where 1 equals little or unclear direction and 10 equals excellent and clear direction.

| | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|

18. Balancing day-to-day responsibilities with EOC responsibilities can be challenging. Did you experience any conflicts between your regular work and the EOC work?
19. Was the Public Information (media, news bulletins, website, social media) developed in the EOC clear and easy to understand?
20. Did you receive any feedback from family, friends, or coworkers regarding the public information? Please share examples.
21. Core EOC Functions played a significant role in this pandemic. Did you understand what your role and responsibilities were? What would help you to become more comfortable in the EOC roles?

22. Did some best practices develop during this event? Please provide examples of best practices you would like to see continue.
23. As we prepare for a potential second wave of COVID-19, could you provide one or two potential improvements that you would like to see implemented for this second wave?

Thank you for all your efforts to support the EOC and your communities during this prolonged COVID-19 event. We also appreciate your time responding to this survey as it will help us to gain a better understanding of what is working well or not so that we can continue to progress towards our goal of continuous improvement.