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EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT PROGRAM 2006 ANNUAL TRAINING EXERCISE RESULTS

The Finance and Administration Committee recommends the adoption of the recommendations contained in the following report, January 29, 2007, from the Chief Administrative Officer:

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Council:

1. Endorse the recommendations of “Operation FLU-READY”.
2. Continue to develop business continuity programs to ensure the continued delivery of essential services and critical functions.
3. Update and test York Region departmental emergency plans to ensure a coordinated and effective response.
4. Develop Resource policies to deal with issues such as:
 - a) Refusal to work
 - b) Extended absences
 - c) Management of Volunteers
 - d) Ill Dependents
 - e) Work from home
 - f) Redeployment of staff
 - g) Compensation
5. Develop and test crisis communications plans to ensure timely, consistent and effective messaging between all stakeholders.
6. Seek Provincial clarification regarding matters such as:
 - a) Appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)
 - b) Mass casualty management (natural death surge management)
 - c) Management of assessment and alternate care centres
7. Communicate Emergency Management’s personal preparedness message to staff and the community on an on-going basis.

2. PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to inform Council of the key comments, issues and gaps in York Region's Emergency and Business Continuity Plans as identified in the "Operation FLU-READY" exercise by participants and evaluators and to present recommendations for future action.

3. BACKGROUND

The *Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act* and Ontario Regulation 380/04 require municipalities to implement an emergency management program. The main components of the Act relevant to this report include:

1. Annual training and exercises for employees of the Region and other persons with respect to the provision of the necessary services and the procedures to be followed during Regional emergency response and recovery activities.
2. Identification and assessment of various hazards and risks to public safety that could give rise to emergencies and identification of facilities and other elements of the infrastructure that are at risk of being affected by emergencies.

On October 23, 2006, York Region Emergency Management hosted an interactive workshop/exercise named "Operation FLU-READY" that focused on a simulated influenza pandemic emergency affecting Canada, Ontario and, ultimately, York Region. One hundred and seventy participants took part in the exercise, including Regional employees, all nine local municipalities, and other key external stakeholders, such as hospitals, Office of the Chief Coroner, long-term care facilities and Non-Governmental Organizations.

The exercise was delivered in a series of three modules, with each module supported by focused questions aimed at key issues. The exercise allowed senior decision makers to conduct a high level strategic analysis of a simulated event to assess emergency response and decision-making processes, with a particular emphasis on communications, public information, emergency response coordination, resource integration, problem identification and resolution. The exercise provided a unique opportunity for stakeholders to assess readiness for an emergency that would significantly impact the delivery of essential services and programs to the residents of York Region.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

4.1 Objectives

The objectives of the exercise/interactive workshop were to assess:

1. Local Decision-Making Process
2. Municipal Plans
3. Examine the local interface between Town/City / Region / Provincial / Federal Agencies and Private / Public Sector
4. Public Information and Media Relations
5. Medical Response / Surveillance
6. Training and Education
7. Legislative Compliance

Exercise “Operation FLU-READY” achieved its objectives on several fronts, providing an opportunity for participating organizations to assess their pandemic preparedness, emergency response and decision making and inter-act with community stakeholders.

The exercise reinforced the need for ongoing support of participating organizations and their senior decision makers to continue influenza pandemic planning and preparedness, in partnership with community stakeholders and organizations.

4.2 Observations

Key observations identified by participants, evaluators and facilitators were utilized in the preparation of the executive summary and recommendations. Some of the key observations included:

- Focus was on the current response – need to develop strategy for sustained operations
- “Clarification from MOHLTC required on many issues”
- Identify lead agency in charge of communications
- Competing with Regional Health Services for staff resources; i.e. establish corporate consensus on essential services and staff reallocation
- “Public health sector stronger than others”
- Promote consistent communications and information sharing
- Enhance interdepartmental and interagency coordination and cooperation with a wide range of groups
- Left with a better understanding of how my organization fits into the overall Regional plan
- Gained confidence in planning to date
- Continue to plan and evaluate plans
- Need to gain a better understanding of the roles, capabilities and capacities of other agencies.

4.3 Recommendations

The recommendations outlined within this report reflect the cumulative comments, key observations, issues and gaps identified by the exercise participants, evaluators and observers. Based on these assessments, it was recommended that York Region focus on the following areas:

1. Continue to develop business continuity programs.
2. Update and test departmental emergency plans.
3. Develop Human Resource policies to deal with issues surrounding an influenza pandemic.
4. Develop and test crisis communications plans.
5. Seek Provincial clarification regarding matters such as:
 - a) Appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)
 - b) Mass casualty management (natural death surge management)
 - c) Management of assessment and alternate care centres
6. Communicate Emergency Management's personal preparedness message to staff and the community.

Emergency Management will collaborate with departments to build a collaborative work plan to implement recommendations and strengthen the Regions' coordinated response capacity.

4.4 Relationship to Vision 2026

The Emergency exercise and interactive workshop "Operation FLU-READY" represents one initiative within York Region's Emergency Management Program towards achieving the goals in *Vision 2026* through supporting safe and secure communities and enhancing our human resources and partnerships. York Region's Emergency Management Program best protects public safety and creates disaster-resilient communities.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Costs associated with the design and delivery of the exercise was identified in the Council approved 2006 Emergency Management Program budget. Costs associated with the implementing recommendations are proposed in the 2007/08 Regional budget.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

In 2006, the Region partnered with municipalities in emergency training and exercises, public information, and Critical Infrastructure database maintenance. These partnerships will continue to be expanded in 2007. The Region and all municipal partners will benefit from improved emergency response and increased disaster resiliency.

7. CONCLUSION

The *Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act* and Ontario Regulation 380/04 requires municipalities to develop and implement an Emergency Management Program which includes an annual simulated emergency exercise. “Operation FLU-READY” simulated an escalating Influenza Pandemic impacting York Region. Approval of the recommendations contained in this report is sought to address gaps and deficiencies identified through the exercise.

The Region will continue to play a key role as a service provider and a partner to the local municipalities by assisting them in increasing their emergency management capacity via a joint emergency management process.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.

(The attachment referred to in this clause were included in the agenda for the March 8, 2007 Committee meeting.)