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EMERGENCY EXERCISE “OPERATION WHITEOUT”

The Finance and Administration Committee recommends the adoption of the recommendation contained in the following report, March 2, 2006, from the Chief Administrative Officer:

1. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that:

Council receive this report for information.

2. PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the outcomes and observations documented from the November 28, 2005 emergency tabletop exercise “Operation Whiteout”

3. BACKGROUND

The *Emergency Management Act* and Ontario Regulation 380/04 require municipalities to develop and implement an emergency management program that includes:

1. An Emergency Plan;
2. Identification and assessment of various hazards and risks to public safety that could give rise to emergencies and identification of the facilities and other elements of the infrastructure that are at risk of being affected by emergencies;
3. Annual training and exercises for employees of the Region and other persons with respect to the provision of necessary services and the procedures to be followed in emergency response and recovery activities;
4. Public education on risks to public safety and on public preparedness for emergencies; and
5. Any other element required by the standards for emergency management programs as prescribed by the *Emergency Management Act*.

On November 28, 2005 York Region partnered with the Towns of Aurora, Newmarket and Richmond Hill to create a simulated emergency event. Operation Whiteout was a severe winter storm exercise that required the activation of the Regional and municipal Emergency Operation Centers (EOC) and the declaration of multiple emergencies.

The exercise was developed by a design team involving staff from York Region Emergency Management, Health Services, Community Services and Housing, York Region Police, Fire officials from four municipalities, and a consulting firm. The consultant provided exercise facilitators for all EOC's, controlled the delivery of inputs to the participants and orchestrated overall exercise delivery.

Comments from the Regional Emergency Control Group (RECG) documented immediately after the exercise (i.e., Hotwash), along with observations from the written evaluations and formal debriefing of the facilitators form the basis for identifying next steps.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

The objectives of the exercise were to:

- Clarify roles and responsibilities of the Regional Emergency Control Group,
- Test emergency plans and evaluate EOC procedures,
- Establish communications with participating municipalities,
- Monitor events,
- Make decisions,
- Formulate and implement actions plans.

The Regional and municipal Emergency Control Groups achieved the objectives and successfully managed the simulated severe winter weather event. Comments and observations form the "Hotwash", written evaluation and formal debriefing with facilitators have been forwarded for review to the Regional Emergency Program Committee.

4.1 Lessons Learned

Although the objectives of the exercise were achieved, comments and observations from participants and facilitators identified some gaps and offered suggestions for improvement. The following recurring themes from the evaluation are:

- Emergency Management should develop and maintain a 24/7 REOC staffing Plan. This plan will ask Commissioners to identify key individuals within their Departments that will be dedicated to the various Incident Management System (IMS) functions (i.e., Planning, Logistics, Operations, Finance) in the REOC.
- The individuals named in the REOC Staffing Plan will be targeted for training in both Emergency Management and IMS in 2006. Two workshops on IMS have been scheduled for April 7 and April 10, 2006.

- York Region explore options for retrofitting or relocating the REOC to accommodate IMS. The current size and configuration of Committee Room “A” is not suitable or effective for sustained emergency operations.
- Emergency Management prepare detailed IMS procedures and checklists for each member of the Regional Emergency Control Group.
- IMS documentation be reviewed and amended to ensure efficient tracking and follow-up of required tasks (i.e., master log, incident action plan, briefing notes, etc).

4.2 Relationship to Vision 2026

The emergency tabletop exercise “Operation Whiteout” represents one initiative within the Emergency Management Program towards achieving the goals in *Vision 2026* through supporting safe and secure communities and enhancing our human resources and partnerships. The 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 2005 Emergency Management budget.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

The Towns of Aurora, Newmarket and Richmond Hill provided positive feedback on the delivery and outcomes of the exercise and they all expressed a desire to participate in future training and exercise opportunities.

The Region will continue to partner with municipalities in emergency training and exercises, public information, and Critical Infrastructure database maintenance. These initiatives will result in improved emergency response and increased disaster resiliency.

7. CONCLUSION

The *Emergency Management Act* and Ontario Regulation 380/04 requires municipalities to develop and implement an Emergency Management Program which includes an annual simulated emergency exercise. “Operation Whiteout” simulated a severe winter weather event.

The Regional and Municipal Emergency Control Groups achieved the objectives of the exercise and successfully managed the emergency event. Gaps and area of improvement were identified.

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

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.