
**UNIT 5. SITUATIONAL AWARENESS AND
COMMON OPERATING PICTURE**

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INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

Visual 5.1

**Unit 5:
Situational Awareness
and Common
Operating Picture**



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Visual 5.1
EOC Management and Operations (G0775)

Key Points

Unit 5 will cover the topics of situational awareness and common operating picture.

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

Visual 5.2

Unit 5 Objectives

- Define situational awareness (SA) and common operating picture (COP).
- Explain how situational awareness and common operating picture contribute to effective incident management, EOC operations, and decisionmaking.
- Identify methods to achieve situational awareness and common operating picture.



Visual 5.2
EOC Management and Operations (G0775)

Key Points

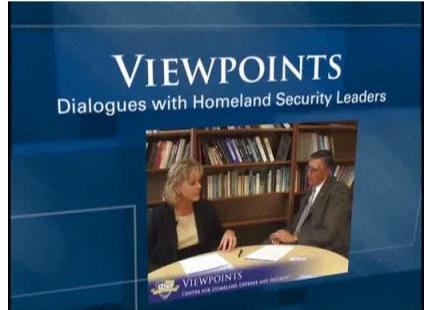
At the end of this unit, you will be able to:

- Define situational awareness (SA) and common operating picture (COP).
- Explain how situational awareness and common operating picture contribute to effective incident management, EOC operations, and decisionmaking.
- Identify methods to achieve situational awareness and common operating picture.

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

Visual 5.3

Video: Viewpoints From the Field



VIEWPOINTS
Dialogues with Homeland Security Leaders

Click image to play video.

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Visual 5.3
EOC Management and Operations (G0775)

Key Points

Adam Thiel is the Alexandria, Virginia Fire Chief. In this video, he shares his thoughts on situational awareness and common operating picture.

Video Transcript:

John Pennington: Hi, this is John Pennington and this is Viewpoints. With us is Adam Thiel, who is the fire chief of the Alexandria, Virginia Fire Department, and first and foremost thank you for being here and talking to us about EOC operations.

Adam Thiel: Thanks John, it's great to be here at CHDS.

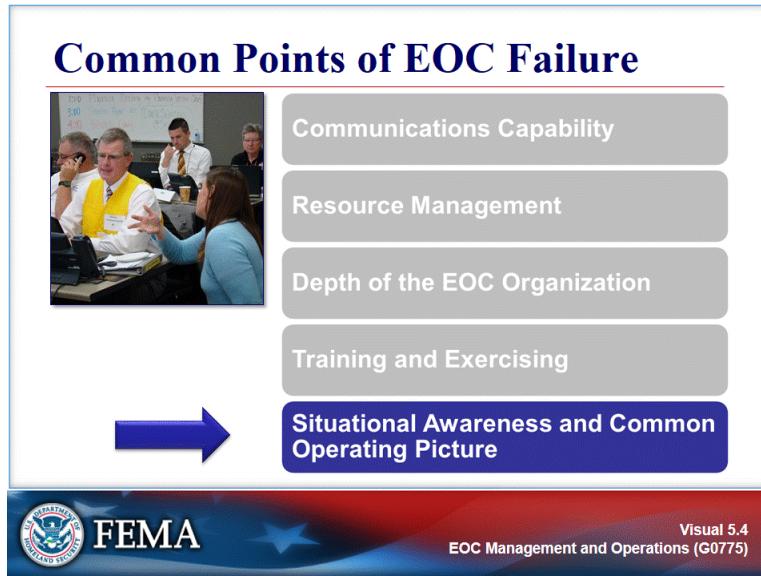
John: Expand a little bit on the role of situational awareness and a common operation picture in an EOC environment and its relationship to you guys out in the field.

Adam: Well, it's really critical for a number of levels. Where I work, we're in a very regional system so the EOC actually has to concentrate not just on our incidents and our city, but there's information that has to go out to other jurisdictions and other disciplines, and of course the public, to the broader community. The extent to which that information is correct, to which it's actionable, can really make our jobs easier or harder.

We also need to get good information and good situational awareness to the command post, to the incident command post, out in the street from the EOC because it really does affect our tactical decisions and weather is a great example. We can't necessarily always have a spot weather forecast in our incident command post, so getting that kind of update, getting that continual stream of information from the EOC is really vital and kind of takes the strategic framework and pushes it down to the tactical level so the EOC is that kind of clearinghouse, that middle coordination point between the tactical, the strategic, and often up to the regional, the State, and the Federal level.

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

Visual 5.4



Key Points

Although each disaster is different, there are common points where EOCs may experience failure. One of those areas is maintaining situational awareness and the development of a common operating picture.

Situational awareness and the development of a common operating picture are responsibilities of the EOC that often get overlooked. Emergency management professionals and EOC managers need to recognize that first responders, other communities, and their respective States count on EOCs to provide coordination and leadership in the development of these two critical functions.

SITUATIONAL AWARENESS

Visual 5.5

Review: Situational Awareness

“The ability to identify, process, and comprehend the critical information about an incident. More simply, it is knowing what is going on around you. Situational Awareness requires continuous monitoring of relevant sources of information regarding actual incidents and developing hazards.”

- National Response Framework (NRF)



Visual 5.5
EOC Management and Operations (G0775)

Key Points

EOCs have responsibilities in both situational awareness and a common operating picture. Most often, an EOC is obtaining situational awareness in the early stages of activation.

“The ability to identify, process, and comprehend the critical information about an incident. More simply, it is knowing what is going on around you. Situational Awareness requires continuous monitoring of relevant sources of information regarding actual incidents and developing hazards.”

- National Response Framework (NRF)

SITUATIONAL AWARENESS

Visual 5.6

Sources of Situational Awareness

Sources of situational awareness in early stages of EOC activation:

- First responders and government agencies
- Dispatch Centers (911)
- Citizens
- Media
- Nongovernmental organizations

Who else contributes to situational awareness?

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Visual 5.6
EOC Management and Operations (G0775)

Key Points

Common sources of situational awareness during the early stages of activation for an EOC can include:

- First responders and government agencies
- Dispatch Centers (911)
- Citizens
- Media
- Nongovernmental organizations

Discussion Question: Who else contributes to situational awareness?

SITUATIONAL AWARENESS

Visual 5.7

Data Collection and Management

Effective data collection and management is critical to situational awareness and must include:

- **Agreement on which data elements are critical.**
- **Reliable systems for transmission and display of situational awareness components.**



Visual 5.7
EOC Management and Operations (G0775)

Key Points

Good data collection and management is the key to developing solid and reliable situational awareness. For an EOC, there must be agreement on what constitutes acceptable data. There must also be a reliable system for the transmission and display of situational awareness components. Reliable systems include all-inclusive, web-based EOC Management software as well as independent technology to maintain situational awareness.

COMMON OPERATING PICTURE

Visual 5.8

Review: Common Operating Picture

A common operating picture:

- Means that personnel from all organizations at all locations have the same information.
- Is based on situational awareness of:
 - Current status and evolving situation.
 - Needed resources.
 - Availability and location of resources.



Visual 5.8
EOC Management and Operations (G0775)

Key Points

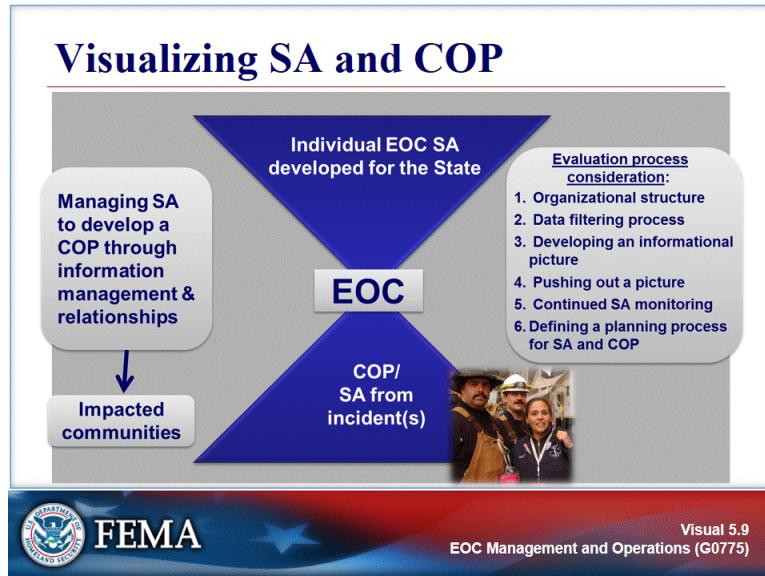
A common operating picture means that personnel from all organizations at all locations have the same information. The common operating picture is based on situational awareness of:

- Current status and evolving situation.
- Needed resources.
- Availability and location of resources.

An EOCs responsibility in the development of a common operating picture usually begins following the initial stages of an incident, after the EOC has begun obtaining situational awareness from a myriad of sources. At this stage, the EOC is in the process of developing a common operating picture for those who have contributed to situational awareness. Likewise, the EOC (along with other EOCs) are simultaneously sharing situational awareness with neighboring jurisdictions and States.

COMMON OPERATING PICTURE

Visual 5.9



Key Points

The graphic depicts one way you can visualize situational awareness and common operating picture.

The bottom of the hourglass represents the gathering of information sent to the EOC from different agencies and sources. Agencies and sources include first responders and other jurisdictions (e.g., smaller cities sending information to a coordinating county or regional EM entity.).

The middle of the hourglass represents the EOC, which receives situational awareness from the appropriate entities. The EOC must “filter” information as efficiently as possible and develop a common operating picture for those who have contributed, those who are impacted, and those who may become impacted by the event.

The top of the hourglass represents the situational awareness from the EOC to the State, tribal, or other neighboring jurisdictions and is often conveyed via a Situational Report (SitRep).

COMMON OPERATING PICTURE

Visual 5.10

EOC Situation Reports

Standardized reports documenting the:

- Level of activation
- Operational status
- Ongoing issues
- Requests or needs
- Anticipated issues and needs



**EOC SitReps =
Situational Awareness**

 **FEMA** Visual 5.10
EOC Management and Operations (G0775)

Key Points

Situation Reports are standardized reporting documents that summarize a jurisdictional EOC's level of activation, operational status, ongoing issues, documentation of requests or needs, and anticipated issues and needs.

Most States have templates for SitReps that assist EOCs in reporting this critical information. SitReps from EOCs are critical documents that require ongoing work from the EOC.

Situation Reports are often overlooked by EOCs focused on the incident they face. However, Situation Reports are the critical tool for an EOC to provide situational awareness for the State.

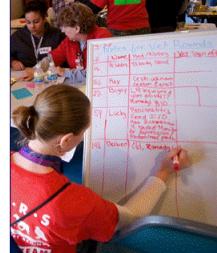
COMMON OPERATING PICTURE

Visual 5.11

COP: Elements

A common operating picture includes:

- Data
- Information
- Intelligence



A common operating picture enables effective, consistent, coordinated, and timely decisionmaking.

Visual 5.11
EOC Management and Operations (G0775)

Key Points

These critical elements of a common operating picture enable effective, consistent, coordinated, and timely decisionmaking:

- Data
- Information
- Intelligence

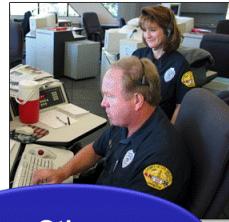
COMMON OPERATING PICTURE

Visual 5.12

COP: Data

Sources of information for a common operating picture include:

- 911 calls
- Social media
- Eyewitness reports
- Radio communications among responders
- Weather reports



Other sources?

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Visual 5.12
EOC Management and Operations (G0775)

Key Points

Sources of information for a common operating picture include:

- 911 calls
- Social media
- Eyewitness reports
- Radio communications among responders
- Weather reports

Discussion Question: What other sources of information should be included on the list?

COMMON OPERATING PICTURE

Visual 5.13

COP: Information

Information is combined, organized, and verified to develop a picture of what is happening.



As more data are added, the COP becomes clearer.

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Visual 5.13
EOC Management and Operations (G0775)

Key Points

A good example of information is an emerging flood that has been reported from various locations on the same river using different pieces of data, including a phone call to a 911 Center, a posting via social media, and a first responder arriving on-scene and communicating via radio communications. The pieces of data are combined to create the information that flooding is occurring on that river.

COMMON OPERATING PICTURE

Visual 5.14

COP: Intelligence

Intelligence results from analyzing the information and adding findings, conclusions, and recommendations for action.



FEMA Visual 5.14
EOC Management and Operations (G0775)

Key Points

Intelligence occurs when:

- The information about the river flooding is analyzed (flood gauges checked and additional reports gathered),
- A determination has been made as to why the flooding is occurring (potential breach of a levy upstream), and
- Recommendations exist (send teams to fix the breach or order an evacuation downstream).

ACTIVITY: COMMON OPERATING PICTURE

Visual 5.15

Activity: COP (1 of 3)

Scenario:

- Six city EOCs are activated to coordinate their communities' disaster response/recovery, requiring extensive transportation and sheltering.
- Three of the City EOCs are so busy that they do not:
 - Submit a SitRep to their coordinating county.
 - Participate in a conference call coordination briefing.
 - Have communications with their field components or the county.



Key Points

Scenario:

- Six city EOCs are activated to coordinate their communities' disaster response/recovery, requiring extensive transportation and sheltering.
- Three of the city EOCs are so busy that they do not:
 - Submit a SitRep to their coordinating county.
 - Participate in a conference call coordination briefing.
 - Have communications with their field components or the county.

ACTIVITY: COMMON OPERATING PICTURE

Visual 5.16

Activity: COP (2 of 3)

Scenario (Continued):

- The county develops their Incident Action Plan for coordination based upon the information provided by the six city EOCs.
- Priorities and objectives are based on the information received from the cities.
- Three cities do not have communication capabilities and cannot share their situational awareness.



Key Points

The scenario (Continued):

- The county develops their Incident Action Plan for coordination based upon the information provided by the six city EOCs.
- Priorities and objectives are based on the information received from the cities.
- Three cities do not have communication capabilities and cannot share their situational awareness.

ACTIVITY: COMMON OPERATING PICTURE

Visual 5.17

Activity: COP (3 of 3)

Instructions: Working in small groups, answer the following questions:

- Is there a common operating picture for the county? Why or why not?
- Does the county have accurate situational awareness to provide and report to the State? Why or why not?
- What does the group recommend (from the viewpoint of the county EOC) as an action item to resolve the problem of cities not providing situational awareness?
- Be prepared to share your work in 15 minutes.



Visual 5.17
EOC Management and Operations (G0775)

Key Points

Instructions:

Working in small groups, answer the following questions:

- Is there a common operating picture for the county? Why or why not?
- Does the county have accurate situational awareness to provide and report to the State? Why or why not?
- What does the group recommend (from the viewpoint of the county EOC) as an action item to resolve the problem of cities not providing situational awareness?
- Be prepared to share your work in 15 minutes.

ACTIVITY: COMMON OPERATING PICTURE

Visual 5.18

Questions to Ask Yourself

When developing a common operating picture, ask yourself:

- Is the information relevant and timely?
- Is the development of an action plan based on the COP necessary?
- Does the information help in maintaining situational awareness for others?



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Visual 5.18
EOC Management and Operations (G0775)

Key Points

As you develop a common operating picture, ask yourself these questions to help guide the process:

- Is the information I am providing relevant and timely?
 - Does the information matter to those at an ICP or several EOCs in smaller jurisdictions? For example, do the six city EOCs in the activity need to know that the Governor will be touring the county EOC tomorrow? No.
- Is the development of an action plan based on the COP required or necessary?
 - The EOC can develop a plan for how it will operate internally, but is it necessary to develop an action plan for the entire event when the cities, for example, are managing their incidents appropriately and all that is needed is information?
- Does the information help in maintaining situational awareness for others who depend on the EOC... primarily a State?
 - The EOC is developing a COP for the cities in this case, but it is also “pushing” SA upwards toward the State. Is there too much or too little information in a situation report, especially when that SitRep may be used as the means for both the COP (for the cities) and the SA (to the State)?

FINAL THOUGHTS: COMMON OPERATING PICTURE

Visual 5.19

COP: A Powerful Leadership Tool



A formally established and well-managed common operating picture is a powerful leadership tool that:

- **Facilitates collective efforts.**
- **Increases collaboration.**
- **Collects and disseminates pertinent and up-to-date information.**

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Visual 5.19
EOC Management and Operations (G0775)

Key Points

A formally established and well-managed common operating picture is a powerful leadership tool. The COP helps you:

- Facilitate collective efforts.
- Increase collaboration.
- Collect and disseminate pertinent and up-to-date information.

FINAL THOUGHTS: COMMON OPERATING PICTURE

Visual 5.20

Importance of a COP

- Improves incident safety.
- Provides the basis for informed predictions and proactive response.
- Allows effective, consistent, and timely tactical and strategic decisions.
- Supports a coordinated response among all response participants.
- Helps ensure consistency of situational awareness.



Visual 5.20
EOC Management and Operations (G0775)

Key Points

There are several benefits of a common operating picture. A well-developed COP:

- Improves incident safety.
- Provides the basis for informed predictions and proactive response.
- Allows effective, consistent, and timely tactical and strategic decisions.
- Supports a coordinated response among all response participants.
- Helps ensure consistency of situational awareness.

FINAL THOUGHTS: COMMON OPERATING PICTURE

Visual 5.21

Social Media Tools for SA and COP

- Gather information and first-hand accounts of incident impacts.
- Capture citizen reactions.
- Distribute emergency information.
- Map incident visualization.
- Match available resources and information to identified needs.



FEMA Visual 5.21
EOC Management and Operations (G0775)

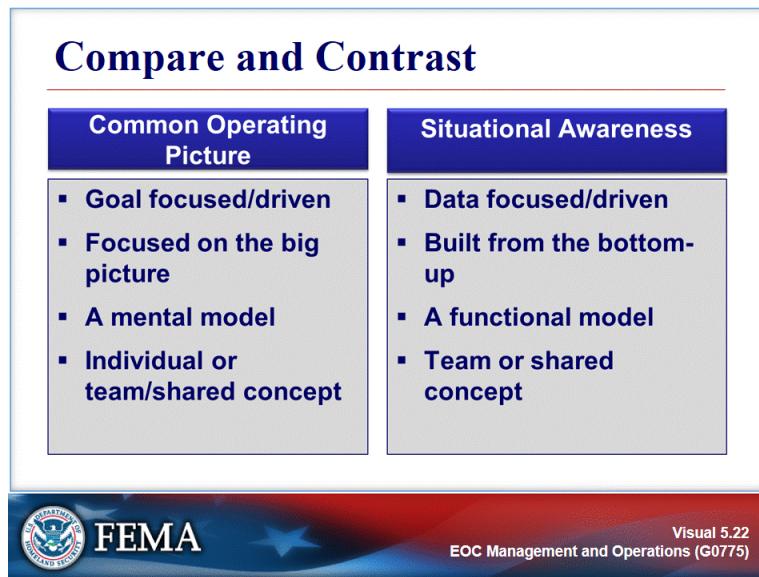
Key Points

Social Media offers tools for SA and COP that should be incorporated into the culture of an EOC. Social media allows an EOC to:

- Gather information and first-hand accounts of incident impacts (Twitter posts of people on rooftops after a flood).
- Capture citizen reaction (expressing gratitude for a first responder or city-wide actions).
- Distribute emergency information (re-Tweeting or re-posting).
- Map incident visualization (geo-locating an incident and posting a photo or video).
- Matching available resources and information to identified needs (posting that a remote community needs sand or sand bags).

FINAL THOUGHTS: COMMON OPERATING PICTURE

Visual 5.22



Key Points

This visual sums up common operating picture and situational awareness. Both functions of emergency management are complex and require research, training, and exercise by emergency management professionals and EOC leaders.

FINAL THOUGHTS: COMMON OPERATING PICTURE

Visual 5.23

Final Thoughts

Situational awareness and common operating picture:

- Begin with relationships.
- Require policy and procedures to facilitate the processes.

Available Training:
EMI L948: Situational Awareness and Common Operating Picture Course



Visual 5.23
EOC Management and Operations (G0775)



Key Points

SA and COP depend upon the building of relationships. These relationships help develop the necessary policies and procedures to facilitate SA and COP.

For more training on situational awareness and common operating picture, the L-948 course, Situational Awareness and Common Operating Picture is a good tool for emergency management professionals.

SUMMARY

Visual 5.24

Unit 5 Summary

We discussed:

- **Situational awareness and common operating picture.**
- **How situational awareness and common operating picture contribute to effective incident management, EOC operations, and decisionmaking.**
- **Methods to achieve situational awareness and common operating picture.**



Visual 5.24
EOC Management and Operations (G0775)

Key Points

Key concepts discussed in this unit include:

- Situational awareness and common operating picture.
- How situational awareness and common operating picture contribute to effective incident management, EOC operations, and decisionmaking.
- Methods to achieve situational awareness and common operating picture.

Notes: