

TOWNSHIP OF O'CONNOR – NOTES –  
EMERGENCY TABLETOP EXERCISE NOVEMBER 29, 2021

Notes of the Tabletop Exercise held on Monday, November 29, 2021 in the O'Connor Community Centre and virtually.

Present: Councillors Alex Crane, Wendy Handy, Jerry Loan,  
Clerk-Treasurer Lorna Buob  
Deputy Clerk-Treasurer & CEMC Linda Racicot  
Administrative Assistant and Alternate CEMC Erin Laforest  
Fire Chief Henry Mattas  
Deputy Fire Chief and Alternate CEMC Monica Budiselic - virtually  
O'Connor First Response members – Leanne Coderre, Willy Coderre,  
Road Department – Kelly Johnson, Brent Dennhardt, Eugene Payette  
Ontario Provincial Police (OPP) – Sergeant Don Everts, Officer Luc  
Verardo  
Superior North EMS – Arthur Soulias - virtually

Acting Mayor Loan welcomed everyone to the exercise at 7:05 p.m. and thanked those present for attending the Township of O'Connor's Emergency Tabletop Exercise. Introductions were made around the room, as well as online.

Prior to the start of the exercise, Employee Recognition Awards were presented to four Township of O'Connor employees for their years of service with the Township. These certificates are usually presented at the annual Christmas party in February, however, due to COVID-19 Council were unable to do so.

Acting Mayor Loan then turned the exercise over to Ms. Racicot, the Township of O'Connor's Community Emergency Management Coordinator (CEMC).

Ms. Racicot noted that due to the COVID-19 pandemic she has made this tabletop a smaller scale exercise with less people attending in person and explained the objectives of tonight's scenario. A general overview of the Township's requirements was noted. She stated that the Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act, Regulation 380/04, Section 12. (1) states that every municipal shall have a Municipal Emergency Control Group (MECG). The MECG is made up of the Mayor, Clerk-Treasurer, Fire Chief and the Deputy Fire Chief. These are the key people who will be in the Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) and who are required to be trained and be able to demonstrate knowledge of the components of the Township's Emergency Plan. The Members of the MECG are also a part of the Community Control Group (CCG), which includes other Township employees including the Community Emergency Management Coordinator (CEMC) and Alternates, Road Department Leadhand, and members from outside agencies, depending on the need of the particular emergency. These include the O.P.P. Thunder Bay Detachment Officer, the Emergency Medical Services Supervisor, the CAO of the Lakehead Region Conservation Authority, District Manager of the MNRF, CAO of the Thunder Bay DSSAB, and the Medical Officer of Health.

Under Section 12 (6) of the Act the MECG is required to conduct an annual practice exercise for a simulated emergency incident in order to evaluate the municipality's emergency response plan and make recommendation for any change, clarify everyone's roles and the Township's own procedures. The exercise is to improve the readiness and to build local capacity for dealing with emergencies and disasters that could occur in the Township of O'Connor.

Every Municipality shall also have an Emergency Management Program Committee (EMPC). This group is responsible to ensure that the Township's Emergency Plan is updated and relevant. The Committee also addresses any deficiencies that may arise after a Tabletop Exercise. The Committee consists of the Mayor, Councillors, Clerk-Treasurer, Fire Chief, CEMC and alternate CEMC's.

Ms. Racicot went on to explain that following the exercise, an informal debriefing of the exercise called a Hot-wash will be held to allow for immediate feedback.

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The scenario for this exercise is a tornado, which touches down in the centre of Township of O'Connor. The slide presentation part of the scenario was read aloud with the group. The scenario played out as follows: At 3:30 p.m. Environment Canada issued a Tornado Watch for our area, with a large line of thunderstorms approaching. At 5:00 p.m. a significant tornado has touched down 20 km northwest of the Township.

The Group then discussed how the Township would prepare for the approaching storm and potential tornado. It was noted that the Township would not have to send out their own weather alert as Environment Canada would do so for the area. There would not be a lot of time to respond to the situation, however the Township could send out a text message to those residents who have signed up for emergency notices through the Township Text Magic system. It was noted that everyone should find shelter and prepare themselves for the storm and potential tornado.

The scenario continued and at 5:05 p.m. a tornado touched down in the Township of O'Connor in the centre of the Township. At 5:10 p.m. the power is out in the entire community, many roadways are blocked due to downed trees, the Township office and the Tbaytel exchange building have been destroyed, and the Clerk-Treasurer and Deputy Clerk-Treasurer are believed to still be in the office at the time of the tornado hitting. The Community Centre has also sustained major damage. The municipal garage and fire hall have damage, however, the structures are still sound.

Each participant again then discussed how they would proceed in this situation. 911 would be called and the CCG would be notified of the situation. If it was safe to do so and the storm had subsided the members of the CCG would assess the situation and the necessary resources would be deployed. If the tornado was still active people should not be out wondering around. Many resources would not be available. The Clerk-Treasurer and Deputy Clerk-Treasurer's condition would be in question and others would have to fill their roles in a disaster.

The OPP were asked if they have a drone that could identify the path of destruction and identify anyone in danger or needing assistance. It was confirmed that they do have a drone, however depending on the winds it may not be able to fly.

Locations for an EOC and a reception centre for those needing shelter or food would have to be established as the Township office and Community Centre are unavailable. The location would depend on the safety of the location and availability of resources, including power. Those in need would be made aware of these locations. A triage area would also be established and those needing medical attention would be assessed and assisted as needed. A scribe would be appointed and would record all happenings of the situation for future reference.

Mutual Aid would most likely be called to assist, depending on access to the area in need. The Fire Department and Roads Department would work together to open up roads that may be blocked from downed trees. If down powerlines, Hydro would be called and roads closed. If power and phone lines are not working the two-way radios would be used to communicate.

The group would continue to work together until the situation is under control and all residents and volunteers are safe. The situation will continue to be assessed and cleanup continued.

Each group was once again asked how they would be dealing with the situation at this point.

Ms. Racicot then continued the exercise with the Hot-wash. Participants responded on the strengths or weaknesses of the plan and the exercise tonight. The Township's Emergency Plan does have an Appendix describing how to deal with a severe windstorm or tornado for reference.

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The OPP would like to be added to the Text Magic call out list, which our residents can sign up for. This program allows the Township staff to page out any warnings or notice of an emergency within the Township. It was suggested that the residents be encouraged more often to sign up for this warning and inform them of the importance. It was suggested that perhaps the information could be included in with the tax bills.

The significance between a “watch” and a “warning” should be made clear in correspondence. It was suggested that each month in the newsletter an emergency term be described, keeping it simple to understand.

It was noted that weather alerts are sent out on cell phone, however, not everyone has a cell phone. It suggested that in the Township’s public education that during an emergency people be asked to check in on their neighbours to ensure everyone is safe.

Also, if a weather alert has been sounded and is heading in our area that people be alerted to check the weather channel to find out exactly where the danger is located. In this situation the severity of the weather was unanticipated.

Concerns were expressed that in this situation all supplies are in one location which was destroyed.

It was suggested that the Continuity of Operations Plan, currently only included in the Influenza Plan, should be generalized and created for all emergencies.

As the hydro grid in the Township of O’Connor comes in from different directions, it was suggested that the grid lines be identified in the plan to help determine where the outages might run during an emergency.

It was agreed that communication is key in an emergency. In this scenario the Clerk-Treasurer, also the Information Officer, would be unavailable. Someone else would have to assigned to this role.

Ms. Racicot noted that the updated Emergency Plan will be sent out to the outside agencies in the near future.

Ms. Racicot thanked everyone for attending and participating and the exercise adjourned at 8:25 p.m.

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Mayor

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Clerk-Treasurer