

Incident Response Assessment Key Findings and Implementation

Richmond City Council
Public Safety Standing Committee
July 22, 2025, 1:00 PM



Planning

Planning lays a foundation for emergency response operations. Findings are summarized below:



Strengths

- **Pre-disaster and in-the-moment planning** enabled rapid and unprecedented mobilization of a water distribution system.
- **City staff** stepped into unfamiliar emergency roles quickly and effectively.
- **Planning for vulnerable populations** was a notable success, and **wellness efforts** during the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) activation received positive feedback.
- Some departments demonstrated strong **pre-developed procedures and internal communication**.

Areas for Improvement

- While some planning elements were in place, **key tools** like the Emergency Operations Plan (EOP) were not consistently used or known among staff.
- **Roles and responsibilities** were often unclear, and essential emergency plans were outdated or still in development.
- **Foundational tools** like WebEOC and Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) were underutilized.

Recommendations

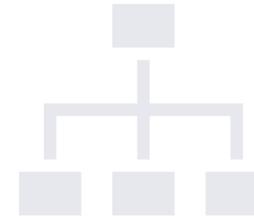
13 Planning recommendations identified, which are summarized below:

- ❑ Develop a City-wide Integrated Preparedness Plan (IPP).
- ❑ Update and train staff on the EOP and emergency roles.
- ❑ Finalize and socialize critical emergency plans (e.g., Point of Distribution [POD], Crisis Communications).
- ❑ Provide routine WebEOC and SOP training across departments.



Operational Coordination

Operational Coordination highlights the importance of an operational structure and process based on clear chains of command and systematic unified situational awareness across teams involved in the response. Findings are summarized below:



Strengths	Areas for Improvement
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• City staff and volunteers displayed strong dedication and flexibility, stepping up to meet urgent needs.• The Mayor’s active leadership and existing regional relationships supported timely collaboration.• External support from the Central Virginia Incident Management Team (CVAIMT) helped strengthen coordination and resource management.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Initial EOC setup and command structure lacked clarity, causing delays in decision-making.• Nightshift staffing was inconsistent, and the sign-in process and resource tracking were fragmented.• Roles of external partners like the CVAIMT were not well-defined early in the response.

Recommendations

14 Operational Coordination recommendations identified, which are summarized below:

- ❑ Clarify EOC command structure and shift protocols.
- ❑ Expand Office of Emergency Management (OEM) staffing and consider forming a City Incident Management Team (IMT).
- ❑ Standardize coordination processes with external partners.
- ❑ Establish a permanent, pre-configured EOC space.



Operational Communication



Operational Communication emphasizes the need for communication to be timely and accurate between all stakeholders involved (i.e., City leadership, response personnel, and City residents). Findings are summarized below:

Strengths	Areas for Improvement
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Internal communication processes in place laid a good foundation for communication during emergency operations. Within teams, staff communicated effectively.• Policy Group briefings maintained consistent internal updates.• Councilmembers were informed promptly of EOC activation, showing improved awareness at the leadership level.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Stakeholders at every level were impacted by a lack of transparent, timely, and accurate communication, which led to confusion about the situation at hand.• During initial activation, many staff were unclear on where to report or who to contact.• Council received updates in various ways, and both upward and downward information-sharing channels within the EOC were limited.

Recommendations

12 Operational Communication recommendations identified, which are summarized below:

- Implement and test the City's new emergency notification system.
- Establish a Council liaison and consistent update schedule.
- Improve communication protocols between field staff and EOC.
- Share internal updates ahead of public messaging and press when possible.



Situational Assessment



Situational Assessment supports an effective response, providing a clear picture of evolving conditions and guiding decision-making at every step of the incident. Findings are summarized below:

Strengths

- **Daily EOC briefings and Situation Reports (SitReps)** improved over time, helping clarify restoration progress and improve decision-making.
- **Communications from the Water Treatment Plant** became more frequent and structured later in the response, offering a more accurate depiction of operational capabilities.

Areas for Improvement

- The EOC lacked a **clear common operating picture early in the incident**, with inconsistent documentation and unclear metrics for decision-makers.
- **Teams relied heavily on verbal updates**, which led to confusion and gaps in situational awareness across locations.
- Within the EOC, **SitRep inconsistencies and a lack of a defined information-sharing cadence** caused challenges.

Recommendations

8 Situational Assessment recommendations identified, which are summarized below:

- ❑ Standardize SitRep format and reporting cadence.
- ❑ Integrate technology/data staff into the EOC to create and maintain incident dashboards.
- ❑ Provide documentation training and establish written reporting standards.
- ❑ Ensure technical metrics are clearly explained and contextualized.



Public Information and Warning



Public Information and Warning emphasizes effective public messaging as a critical role in emergency response. Findings are summarized below:

Strengths	Areas for Improvement
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The City provided daily press briefings.• Messages were verified before release.• Information on water restoration and PODs was regularly shared through a variety of channels.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Public notifications via platforms like CodeRed were unclear, and messaging across platforms and jurisdictions lacked consistency.• The absence of a Joint Information Center (JIC) led to mixed messages and confusion among residents.• Conflicting reports and misinformation further complicated efforts, sometimes causing unnecessary panic or underutilization of available resources.

Recommendations

9 Public Information and Warning recommendations identified, which are summarized below:

- Implement and test the city’s new emergency notification system.
- Finalize and train on a Crisis Communications Plan.
- Clarify public messaging protocols and integrate JIC activation.
- Improve coordination with 311 and provide direct EOC updates.
- Upgrade the City website for centralized emergency information.



Logistics and Supply Chain Management

Logistics and Supply Chain Management refers to the coordination, procurement, transportation, distribution, and tracking of critical resources. Findings are summarized below:



Strengths	Areas for Improvement
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The City quickly set up water distribution sites with volunteer support.• Inter-agency collaboration enabled unprecedented large-scale water delivery under tight timelines.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Resource tracking, requests, and distribution were ad hoc, and teams often duplicated efforts due to unclear coordination.• Staffing and logistics support roles were not clearly defined, leading to confusion and inefficiencies.

Recommendations

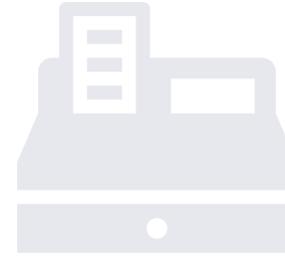
12 Logistics and Supply Chain Management recommendations identified, which are summarized below:

- ❑ Develop and implement a Resource Management Plan and POD Operations Guide.
- ❑ Clarify responsibilities for logistics coordination during activation.
- ❑ Integrate logistics planning into future trainings and exercises.
- ❑ Establish real-time tools to track resource requests and delivery.



Economic Recovery

Economic Recovery is essential to sustaining operations during and after a disaster while minimizing financial strain. Findings are summarized below:



Strengths

- The City took **early action** to enable cost recovery by activating emergency codes and engaging with state partners on funding mechanisms.
- Staff were proactive in **tracking emergency-related expenditures**.

Areas for Improvement

- A **formal cost recovery framework** was not in place early in the response, which may delay long-term recovery and funding efforts.
- City **departments used their own budgets**, risking long-term financial impacts.
- **Decentralized purchasing and inconsistent use of financial tracking** further complicated recovery.

Recommendations

4 Economic Recovery recommendations identified, which are summarized below:

- ✓ Develop a citywide Recovery Framework with lead department roles.
- ✓ Integrate financial tracking with operational decision-making.
- ✓ Engage departments in early recovery planning as part of EOC activations.
- ✓ Align cost tracking with state/federal reimbursement systems.



Long-Term Vulnerability

Long-Term Vulnerability is essential for ensuring that communities can withstand and recover from future incidents without facing repeated risks. Findings are summarized below:



Strengths

This incident highlighted the interdependencies of the water infrastructure within the City and within the Central Virginia Region, but through exhaustive efforts, **surrounding jurisdictions were able to minimize their impacts.**

Areas for Improvement

This incident highlighted the potential challenges **infrastructure interdependencies** may cause in future incidents, due to current gaps in regional planning.

Recommendations

3 Long-Term Vulnerability recommendations identified, which are summarized below:

- Coordinate recovery and mitigation planning with infrastructure departments.
- Regularly update vulnerability data to inform future risk reduction.
- Build cross-departmental collaboration into long-term planning efforts.



Current Efforts

In line with the recommendations provided in the report, the City has been actively working towards implementing a series of key improvements to prepare the community to more effectively respond to future incidents, including:

Key Improvement	Progress
Implement and test the city’s new emergency notification system.	Complete
Develop a citywide Recovery Framework with lead department roles.	Complete
Develop a citywide Cost Recovery Plan.	In Progress
Update Continuity Plans across the City.	In Progress
Update the Emergency Operations Plan (EOP).	In Planning
Develop a citywide Integrated Preparedness Plan (IPP).	In Planning

Summary of Findings

Overall, the response revealed **both areas of strength and significant lessons to be learned**. Leadership was decisive, public safety measures were effective, and transparency was prioritized throughout the incident. Yet, the incident exposed vulnerabilities in **communications and inter-agency coordination**.



Q&A

