

## Response to Questions on the FY 2010 County's Line of Business & Schools Program Review Processes Fall 2008

**Request By:** Employee

**Question:** Why does the Health Department have an Office of Emergency Preparedness (OEP) and how does this activity interface with the County's Office of Emergency Management (OEM)?

**Response:** Public Health spans several disciplines and areas of expertise that are unique to the emergency management arena and therefore require a tailored approach to emergency preparedness. After decades of decline in the public health infrastructure, a systems approach is needed to strengthen the infrastructure to address biological, chemical, radiation and environmental hazards.

Unlike other first responder agencies, emergency preparedness and response was not a core function of the Health Department prior to 2001. The Office of Emergency Preparedness (OEP) was formally established in 2006 in response to the expanding and evolving role of Public Health following the terrorism events of 2001. Agency staff and the partner organizations that constitute the local public health system have ongoing planning, training and exercise requirements that are not addressed by generic first responder trainings.

The OEP collaborates with Regional, State, National Capital Region and County public health partner agencies to address public health threats, emergencies and meet the public's expectation for the health of the community. In addition, the OEP works closely with Office of Emergency Management (OEM) and County emergency management partners to assure prompt, appropriate response to emergencies as demonstrated with the Huntington floods, Tropical Storm Ernest and Tropical Storm Hannah. The OEP also makes contributions to countywide planning activities such as the COOP, the Emergency Operations Plan, the Emergency Management Coordinating Committee and other countywide emergency planning efforts

The OEP is also responsible for the oversight of the Medical Reserve Corps, the Cities Readiness Initiative, Pandemic Influenza preparedness, physician community readiness and medical surge.

Having the Office of Emergency Preparedness within the Health Department allows for better integration of emergency preparedness and public health preparedness initiatives within the County. One example is the grant funded pandemic flu team that has been used to leverage broader community outreach partnerships and efforts to address public health challenges and threats such as food safety, TB, respiratory and hand hygiene and home safety. Public health preparedness strengthens the local public health system; enhances the delivery of agency services; promotes resiliency and individual/family preparedness within the Fairfax community; and increases the likelihood of an effective and timely response to public health emergencies.