

CENTRAL AMERICA BUILDING EOCs ON A SHOESTRING

Having Emergency Operations Centers (EOCs) that can respond within two hours is one of the goals of the Global Health Security Agenda. But do EOCs need to come with a high price tag? Not according to Luis Hernandez, who is on the road 200 days a year setting up EOCs in all corners of the world.

Luis Hernandez knows firsthand that mounting an effective response is about more than having the latest technology and equipment. From his Guatemala office, he helps countries with small budgets and limited staff create EOCs of their own. Not only has he been setting up successful EOCs in Central and South America, but he has traveled across the globe to help Bangladesh, Kenya, Thailand, Guinea, and India.

Here's what Luis has learned about building an EOC on a shoestring.

FIND AN EMPTY ROOM

Any empty room will do. Luis usually finds an unused conference room. "You don't need a multi-million dollar EOC to respond to an emergency," he says.

GET A FEW COMPUTERS... AND SOME OTHER STUFF

The EOC in Guatemala has 12 laptops, a projector, and a screen. "I had to borrow a conference table from the influenza program," Luis says, laughing. "I need a network and I need power. I have three flat-screens—also borrowed. We have an old plotter I fixed up to print maps for the Ministry of Health."

TRAIN PEOPLE WELL

By far, the most important resource in an EOC is people. "If you don't have the right people with the right training, a multi-million dollar facility is no use. If you have the right people, with their laptops they can do their jobs," says Luis. When budgets don't allow for dedicated staff, as in Guatemala, Luis recommends training staff who can shift focus from their day jobs and become emergency responders at a moment's notice.

CONNECT WITH NEIGHBORS

A functional EOC is about training the right people and connecting with others. In Central America, a regional emergency management technical committee enables countries to find out how others are preparing.

DO AMAZING WORK

Central America demonstrates the power of a low-tech, low-cost EOC. Among other achievements, they've responded to the 2014 Ebola outbreak, linked resources when dengue came to the region, helped regional governments develop emergency action plans, and provided a model for how small EOCs can work all over the world.

Work in building EOCs is supported by countries' Ministries of Health and U.S. and international partners. In Guatemala, this work is coordinated through the GDD Regional Center for Guatemala and Central America, which is part of CDC's country office.

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Guatemala Ministry of Health EOC Earthquake Tabletop Exercise, March 2014.

Read the full story: <http://www.cdc.gov/globalhealth/healthprotection/gdd/stories/guatemala-resourceful-eoc.html>