OSOCC SITE SELECTION

When choosing a site for an OSOCC, several important points must be kept in mind. First, the general location of the OSOCC should be in close proximity to the national government’s emergency management coordinating unit as well as other agencies providing humanitarian assistance. Where this is located will depend, to some extent, on the type of disaster/emergency. In an earthquake, the centre is best situated close to the local emergency management on-site, but in a flood situation, over a widespread area, it might be best to stay in the capital close to the RC/HC and national authority.

The physical location should maximize the possibilities of effectively utilizing communication equipment, e.g., on higher ground and not surrounded by hills or other natural obstructions. The site should slope and drain effectively. The site should facilitate proper security procedures including ease of access and evacuation, a perimeter easily guarded, and distance from actual or potential armed conflict.

The building housing the OSOCC should be structurally sound and not damaged during the emergency. Ideally there will be several separate rooms to use as offices. There should be a general area for receiving and registering visitors, preferably with some pleasant ambiance such as a coffee machine. There should also be a general situation room with tables and chairs sufficient for meeting of 12-15 people (larger, if possible). There should be some private offices where confidential discussions may take place. The building should be large enough to accommodate the co-location of staff from the national government and other agencies that wish to operate within the OSOCC structure.

Communication equipment should be in a secure communications room. Office equipment like copiers should be accessible but not in general meeting space areas.

In general it will be useful to think about traffic control in designing the physical layout of the OSOCC. Certain areas will need to be secure and not accessible to the public or even other responders. Some areas will be required for open meetings. The private and public areas should be well separated.

In large-scale emergencies, it is important to think big from the start as the OSOCC may need to provide operating space and services for a large number of people as OCHA surge capacity and other international organizations start to deploy.