



## SUBMISSION FORM

All submission forms must include the following information. Separate submission forms must be turned in for each eligible program. **Deadline: July 1, 2021.** Please include this submission form with the electronic entry. If you do not receive an email confirming receipt of your entry within 3 days of submission, please contact [Gage Harter](#).

### PROGRAM INFORMATION

County: County of Henrico

Program Title: Measures to Address a Unique Emergency Safety and Health Standard

Program Category: Organizational Developmental

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## **Program Overview**

In the spring and summer of 2020, Henrico County Government created and implemented a comprehensive COVID-19 safety and health program, which includes training, documentation, and best practices for employees. A small group of employees accomplished this work under significant time constraints. This successful program was only able to succeed thanks to an innovative use of the Emergency Operations Center framework, creating the flexibility needed to respond to this public health emergency. These detailed programs were established mainly in response to a once-in-a-lifetime set of safety and health standards ordered by Governor Northam: The Virginia Department of Labor and Industry's VOSH Emergency Temporary Standard (ETS) for COVID-19. The standard requirements were far-reaching, but Henrico County's Emergency Operations Center and personnel from Emergency Management and Workplace Safety (EMWS) were able to coordinate a quick, effective and rational response within the specified time periods. This organizational structure provided a flexible foundation for success including EOC staff, department leaders, and a small group of subject matter experts. The unique approach allowed Henrico County to develop and establish the necessary safety and health programs that remain relevant, clear, and effective to this day. Noteworthy achievements include a County-wide COVID-19 training module that reached over 3500 employees in approximately one month and a reporting system that efficiently managed large amounts of sensitive information and facilitated information sharing with state regulatory agencies within the required time frames.

## **Problem /Challenge /Situation Faced by Locality**

In the midst of a global pandemic, Henrico County government faced compliance with a once-in-a-lifetime set of safety and health standards designed to protect employees from Coronavirus in the workplace: The Virginia Department of Labor and Industry's VOSH Emergency Temporary Standard (ETS) for COVID-19. Virginia's COVID regulations were the first in the nation. These

regulations posed a major challenge for Henrico County, one of the largest employers in the Metro Richmond region, based on the number of employees providing essential services and the highly diverse nature of the jobs within County government. Additionally, many of Henrico County's front line employees actively responded to significant needs related to COVID outbreaks in congregate care settings.

### **How Program Fulfilled Awards Criteria**

Henrico County government, operating under the County State of Emergency since March 13, 2020, established a hybrid Emergency Operations Center (EOC) and Incident Management Team (IMT) based on Incident Command System (ICS) concepts. In this All-Hazards approach, a Henrico County EOC managed day-to-day COVID-related activities utilizing personnel from Henrico County Emergency Management & Workplace Safety (EMWS), Henrico County's Type IV IMT, and employees from other key county groups. This unique application of ICS concepts created unparalleled collaboration among stakeholders. Henrico County's response to the pandemic did not require the typical EOC-IMT relationship since the nature of the threat was fluid and pervasive. The standard Emergency Support Functions (ESF) did not offer a clear framework to address employee safety and health issues. The guidance of the EOC enabled EMWS personnel to apply ICS concepts such as management by objectives, comprehensive resource management, and a common operating picture to general government administrative processes. This framework fostered the interactions necessary to plan, develop, implement and maintain a clear and effective County-wide response to the pandemic, including the VOSH ETS. Programs, documentation and practices implemented in July 2020 continue to guide Henrico County's ongoing response to this global health crisis.

In early spring of 2020, a combination of the Governor of Virginia's executive orders and recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) were the guiding

principles for workplace COVID-19 procedures. Later that spring, Governor Northam directed the Department of Labor and Industry (DOLI) to create emergency temporary workplace COVID safety and health standards to be applicable to all Virginia places of employment, regardless of type or size. Over the course of four meetings (more than 30 hours of discussion), the content of the standard was debated by DOLI's Safety and Health Codes Board (SHCB) and eventually approved. Effective June 27, 2020, the VOSH ETS was the first and only Emergency Temporary Standard ever promulgated by the Virginia Department of Labor and Industry and the first state-level COVID standard in the nation; it contained 14 individual requirements related to protecting employees from COVID-19. In January 2021, the SHCB voted to make this temporary standard a "Final Permanent Standard," meaning the set of regulations will be in effect until the Board votes to repeal them.

Henrico County's EOC created a transition task force made up of teams dedicated to COVID-19 safety and the challenges of operating a large county government. Issues of telework, social distancing, and face coverings were starting to become necessary, whether mandated or not. Transition task force teams managed health screening, signage & marking, and the physical layout of work areas. EMWS personnel assisted these teams throughout this process by compiling and analyzing information from the CDC and Virginia Department of Health (VDH) to create safety and health guidance. Many of the future requirements of the VOSH ETS had been addressed to varying degrees by the time the workplace rules became mandatory, thanks to the planning and hard work of Henrico County leadership.

This application will focus on the ongoing requirements related to two of the major provisions of the standard: training and recording /reporting of positive COVID-19 cases.

### **How Program was Carried Out**

To obtain as much current and relevant information as possible, EMWS personnel virtually “attended” every SHCB meeting and provided updates to stakeholders on the pending regulations. The final text of the ETS was approved on July 15, and it became effective on July 27. This 12-day advance knowledge of the requirements allowed EMWS Safety Officers to prepare much of the soon-to-be-required documentation. Utilizing contacts from the EOC, EMWS obtained necessary input on existing policies and practices in essential service roles, such as Police, Fire, Sheriff’s Office, and detention facilities. At this point, the pending regulations had been discussed at multiple daily meetings with agency heads and representatives. This heightened level of communication allowed for a clearer, concise, and controlled message, rather than the anonymity of group emails or the isolation and inefficiency of multiple individual calls with each representative.

Training: The ETS requires that each employee be trained on a wide variety of COVID-related topics, including information on workplace-specific policies and procedures. With more than 4000 full-time employees, this would have been a difficult task even during non-COVID times, let alone with the challenges of social distancing and most employees working virtually. Henrico EMWS personnel worked to develop a web-based training module that would include the required information, remain visually engaging, and keep each employee focused throughout. Adding photos and videos of Henrico County employees and work locations was one approach to maintaining interest. The safety and health content was shared with Henrico County Public Relations to provide technical assistance with audio and video production. This polished product was delivered through Henrico’s existing online learning management system. Once the necessary settings were fine-tuned, a link was sent directly to each employee by email.

Initially, EMWS personnel assisted Henrico County employees and supervisors nearly around the clock with account maintenance. Agency heads received detailed weekly compliance summaries. Thanks to the strong relationships built by the EOC, agency heads were highly involved in completing the training within the required timeframe. Within one month, almost 3500 Henrico County employees had completed their mandatory training and received essential information on workplace COVID-19 procedures. Certificates of completion are available for both employee reference and EMWS recordkeeping, and compliance reports can be run at any time to assess completion percentages. Administrator reports are available at multiple organizational levels as well to monitor compliance. Any changes in content can be addressed in the future as necessary. While in-person training is recognized as most effective, the exigencies of COVID prevented that approach. Utilizing an existing platform and adjusting the material for content and scope has proven to be an effective way to deliver mandatory information to Henrico County employees.

Reporting and Notification: Another group of requirements in the VOSH ETS deals with positive COVID case reporting and notification. Henrico County is required to:

- maintain a record of all COVID-19 positive employees in the workplace,
- notify employees (within 24 hours) who also worked in the same work area as the positive employee,
- report each of these positive cases to the Virginia Department of Health within 24 hours (later changed to a threshold of 2 employees per work area),
- report three or more positive employees in a work area to VOSH within 24 hours.

The need to receive medically sensitive information from an employee conveyed through a supervisor to a central location presents unique challenges. The 24-hour window made it even more difficult. EMWS staff created a survey using ESRI's ArcGIS platform. This survey's access

was restricted to specific agency representatives, and it was only viewable by several designated individuals responsible for making notifications to stakeholders and state regulators. While the submission process was new to everyone, most agency representatives quickly provided the required information in an efficient, effective manner. Those that needed it were provided with assistance from EMWS staff. The clear messaging put out by EMWS through the EOC was essential in establishing the understanding and trust necessary for this process to work. This reporting system has, to date, successfully captured the necessary information and provided an excellent framework for internal recordkeeping and data analysis.

As the VDH struggled to keep up with the task of contact tracing, they hired hundreds of new employees. During times with many positive cases, such as November and December 2020, multiple VDH employees could call to enquire about a single reported positive Henrico County employee. Often this information was requested well after the initial report, creating potential confusion. The detailed, time-stamped reports created through ArcGIS were extremely valuable in controlling the appropriate flow of information to state regulators.

In December 2020, VDH and VOSH changed the reporting threshold for VDH reporting. While on the surface, raising the threshold from one employee per work area to two lessened the reporting burden, it created a new problem. An “outbreak” as defined by VDH is two or more employees positive in a work area within 14 days. However, VOSH’s definition of outbreak remained at three employees. VDH considers an outbreak to be “active” for 28 days from the last positive case, which essentially created an unending cascade of “outbreak” tracking. Survey123 provided excellent data collection and analysis tools, which greatly helped EMWS with this herculean task. The trusting relationships established through the EOC were again essential in collecting and maintaining information related to these outbreak areas. Personnel in Employee Health Services, Police, Fire, and the Sheriff’s Office were instrumental in properly sharing

sensitive employee information in this mutual effort to accurately report this information to state regulators.

An additional benefit of utilizing Survey123 was the ability to perform useful data analysis on positive cases. Group affiliations and work locations were easily analyzed and sorted, which enabled additional information sharing among stakeholders, all while protecting employee confidentiality. One extremely helpful aspect of this was an up-to-the-minute document with all COVID positive cases within Henrico County employees (with names redacted), which was available for selected senior administrators to review at any time or location. This document remains up to date and available.

### **Financing & Staffing**

Since all personnel involved in the creation of this program are Henrico County employees, there was no additional cost for labor. No additional costs were incurred for products or IT platforms either. The learning management system which hosts the training module has been an established part of EMWS's training programs for several years and multiple County groups have utilized the GIS platform used for reporting and notification.

### **Program Results**

While the human results of this program are not able to be quantified, the program clearly contributed to Henrico County's coordinated and unprecedented response to the COVID pandemic. Henrico County's existing practices related to face coverings, physical distancing and signage were standardized during the creation of the County's VOSH ETS response. These already implemented practices were able to be seamlessly integrated into this program, creating continuity as well as saving the County time, money and effort.



The following documentation /products were developed and implemented specifically for compliance with the VOSH standard:

- A COVID-19 training module, delivered via an online learning management platform (As of early June 2021, this training was completed by 3997 county employees);
- A comprehensive written Infectious Disease Preparedness and Response Plan;
- COVID-19 Exposure Risk Assessments for all Henrico County job titles /work areas;
- A system for receiving notification of an employee's positive COVID-19 test result utilizing a confidential survey and data collection tool, built in a GIS mapping software platform;
- Procedures for notifying co-workers of a positive case in their work area;
- Procedures to notify VDH and VOSH of threshold numbers of positive cases, when necessary.

### **Brief Summary**

In response to a once-in-a-lifetime set of emergency safety and health regulations issued by the Commonwealth, Henrico County Government used a unique combination of Incident Command System concepts to create a flexible framework for success. Using these elements to create unparalleled communication and collaboration, a small group was able to develop, implement and maintain a complex safety and health program in a very short timeframe, providing meaningful protection to Henrico employees from COVID-19. Highlights of this program include delivering a COVID-19 training module to more than 3500 employees in approximately one month and creating a reporting and notification process which collected and maintained complex confidential information in an efficient and effective way. This program continues to provide Henrico employees with incomparable safety and health protection today.



## Measure to Address a Unique Emergency Safety and Health Standard Supplemental Materials



# Working Safely During COVID-19

*Information about work practices in place to keep Henrico County employees safe and healthy.*

*Details of the VOSH Emergency Temporary Standard on COVID-19*



Henrico County [Working Safely During COVID-19](#) training module