

SCIENCE-BASED PLANNING TAXONOMY

A field-ready job aid for emergency management practitioners

▶ THE COORDINATION FAILURE

Same term. Different mental model. Operational failure waiting to happen.

Fire service, civilian EM, oil & gas, and municipal practitioners each carry a different definition — even when they use identical words like ERP, EOP, or ICS. This gap is not semantic. It is a coordination failure.

▶ STEP 1 — CLASSIFY ANY PLANNING DOCUMENT

Ask these four questions in order. The first YES gives you the tier.

#	Ask yourself ...	Tier	Document type
1	Does it define legal authority, overall jurisdiction strategy, and who is in charge across ALL emergencies?	TIER 1 GOVERNANCE	EOP Emergency Operations Plan
2	Does it describe how your EM program is organised — capabilities, resources, and multi-year priorities?	TIER 2 STRATEGIC	EMP Emergency Management Plan
3	Does it detail how to RESPOND to a specific incident — operations, ICS structure, checklists, asset protection?	TIER 3 TACTICAL	ERP / ICS / PIP Emergency Response Plan, Pre-Incident Plan
4	Does it cover evacuation routes, muster points, wardens, and employee life-safety at a specific facility?	TIER 4 OPERATIONAL	EAP Emergency Action Plan

▶ STEP 2 — DEFINE SCOPE BOUNDARIES

What each document covers, what it does NOT cover, who owns it, and which standard governs it.

Document	Covers	Does NOT cover	Owner	Standard
EOP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Legal authority & jurisdiction strategy ✓ All-hazards scope ✓ Roles & responsibilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ Operational checklists ✗ Site-specific tactics 	EM Director / Senior Executive	FEMA CPG 101 ISO 22320

Document	Covers	Does NOT cover	Owner	Standard
EMP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Program capabilities & resources ✓ Multi-year planning priorities ✓ Mutual aid arrangements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ Incident command structure ✗ Facility-level life safety 	EM Coordinator	NFPA 1600 FEMA CPG 101
ERP / ICS / PIP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Incident response operations ✓ ICS command structure ✓ Hazard-specific checklists 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ Governance or legal authority ✗ Employee evac routes 	Operations Mgr / Safety Officer	NIMS / ICS ISO 22320
EAP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Evacuation routes & muster points ✓ Warden roles ✓ OSHA compliance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ Multi-incident strategy ✗ ICS or command structure 	HR Director / Facilities Manager	OSHA 29 CFR 1910.38

▶ STEP 3 — ASSIGN OWNERSHIP

One person. In writing. Before the incident. Not a department — a named individual.

EOP	EMP	ERP / ICS	EAP
Emergency Management Director <i>Signs off. Reviews annually.</i>	EM Coordinator or Deputy <i>Maintains & updates.</i>	Operations or Safety Manager <i>Activates & trains.</i>	HR Director or Facilities Mgr <i>OSHA accountable.</i>

▶ STEP 4 — COMMUNICATE TO LEADERSHIP

Use these four sentences to brief any audience in under two minutes.

EOP	Frame it: Our EOP sets the legal authority and overall strategy — it rarely changes and governs everything else.
EMP	Connect it: Our EMP translates that strategy into program capabilities and multi-year planning priorities.
ERP	Ground it: Our ERPs and Pre-Incident Plans are the operational checklists that activate when an incident occurs.
EAP	Close it: Our EAPs are facility-level evacuation documents — OSHA-required, building-specific, owned by HR.

▶ STEP 5 — VERIFY ALIGNMENT BEFORE THE NEXT INCIDENT

Tick each box. If you cannot, that is your gap.

<input type="checkbox"/> Every planning document has a named owner — a person, not a department
<input type="checkbox"/> Scope boundaries are written and agreed, not assumed
<input type="checkbox"/> All documents have been reconciled against at least one external standard (FEMA CPG 101, ISO 22320, or NFPA 1600)
<input type="checkbox"/> Leadership has been briefed on the taxonomy in a structured session
<input type="checkbox"/> The terminology model was tested in the last tabletop exercise
<input type="checkbox"/> New hires are onboarded into the shared planning taxonomy on day one
<input type="checkbox"/> A written definition of each document type exists and is accessible to all staff

▶ COMMON PITFALLS TO AVOID

The pitfall	The fix
"The department owns this plan" A department cannot make decisions in an incident. A person can.	Name one person. Write it down.
"Everyone knows what ERP means" They don't. Fire, civilian EM, and oil & gas each carry a different model.	Define it in writing. Test it in your next tabletop.
"We aligned to ICS — that's the plan" ICS is a command structure, not a governance document. The EOP is still needed.	Layer them: EOP governs → EMP organises → ERP activates → EAP protects.
"Our MOU covers mutual aid coordination" A signed MOU without shared terminology creates misalignment when it activates.	Attach a shared taxonomy appendix to every mutual aid agreement.

Sources: FEMA CPG 101 v3.0 (2021) · ISO 22320: Emergency Management (2018) · NFPA 1600 (2022) · OSHA 29 CFR 1910.38