



# Washington State Patrol

**Pandemic After-Action Review  
Agency Input**

## Executive Summary

On May 18, 2021, the Washington State Legislature enacted Engrossed Substitute Senate Bill 5092 into law, authorizing and appropriating the state budget for the fiscal biennium beginning July 1, 2021 and ending June 30, 2023. Included in this legislation was a budget proviso appropriated to the Washington State Military Department for \$251,000 in fiscal year 2022 and \$250,000 in fiscal year 2023 to facilitate a task force to conduct a comprehensive after-action review of the statewide pandemic response and recovery.

The Pandemic After-Action Review Task Force is co-chaired by Secretary Umair A. Shah of the Department of Health and Major General Bret D. Daugherty of the Military Department, and composed of various stakeholders identified in the authorizing legislation (see appendix A for task force membership). A critical component to the statewide pandemic response was our state's activation of the Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan (CEMP) and concurrent activation of the State Emergency Operations Center (SEOC). Through the CEMP and SEOC, state agencies and departments were directed by the Governor to utilize state resources and to do everything reasonably possible to assist affected subdivisions in an effort to respond to and recover from the outbreak. To collect feedback from the agencies involved in the response, the Task Force has requested that agencies submit input, lessons learned, and key recommendations to the Task Force by March 9, 2022.

This report represents the Washington State Patrol's (WSP) response to that request and includes the following:

- Agency Impacts
- Strengths
- Areas for Improvement
- Follow up Actions, and
- Appendices and other reference material

As with other emergencies and disasters, the strength of our response was the strength of our employees. Our employees—from our frontline troopers to our back office professional staff—adapted, overcame, and responded in admirable and remarkable ways that truly exemplified our agency's motto of *Service with Humility*. This report represents a snapshot of that in time and there are many things that we are still learning along the way as we near the second year of the pandemic. It is our hope that these after-action review items will inform the Task Force's report and also strengthen our agency's current and future responses to the ongoing incident.

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## **Agency Impacts**

### **Internal**

**Impacts were felt within the patrol in several waves. The initial impacts (March - September 2020) from the pandemic and guidance in Washington's Safe Start plan under Phase One included:**

- Troopers transitioned from proactive to reactive patrolling, primarily responding when notified of a possible criminal or significant public safety hazard as traffic declined sharply early on in the pandemic.
- Employees that were traditionally in an office setting were outfitted to telework.
- Employees that still required an in-person presence adopted new check in procedures and temperature checks.
- The agency's Incident Management Team (IMT) was activated not only for the pandemic to coordinate information and prioritize resources but also for the Line of Duty Death of Trooper Justin Schaffer on March 24, 2020. The memorial service was delayed by four months until Phase Three of the Safe Start plan. In addition to simultaneous incidents, this was the first time the IMT had to function in a 100% virtual environment.
- WSP relied on Office of Financial Management (OFM), State Human Resources, and State Department of Health (DOH) for pandemic related guidance for our personnel.

**As the incident stabilized, there was less of a focus on incident response and a continued focus on the health, safety, and wellness of employees. (October 2020 – May 2021)**

- The vacancies in high demand sections exacerbated some remaining employees' feelings of COVID fatigue and burnout. The agency prioritized filling many of the vacant positions to better support employees and provide relief.
- Outbreaks among districts and divisions caused disruptions and delays. The Executive Staff encouraged and remained supportive of increased safety measures and telework when possible.
- Once vaccines became available, the agency coordinated and shared information from the DOH. This information included when employees were eligible to get vaccinated as well as sites and dates of vaccination clinics, and resources for more localized information.

**The term "new normal" was adopted, as a way of coping with mandates and expectations. (June 2021 – Present)**

- 126 employees chose not to comply with the vaccination mandate and 25 more retired or took positions out of state service to avoid it.
- The agency made employee assistance programs available for employees to cope with the mandate and its effects.
- On September 26, 2021 the agency experienced its second Line of Duty Death of Trooper Detective Eric Gunderson. This was the first loss to the agency as a direct result of the pandemic.

## **External**

**The SEOC's Joint Information Center (JIC) allowed for coordinated communication regarding "stay at home" orders and the role that law enforcement played in helping to educate and inform the public about the orders.**

- Early in the pandemic, there was concern and misunderstanding regarding how law enforcement would enforce isolation and quarantine. In coordination with JIC partners (including DOH, the Washington Association of Sheriffs and Police Chiefs (WASPC), and the Washington State Emergency Management Division), WSP helped to communicate statewide messaging that law enforcement would not be "checking papers" or detaining people for violating isolation or quarantine orders. Instead, law enforcement throughout the state would serve as another voice to communicate and educate the public on what the orders mean and why they are important.

**In the early stages of the pandemic, there was little information on how the virus was transmitted. Because of the unknown risks of person-to-person transmission, a lack of personal protective equipment, and early indications that the virus could be transmitted through viral airborne respiration, WSP adopted a reactive response posture that prioritized employee and public safety over proactive law enforcement activities.**

- During this time, patrol vehicles were still highly visible throughout the state, serving as a visible deterrent and remaining immediately available for calls for service.
- Less proactive law enforcement reduced WSP's face-to-face interactions with the public.
- WSP prioritized injury collisions and responding to calls for service.

**WSP provided security to critical infrastructure as requested by the Washington State Department of Health and other public safety partners.**

- WSP provided security to the DOH Incident Command Post (public health lab) in Shoreline.
- WSP provided security to the Department of Enterprise Services warehouse in Tumwater.
- WSP provided security at DOH isolation and quarantine facilities.

**In accordance with Governor Inslee's "Stay Home, Stay Healthy" order, WSP closed public-facing offices and transitioned to providing public services in a virtual environment.**

Prior to the pandemic, most WSP offices were open to the public for in-person services. As state and local health officials advised and required limited public interaction, WSP adjusted the way that some of its services were provided to the public. This included closing some offices to the public, requiring appointments for some in-person activities, and transitioning other services to online or phone.

## **Interagency**

From the beginning of the pandemic, WSP was, and continues to be, involved in interagency communication and coordination through the SEOC. This served as an effective venue for multiagency coordination with key partners and stakeholders. In addition, with district offices located throughout the state, WSP works closely with city and county officials, federal partners, and other state agencies on a daily basis to improve public safety.

## **Agency Involvement in Key Areas**

The legislation authorizing the creation of the task force instructed the task force to review and respond to eight key topics of the response. Not all eight of these topics were applicable to state agencies, and they will be addressed by other key stakeholders. WSP identified one topic that it could provide input and feedback on: (A) aspects of the COVID-19 response that may inform future pandemics and all-hazards responses.

### **(A) Aspects of the COVID-19 response that may inform future pandemic and all-hazards responses:**

The single most valuable tool throughout this pandemic has been timely communication. Having open and continuous communication has been vital to the health and safety of employees.

During this time, a COVID resource page was set up on the WSP intranet homepage as an ongoing resource for the most up-to-date information for employees. The page has links to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidance, Washington State guidance, and reporting requirements. Having an accessible resource page to reference for future incidents will serve the agency well in ensuring all personnel has access to information when needed.

This agency has proven its ability to be flexible in the face of a pandemic. Never before has the agency needed to adapt in this way and rose to the occasion. Troopers are able to function 100% out of their patrol cars when necessary and many civil service employees are able to perform their duties, at least part time, from home, during disasters and potentially long-term. This allows the agency to be better prepared during any disaster or incident in the future to continue serving the people of Washington with less disruption.

## Strengths

- 1. Activation of the agency's IMT proved highly effective to coordinate information sharing, resource management, and Continuity of Operations (COOP) implementation.**
  - Previous investments in planning, training, equipping, and organizing the WSP IMT yielded dividends in the agency's ability to quickly adapt and respond to the incident.
  - The IMT served as a central hub in the agency for collecting, analyzing, and distributing information from Executive Staff, the DOH, and the CDC.
  - At the beginning of the pandemic, there were greater needs for Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), such as N95 masks and nitrile gloves, than there were supplies available. The IMT helped to determine resource needs, source supplies, and sort and prioritize distribution within the agency. This helped to ensure equitable distribution of PPE across the agency.
  - The WSP COOP Plan provided an initial framework for the agency to understand the most critical functions the agency needed to continue and which activities could be suspended. The Concept of Operations for COOP Plan activation is that the IMT would be stood up at the same time that the COOP is activated. The IMT assisted district and division commanders with understanding the COOP Plan, how it could be used, the limitations of the plan, and the authority of districts/divisions to operationalize the COOP Plan for their respective areas of command.
  
- 2. Emergency adoption of telework enhanced the agency's ability to keep key business processes functioning.**
  - Many key positions throughout the agency transitioned from desktop to laptop or tablet computers in recent years. This allowed for greater mobility of the workforce, enhanced Continuity of Operations, and teleworking.
  - WSP was able to quickly procure Zoom licenses to allow employees the opportunity to videoconference and was able to deploy laptops to those with assigned desktops.
  
- 3. As with all incident management activities within WSP, employee safety was given the first and highest priority.**
  - At the onset of the pandemic there were many unknowns about the COVID-19 virus and how it was transmitted from person to person. The agency's response posture adjusted accordingly, prioritizing employee safety over proactive law enforcement in the beginning, and scaling response activities as better information, personal protective equipment, and other safety measures were put into place later on.
  - WSP integrated the agency's Industrial Hygienist into IMT activities, and decisions regarding safety, wellness, and PPE were first assessed by the Industrial Hygienist through the lens of employee safety.
  
- 4. Existing interagency relationships created a more coordinated, consistent, and effective response.**
  - WSP is geographically divided into eight different districts. Within these districts, district and division commanders--and their teams--have developed strong ties with communities, stakeholders, and response partners. These existing relationships allowed for an integrated response to the pandemic. For instance, district commanders regularly met with local police chiefs and sheriffs to understand and develop mutual solutions to common issues such as booking

suspects, providing backup, and consistent messaging in regards to law enforcement actions around quarantine and stay-at-home orders.

- Several districts have developed strong relationships with city and county emergency management offices. Throughout the pandemic (and during winter weather, protests, wildfires, and other emergencies), many districts have sent Field Operations Bureau sergeants to serve as liaisons to city and county Emergency Operations Centers. This allowed for a better integrated and more effective response, as WSP worked side-by-side with city and county officials.
- To help coordinate law enforcement actions and considerations on a statewide level, WSP worked closely with WASPC and also filled a policy role at the SEOC in the Advance Planning Section. This allowed for consistent and coordinated actions and communication regarding law enforcement's role in supporting non-pharmaceutical interventions.



## **Areas for Improvement**

### **1. Coordinated and timely communication across state government.**

- Information in the COOP Plan did not address a pandemic response, but was a starting point. There is a need to expand the COOP Plan to include more pandemic specific information, to include telework capability, exposure degrees, and another look at what essential means in the context of a pandemic.
- All agencies relied on information initiated by DOH, State HR, or OFM. This allowed for unity of messaging, which was exceptionally helpful, but also created timeliness challenges for employers and employees. This is expected in an emerging health emergency like a pandemic, when we have not faced this kind of a response in recent history.

### **2. WSP's COOP Plan could be enhanced to provide more procedural and tactical guidance and recommendations for a pandemic.**

- The WSP COOP Plan is a strategic framework and guide for managers in the agency to identify Mission Essential Functions that must be continued under all circumstances. As such, it served as a guiding document for the agency during the early stages of the pandemic on what needed to be continued and what could be suspended or delayed. It did not, however, identify how those activities would be continued. Future COOP Plan updates could include guidance on operationalizing the continuity of Mission Essential Functions to provide a playbook that includes both “what to do” and “how to do it.”
- There were many questions throughout the pandemic that were human resources questions that applied to state employees in general (not just WSP employees). Guidance from OFM and State Human Resources that was developed during the pandemic could be incorporated into an annex in the COOP Plan for future pandemics.

## **Follow up Actions**

- Provide tools and resources for command and executive staff to institutionalize continuity throughout programs.
- Establish COOP Plan annex on pandemics to guide future responses.

**APPENDIX A:**

**Pandemic After-Action Review Task Force Membership**

The task force is composed of representatives from the following:

The two largest caucuses of the Senate	Federally Recognized Tribes
The two largest caucuses of the House of Representatives	Washington Association of Sheriffs and Police Chiefs
Department of Health (co-chair)	Pharmacy Quality Assurance Commission
Military Department (co-chair)	Association of Washington Businesses
Employment Security Department	Health Care Authority
Department of Financial Institutions	Office of the Governor
Office of the Insurance Commissioner	Association of Washington Cities
Department of Social and Health Services	Emergency and Transitional Housing
Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction	Statewide Association of Physicians
Department of Labor and Industries	Statewide Association of Nurses
Department of Commerce	Statewide Association of Hospitals
Department of Enterprise Services	Up to 10 members representing demographic groups that have been disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, that include, but are not limited to individuals of different race, class, gender, ethnicity, and immigration status.
Department of Transportation	
Department of Licensing	
Education Services	
Leisure and Hospitality Industries	
Manufacturing and Trade Industries	
Community Health Centers	
Local Public Health Officials	
Local Emergency Management (west)	
Local Emergency Management (east)	
Office of Financial Management	