According to the FEMA National Response Framework (NRF), a common operating picture (COP) is “a continuously updated overview of an incident compiled throughout an incident's life cycle from data shared between integrated systems for communication, information management, and intelligence and information sharing.” In short, a COP achieves real-time situational awareness across all levels of incident management and jurisdictions. A COP can provide emergency operations centers, incident commanders, and response personnel accurate and timely information concerning equipment distribution, location of personnel, on-site intelligence, and incident mapping when responding to and managing an incident.

The National Incident Management System (NIMS) and NRF suggest that agencies develop a COP for responding to a large-scale incident or an incident involving multiple agencies. Specifically, the NRF states that local governments should “gain and maintain situational awareness” in their response actions during a crisis event. Developing a COP system which incorporates advanced technology such as mapping tools, sensors, and video feeds, can improve incident response by dramatically enhancing information sharing, situational awareness, and data transfer during emergency incidents.

To assist emergency responders in developing a COP for their jurisdiction, the Space and Naval Warfare Systems Center (SPAWARSYSCEN), Charleston, has prepared the Creating a Common Operating Picture for Emergency Responders TechNote and the Common Operating Picture Systems and Tools in Action Application Note. These reports are available on the SAVER Web site (https://www.rkb.us/SAVER).

Example of a COP System Portal