


Emergency Management & Safety Solutions



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Preparing the BEST  
Tabletop Exercise

October 2009

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## Agenda

- Review exercise design basics
  - You will be developing your own exercise outline as we progress.
- Participate in a pandemic exercise

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## A few definitions...

- What are you exercising?
  - Emergency response versus ...?
  - Business continuity versus ...?
  - Disaster recovery versus ...?
- Terminology
  - "Exercise" versus "test."

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## What is an emergency exercise?

- An activity designed to promote emergency and business preparedness.
- An exercise consists of the performance of duties, tasks, and operations very similar to the way they would be performed in a real emergency.

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## Who should do an exercise?

- Any company that wants to be prepared for a possible emergency, disaster, or other event.
- Any company that wants to see if their plans work.

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## What are the benefits?

- Evaluate the communication between different groups.
- Assess the allocation of resources and manpower.
- Assess the adequacy of current procedures and policies.
- Determine overlaps and holes in planning.
- Clarify roles and responsibilities.
- Improve individual performance.
- Motivate employees.
- Build confidence.
- Increase general awareness of proficiencies, deficiencies and gaps.

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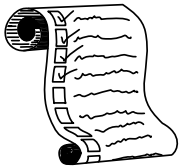
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## Types of exercises



- Orientation
- Drill
- Tabletop
- Functional
- Full-scale

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## Orientation exercise

- Introduces the participants to the plans and procedures.
- Introduce new plans or revise the old.
- Requires no previous experience.
- Helps orient new staff or leadership.
- Planning cycle: one month.
- Exercise time: 60-90 minutes.

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## Orientation exercise example

- Review new plan or changes to a plan at a staff or department meeting.
- Use simple scenarios as a way to make it more interesting.

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## Drills

- A test of a single emergency response function.
- Involves actual field response.
- Practice or test under realistic conditions.
- Involve all levels of responders.
- Planning cycle: one month.
- Exercise time: 10-60 minutes.

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## Drill examples

- Fire drill
- Radio exercise
- Tornado exercise
- Earthquake (“drop and cover”)

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## Tabletop exercise

- Two types of tabletops:
  - Basic: Seeks to solve problems in a group setting via brainstorming.
  - Advanced: Includes the introduction of inputs and exercise assistants who can answer questions.

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## Tabletop exercise basics

- Characterized by being a bit more realistic and a tad more stressful.
- Exercise time – 3 hours (minimum).
  - Briefing time: 30 mins.
  - Exercise time: 2 hours.
  - Debriefing: 30 mins.
- Planning cycle: two months.

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## Tabletop exercise options

- Basic
  - Simple narrative.
  - May have several additional inputs to exercise.
  - Format:
    - Introduce concepts, topic and narrative (15 mins).
    - Divide into groups (if applicable) have them discuss the top issues, select a spokesperson (45 mins).
    - Report out (10 mins per group).
    - Debrief (30 mins).

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## Tabletop exercise options

- Advanced
  - More detailed narrative.
  - Inputs to exercise.
  - Simulation Team acting as outside world.
  - Format:
    - Introductions, goal(s), objectives, exercise briefing (30 mins).
    - Exercise (2 hours).
    - Debriefing (30 mins to one hour).

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## Tabletop exercise options

- **Leader led**
  - Detailed narrative.
  - Inputs delivered via a facilitator with each group for a more focused discussion.
  - **Format:**
    - Introductions, goal(s), objectives, exercise briefing (30 mins)
    - Exercise with inputs delivered by a facilitator at each group (2 hours).
    - Debriefing (30 mins to one hour).

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## Tabletop exercise options

- **Learning “the big three” by repetition**
  - Initial Assessment Team process.
  - Action planning.
  - Roles and responsibilities.
  - **Format:**
    - Detailed narrative
    - Introductions, goal(s), objectives, exercise briefing (30 mins).
    - Initial Assessment Team meeting (15 - 30 mins).
    - Action Planning Meeting (15 - 30 mins).
    - Teams work on assigned objectives (1 hour).
    - Teams report out (10 mins per group).
    - Second action planning meeting (15 - 30 mins).
    - Debriefing (30 mins to one hour).

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## Functional exercises

- Exercise is fully simulated. Participants perform the activities.
- Involves more participants: simulators, observer/evaluators, bigger design team.
- Introduction of sophisticated inputs and other media.
- Planning cycle: two to four months.
- Time: Briefing (30 mins); exercise (3 – 4 hours); debriefing (45 - 60 mins).

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## Full-scale exercises

- Actual mobilization of field personnel and resources, and the actual movement of emergency response teams, equipment, and resources.
- Events are in real time, complex, and detailed.
- Highly stressful, rigid time schedule.
- Expensive.
- Planning cycle: four months minimum.
- Exercise time: 2 – 8 hours.

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## Sample orientation exercise agenda

- 8:30 - 9:00: Coffee
- 9:00 - 9:15: Introductions, goal(s), Objectives
- 9:15 - 10:45: Review plan
- 10:45 - 11:00: Break
- 11:00 - 1:00 PM: Orientation exercise and working lunch

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## Typical half-day exercise agenda

- 8:30 - 9:00: Coffee
- 9:00 - 9:30: Introductions, goal(s), Objectives, Exercise briefing
- 9:30 - 11:30: Exercise
- 11:30 - 11:45: Break
- 11:45 - 1:00 PM: Debriefing over lunch

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## Typical full-day exercise agenda

### Morning

- 8:30 - 9:00: Coffee
- 9:00 - 9:30: Introductions, goal(s), Objectives, Exercise briefing
- 9:30 - 11:30: Exercise
- 11:30 - 11:45: Exec Briefing
- 11:45 - 12:30 PM: Debriefing over lunch
- 12:30 - 1:00 PM: Plan revisions

### Afternoon

- 1:00 - 3:00: Exercise #2
- 3:00 - 3:15: Exec Briefing
- 3:15 - 3:30: Press conference
- 3:30 - 3:45: Break
- 3:45 - 4:20: Debriefing
- 4:20 - 4:30: Next steps and thanks

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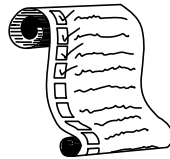
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## It all starts with the planning...

- The devil is in the details. Exercises are about detailed planning.
- What you need is a great design team!




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## Start with the design team

- Who should be on it?
  - Strong knowledge of the overall business.
  - A depth of knowledge in their area or department.
  - Examples: Facilities person who really knows the buildings; MIS person who knows all the servers.
- How many?
  - 5-7 committed individuals (maybe more).

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## Design team

- Creative, works well under pressure
- Detailed
- Keeps on schedule and on track
- Willing to question and push back
- Good at keeping a secret!
- Will not be participating in the exercise on the response team

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## Design team model

- Three to four meetings
- From 90 minutes to two hours each session:
  - Meeting #1 - Review exercise basics, goal(s), objectives, narrative exercise #1. Discuss possible inputs, give homework assignment.
  - Meeting #2 - Review homework, validate inputs, review exercise plan #2, issue next homework.
  - Meeting #3 - Review homework, discuss simulation and exercise process.
  - Meeting #4 - May be necessary for more complex exercises.

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## Decision point

- Who is on your design team?

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## The exercise plan

- Exercise goal(s)
- Objectives
- Scope
- Artificialities and assumptions
- Instructions to participants
- Narrative
- Communication directory

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## Exercise goal(s)

- Brief and clearly stated goal(s) of what you want the exercise to accomplish.
- Exercise goals – along with objectives – drive the exercise and keep you on track.

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## Sample exercise goals

- To assess the ability of the EOC to manage a company-wide event.
- To assess the EOC's ability to respond to a regional disaster.
- To assess the ability of the Corporate Crisis Management team to manage an emergency at a distant mission-critical location.

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## Decision point

- What is the initial goal (or goals) for your exercise?

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## Exercise objectives

- Clear, measurable objectives.
- At least 3 - 5 overall objectives.
- May be additional objectives for a specific function of an EOC, a department, location, or other entity.

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## Exercise objectives

- Establish the direction of the exercise.
- Control the direction of the inputs.
- Narrow the scope of the exercise plan.
- Keep the exercise and participants on track.
- Are used to evaluate the exercise.
- Help to identify follow-up needs, improvements and to do lists.

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## Writing objectives

- Simple
- Concise
- Measurable (when possible)
- Achievable
- Realistic and challenging

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## Sample objectives

- Notify employees of status with company 800# within <<??>> minutes of the EOC instructions.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of the shelter-in-place protocol.
- Determine if the BIA has captured the significant company risks.
- Assess the notification system and the timely response of the team to receive the communication and go to the bridge line (less than <<??>> minutes).
- Restore tapes within 24 hrs of arriving at hot site.

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## Decision point

- Write two objectives that support the goal(s) of your exercise.

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## What is the scope?

- Determine the scope of your exercise.  
This could include:
  - Functions you want to exercise.
  - Departments involved.
  - Personnel involved.
  - Geographical area.

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## Sample scope statements

- Full EOC activation (or partial).
- Corporate EOC activated, all other company locations are simulated.
- Tabletop exercise using pre-scripted inputs.

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## Decision point

- What is the initial scope of your exercise?

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## Exercise narrative

- The narrative prepares participants for the exercise.
- This is the overview of the event, the beginning of the movie.
  - Describes the environment at the time of the exercise.
  - Provides necessary background information.

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## Narrative checklist

- Things to consider:
  - Precipitating event: Realistic.
  - Discovery: How do you find out?
  - Details: Time, location, extent of damage.
  - Sequence of events.
  - Initial damage report (if possible).
  - Weather conditions.
  - Did it just happen? Or is this in progress?

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## What are some possibilities?

- Go to your hazard analysis of the area.
- Review your business impact analysis.
- What are the *likely events* that will deliver the *best scenario* that will exercise the groups you wish to include?
  - Examples: Earthquake, regional flooding, wildfires, hurricane, multiple hacker attacks at multiple sites, airline crash.

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## Decision point

- What are at least three potential hazards/events/disasters for your exercise?

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## Any issues in particular?

- Any areas/plans/groups you are concerned about? Consider recent changes in people, plans, processes, equipment.
- Any known weaknesses you wish to explore? New plans or no plans? New staff or uninterested managers?
- Off-hours: Evening or weekend exercise.
- Move the clock forward.
- Introduce shift changes.
- 12-hour shifts.
- Exercise with backup team, using primary staff as exercise Design Team, Sim Team, and Observer or Evaluators.

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## Example of a narrative

- A major earthquake struck at 9 AM. The epicenter has not yet been determined.
- Electric power and phones are out. Your emergency generator did not turn on.
- The shaking was severe, causing glass and windows to break and furniture to topple.
- You hear moans and screams of employees.
- You do not know the status of your building or the city.

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## Decision point

- Write out your idea for your narrative.

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## Artificialities and assumptions

- Determine the exercise artificialities and assumptions.
- You must clearly lay out the ground rules of what people can assume, and provide clear instructions about what is indeed going on.
  - If you don't, people will invent their own story, which may not be in line with yours.

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## Artificialities

- Equipment, procedures, standard operating procedures or conditions that are necessary to conduct the exercise but exist only for the purpose of the exercise. Examples:
  - The weather is hot and humid; temperatures will exceed 100 degrees.
  - For purpose of the exercise, today is <<future date>>.
  - <<Named person(s)>> is/are on vacation and not available,
  - The only valid phone numbers are those in the communications directory.

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## Assumptions

- Those design criteria that further define the scope of the exercise by placing assumed limits on the participants. These points answer nagging questions and those that would hold up the exercise. Examples:
  - The city will be isolated for 24 hours.
  - The telephone systems are operating normally.
  - All employees who are “supposed to come to work” show up.

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## Decision point

- Write two artificialities and assumptions.

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## Share with a classmate

- Share your narrative ideas with others for feedback and some new thoughts!



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## Input/Inject development

- Inputs or injects are the “drivers” in the exercise.
  - Inputs drive the exercise, expose unresolved issues, and address the objectives.
- Describes the disaster environment and/or situation.
- Stimulates the participants to action.

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## Input/Inject development

- Can escalate an initial (primary) problem and/or create secondary or tertiary problems.
  - Primary event: Earthquake.
  - Secondary event: Building collapse.
  - Tertiary event: Building fire.

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## Input/Inject action

- Inputs should influence action in at least one of four ways:
  - Verification: Information gathering.
  - Consideration: Discussion, consultation.
  - Deferral: Place on priority list.
  - Decision: Deploy or deny resources.

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## Input/Inject components

- Time: What time is it to be delivered?
- Who: Source of the input (the “caller”)
- Mode: Method of input transmission.
- To Whom: Who is the recipient?
- What: Content of Input.
- Keep inputs on a spreadsheet so you can sort by location, time, type of event, etc..

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## Input/Inject categories

- People: Employees, contractors, public
- Business issues
- Technology issues
- Facility issues
- Media
- Other locations
- Vendors
- Supply chain disruption
- Ex-pat issues
- Investor concerns
- Other key partners
- Lifeline failures (roads, utilities, government)

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## Input/Inject delivery

- May be delivered by:
  - Phone
  - Walkie-talkie
  - Fax
  - Email
  - Radio broadcast
  - Video
  - Runner
  - Actor playing a role

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## Input/Inject examples

- This is the security guard at the main desk. There is a strong smell of gas in the lobby. What should I do?
- This is the floor warden on the 22nd floor. Employees are asking if they should go home or stay. Is there any food and water here at work if we have to spend the night?

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## The cast of characters

- Recruit and train lots of volunteers!
  - Design Team.
  - Exercise facilitator.
  - Simulation Team.
  - Observer/Evaluators.

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## Exercise realism - make it real!



- Radio broadcasts
- Press releases
- Maps
- Video footage
- Faxes
- Electronic messages
- Newspaper articles
- Use of actors

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# The Big Day

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## Exercise Facilitator

- Review all the major points: timelines, key inputs, contact information at all facilities.
- Have an assistant, if possible.
- Provide cell, pager, and landline numbers to be reached.
- Float. Don't get into active problem-solving. Delegate! Hang loose!
- Pray! It's out of your control now!

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## Sim Team members

- Have fun!
- Stay in role!
- Don't be too crazy!
- Check with the Facilitator if there are any questions.

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## Observer/Evaluators

- Observe participants in the key roles.
- Look at situation boards and forms.
- Look at reports.
- Talk with participants.
- Attend briefings.
- Follow the key inputs as they come into the EOC to see how they are handled.

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## Exercise briefing

- Exercise plans in advance? Depends.
- Directly before the exercise begins, the Facilitator reviews the exercise plan with the participants and answers all questions.
- If using AV, it's helpful to start with something to impart realism (radio broadcast, web video, etc).
- At conclusion of briefing, give them a few minutes to get in place and begin.

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**Get out of the way!**

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## Exercise debriefing

- Purpose:
  - To review and evaluate the exercise.
  - To provide feedback.
  - To review lessons learned from the exercise.
- Very important to do!

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## Exercise debriefing

- General feedback from all participants on what worked and what didn't work.
- Note issues of command, control, coordination, and communication.
- Have each function chair report on their group.
- Observer/Evaluators and Sim Team share their observations.

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## Debriefing guidelines

- This debriefing should be quick – no more than an hour.
- Exercise Facilitator facilitates the session.
- Even though everyone will be tired, there will be tremendous value from doing this immediately after the exercise.
- You only need to ask two questions:
  - 1. What worked?
  - 2. What didn't?

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## Participant written evaluation

- Perceived value of the exercise. Overall reaction to the experience.
- Adequacy of the existing plan.
- Exercise itself.
- Need for further training and exercises.
- Suggestions for improvement.

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## Written report (“after action”)

- A written report should minimally include:
  - Executive summary.
  - Recommendations.
  - Facilitator observations.
  - Debrief notes.
  - Observer/Evaluator comments.
- Complete within 14 working days and distribute to all participants.

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## THANK YOU!

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