



## **Emergency Exercises**

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### **THE MOST IMPORTANT ASPECT OF YOUR PLANNING EFFORT**

Do you have a plan but have not yet tested it? You might discover that your document is less than sufficient. There is really only two ways to find that out. One is to have an actual disaster; the other is to do an exercise. The latter is usually a better learning experience and certainly a lot less stressful! Emergency Management & Safety Solutions can help you achieve success in your exercise program.

### **What is an Exercise?**

Exercises consist of the performance of duties, tasks, or operations very similar to the way they would be performed in a real emergency. An exercise can test or evaluate emergency operation plans, procedures or facilities. The exercise performance is in response to a simulated event.

### **Why Exercise?**

Planners often have to build a case to management to conduct exercise. Exercises will provide you with a wealth of information regarding the viability of your plan. Benefits include:

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

## **Exercise Design Team**

Who should be on the team? Participants need to have a strong knowledge of the overall business and the functions that will be exercised. How many members do you need? It depends on the complexity of the exercise. It may be two to five committed individuals. For a very complex activity, you may need more. Desirable team qualities include:

- A depth of knowledge in their area or department. For example a facilities person who really knows the buildings or a MIS person who knows the network.
- Overly agreeable team members aren't helpful; you need someone who will push back on ideas.
- Creative, works well under pressure.
- Detailed, keeps on schedule and on track.
- Good at keeping a secret!
- Will not be participating in the exercise.

## **Types Of Exercises**

There are five types of exercises. When you first begin, start with an orientation exercise and then progress to a tabletop. Beginning with a more complicated exercise than the group can handle can act as a deterrent to future participation and a real de-motivator.

### Orientation Exercise

- No previous experience
- New plan
- New staff or leadership

The orientation is relatively easy to conduct and serves the dual purpose of familiarization and motivation. This involves bringing those together who are part of the plan or procedures. Orientations are usually informal, last an hour and have a planning cycle of 30 days.

### Drills

- Test a single emergency response function
- Involve actual field response
- Practice or test under realistic conditions

A drill is an activity that tests, develops or maintains skills for a single emergency response procedure. A common example is a fire, radio or earthquake drill.

### Tabletop Exercise

- Provides a vehicle to practice problem solving in a group.
- Team building.
- Familiarizes departments with their specific roles.
- Continue to work and revise plans.

The tabletop exercise begins with a simulated event that is described in a narrative. Participants respond to a set of problems related to the emergency. The basic version seeks to solve problems in a group setting via brainstorming. Discussion takes place amongst the participants to solve problems presented using resources available to them. A more advanced tabletop will include the introduction of messages and exercise assistants. The exercise assistants act as the “world” and participants who want additional information go to the assistants in the room to ask specific questions. This assists in the problem solving aspect of the activity. The planning cycle is two to three months. The exercise time can be two to 4 hours with a 30 – 60 minute debriefing.

### Functional Exercises

- Assess the allocation of resources and manpower.
- Evaluate the communication between the different groups.
- Assess the adequacy of current procedures and policies.
- Exercise is fully simulated.

A functional exercise is a fully simulated activity. Participants actually perform the activities that are required in the plan although the work happens within the confines of the exercise room. This type of exercise involves more participants: simulators, evaluators and a bigger design team. It also includes the introduction of sophisticated messages and other media. This can include news video footage, radio broadcasts, faxes, newspaper articles or actors. The simulation (sim) team is the main driver of the exercise. The Sim team delivers all messages. This closes the communication loop, as all problems must be resolved by speaking to a Sim team member. The functional exercise is stressful by the escalating messages, increasing in frequency and complexity. The planning cycle is three to four months. The exercise time can be two to 4 hours with a 30 – 60 minute debriefing.

### Full-Scale Exercise

- Evaluates the operational capability of systems in an interactive manner over a substantial period of time.
- Coordination of information
- Communication capabilities
- Interdepartmental cooperation

- Negotiation skills
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A full-scale exercise involves the mobilization of personnel and resources and the actual movement of emergency response teams, equipment and resources. It evaluates the operational capability of emergency management systems in an interactive manner over a substantial period of time. Events are complex and detailed. Full-scale exercises are highly stressful, extremely expensive and have a rigid time schedule. The planning cycle is often over six months to plan.

### **Who Should Participate In The Exercise?**

It will depend on what type of plan you are exercising. Options include your Emergency Operating Center (EOC) members, critical business units, or specific departments such as Facilities or Communications. Be sure you have the key players involved.

### **Where To Begin?**

#### Obtain Commitment to Participate

Begin the planning by gaining commitment for the activity. This includes:

- Solicit top management support
- Prepare directive signed by top management
- Determine resource needs
- Obtain commitment for critical dates
- Form an exercise design team
- Develop a timeline

#### Define the Exercise

Explore the following questions to define the activity?

- What operations do you want to test?
- Who do you want to involve?
- What hazards do you anticipate?
- What are the geographical boundaries?
- How real do you want it to be?
- What is your budget?

#### Define the Purpose

What is the purpose of the exercise? The purpose states broadly what you want to accomplish in the exercise

## Define Objectives

Define clear objectives that are then used to evaluate the exercise.

## **A Word About Failure**

Failure in an exercise is a good thing! If you always have “great exercises” (i.e. you don’t make any mistakes) you are missing the point. There is nothing wrong about making mistakes, the learning is in making mistakes and finding a new way to manage the issue. Encourage your group to make their mistakes now, not later...it’s a good thing!

## **Now What?**

Get management buy-in, assemble a design team and get going! If your group is new to exercises, start with an orientation exercise and then progress to more complicated activities. Many companies work with consulting firms that specialize in exercise development. This can sometimes save you time and money and you benefit from their rich experience. Remember a plan that is never exercised is like a paperweight – instead of giving you guidance, it instead can weight you down!

## **AUTHOR INFORMATION**

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Conduct an average of 40 exercises per year in corporate settings. Clients are primarily Fortune 1000 companies.

**Supply a short bio of the author, about 30 words in length.** Regina Phelps is an internationally recognized expert in the field of emergency management and contingency planning. With over 18 years of experience, she has providing consultation and speaking services to clients in four continents