



Emergency Preparedness Exercises

What are Emergency Preparedness Exercises?

Emergency preparedness exercises are a way to test and improve upon emergency preparedness plans. Exercises give participants a detailed scenario and clear and measurable objectives for their response. In this way, exercises help assess the clarity and feasibility of existing plans and identify areas for improvement.

Why are Emergency Preparedness Exercises in Public Health Preparedness?

Emergency preparedness exercises are an important part of public health preparedness. Exercises improve readiness for an emergency or disaster by evaluating plans, building teamwork between key stakeholders, and by increasing morale and perceptions of preparedness before an actual emergency. Exercises also allow planners to delegate responsibilities, find gaps in existing plans and available resources, and provide individual training opportunities for disaster response workers.

What are the Different Types of Emergency Preparedness Exercises?

Emergency preparedness exercises are either discussion-based or operations-based. These exercises each have a specific purpose for testing existing emergency preparedness plans.

The purpose of discussion-based exercises is to test or develop plans, policies, and procedures. There are 4 types of discussion-based exercises:

- **Seminars:** A seminar is an informal discussion, designed to familiarize participants with new or updated plans, policies, or procedures (e.g., a seminar to review a new evacuation plan).
- **Workshops:** A workshop is similar to a seminar, but is used to develop specific products, like a draft plan or policy (e.g., a training and exercise plan workshop is used to develop training and exercise plans).
- **Tabletop Exercises (TTX):** A tabletop exercise involves key personnel discussing simulated scenarios in an informal setting. TTXs can be used to assess plans, policies, and procedures.
- **Games:** A game is a simulation of operations that often involves two or more teams, usually in a competition. Games use rules, data, and procedure designed to depict an actual or assumed real-life situation.



A "victim" of a chemical spill training session is rescued by members of an area Emergency Medical Technician team. Win Henderson / FEMA ID 16931

The purpose of operations-based exercises is to test plans, policies and procedures to see if they work during an actual event. Operations-based exercises also clarify roles and responsibilities and identify gaps in existing plans. There are 3 types of operation-based exercises:

- **Drills:** A drill is a coordinated, supervised activity usually done to test a single, specific operation or function within a single agency (e.g., a fire department conducts a decontamination drill).
- **Functional Exercises (FE):** A functional exercise examines and/or validates the coordination, command, and control between various multi-agency coordination centers. A functional exercise does not involve any "boots on the ground" (i.e., first responders or emergency officials responding to an incident in real time).
- **Full-Scale Exercises (FSE):** A full-scale exercise is a multi-agency, multi-jurisdictional, multi-discipline exercise involving functional and "boots on the ground" response (e.g., communication between state and city officials, firefighters decontaminating mock victims, etc).

How do I Know What Type of Exercise is Right for My Community?

Exercises vary greatly in terms of cost, time, complexity, scope, and purpose. Choose an exercise that balances the resources that are available for preparedness training and gathering information of interest. It is best to start with simple discussion based exercises, and work towards more complex operations-based exercises over time.

Online Emergency Preparedness Exercise Resources for Public Health Professionals

- The Centers for Public Health Preparedness (CPHP) resource center provides exercise scenarios that you can use in your community: <http://www.asph.org/cphp/home.cfm>
- The Homeland Security Exercise and Evaluation Center (HSEEP) provides in-depth information on federal exercise guidelines and resources: <https://hseep.dhs.gov>
- FEMA IS120.A: An Introduction to Exercises is a self-guided online course which provides information on the basics of emergency preparedness exercises: <http://training.fema.gov/EMIWeb/IS/IS120A.asp>
- The Rand Public Health Preparedness database is a searchable tool with links to public health preparedness exercises: <http://www.rand.org/health/projects/php/>



YALE CENTER FOR PUBLIC HEALTH PREPAREDNESS

2 Church Street South, Suite 314
New Haven, CT 06519
Phone: 203-764-9713
E-mail: cphp@yale.edu

<http://publichealth.yale.edu/ycphp>
<http://blogs.yale.edu/roller/page/prepare>

This publication is funded through CDC Cooperative Agreement #U90/CCU124251-02. Its contents are the sole responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the CDC.

Mission: As part of a national network of Centers for Public Health Preparedness that are funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Yale Center for Public Health Preparedness, based at the Yale School of Public Health, works to ensure that frontline public health workers are prepared to respond to public health emergencies including natural disasters, acts of terrorism, and disease outbreaks.

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