

Emergency Preparedness: Emergency Exercise Plan

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NOVA SCOTIA HEALTH + COMMUNITY SERVICES SAFETY ASSOCIATION

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INTRODUCTION

One of the most important aspects of emergency preparedness is testing your plan to ensure what you have written will actually work in a real life situation. Most exercises follow a similar planning and execution process. The differences in exercises are primarily related to the type of emergency and the specific objectives of the exercise.

Remember, paramount to any exercise is ensuring it is done safely. The following document provides some general tips for emergency exercises – in addition there are various resources available to your Emergency Exercise Planning Committee including your local fire and emergency services and various emergency measures websites.

WHAT IS AN EMERGENCY EXERCISE?

An emergency exercise is a coordinated, controlled, simulation of an emergency event with the intention of testing a component (or components) of an emergency plan, to ensure they will function as designed in a real life situation.

ARE THERE DIFFERENT TYPES OF EMERGENCY EXERCISES?

Yes, some general types include:

- Paper/Tabletop exercises
- Drills
- Full scale emergency exercises involving a portion or an entire facility.
- Full scale emergency exercises involving the facility and the community.

WHO SHOULD HAVE EMERGENCY EXERCISES?

Anyone having an emergency response plan should exercise that plan.

ARE THERE SPECIFIC STANDARDS THAT MUST BE ADDRESSED IN AN EMERGENCY EXERCISE?

First and foremost your emergency exercise must meet the specific objectives set out by the exercise planning committee. Often exercises are also specified by specific legislation, standards and licensing requirements – your exercise must meet the requirements specific to your industry.

WHO OWNS THE EXERCISE – SHOULD THERE BE A LEAD?

Ultimate ownership of the exercise is held by the person responsible for the emergency response plan (typically an Administrator, General Manager etc.), however aspects of the exercise are often delegated to positions responsible for managing the plan, such as a facility Chief Fire Warden.

WHO MAKES UP THE EMERGENCY EXERCISE PLANNING COMMITTEE?

The emergency exercise planning committee is typically made of a team of individuals that may include:

- The Facility Chief Fire Warden.
- Departmental/Facility Managers
- Joint Occupational Health and Safety Members
- Front Line employees
- Community emergency response personnel
- Etc.

WHAT RESOURCES SHOULD BE AVAILABLE TO THE EMERGENCY EXERCISE PLANNING COMMITTEE TO SUPPORT A GOOD EXERCISE?

At a minimum a planning committee should have access to:

- Sufficient human resources to support the exercise
- A sufficient budget to support the exercise
- Emergency Response Plans (documents)
- A written scenario with objectives
- Emergency Exercise task checklists
- Emergency Exercise supplies checklists
- A timeline document for planning the day's events
- Emergency Exercise Agenda and Minutes templates
- Emergency Exercise Report Templates
- Materials for providing education
- Applicable legislation, standards, policies etc.

WHAT EDUCATION IS REQUIRED IN PREPARATION FOR AN EMERGENCY EXERCISE?

At a minimum, education requirements must follow what you have identified in your emergency response plan(s). Additional, targeted education is driven by feedback from discussion, observations, drills, incidents and other applicable metrics and indicators.

HOW LONG SHOULD PREPARATION FOR YOUR EXERCISE TAKE?

Preparation for an exercise varies depending on where you are starting from. For example if new information is being provided this may take additional time to educate on, as opposed to providing a refresher on information that is already known.

The preparation time will also vary depending on how intricate the exercise is and who is involved. Coordination of all persons involved can take a significant amount of time and appropriate time must be

allotted to allow this to happen. Typical preparation for an emergency exercise is usually months as opposed to weeks or days.

TYPICALLY WHAT SHOULD THE EMERGENCY EXERCISE SCENARIO FOCUS ON?

The scenario is developed by the committee and should address areas of difficulty as opposed to what is easiest to do.

The scenario should be formalized (documented) and should include specific, defined objectives. The scenario must also be reviewed by the management team to ensure operational and safety requirements are met.

SHOULD EXTERNAL AGENCIES BE INVOLVED IN THE EXERCISE?

External agencies should always be invited to participate if they are able. Some of these agencies may include:

- Fire Department
- EMO
- Licensing representatives
- Police
- Occupational Health and Safety Division
- Emergency Response agencies such as the Red Cross

ARE ACTORS UTILIZED IN EMERGENCY EXERCISES?

Many exercises utilize actors – the extent to which actors are used depends on the objectives and scope of the exercise, the assurance of safety and on the availability of participants.

WHAT WILL THE EXERCISE DAY LOOK LIKE?

The day should follow a specific timeline as outlined by the planning committee. The timeline must include ensuring all preparations, tools, props, manuals and provisions are in place (and specifically at what time they are to be placed).

The timeline must also include a provision for notifying all who may be affected by the exercise (both at the facility and in the community) so everyone who needs to know, knows.

The timeline must be adhered to as much as possible, understanding that events (such as an actual emergency) may happen that could require an adjustment or postponement of the exercise.

WHAT SAFETY MEASURES NEED TO BE IN PLACE?

Safety is the first priority. All participants, observers, actors and external resources must be aware of the safety requirements prior to the exercise beginning. Expectations for safety must be clearly established during the planning process and clearly communicated to all participants.

Specific people must be designated as safety officials for the exercise. Their duties are only to observe and ensure all safety measures are followed. Additionally, all participants must be empowered to stop the exercise anytime a safety issue arises.

ARE PROPS IMPORTANT TO THE EXERCISE?

Exercises can fail specifically because not enough preparation has gone into ensuring appropriate props are in place. Props must be safe and appropriate for the exercise and must adequately cue the participants to what it is they are responding to.

A good example of this would be the use of helium balloons tied with ribbons that signify smoke – the more balloons there are the more smoke this represents. The length of the ribbons will represent the height of the smoke. For instance, very long ribbons will signify smoke closer to the floor.

Again, safety is always the first priority – do not create any hazards for the people involved or bystanders. Be especially cautious not to create tripping hazards, fire hazards, breathing hazards or hazards which could create stress for occupants.

Always ensure all safety legislation is strictly adhered to including the Occupational Health and Safety Act, Fire Codes and other related codes, standards and practices.

HOW MANY OBSERVERS SHOULD BE PRESENT?

Observers can vary but generally you will need as many as is required to adequately observe all areas that require observation, while also ensuring there is not an excessive number that could impede the exercise.

All observers should be provided with a pre-exercise discussion on what they are expected to observe and with a means of documenting their observations. Observers should also be provided with a means of identifying them (such as a name tag) so they are not confused with exercise participants.

SHOULD YOUR COMMUNITY PARTNERS EXERCISE ALONG WITH YOU?

At times, community partners may want to exercise along with you. As long as this works with your exercise, it is a viable option.

WHAT'S THE COMMUNICATION PROCESS FOR YOUR COMMUNITY?

Safety (and courtesy) requires that communications should happen for anyone who may be affected by your exercise. The type and extent of your communications is dependent on the receiver(s). The emergency planning committee must identify who requires communications and what the appropriate communications strategy must be.

Always ensure your communication strategy includes thanking and acknowledging all those who helped to make the exercise possible.

Additionally, ensure that your communication plan includes an update for those involved as to what the outcome of the exercise was and what the next steps are.

HOW SHOULD STAFF BE RESPONDING DURING THE EXERCISE?

Set the expectation for response prior to the exercise - Do not create undue stress but an emergency exercise is serious business and requires a serious response. As part of the expectation remind those involved that horseplay is unsafe and unacceptable.

SHOULD SOMEONE BE TAKING NOTES?

Yes, designate a note taker prior to the exercise. Such notes are extremely important for reference purposes when writing your report.

SHOULD THERE BE A DEBRIEFING FOLLOWING THE EXERCISE?

Yes, a debriefing provides an opportunity to get feedback from the participants in support of quality improvement.

Generally, a debriefing should include asking the participants what part they played in the exercise, what they felt went well and what could be improved. There are various tools available to support an effective debrief – The person(s) providing the debriefing should be well schooled in the process so they can maximize participation and discussion.

WHAT DOCUMENTATION IS REQUIRED FOLLOWING THE EXERCISE?

Documentation required following the exercise should follow your internal policies for such reports.

Generally they should include a thorough discussion of the exercise, observations, analysis and a corrective action plan.

IF WE DO NOT ACHIEVE OUR EXERCISE OBJECTIVES – SHOULD WE DO ANOTHER EXERCISE?

If your objectives are not met, doing an additional exercise may be required.

WHAT ARE SOME SAMPLES OF EXERCISES?

There are numerous types of emergency exercises. The general types of exercises typically follow the various recognized Codes (example: Code Red is Fire) – these should be defined in your Emergency Response Plans.

WHAT WOULD AN EXAMPLE OF AN EMERGENCY EXERCISE SCENARIO TEMPLATE LOOK LIKE?

An exercise scenario template is included in Appendix 1 – this is meant as a general template, the Emergency Exercise Planning Committee should construct their scenario in accordance with their specific objectives.

Appendix A – Sample Emergency Exercise Scenario Template

Facility:

Emergency Exercise Scenario:

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Prepared by: Emergency Exercise Planning Committee

Name	Position

Version:	Date:
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Introduction:

This document has been developed to detail the specific scenario associated with this emergency exercise. The objectives of this emergency exercise are as follows:

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General Facility Information:

Number of Beds/Suites:
Location:
Number of Floors:
Number of Private Rooms:
Number of Semiprivate Rooms:
Type of Rooms Found in Public/Common Areas:
The Buildings Main Entrance is Accessible from (Street):
Staff Compliment Days:
Staff Compliment Nights:

Scene 1 – Initial Emergency (Beginning)

Date:	Time:
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Emergency Description:

Assumptions:

Expected Response:

Scene 2 – Emergency Progression (Middle)

Date:	Time:
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Emergency Description:

Assumptions:

Expected Response:

Scene 3 – Emergency Progression (End)

Date:	Time:
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Emergency Description:

Assumptions:

Expected Response:

Scene 4 – Post Emergency Response (Sample) Questions for Discussion

1. If your residents had to relocate, where would they relocate to?
How would this be accomplished?

2. Who would be notified? What would the notification process be?

3. Would additional staff be required? How would this be accomplished?

4. Would food services be affected? How?

5. What response is required to ensure business continuity?

6. What documentation is required as follow up to the event?

7. How would we communicate and update family members?

