READINESS AND EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT FOR SCHOOLS

REMS

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE CENTER

Your National School Safety Center

Emergency Exercises Training Package

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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Emergency Exercises Training Package Instructions

Thank you for downloading the Emergency Exercises Package from the Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools (REMS) Technical Assistance (TA) Center. The purpose of this package is to support K-12 core planning teams at schools (public and nonpublic) and school districts with conducting emergency exercises. This activity is recommended in the *Guide for Developing High-Quality School Emergency Operations Plans* and *The Role of Districts in Developing High-Quality School Emergency Operations Plans*. Exercises can help teams maintain a school emergency operations plan (EOP), as well as

- Examine current policies and procedures regarding different emergencies, as well as courses of action that a school will need to take before, during, and after an incident.
- Assess the school EOP and resources, as well as facilitate an understanding of emergency management and planning concepts.
- Identify gaps and weaknesses in the school EOP and any accompanying annexes and make improvements as an outcome of the exercise.
- Provide a training opportunity to school administrators, planning teams, response teams, and other school or school district staff members, so that they can act more effectively before, during, and after an emergency.

The success of tabletop exercises does not depend on how easily the participants can answer the questions posed. Rather, success is based on lessons learned. For example, did the exercise demonstrate that the school's or school district's response protocols or courses of action in the EOP need to be adapted? Did the event reveal that staff members need to be better trained in their roles in an emergency? Once these factors are identified, changes should be made to the appropriate protocols, systems, or resources to ensure that the school or school district is better prepared for future exercises or actual emergencies.

Audience

The target audience for these tabletop exercises includes anyone who may have a role or responsibility in developing protocols for, or responding to, an emergency at any level of K-12 education. This includes administrators, staff, teachers, and members of planning teams and response teams, as well as community partners, such as local law enforcement officers, fire officials, emergency medical services personnel, emergency management staff, public health officials, and mental/behavioral health practitioners.

Contents

This package is composed of materials that will assist you with conducting an emergency exercise. The materials below are intended to provide you with an understanding of what emergency exercises and after-action reports are, how they fit into the six-step planning process and EOP development, the benefits of engaging in these activities, and resources for more information. Review these fact sheets before conducting one of the emergency exercises in this package to ensure that all aspects of the exercise are well designed, add value to your team's needs, and are helpful for updating the school EOP.

- "Emergency Exercises: An Effective Way to Practice and Validate Emergency Operations Plans Fact Sheet"
- "After-Action Reports: Capturing Lessons Learned and Identifying Areas of Improvement Fact Sheet"
- "Resources for K-12 Emergency Exercises"

In the tabletop exercises, a hypothetical scenario, which describes how the incident unfolds, is provided for each emergency. This package contains materials for four hypothetical scenarios: infectious disease, power outage, flood, and a cybersecurity incident. Each tabletop exercise is designed to last approximately 60 minutes, although based on the number of participants you have and the amount of time spent on each scenario, this may vary. Each scenario contains a podcast, a participant guide, and a resource list.

- **Infectious Disease Tabletop Exercise**
  - Facilitator podcast
  - Participant guide
  - Resource list
- **Power Outage Tabletop Exercise**
  - Facilitator podcast
  - Participant guide
  - Resource list
- **Flood Tabletop Exercise**
  - Facilitator podcast
  - Participant guide
  - Resource list
- **Cybersecurity Tabletop Exercise**
  - Facilitator podcast
  - Participant guide
  - Resource list

Use the materials provided and follow the steps below to conduct the tabletop exercise.

Before the Exercise

As the facilitator, review all materials in the package to familiarize yourself with the content and determine the extent to which you would like to customize the exercise.

- The scenario, injects, and questions in the participant guide can be modified to reflect the policies and procedures of your school or school district or specifics of your locality. For example, you may choose to adapt the scenario to reflect local conditions or direct the exercise participants to specific parts of your EOP.

Set aside a dedicated period to conduct the exercise. Each exercise is designed to last approximately 60 minutes, but actual time may vary based on the number of participants.

Identify the personnel at your site who would benefit from participating in the exercise, schedule the event, and invite them to participate. Exercise facilitators at the school or school district level should identify as participants for the emergency exercise those persons who would play a role in a real emergency, including but not limited to those who serve on the school's or district's emergency response team as well as community partners. Facilitators should intentionally select participants on the basis of the type of exercise being conducted and the portions of the EOP being practiced. By including participants with a diverse range of skills

and perspectives, schools and school districts can practice coordinating emergency responses that require multiple individuals and departments and can ensure that EOPs include input from both school or school district staff and community partners.

School	School District	Community Partners
• School nurse • Bus driver(s) • Custodian(s), groundskeepers, and maintenance staff • Cafeteria staff • School psychologist(s) • School social worker(s) • Counselor(s) • Athletic director • Network administrator • Parent/family member • General education teacher(s)/ instructional aides • Special education teacher(s)/ instructional aides • Specialized student support services personnel • Principal • Assistant principal(s)	• Transportation director • Facilities manager • Nutrition director/food manager • Community engagement specialist • Information technology specialist • Family services personnel • Specialized student support services personnel • General counsel • Chief business officer • Personnel director • Risk manager • Superintendent • Assistant superintendent(s)	• School resource officer(s) • Law enforcement officer(s) • Fire official(s) • Emergency medical services personnel • Emergency management staff • Public health official(s) • Mental/behavioral health practitioner(s) • Municipality representative • Youth-serving organization representative

During the Exercise

Conduct the tabletop exercise with the materials in the package. There is flexibility in how this is done, but consider using one of the following strategies:

- Play the podcast for the group while participants follow along with the participant guide.
- Use the participant guide on its own without the podcast. Participants may take turns reading the scenarios, questions, and injects to the group. The participant guide can be used in small groups or printed for use as individual handouts to allow participants to take notes.
- Use the facilitator podcast on its own. You may pause the recording after each set of questions so participants can work through the scenario and respond to the questions in their own time.

Below are some tips for planning and conducting your exercise:

- Take time to discuss the goals, objectives, and guidelines of the exercise with participants. Explain that each participant brings valuable skills and perspectives to the exercise, and it is expected that multiple different viewpoints and ideas will be discussed during the exercise. Tabletop exercises are designed to be low-stress, no-fault environments where participants

explore a variety of potential responses to the scenario — there is not necessarily one "right" answer.

- Make copies or an online version of the school EOP available for participants to refer to throughout the exercise. Remind participants that they have access to only the resources and systems that are currently in place.
- Designate a notetaker to capture key discussion points and responses as participants work through the exercise and answer the guiding questions. This will help later with the exercise debrief.
- If there are many exercise participants, you may decide to split them into smaller groups. This can encourage more group discussion and ensure that all the participants have an opportunity to actively contribute to the group discussion. The entire group can progress through the exercise together, alternating between small-group discussions and reporting out to the larger group, or smaller groups can progress at their own pace.
- Focus on certain aspects of the exercise prompts and allow participants to spend more time discussing how they would respond to certain questions posed to them. This is another way that the exercise can be customized to fit the needs of the audience.
- Ensure that you allow time at the conclusion of the exercise to discuss how to integrate lessons learned into your school EOP and preparedness efforts.

After the Exercise

At the end of each exercise, it is important to debrief (called a "hot wash") and develop an after-action report. A hot wash consists of a discussion immediately following the exercise and serves to help participants collaboratively review decisions made during the exercise and lessons learned, as well as to identify any gaps and shortfalls in the school EOP. This discussion can help inform plans to update and review EOPs. To ensure a successful debrief, both the facilitator podcasts and the participant guides include guiding questions at the end of the exercises.

After-action reports are written documents that effectively evaluate the results of an exercise, synthesize lessons learned, and formally document any gaps or shortfalls in an EOP. After-action reports are critical for ensuring that information from the debrief is used to inform EOP revisions. High-quality after-action reports contain an overview of the exercise, goals and objectives indicating desired outcomes, an analysis of decisions made during the exercise, an analysis of critical tasks/capacity, and a final summary. To learn more about creating after-action reports and to access helpful related resources, please refer to the fact sheet in this package titled "After-Action Reports: Capturing Lessons Learned and Identifying Areas of Improvement."

Lastly, choose a set of resources or training opportunities from the accompanying preparedness resource lists to further staff professional learning or to use in revising the school EOP on the basis of lessons learned from the exercise.

Help From the REMS TA Center

For more information on preparing for threats, hazards, and cross-cutting activities that may be needed after many emergencies (e.g., communication, recovery), please visit the REMS TA Center Website. If you have any questions on exercises, the tabletop scenarios, or any other topic, we also encourage you to contact the REMS TA Center with any requests at info@remstacenter.org or through the toll-free number 1-855-781-REMS (7367). The REMS TA Center's hours of operation are Monday through Friday, 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. ET. You can also reach us by submitting an online Technical Assistance Request Form.