Resources for K-12 Emergency Exercises

Training Opportunities

IS-120.C: An Introduction to Exercises, Online Course (U.S. Department of Homeland Security [DHS], Federal Emergency Management Agency [FEMA], Emergency Management Institute [EMI]). Introduces the basics of emergency management exercises, ranging from discussion-based exercises to operations-based exercises. The training introduces students to the concepts of managing, designing, developing, conducting, and evaluating an exercise program and developing an improvement plan. This online course is also available in Spanish.

IS-130.A: How to Be an Exercise Evaluator, Online Course (DHS, FEMA, EMI). Builds on IS-120.C and introduces participants to the basics of emergency management exercise evaluation and improvement planning, which are based on concepts identified in the Homeland Security Exercise and Evaluation Program. The course describes concepts such as how to analyze exercise data and identify the steps to create an after-action report. This online course is also available in Spanish.

School EOP Planning 101: Modifying Exercises and Drills in Response to the Pandemic, Webinar (REMS TA Center). Offers strategies for schools to use, in collaboration with their community partners, to practice emergency operations plans (EOPs) through types of exercises, including drills, tabletop exercises, virtual simulations, and more. This Webinar also shares considerations for modifying exercises and drills amid the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic.

Further Reading on Exercise Planning

Modifying Education Agency Exercises and Drills in Response to the Pandemic: Protecting Students, Faculty, Staff, and the Whole School Community While Practicing Plans, Fact Sheet (REMS TA Center). Provides details and strategies for conducting and modifying exercises and drills during the COVID-19 pandemic. These best practices can also be implemented during a variety of school disruptions or future infectious disease outbreaks.

Emergency Exercises: An Effective Way to Practice and Validate Emergency Operations Plans, Fact Sheet (REMS TA Center). Describes the different types of emergency exercises, the benefits of exercises, and steps to develop an effective exercise program. The resource also provides a case study and additional resources.

Exercise and Preparedness Tools, Web Page (DHS, FEMA). Includes resources to support whole community preparedness, including through emergency exercises. This Web page also hosts the following best practice guides.

Virtual Exercise Best Practices, Publication (DHS, FEMA). Outlines best practices in designing, planning, and coordinating virtual emergency exercises. This guide is also available in Spanish.

Safe Exercise Best Practices, Publication (DHS, FEMA). Provides strategies for planning and conducting in-person emergency exercises, with a focus on safety and security. This guide is also available in Spanish.

National Exercise Program, Web Page (DHS, FEMA). Designed to test the nation's capabilities in responding to emergencies and disasters. The program provides a 2-year cycle of exercises that concludes with a biennial National Level Exercise.

Tools for Conducting Emergency Exercises

Homeland Security Exercise and Evaluation Program, Web Page (DHS, FEMA). Offers a comprehensive framework and training activities for designing, conducting, and evaluating emergency exercises to increase community preparedness.

Preparedness Toolkit: Homeland Security Exercise Evaluation Program, Web Page (DHS, FEMA). Provides a common approach to exercises, no matter the scale of the exercise or the number of individuals or groups participating in the event. This toolkit provides resources on program management, design and development, conduct, evaluation, improvement planning, and exercise evaluation guides.

Tool Box, Web Page (REMS TA Center). Hosts an online repository of tools and resources developed by practitioners in the field that is pertinent to the needs of school practitioners as they engage in school emergency management planning. Use the Tool Box's Advanced Search function, and select the "Drill, Tabletop, or Other Exercise" option to find exercise resources from schools and school districts across the country.

Resources for Capturing Lessons Learned and Updating EOPs

Emergency Operations Plan Maintenance: Reviewing, Updating, and Strengthening Plans, Fact Sheet (REMS TA Center). Shares strategies for maintaining high-quality EOPs, such as conducting emergency exercises and preparing after-action reports.

K-12 School Planning and Response Teams: Developing and Enhancing the School Emergency Operations Plan, Checklist (REMS TA Center). Helps school planning and response teams develop or revise a high-quality EOP, and includes considerations for conducting drills and exercises within the Step 6 section.

School District Planning and Response Teams: Developing and Enhancing the School Emergency Operations Plan, Checklist (REMS TA Center). Supports school district planning and response teams in assisting schools with developing or revising a high-quality EOP, and includes considerations for supporting schools with drills and exercises within the Step 6 section.

After-Action Reports: Capturing Lessons Learned and Identifying Areas of Improvement, Fact Sheet (REMS TA Center). Provides an overview of the purpose, structure, and benefits of after-action reports; offers best practices for creating after-action reports and implementing lessons learned after EOP exercises or activations; and shares resources to support K-12 and higher ed emergency management practitioners in integrating after-action reports into emergency planning.