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Fast Facts for our Valued Friends and Clients February 2009

Here are some bullets and brain teasers about current events from your friends at Disaster Survival Planning Network (DSPN). In this issue, we provide information about tests and exercises. If you'd like to forward this message to your colleagues, just click the "Forward Email" link at the bottom of this page.

Fast Facts about Tests and Exercises

Did you know...

- The National Incident Management System (NIMS) defines four types of exercises--drill, tabletop, functional, and full-scale.
- According to NIMS, a drill is a coordinated, supervised activity usually used to test a single specific operation or function. Drills are commonly used to provide training on new equipment, develop or test new policies or procedures, or practice and maintain current skills. Most programs include evacuation drills, but few include shelter-in-place drills, an important exercise in light of recent disasters.
- NIMS defines a tabletop exercise as an activity that involves key personnel discussing simulated scenarios in an informal setting. Tabletop exercises are typically aimed at facilitating understanding of concepts, identifying strengths and shortfalls, and achieving changes in attitude. Participants are encouraged to surface issues and develop decisions through slow-paced problem solving, rather than the rapid, spontaneous decision making that occurs under actual or simulated emergency conditions.
- Tabletop exercises have become very popular for several reasons. They can be designed and delivered very effectively for a fraction of the cost of a functional exercise. They can uncover gaps that are simple or complex. Tabletop exercises cause minimal impact to the day-to-day functions of a business.
- According to NIMS, a functional exercise simulates the reality of operations in a functional area by presenting complex and realistic problems that require rapid and effective responses by trained personnel in a highly stressful environment.
- NIMS describes a full-scale exercise as a multi-agency, multi-jurisdictional, or multi-organizational activity that tests many facets of preparedness. Full-scale exercises focus on implementing and analyzing the plans, policies, procedures, and cooperative agreements developed and honed in previous, smaller exercises. They are conducted in real-time, stressful environments that closely mirror real events.
- Full-scale exercises are most commonly conducted in the public sector, although some types of businesses, such as telecommunications companies and oil refineries conduct them regularly.
- An important consideration when designing an exercise is to choose an exercise type that

compliments your scope, purpose, and objectives.

- Before selecting a complex exercise type, the coordinator should be certain that the program to be tested has sufficient maturity and that the funding organization is prepared to support the project with adequate resources to ensure its success.

Brain Teasers

True or False

1. Considering the most common mistakes made when designing an exercise, a designer should pay more attention to the basics.
2. When you write objectives for an exercise, you are identifying the things you will observe to determine if your purpose was achieved.
3. When designing a functional exercise, you will need to simulate messages-- phone calls, notes, or some other form of messages that are directed to participants in the exercise as if they came from senders who are not present in the room.
4. The best way to evaluate an exercise is to hold a critique session with participants as soon as the exercise is over.
5. Many coordinators do a good job of identifying gaps, but many are less effective at removing the identified gaps.

Check your answers here...

Answers to the above questions:

1. *True.* Here are some of the most common mistakes project managers make when designing an exercise: exercise scope too large, purpose not defined, too many objectives, objectives not measurable, messages not aligned with objectives.
2. *True.* Writing good objectives takes practice. You should try to make your objectives participant-focused, observable, and measurable.
3. *True.* These simulated messages are often called "injects" in the public sector.
4. *False.* (trick question!) Experienced designers use a variety of evaluation techniques to make sure they collect all of the useful information that is available. Besides critique sessions with participants, consider using problem logs, live observers, critiques from simulators, and delayed feedback report forms.
5. *True.* Here are some useful techniques to make sure identified gaps are removed: specifically define corrective actions; establish a timetable; assign responsibilities and accountabilities; monitor progress; retest at an appropriate interval.

Readiness Check

Hard-to-remember details:

1. Have you included a shelter-in-place drill in your exercise schedule? (In today's world, this type of practice is just as important as evacuation drills.)
2. Have you defined an exercise schedule for all components of your program?
3. Do you invite key people well in advance and take appropriate steps to ensure they will attend?
4. Do you make use of a variety of exercise types and suit them to your scope, purpose, and objectives?
5. Have you thought carefully about all of the resources you will need to design and stage an exercise so you can package them all in a single request to your project sponsor?

Comments and Contributions

Tell us what you think...



Thanks to all of you have sent us comments about this mailing.

In responding to recent incidents, did you discover an interesting detail that you would like to share with our readers? If so, send it along and we'll consider it for a future issue. If you want us to print a comment or submission about your company, be sure to give us permission when you write.

[Paul Klier](#)

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pklier@dspnetwork.com