

Plan Maintenance

An EOP is a living document that is constantly being revised and updated. This occurs as part of the emergency management cycle. When a disaster is not the major reason for plan revision, the plan should be tested regularly.

Exercises

Exercises are one of the most effective ways to test the plan and the capabilities of emergency management programs and procedures. The four different types of emergency management exercises are only outlined here, since official FEMA courses teach how to conduct exercises.

Information on types of exercises is provided in FEMA's "Exercise Design Course" and in the *Guide to Emergency Management Exercises* (Student Manual 170.2, available through state emergency management offices). The detail of these courses goes beyond the scope of this book.

Orientations are used as a building block to more difficult exercises.

Tabletop exercises attempt only to approximate reality. The focus in these exercises is on training and familiarization with roles, procedures, responsibilities, and personalities in the jurisdiction's emergency management system. Tabletop exercises are often the first type of exercises used to test a new plan.

Functional exercises usually take place inside, such as in a classroom or actual emergency operations center (EOC). They may include various forms of message traffic (written, telephone, radio) and attempts to recreate a realistic environment while participants respond.

Full-scale exercises combine a functional exercise with a drill. Here field personnel of one or more emergency services are put in operation. The actual movement of equipment and personnel is important for the preparedness of individual emergency service organizations. To ensure the success of a full-scale exercise, several drills should be conducted successfully first.

Training

Emergency action plans require training. Exercises are the best way to identify deficiencies in the plan and whether employee performance must be improved. The plan should be revised whenever changes have occurred in materials used or procedures implemented. A current copy of the plan should be kept in a central location. All employees should know where the plan is kept. All staff should be familiar with this information. A good way to rehearse emergency plans is to conduct exercises at the following times:

- Annually
- When employees are hired
- When new responsibilities are designated (e.g., promotions)
- When new equipment, materials, or processes are purchased or introduced

Some businesses practice evacuation during hours when they are open. This allows clients to recognize a proactive stance on disasters and gives them insight into the scope of services offered.