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INNOVATIVE PRACTICE

Mass Care: Jefferson County, Colorado, Animal Response “Exercise in a Box”

SUMMARY

The *Lessons Learned Information Sharing (LLIS.gov)* team identifies innovative practices within the whole community and documents these practices for emergency managers to consider for incorporation when developing plans and exercises. The Jefferson County, CO Animal Response Team (J-CART) developed its “Exercise in a Box” (EIAB) program—a scalable, comprehensive animal response exercise toolkit—to develop repeatable, functional, and highly effective exercises. The EIAB includes all required materials and instructions to conduct and evaluate an animal response functional exercise. By consolidating these materials and standardizing the exercise process, J-CART reduced barriers for emergency management personnel and volunteers to conduct and participate in animal response exercises. Jefferson County emergency managers maintain their familiarity with animal response incident management by conducting at least one exercise or deployment each year. Emergency personnel and volunteers can use similar exercise programs to gain experience in incident management for animal response emergencies.



The Jefferson County Sheriff's Office partnered its Animal Control efforts with the Jefferson County Horse Council and other community groups to create J-CART, which used the EIAB to improve incident management for handling animals during a disaster. (Source: [Jefferson County Sheriff's Office: Emergency Updates Blog](#), last updated December 20, 2013, accessed May 8, 2014)

DESCRIPTION

In the aftermath of the 2000 High Meadows Fire, Jefferson County animal response stakeholders recognized that existing plans and procedures were insufficient for effective animal rescue efforts. Although responders and volunteers were able to effectively handle the animals during the fire, the incident highlighted capability gaps in logistical, organizational, and coordination processes. Responders also noted capability gaps with staging animal shelters, preparing necessary paperwork, and coordinating responder and volunteer efforts. Stakeholders from the Sheriff's office, animal control, the county, and non-profit organizations addressed these issues by forming J-CART, developing the Jefferson County Animal Response Plan, and designing an exercise program.

LLIS.gov defines Innovative Practice as successful and innovative procedures, techniques, or methods developed and/or implemented by the emergency management or response community to adapt to changing circumstances that others may wish to emulate.

Jefferson County used functional exercises to evaluate existing plans and protocols for J-CART and volunteer agencies. The exercises also provided opportunities for participants to practice their tasks prior to an actual emergency. Exercises typically simulated the following incident management tasks:

- Filling incident management positions;
- Handling communications;
- Assigning ID numbers to animals;
- Checking animals into a shelter or evacuation location;
- Instituting care procedures;
- Reuniting owners with their animals; and
- Completing all associated documentation.

Jefferson County also secured agreements with evacuation and shelter locations in order to conduct exercises using facilities that may be used in real-world events, improving responders' familiarity with the sites and any site-specific requirements. The exercises use mock animals and participants focus on following the proper procedures and completing all documentation, rather than physically performing the tasks. This also reduces the time and resource burden on participants and organizers.

Exercise in a Box

The EIAB contains the tools needed to conduct a functional animal response exercise, including all necessary forms, materials, and instructions. The EIAB simplifies and standardizes the process to reduce complexity and make it easier to conduct exercises testing the Jefferson County Animal Response Plan.

Moreover, J-CART designed the EIAB to be scalable, so users can adjust exercises to match the size of the response team, the number of participating agencies, and the time allotted for the exercise. This flexibility has allowed the J-CART to use the EIAB in a number of different situations, testing a variety of processes and tools and customizing the EIAB to match user needs. Many of the forms included in the EIAB address issues encountered during the first EIAB functional exercise.

Contents of the "Exercise in a Box"

The "Exercise in a Box" contains all necessary documentation, plans, and procedures to operate a successful functional exercise, including:

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| • Laminated (8"x10") photos of individual animals attached to wooden stakes | • Laminated (8"x10") photos of houses with addresses stapled to wooden stakes | • Laminated (8"x10") photos of supplies stapled to wooden stakes |
| • Laminated job description documents | • Laminated "Request for Service" cards | • Index cards with resource request injects |
| • Extra laminated (8"x10") photos to increase scope of exercise, as needed | • Livestock "rump tags" with Velcro tabs (large animal ID) | • Paper collars with Velcro tabs (small animal ID) |
| • Organizational charts for all responding organizations | • Small and large animal impound forms | • Staging check-in/check-out forms |
| • Shelter maps | • Laminated role ID cards | |

Jefferson County created several documents for inclusion in the EIAB to support these exercises, such as:

- [Exercise In a Box Instructions](#);
- [Organizational charts](#) for all responding organizations;
- [Job descriptions](#) of the required participants;
- [Forms required for animal intake](#); and
- [Maps of the shelter](#).

By developing these documents, incorporating them into the EIAB package, and sharing them with all participants, county officials provided access to the necessary tools and consistent points of reference for use throughout any exercise. This consistency facilitated improved coordination and helped drive repeatable, functional, and effective exercises.

Exercising with Animal Volunteer Agencies

The EIAB provides opportunities for volunteers to improve their skills and facilitates coordination with county officials. During exercises, volunteers use forms included in the EIAB to practice incident management tasks, with a particular focus on evacuation, sheltering, tracking, and reunification. Volunteer agencies participate in EIAB exercises, ensuring that volunteers practice using the same forms, tools, and processes they would use during a real-world event.

J-CART conducts annual exercises using the EIAB, allowing experienced volunteers to continuously hone their skills. Additionally, these EIAB-driven exercises help integrate new volunteers into the process by providing a forum for experienced volunteers to mentor or coach new volunteers.

Exercises also serve a valuable role in developing volunteer networks. EIAB-driven exercises bring J-CART and various volunteer groups together to interact, network, socialize, and cement relationships that are integral to a coordinated response efforts. Those relationships also help address the persistent challenge of continued volunteer engagement. EIAB exercises help volunteers stay active and more likely to participate in real-world response efforts.

APPLICABILITY

Scalable EIABs that can be easily repeated make it possible for other jurisdictions, groups, or agencies to contribute to or use the EIAB for their own exercises. J-CART has loaned the EIAB to two other Colorado counties and has provided training on animal emergency response in Routt County, Colorado. The EIAB and its related exercises can also build and strengthen relationships between county officials, shelters, and local animal welfare groups,



The "Exercise in a Box" includes laminated photos of animals that emergency personnel can use to help responders sort animals into the proper areas. (Source: Interview with Carla Zananti, November 4, 2013)

improving coordination and understanding of participants' roles and responsibilities during an emergency. Emergency managers can also use these relationships to help secure resources for the EIAB.

Testing Incident Management Processes with "Exercise in a Box"

County officials and volunteer agencies can use the "Exercise in a Box" to test and exercise any combination of the following aspects of emergency response:

- Activation/Call-Out
- Large and small animal shelter set-up
- Resource request paperwork
- Coordination between teams
- Conducting the After Action Review & hot wash
- Staging
- Animal ID and tracking paperwork
- Communications
- Job roles and responsibilities
- Coordination between responders & the Emergency Operations Center
- Chain of command and incident command
- Requesting and receiving resources
- Shelter check-in/check-out
- Activity tracking paperwork
- Coordination between animal responders and the incident team

CITATIONS

All information contained in this Innovative Practice document was collected by the *LLIS.gov* research team from interviews with Carla Zinanti, Manager of Jefferson County, Colorado's Sheriff's Office Animal Control on November 4, 2013, November 13, 2013, and January 2, 2014.