



FEMA

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## LESSON LEARNED

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### Exercise Conduct: Providing Participants with Incident Command System Training Prior to an Exercise

#### SUMMARY

Exercise planners should ensure that exercise participants are familiar with Incident Command System (ICS) structures, protocols, and tools prior to an exercise. Planners should make the appropriate ICS training available to participants, depending on their roles in the exercise.

#### DESCRIPTION

In October and November of 2007, the state of Washington conducted a multi-agency full-scale exercise (FSE). The FSE included 2,500 players from 35 federal, state, local, and tribal agencies. It simulated a *Salmonella typhi* outbreak deliberately introduced into the Washington region through tainted communion wafers. The objective of the FSE was to test the participating agencies' abilities to detect, respond to, and recover from a bioterrorism event.

The Washington State Annual Bioterrorism Exercise – Region 9 (WASABE 9) is conducted annually by the state of Washington to test the state's preparedness for a bioterrorism incident.

During the FSE, participants at a Department of Health (DOH) incident command post had varying understanding of and ability to adapt to the incident command structure. Some participants did not know to whom they reported during the FSE. Often, they turned to their day-to-day supervisors for direction rather than relying on the incident command structure. Consequently, some FSE participants spent time attending duplicative meetings and reported to dual structures.

The failure to follow ICS standards resulted in inefficiencies and errors that reduced the effectiveness of the FSE. To remedy this problem, the WASABE 9 after-action report (AAR) recommended that DOH leaders emphasize the importance of ICS to their staffs and provide them with additional ICS training. The AAR also recommended that DOH staff members use the ICS structure during routine incidents, which would allow them to increase their familiarity with incident command structures and processes "in a real-life situation."

Exercise planners should ensure that exercise participants are familiar with ICS structures, protocols, and tools prior to an exercise. Planners should make the appropriate ICS training available to participants, depending on their roles in the exercise.

**CITATION**

Washington State Department of Health. *Washington State Annual Bioterrorism Exercise – Region 9 (WASABE 9) After Action Report*. 31 Dec 2007.  
<https://www.llis.dhs.gov/docdetails/details.do?contentID=30826>

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