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Volunteer Coordination: Utilizing Two Shifts of Volunteers during Lengthy Full-Scale Exercises

SUMMARY

Exercise planners should consider utilizing two shifts of volunteers during lengthy, full-scale exercises (FSEs). This can reduce volunteer attrition, enhance participant safety, and help to ensure exercise continuity.

DESCRIPTION

On June 7, 2005, Volusia County, Florida hosted a FSE simulating a man portable air defense systems (MANPADS) attack on a commercial airliner departing from Daytona Beach International Airport. The goal was to improve cooperation between agencies likely to participate in a Volusia County ocean mass casualty incident (MCI). The FSE focused on the triage and treatment of MCI victims on or near a quarter-mile portion of Daytona Beach. In addition, area hospitals tested their ability to manage, treat, and track large numbers of patients and casualties.

Nearly 140 volunteers took part in the exercise, 90 as actors playing MCI victims. These volunteers lay on the beach simulating injuries before being transported to area hospitals for treatment. Due to the FSE's beach location, 1:00 pm start time, and prolonged duration, MCI victims withstood intense heat and sunlight while performing their roles. Strain imposed by exercise conditions caused approximately 30 percent of volunteers to become exhausted and exit exercise play prematurely. Others became too fatigued to continue participating after they arrived at local hospitals. Hospitals were unable to fulfill key requirements stipulated by the exercise design because so many "patients" and "casualties" were absent from the latter stages of the FSE.

Exercise planners should consider utilizing two shifts of volunteers during prolonged FSEs. Utilizing two shifts of volunteers increases volunteer retention, reduces individual participant distress, and ensures that key exercise objectives are fulfilled.

CITATION

Volusia County Emergency Management. *Volusia County Ocean Mass Casualty Exercise: After Action Report*. June 7, 2005.

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