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LESSON LEARNED

Exercise Design: Ensuring Exercise Play over Multiple Operational Periods

SUMMARY

Prior to an exercise conducted over multiple operational periods, planners should review the master scenario event list (MSEL) to ensure that there is adequate activity for each period. This can help to ensure that there is sufficient exercise play for all shifts during an exercise.

DESCRIPTION

The Maine Emergency Management Agency (MEMA) sponsored and conducted the Maine Statewide Communication Functional Exercise (FE) in conjunction with 14 county emergency operations centers (EOC) on October 29 and 30, 2009. Participants included state and county EOC personnel, the American Red Cross (ARC), and the Maine National Guard. MEMA conducted the FE to test its state and county EOC communications capabilities after a statewide power outage. The primary objective of the FE was to demonstrate EOC continuity of operations, including maintaining communications, after losing power and Internet service. The FE scenario was based upon a major ice storm in 1998 that caused blackouts throughout the state.

MEMA conducted the FE over two consecutive operational periods to make the exercise more challenging for the state and county EOCs. Exercise planners and the simulation cell tasked each shift at the state EOC with accomplishing various tasks, such as executing MEMA's backup communication plan, managing the statewide shelter plan, and prioritizing state resources. In addition, the FE required that state EOC personnel develop an incident action plan (IAP) and practice debriefing a replacement shift. During the first shift, state EOC personnel tested MEMA's backup communication plan and equipment, statewide shelter plan, prioritization of state resources, IAP development, and debriefing procedures. The exercise planners designed the FE so that these tasks would be repeated during the state EOC's second shift.

However, the SIMCell encountered difficulties maintaining the same level of activity during the state EOC's second shift. The second shift experienced long periods of inactivity during the FE due, in part, to some county EOCs choosing to participate for only one shift because of limited resources. As a result, the state EOC's second shift had fewer county EOCs to manage and did not deploy as many state resources to counties. Exercise planners noted that in future exercises a sufficient number of injects should be provided to prevent long periods of inactivity at the state EOC. In multilevel exercises, additional injects will ensure that both state and county participants have enough tasks that result in adequate activity throughout the exercise.

Prior to an exercise conducted over multiple operational periods, planners should review the MSEL to ensure that there is adequate activity for each period. This can help to ensure that there is sufficient exercise play for all shifts during an exercise.

CITATION

Damren, Jeremy. State of Maine Exercise Coordinator and Community Emergency Response Team Coordinator, Maine Emergency Management Agency. Interview with *Lessons Learned Information Sharing*, 10 Oct 2009.

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