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LESSON LEARNED

Exercise Evaluation: Designating Time for After-Action Conference Participants to Review Their Exercise Notes

SUMMARY

Exercise conference planners should consider allotting a session for attendees to review their exercise notes at the beginning of after-action conferences. This will help ensure that attendees are prepared to discuss their results at the conference.

DESCRIPTION

The Maine Emergency Management Agency (MEMA) sponsored and conducted the Maine Statewide Functional Exercise (FE) in conjunction with 14 county emergency operation centers (EOC) on October 29 and 30, 2009. FE participants included personnel from state and county EOCs, the American Red Cross, 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. On December 10, 2009, MEMA held its exercise after-action conference at the state EOC in Augusta.

MEMA instructed participants to review and organize their exercise notes between the FE and the after-action conference. This would help conference attendees prepare for discussing exercise strengths and weaknesses at the after-action conference. However, most attendees did not review their notes as instructed, which caused delays during the discussion period of the after-action conference. MEMA personnel stopped the discussion period and redirected it toward how each county could improve its emergency response during the exercise. When the discussion did not improve, MEMA personnel instructed county EOC managers to take a 10-minute break to review their exercise notes. After the break, MEMA observed that the conference ran much more efficiently. County EOC managers could quickly identify response strengths and weaknesses that occurred during exercise play, and the conference ran more smoothly.

For future after-action conferences, MEMA plans to include a breakout session for participants to organize their notes at the beginning of the after-action conference. This will help to ensure that all participants are prepared to discuss their results.

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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 Dec 2009.

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