

Exercising Community Emergency Plans

Using this Guide

There are two main focus areas for this Guide:

- Communities who have, after all the hard work and co-ordination of their community emergency plan, need to run through their arrangements.
- Communities struggling to prepare a Community Emergency Plan without incident to base it around. Exercise Sycamore is designed to help.

Exercising Emergency Plans is a key part of the development process and the ongoing reflection and improvement of the plan. Within the Cumbria Resilience Forum this is called validation.

Having thought through and prepared an Emergency Plan for your community it is important to test the arrangements that you have put in place to make sure that they work. Identifying possible problems and resolving these will help ensure things go smoothly when you do it for real.

Emergency Plans hold significant value once written, however it is not until they are exercised or practiced, and proved to be practical, that confidence can be found in the integrity of a plan.

Exercising the plan allows you to validate the procedures within the plan and offer training to all those involved in the plan.

Generally, participants in exercises should have an awareness of their roles and be reasonably comfortable with them, before they are subject to the stresses of an exercise.

An important aim of an exercise should be to make people feel more comfortable in their roles and to build morale.

Exercising is not to catch people out; they test procedures, not people. If volunteers are under-prepared, they may blame the plan, when they perhaps should blame lack of preparation and training.

Types of Exercises

There are two types of exercises which are easy for a community to utilise at little cost.



- Desk Based
- Tabletop

Desk Based Exercises

Desk Based exercises are the easiest to prepare and run. They can be used as a 'talk-through' the plan to check that all details have been included or used on a completed plan to develop awareness about the plan through discussion; in this respect, they are often used for training purposes.

Table top exercises

Table top exercises are based on a pretend incident and not necessarily literally around a table top. Usually they involve a potentially realistic scenario and a time line, which can be real time or speeded up. The players (these are the community members participating in the exercise) are expected to have some awareness of the contents of the plan and are invited to test how the plan works as the scenario unfolds.

This type of exercise is particularly useful for exploring weaknesses in procedures.

This guide can be used by both methods to help both validate the plan and to identify potential future issues or improvements.

Validation is the process of ensuring that a **plan meets the users needs and requirements.**

Scenario is an imagined or projected sequence of events, especially any of several detailed plans or possibilities



Step 2 – Scenario

The scenarios attached give a few of the incidents which are high on the risk register and likely to need a significant local response. They are brief so can be expanded or made more complicated, or use them as they are to achieve confidence in a newly established plan or arrangements.

Hint: Always remember that planning based on very detailed assumptions on a specific scenario may be too inflexible to adapt to the unforeseen. In exercises the objective will be to test arrangements and procedures which can be brought into play if needed regardless of the cause, therefore may not be ideally designed to respond to the particular incident but give a framework of response.



Step 1 - What you want to achieve from the exercise?

It is important to have some clear elements you want to achieve from the exercise as this helps you to check back on what you have demonstrated during the exercise, and please remember you don't need to try everything on every exercise. Consider setting up a rolling programme of just checking small elements of the plan:

- Contact lists.
- Communications equipment.
- Activation Process.
- Facilities set-up.
- Equipment use.

Your first task is to find a volunteer to be an Exercise Controller/Facilitator. This person does not play a role in the exercise but observes, takes notes and moves the scenario on as required. It does help if this person is familiar with the local area, but doesn't have to be familiar with your plan.

This guide takes you through a desk based or tabletop exercise which will: Test the community response to an incident in which people are displaced from their homes, or find transport or power networks are affected, and this will help validate the processes detailed in the Community Emergency Plan.

Do add in any aims or objectives you would like to achieve.

Hint - start with a straight forward set of objectives and you can always make the exercise more challenging.

The scenario is split into several sections and, for each exercise, a facilitators sheet and players handouts. These will help 'drive' play and make sure the exercise remains interesting. There are also injects for one exercise, these introduce something new or different, and using them is optional. Although approximate timings are included on the facilitators sheet they are only for guidance and if you make the scenario more complicated you will need more time to ensure the players have time to find solutions.

Attached Scenario's increase in complexity:

- **Limited Complexity:** Exercise Sycamore – Electricity Loss (including version to help with developing a Community Emergency Plan)
- **Challenging:** Exercise Beech – Flooding Based
- **Very Challenging:** Exercise Oak – Severe Weather Based (cold weather).



Step 3 – Running the Exercise

Location and Venue - For both Table Top and Discussion based exercises you will need a room with enough room for all the players. If you have a nominated space to meet in the event of an incident in your plan, consider using this, it adds value to the exercise.

Pre-Exercise Final Arrangements

- Participants should be briefed prior to the exercise.
- Anyone not playing should be briefed and suitably identifiable (think about using some sort of hi viz, such as arm bands, and do remind them that they should not interfere).
- Room layout and environment checked for suitability, and resources in place (such as an OS map of the local area).
- All necessary equipment (e.g. paper, pens, flip charts etc.) available.
- Any equipment that is to be tested (if necessary).
- Welfare arrangements (refreshments, toilets) etc. in place.

Briefings - Briefings need to cover key areas of the exercise such as the housekeeping arrangements, type of exercise and aims and objectives.

A template briefing is included in this guide. It is vital that all players understand key things such as domestics and exercise codewords. These three codewords are the ones you will need them to remember:

- Startex – Start of Exercise
- Endex – End of Exercise
- No Duff – real incident break from exercise role.



Step 4: Evaluation and Reflection

Once the exercise is complete it is important to capture any points of reflection, both positive and learning points. These can then be discussed at the next group meeting.

Please remember that it is a plan, a methodology and process, and doesn't have all the answers; it should just assist, direct and hold information.

Consider pairing up with another community to test plans and see if best practice can be shared and your community should benefit from having a critical friend.

It is important that a non-threatening atmosphere is created so that people are not afraid of being honest about their experiences and problems.

Debrief is to question formally and systematically in order to obtain useful intelligence or information.

Debrief Objectives

1. What didn't work well and why?
2. What worked well and why?

Suggested Debrief Questions (note these can be anonymous and don't have to be shared):

- What were the 2 least successful aspects of the communities planned response?
- What are the 2 most significant things I have learned?

How can my community use this learning / experience to improve our future planned response?

Step 5: Regularly Review



The plan is only as good as the information it contains, unfortunately information changes regularly, such as phone numbers, building use, car parking and access (key holders).

You don't need to run a full exercise every time you want to check your plan. Why not go back to the introduction and undertake a discussion based exercise on just communications or resource access on a regular basis, then run a full exercise if you make significant changes to the plan, or have new members of the community getting involved.

If you require this document in another format (eg CD, audio cassette, Braille or large type) or in another language, please telephone 01768 812500

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