

Practice Disaster Response Drills

John: Let's move on to process. How do you develop and set goals for disaster simulation? That clarifies what you expect to achieve.

For instance, if you want to test the response and capabilities of local law enforcement and fire departments, you want to test the readiness and knowledge of your staff to follow established protocols. Which types of disasters do you want to focus on throughout the year? Floods, earthquakes, pandemic, tornadoes? Defining the process will help you define the scale and complexity of the exercise.

From this, you can define the scenario to be simulated and develop events and upset triggers injected into that test. Then test the dynamics of a real event, and your staff's adaptability and ability to think on their feet. The process is you develop an exercise plan, review it with your governing body or tribal council. Get their buy-in, then you communicate those instructions and procedures for the drill to your staff. Train them in your protocols.

Set some meaningful goals that again, help define simulations you want to develop. Practice the procedures via exercises and drills. And like any systematic process, you want to feedback into your plan. Collect and analyze results with a recorder. Debrief the participants, revise your plan and program, and then repeat it again.

For each scenario, you want to use a small team of a facilitator, an observer or recorder, and an evaluator to help manage, document, and monitor the drill exercise. You want to control the timing and logistics of the simulation and collect data to evaluate the performance and outcomes of the staff on which to base recommendations for improving your planning.

There are several kinds of different types of exercises that you can perform. Put your facility hat on when you think about these, and put on your health and behavioral health hat. Guided by the National Center on Health and Behavioral Health and Safety, all in the same exercise. Earthquake drills, tornado active shooter, loss of utilities, severe weather exercise.

In severe weather, because of climate change, we're seeing stronger force winds and tornadoes, and thunderheads. We just saw that happen in Houston with 80 to 90 mile an hour winds downtown blowing out windows. We had an incident last fall in the Midwest where a tornado coming down out of Illinois at a 140 mile an hour winds at ground level wasn't a tornado. It was just a thunderstorm. Think about how you would respond in various scenarios.

The tabletop exercise facilitates an in - depth discussion amongst participants in an informal setting of how they would carry out the disaster protocols and adjust their response on the fly.

As the situation changes, it helps to identify the strengths and weaknesses of your planning and can then prepare you and your staff for an in-house on - site drill or a full - scale exercise.

Here we have an example exercise that begins as a tabletop exercise, where the program creates a scenario for an earthquake, and all staff participate in the walk through the protocol, and each one describes what they have to do, from the beginning to the end and to the aftermath and the recovery. Then, they look at their facility to say what heavy objects are not secured, what bookshelves could fall over, what is in the path of egress in the hallways that should be removed from the hallways. Then, a secondary trigger is put into the exercise unexpectedly. Post-earthquake, you have a loss of power, loss of phone lines. You have a fire from a ruptured gas line in the kitchen.

You have to notify emergency responders, but the phone lines are down. You have to avoid the build, evacuate the building, but you have to avoid the area of fire and see how your staff does it. And in this case, you could do an onsite drill. You go from a tabletop to an onsite drill. That's an example of a thoughtful exercise that you could build off of. Your key takeaways for today, the first one is to make sure here that you and your staff read and understand the guide that we have of an ECLKC for facility disaster management.

The other guides for planning for natural disasters published by the other national centers. You want to walk through the guide, the eight steps in developing a disaster management plan. You might already have a disaster management plan or disaster preparedness plan in place, but it may not include all the facility jargon, all of the facility issues that we talk about. You want to go back through, modify your plan to insert facility context. You want to formulate some near - term strategies.

We talked a lot about near - term strategies and things that you can do to improve your facilities, resiliency to natural disasters, and therefore the survivability of its occupants, and enabling you to get your facilities up online sooner after a natural disaster, which is critically important to your families, who themselves want to go back to work and have a place to put their children while they're working.

The last point is to prepare your staff to react in a calm manner following an emergency response, and, to the various types of hazards, and ensure that your facility is going to be resilient to the forces of a natural disaster.