

6-1-2012

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Julie Smith

University of Vermont College Agriculture and Life Sciences, julie.m.smith@uvm.edu

Lynette Black

Oregon State University Extension Service, lynette.black@oregonstate.edu

Linda Williams

Montana State University Chouteau Extension, lwilliams@montana.edu



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Recommended Citation

Smith, J., Black, L., & Williams, L. (2012). Emergency Exercise Participation and Evaluation. *The Journal of Extension*, 50(3), Article 46. <https://tigerprints.clemson.edu/joe/vol50/iss3/46>

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Emergency Exercise Participation and Evaluation

Julie Smith

Extension Dairy Specialist
University of Vermont College of Agriculture and Life Sciences
Burlington, Vermont
julie.m.smith@uvm.edu

Lynette Black

4-H Youth Educator
Oregon State University Extension Service
Wasco County
The Dalles, Oregon
lynette.black@oregonstate.edu

Linda Williams

County Agent
Montana State University Chouteau County Extension
Fort Benton, Montana
williams@montana.edu

Abstract: *Extension is uniquely positioned to participate in emergency exercises, formally or informally, with the goal of engaging community members in emergency and disaster preparedness. With their knowledge of community needs, Extension personnel are valuable resources and can assist emergency managers in the process of identifying local risks and vulnerabilities as well as identifying capabilities that should be tested and strengthened through the process of exercises. By facilitating, participating in, or evaluating exercises, Extension professionals can help communities better prepare for, prevent, respond to, and recover from disasters.*

Introduction

Incident simulations or "exercises" are useful ways to educate and evaluate. Both real and fictional scenarios are often used by Extension educators when engaging audiences in learning (Lehtola, 2008). Real and fictional incident scenarios are used by emergency managers to evaluate adequacy of planning, training, and equipping responders (US Department of Homeland Security, 2007a). Extension personnel can provide informational resources and can use existing relationships with community organizations, commodity groups, and regulatory agencies to support their local or state exercise programs. The relationships Extension personnel have in communities are extremely valuable. By partnering with emergency management, Extension can help the traditional emergency management community overcome one of its historic challenges—bringing the right people to the table.

Extension personnel in all program areas have opportunities to incorporate emergency preparedness and disaster resilience topics into their outreach programs (Boteler, 2007). Exercises serve as an interactive and effective means to engage with a variety of audiences, including youth. Specific to agrosecurity issues, Extension is well-positioned to facilitate exercises involving the food and agriculture sector, such as events resulting in many livestock or poultry deaths, pesticide contamination of feed, or disease outbreaks with human health risks.

Exercises and Emergency Management

Responders at the local, state, and national level must be prepared to respond to all incidents, large and small, according to the guidelines set out in the National Response Framework (NRF; USDHS, 2008). Exercises are part of the preparedness cycle set forth in the NRF. Exercises are particularly important in allowing key actors to practice organizing the response according to National Incident Management System (NIMS; USDHS, 2007d) principles and applying the Incident Command System (ICS).

The National Preparedness Guidelines (USDHS, 2007e) address preparedness for each of what are referred to as the four homeland security mission areas: prevention, protection, response, and recovery. The guidelines take a capabilities-based approach and establish national priorities and associated capabilities. Three planning tools were developed to facilitate achieving the preparedness goals set by the Guidelines: the National Planning Scenarios, the Target Capabilities List (TCL), and the Universal Task List (UTL). Many of the identified target capabilities are relevant to Extension. For example, Extension could easily play a role in the following areas: Community Preparedness and Participation; Intelligence/Information Sharing and Dissemination; Food and Agriculture Safety and Defense; Animal Disease Emergency Support; Emergency Public Information and Warning; Volunteer Management and Donations; and Economic and Community Recovery.

The Homeland Security Exercise and Evaluation Program (HSEEP; USDHS, 2007a, b, c) provides common exercise policy and program guidance that constitutes a national standard for exercises. This standard is expected to be used by state emergency management agencies and response organizations but can be followed by any organization or group. Language and concepts from the NRF, the NIMS, the National Preparedness Guidelines, the UTL, and the TCL are integrated in HSEEP training. The HSEEP Program includes numerous tools that could provide Extension professionals with a basis for

working on disaster preparedness and recovery issues and exercises. HSEEP training can lay an important conceptual framework for those outside of the traditional emergency management community, such as Extension professionals, who are working in disaster-related programs with adults or youth.

Types of exercises vary in complexity and intensity from discussion-based activities (including seminars, workshops, tabletop exercises, and games) to operations-based activities (such as drills, functional and full-scale exercises). Exercises should be selected and developed in conjunction with the training and exercise needs of the participating individuals and entities. The exercise cycle is explained in detail in the HSEEP Volumes (USDHS, 2007a, b, c). Its five phases are strategy planning, design and development, conduct, evaluation, and improvement planning. These bear strong similarities to Extension program development best practices.

The National Preparedness Guidelines (USDHS, 2007e, p.10) state, "The challenge for government officials, working with the private sector, nongovernmental organizations, and individual citizens, is to determine the best way to build capabilities for bolstering preparedness and achieving the Guidelines." Extension can be part of the solution because it has established itself as a trustworthy linkage between land-grant universities and clientele in communities across the country.

Extension Can Play a Role

Extension and emergency management come together in most states under the state support function related to agriculture and natural resources, but Extension may be named in other support functions as well. Extension can be involved in all aspects of managing an incident: prevention, mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery. Extension has historically been most involved in preparedness, prevention, and recovery efforts, thus serving to complement the emphasis of traditional emergency management agencies on response. To fulfill the expectations of emergency management at the state, county, or local levels, Extension professionals must first understand the NIMS and the ICS. Participation in exercises is critical to evaluate actual response capacity and identify additional training or equipment needs. Extension's participation in exercises, however, may go beyond simply assessing our own capacity to respond. Extension professionals can also participate in the following ways:

- Promote exercises involving agricultural, family, youth, and community development issues;
- Help design, plan and/or facilitate exercises;
- Serve as evaluators, simulators, or players in exercises; and/or
- Encourage involvement of 4-H families and other volunteers to serve as exercise victims.

Additional roles include:

- Networking with state and county or local emergency management and voluntary organizations active in disaster (VOADs);
- Facilitating and conducting training by incorporating principles of emergency preparedness and planning into current programs;
- Facilitating engagement of internal audience of Extension professionals in disaster preparedness; and
- Promoting the role of Extension and resources of the Extension Disaster Education Network.

Examples of involvement with exercises include the following:

- An Extension "Inbox exercise" has been conducted to test emergency response protocols;
- 4-H youth involved in Teen Community Emergency Response Teams (CERT) have been involved in exercises of their response roles or as victim simulators; and
- An agrosecurity tabletop exercise was coordinated to get conversations going among response organizations about issues not ordinarily encountered.

Extension Disaster Education Network Takes First Steps

The Extension Disaster Education Network (EDEN) recognizes exercise participation as a priority area. To build capacity within Extension to engage with emergency management in exercise conduct and evaluation, the following actions can be accomplished with existing or minimal additional funds:

- Develop a work group to facilitate information exchange through the Extension System;
- Identify Extension personnel who are active in emergency management or exercise programs in their states;
- Foster sharing of experiences to encourage additional Extension personnel to be involved in emergency management and exercises;
- Provide national professional development webinars or workshops on the ICS for Extension personnel; and

- Support professional development training of some number of Extension personnel to become certified exercise planners or evaluators.

An EDEN Exercise Group has recently been established with Linda Williams as the point person for facilitating discussions and exchange of information on its SharePoint site. Based on the response to this newly created Exercise Group, it is clear that many Extension personnel are interested in getting involved in or are already engaged in conducting or participating in emergency management exercises.

The EDEN Professional Development committee has been discussing ways to facilitate ICS training for Extension personnel who want it. Some organizational resistance to system-wide training has been noted. For Extension to achieve its full potential to engage with local or state emergency management agencies, basic training is necessary. Engaging in exercises at the local and state level is another way to make sure Extension resources are recognized and integrated with the emergency management system.

Extension has embraced evaluation as a means to demonstrate impact. Our expertise in that area can easily translate to evaluation of emergency exercises, but training is required to be certified in that context. Being plugged into exercises of national scope as an evaluator would give us a critical perspective on emergency management and how Extension resources can be better publicized and used. Furthermore, exercise conduct and evaluation could be a useful tool for measuring the impact of Extension activities related to emergency preparedness.

Conclusion

Individuals throughout Extension and collectively through the EDEN have the opportunity to become more engaged in emergency and disaster preparedness activities by planning, participating in, or evaluating exercises. An EDEN Exercise SharePoint Group has recently been established to facilitate sharing of experiences and ideas among individuals with diverse expertise and varying levels of experience with exercises. This group has demonstrated a high level of interest in expanding Extension's role in exercise participation at the local, state, and national level. Given the diversity of disciplines represented and having strong community connections, Extension is well positioned to engage in exercises in a number of ways that will increase our profile and result in enhanced community resilience. In the future, Extension personnel could take a lead role in creating platforms for conducting in-person or virtual tabletop exercises, particularly related to agricultural incidents.

Acknowledgments

This commentary is based on a paper submitted by the authors in response to the Extension Disaster Education Network's 2010 call for agrosecurity priority papers. The priority paper as submitted is posted at <http://eden.lsu.edu/Resources/WhitePapers/2010WhitePapers/Pages/EmergencyExerciseParticipationandEvaluation.aspx>. It was selected as one of the top submissions and presented at the Extension Disaster Education Network Annual Meeting, by Julie Smith. Portland, Oregon, October 13, 2011.

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