

Keeping a Crisis-Centric Mindset Throughout the Year

Conduct a Tabletop Drill to Maintain Your Emergency Response Plan

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Every month you change the filter on your furnace. Every 3,000 miles you get the oil changed on your car. Every six months you (hopefully) visit your dentist for a cleaning. Maintenance is important. It's key to keeping you, your home, or your auto running smoothly.

Your business is no different. The office copy machine is serviced after a predetermined number of copies, and when your color printer signals a service code, you put in a call for service. But what about your emergency response plan? Your safety team already has devoted a considerable amount of time meeting regularly and putting together a well-thought out emergency response plan. Do you know where this plan is located?

Chances are, you promptly filed it or

it's tucked away on the shelf above your computer. If the cover page states the last update was more than one year ago, it's time to dust off your plan and put it into action. How long has it been since you last conducted a mock disaster exercise using your emergency plan as your guide?

The emergency response plan is a living document. It should be updated whenever you add new products or services, make technology upgrades, or staff changes. Ideally, changes in the plan should be made as they occur in the workforce. Your plan should be tested at least once a year. More frequent tests can be performed on critical items for the response such as notifications to the teams involved. These do not have to have extensive time involvement. However, if you are not able to reach the people necessary for the response, your

ability to handle the crisis will be hamstrung. Without testing, you won't know where further support might be needed, and you won't know if your employees fully understand their role and responsibilities during a crisis.

Conducting periodic drills and updating your plan are crucial — yet often overlooked — pieces of the disaster response planning process. Since the last edit of your disaster plan, you may have added another building to your facility and hired an additional 50 employees, but have you taken the time to update your plan with these changes? Have the new hires been trained on what to do in an emergency? If the answer is yes, congratulations! You take safety seriously. For many, the answer will likely be no, so here are a few ideas on how to conduct plan maintenance.



Types of Drills
Understand that the purpose of a drill is not to place fault. It's to determine how and when the plan is implemented and identify any gaps. There are three types of drills:

1. critical task or area-specific drill
2. tabletop exercise
3. full scale/live drill

A critical task drill breaks out the time-liest aspects of an emergency response and tests it. Some items included in these drills include:

- ◆ team member notification
- ◆ arrival and setup of the emergency command center
- ◆ test of community emergency contacts
- ◆ communication plan

A full-scale mock crisis or disaster drill takes additional planning and requires the time of everyone involved. It typically will involve the emergency response teams and departments which might be impacted by the disaster type. You should also think about inviting local first responders, local members of the Red Cross, and staff from

hospitals in your location. These are community members who will be involved in an actual event, and it's extremely helpful for them to have an understanding of your response plan and the people they will be working with at the time of a crisis. Planning for this type of drill should take into account the disaster scenarios most likely to impact your organization. If you would like to add a bit of drama, many organizations invite students or even local theatre members to play the role of victims. These exercises take a great deal of planning and are not an annual event.

A quicker, and just as effective, method would be to conduct what we call a tabletop exercise. A tabletop exercise is intended as a means to have the emergency response team members review their current checklists and identify any areas in need of review with regard to a hypothetical simulated emergency. Gathered around the conference room table, your emergency response team will get a chance to image the "what if" scenario and go through your plan to make sure it can take your company from disaster to survival, in a low-stress environment. A typical table-

top exercise will run from three to four hours and include a "hot wash" after it concludes. The hot wash identifies items for additional review as well as gaps in the planning.

Tabletop training provides an opportunity to:

- ◆ assess internal and external capabilities
- ◆ train staff on their responsibilities during a crisis
- ◆ build relationships with other staff members and members of the community
- ◆ learn the importance of collaboration, not just cooperation
- ◆ develop partnering arrangements with the community

A team facilitator might provide different scenarios such as an active shooter on the property, a plant explosion, or a tornado heading toward your building. The facilitator might ask you to work in teams or one large group to walk through what you would do in that situation, using your disaster plan as your guide. This is where you will find the gaps needed to ensure your staff is up to speed on your plan.



Using your plan as a guide, here are some considerations for each scenario:

- ◆ How is the disaster management plan activated? By whom?
- ◆ How is the team notified?
- ◆ Who else needs to be notified? By whom?
- ◆ Who are the members of the team?
- ◆ Are the checklists of responsibilities realistic?
- ◆ What is the communication protocol? Internal? External?
- ◆ Who is the organization's spokesperson?
- ◆ Should the building be evacuated? Shelter-in-place?
- ◆ Who has all the building keys?
- ◆ Who will act as the scribe for the exercise?
- ◆ Who is taking the lead on compiling all individual notes from the exercise?
- ◆ Following the hot wash, who will complete the After Action Report (AAR)?

Effective facilitation is critical to keeping participants focused on exercise objectives. The facilitator may ask about the decisions made, including how a decision was reached or what implications a decision might have. The exercise ends either when all actions have been discussed or when the time limit is reached. Participant learning is reinforced, and feedback is provided through the hot wash immediately following the conclusion of the drill.

While the drill is being conducted, the scribe will take responsibility for documenting the items that were effective as well as any inefficiencies in the plan and identify the gaps.

Outcomes of the Tabletop Exercise?

When the tabletop exercise is complete, you should conduct the hot wash. The scribe will share his or her observations with the entire team. Your team should finish these sentences and use the responses as a follow-up:

- We should keep doing...
- We should stop doing...
- We should start doing...

Using those answers, you can go back to your emergency response plan and fill in any gaps, add new developments, and revise and remove anything that is now old or outdated. The scribe will use the feedback to complete the AAR, noting observations and listing recommendations that were discussed for improvement. Without testing, you won't know if your plan will work, and you won't know if employees will know what to do. The better prepared your facility and staff are, the more resilient you will be, making the recovery process that much smoother. Using the

information from the AAR, a single point person or a committee should make the recommended updates to your plan and share the revised plan with all emergency response team members. Remember, once the AAR is written and filed away, your team should continue to review key details of the plan throughout the year to keep a crisis-centric mindset.



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