



CALIFORNIA EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY

GOLDEN GUARDIAN 2011 AFTER ACTION REPORT EXECUTIVE BRIEF



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INTRODUCTION

Ten years after 9/11, California continues to be a national leader in prevention, preparedness, response, and recovery activities addressing catastrophic natural and man-made incidents. A significant part of this effort is California Emergency Management Agency’s robust training and exercise programs designed to meet the needs of the State’s 58 counties, roughly 38 million residents, tribal nations, approximately 650,000 first responders, 11 ports, over 1,500 critical infrastructure sites, and 10 major metropolitan cities.

Working in concert with preparedness partners, the training and exercise program features the Governor’s Annual Exercise Series, “Golden Guardian.” Golden Guardian allows local, state, private, and federal partners to train and exercise with the goal of evaluating and improving their capabilities in all mission areas related to catastrophic natural and man-made incidents in California. A successful Golden Guardian exercise series is a 12-to-18 month process and includes months of planning, numerous exercises, and a wide range of participants.

California Emergency Management Agency (Cal EMA) conducts Golden Guardian to assist in achieving goals identified in California’s Strategic Plan. The Exercise Series implements critical elements of the State of California Emergency Plan, The Standardized Emergency Management System (SEMS), National Preparedness Goal (NPG), the National Response Framework (NRF), and the National Incident Management System (NIMS). An After Action Report (AAR) is prepared after each Golden Guardian exercise to capture important strengths and lessons learned. Once approved, the AAR is posted on the Corrective Action Planning System (CAPS). This Executive Brief provides an overview of the following:

- (1) Golden Guardian 2011 Scenario**
- (2) Golden Guardian 2011 Objectives and Capabilities**
- (3) Golden Guardian 2011 Major Strengths, Areas of Improvement, and Lessons Learned**
- (4) Golden Guardian 2011 Purpose and Planning**
- (5) Training & Exercises, What’s it All About?**

GOLDEN GUARDIAN 2011 SCENARIO

The Golden Guardian 2011 (GG11) scenario was a catastrophic flood focused on California's Inland Region. The Inland Region stretches from the Oregon border to the northern border of Los Angeles County and consists of 31 counties, 123 incorporated cities, and over 7 million residents. The geography for the Inland Region is vast and varied with terrain consisting of valley floor agricultural centers, grasslands, watershed areas, high desert regions, foothill regions, and mountain range areas.

While the devastating 1997 floods formed the scenario basis, GG11's scenario was intensified or scaled back, in certain locations, in order to meet the needs of exercise participants and adequately test selected Target Capabilities. In the exercise, the flood began in the northern part of the Inland Region on May 17 and worked its way south over a three-day period, affecting the middle of the Inland Region and the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta on May 18 and the southern part of Inland Region on May 19.

A three-week build-up to the full-scale exercise began on April 25 with simulated weather reports and forecasts delivered via the California Data Exchange Center (CDEC) exercise website, a tool specially developed by the Department of Water Resources. Over a three-week period, flood conditions consistently worsened with continued and increasing rain and heavy snowfalls in the lower elevations. By May 16, flood conditions were extremely severe with high ground saturation and snow pack at 120 percent of normal at lower elevations.

The full-scale exercise began on May 17 when warm rains caused a rapid and massive melting of the heavy snow pack. Major rivers overflowed, levees were threatened, and key reservoirs had to make significant releases to prevent overtopping. While major flooding and damage was occurring throughout the region, several significant events occurred, including the weakening of the "J" Levee on the Sacramento River, north of Glenn County, threatening tens of thousands of people in the area.

On May 18, the situation worsened drastically. In the early morning, the "J" levee failed, causing the evacuation of Hamilton City and closures of Interstate 5 and Highways 99, 32, and 45. At 10:00 a.m., a levee along the American River near the Mayhew Drain in Sacramento failed, causing the evacuation of 30,000 people and threatening key facilities in that part of the city. While emergency managers were responding to these events, potential levee failures in the Delta threatened a number of important inlands including Andrus, Brennan, and Bethel Islands. May 18 ended with catastrophic events occurring throughout the region with multiple major levee breaks, mass evacuations, shelters opening, and California's water supply in the Delta threatened.

May 19 continued with flood conditions moving farther south, affecting Kings, Tulare, and Fresno counties. Conditions in the Delta continued to be severe and caused great concern for California's water supply infrastructure. The Department of Water Resources, California Conservation Corps, and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers crews responded to flooding that could have significantly damaged the Delta's Mendota Canal, causing a possible loss of the California Aqueduct in the Central Valley. The exercise ended on the afternoon of May 19 when a Presidential Declaration of Disaster in California was announced.

GOLDEN GUARDIAN 2011 OBJECTIVES AND CAPABILITIES

Capabilities-based planning accounts for uncertainties by developing capabilities suitable for a wide range of threats and hazards when limited resources necessitate prioritization and choice among preparedness efforts. It allows exercise planning teams to develop exercise objectives in an environment of uncertainty and observe exercise outcomes through a framework of specific action items derived from the Target Capabilities List (TCL).

Golden Guardian 2011 objectives were developed by exercise stakeholders using lessons learned from previous Golden Guardian exercises, real world events, and other emergency operations plans, policies, and procedures. The overarching state-level exercise objectives were to:

- Evaluate state, regional, and local response to effects of a catastrophic flood in the Inland Region;
- Examine recovery aspects of a catastrophic flood incident;
- Support regional response to a catastrophic flood incident; and
- Assess State Operations Center (SOC) and regional response, resolution, coordination, and resource support.

Golden Guardian 2011 incorporated the following Target Capabilities:

- Communications;
- Emergency Operations Center Management;
- Citizen Evacuation and Shelter-in-Place;
- Emergency Public Information and Warning;
- Mass Care (Sheltering, Feeding and Related Services);
- Structural Damage Assessment and Mitigation; and
- Critical Resource Logistics and Distribution.

The following California Emergency Functions (EFs) were utilized during the exercise:

- Communications;
- Management;
- Public Information;
- Care and Shelter;
- Evacuation; and
- Recovery.

GOLDEN GUARDIAN 2011 - MAJOR STRENGTHS, AREAS OF IMPROVEMENT, AND LESSONS LEARNED

Highlighted below are the GG11 major strengths, recommended areas of improvement, and key lessons learned. This analysis is a useful tool for stimulating discussion and provides a basis for the improvement planning process.

Major Strengths

Major strengths identified during this exercise include:

- The validation of the strong public-private partnerships that exist in California during all major emergencies and the effectiveness of co-locating the Business and Utilities Operations Center (BUOC) within the State Operations Center (SOC);
- The Multi-Agency Coordination System (MACS) was very effective for establishing priorities, critical resource allocation, communications systems integration, and information coordination during a major flood incident; and
- Several plans and processes were effectively tested, including the revised State of California Emergency Plan, the Emergency Managers Mutual Aid (EMMA) process, draft Delta response strategies, and SOC and BUOC standard operating procedures.

Areas of Improvement

The primary areas for improvement include:

- Improving the common operating picture that exists at all levels of government during a flood emergency and to integrate and coordinate various situational reports into a single useful format in order to simplify and streamline situational awareness;
- Development of state agency/department disaster specific resource lists that are routinely updated and maintained at the SOC, the Regional Emergency Operations Centers (REOC), and by state agency/department liaisons would enhance the resource coordination process during emergencies; and
- Personnel turnover requires the continuation of a robust training program focused on the Response Incident Management System (RIMS) and SOC and REOC positions and standard operating procedures.

Lessons Learned

In all, over 5,000 people participated at some level during the Golden Guardian 2011 (GG11) exercise series. The exercise provided a framework for all levels of government, private sector partners, and non-governmental organizations to review and discuss important plans and procedures and practice critical decision-making processes related to catastrophic flooding. Existing evacuation and mass care plans, mutual aid agreements, multi-agency coordination, draft Delta response strategies, and emergency operations center procedures are all examples of important items addressed during GG11. Further, the exercise forced emergency managers to make decisions prioritizing limited resources in a complex fast moving environment. The successful coordination and synchronization of multiple preparedness events ultimately resulted in one of the most complex catastrophic flood preparedness exercises ever conducted in California.

Local and regional first responders and emergency managers continued to demonstrate expertise in their respective areas. The exercise series provided an opportunity for them to polish their skills in such areas as emergency operations center management, evacuation, mass care and shelter, public information and warning, recovery issues, coordination of mutual aid, and immediate response with state and federal agencies and non-governmental organizations in the region.

GG11 highlighted the strong public-private partnerships that exist in California and validated the co-location of the Business and Utilities Operations Center (BUOC) within the State Operations Center (SOC). Having the two operation centers in close proximity streamlined the coordination and cooperation that must take place between private sector partners and emergency managers during an emergency. Emergency managers received real-time notification of the effects of the flood on key utilities and were able to develop plans to deal with planned shutdowns of electricity and other vital utilities. Having private sector partners in the SOC allowed for real time coordination and integration of private sector resource capabilities into the challenges of flood response.

An important component of GG11 was the ability to address key issues in the Sacramento–San Joaquin Delta during catastrophic flooding. In order to address resource and prioritization challenges, emergency managers practiced using MACS to make critical decisions. The exercise demonstrated that MACS, a process normally used in fire response situations, is very effective when applied to catastrophic flooding.

GG11 provided the opportunity to test several new plans including the revised State of California Emergency Plan, the EMMA process, SOC and Inland REOC SOPs, BUOC activation guidelines, draft Delta response strategies, and MACS. State and federal partners worked closely to plan, coordinate, and conduct emergency support functions and activities. Bringing together federal agencies, the SOC, and the Inland REOC, while complex, was successful. This multi-agency coordination should be trained and exercised on a routine basis.

A challenge in any emergency is the ability to develop and maintain situational awareness through a common operating picture (COP). In GG11 this challenge was no different. The

replacement for the current Response Incident Management System (RIMS) is in final bid review and will address the COP issue at the local, regional, and state levels.

An important component of situational awareness is the various reports that are generated in emergencies and as a matter of routine/non-emergency operations. On a daily basis, multiple state agencies and departments issue a variety of situation reports. It would be worth studying the benefit of integrating and coordinating the various reports into a single format useful at all levels of government.

GG11 demonstrated that California departments and agencies have a vast amount of resources available to aid flood response situations. However, resource availability changes over time and internal institutional knowledge of resource availability is subject to personnel turnover. It is recommended that state agency/department disaster specific resource lists are developed, updated on a routine basis, and maintained at the SOC, REOCs, and by trained state agency/department SOC liaisons.

Since the last catastrophic flood incident took place in California over a decade ago, GG11 provided an opportunity to train new, less experienced emergency managers on flood response and recovery procedures and EOC operations. Personnel turnover and time gaps between SOC and REOC activations requires a continued training program on RIMS as well as SOC and REOC position and SOPs to keep personnel skillful in these tasks.

Significant successes of GG11 were the Executive Response and Recovery Seminars involving senior executives and cabinet secretaries. The seminars allowed review of key lessons learned from previous California floods and provided an opportunity to discuss important strategic and policy level issues that would be faced during a catastrophic flood incident. The involvement of senior officials from local, state, and federal governments, as well as private sector partners, are a key component of the State's exercise program and directly contributes to improving preparedness efforts at all levels.

Conclusions

The Governor's Annual Exercise Series, Golden Guardian, continues to prove itself as a successful and valuable tool for California to test its prevention, protection, response and recovery capabilities for catastrophic natural or manmade incidents. GG11 enhanced and spotlighted the spirit of planning, coordination, and cooperation between participants at all levels, thus ensuring that the State of California will continue to be a national preparedness leader. As a result of multiple coordinated exercises, local, regional, state, and federal agencies are better prepared to respond to and recover from a catastrophic flood in California.

GOLDEN GUARDIAN 2011 PURPOSE AND PLANNING

The GG11 exercise series was funded by the Homeland Security Grant Program and designed to assess response and recovery target capabilities in the context of multiple catastrophic flood incidents throughout California's Inland Region. Planning for GG11 began in November of 2009 and culminated with an Executive Flood Recovery Seminar in June of 2011. The full-scale phase of the exercise, which took place from May 17-19, 2011, included real-time activities in 18 Operational Areas, the Inland REOC, the SOC, and various state agencies' Department Operations Centers (DOCs).

The exercise series was comprehensive and complex. It consisted of 26 separate, yet synchronized, exercise activities including three regional evacuation seminars, three mass care tabletop exercises, an Inland REOC Functional Exercise, four regional/state agency recovery training sessions, two executive level seminars, three regional and one state agency recovery seminars, four controller and evaluator training sessions, four simulation cell training sessions, and a three-day full-scale exercise. In addition to assessing flood response and recovery capabilities, GG11 gave stakeholders an opportunity to exercise the draft Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta Emergency Preparedness and Response Strategy, the EMMA System, and the MACS.

To successfully coordinate the exercise, Cal EMA's Exercise Division used an expanded approach by establishing four exercise planning teams based on Cal EMA's Mutual Aid Regional Advisory Council (MARAC) Regions. Planning Teams were formed for Region III, Region IV, Region V and State and Federal Agencies. Regional planning teams worked closely with Operational Areas and non-governmental organizations within each region, while the State and Federal Agencies Team worked exclusively with state and federal agencies, private sector partners, the Inland REOC, and the SOC.

GG11 utilized the capabilities-based planning methodology which allows exercise participants to assess capabilities suitable for a wide range of threats and hazards that would be experienced during catastrophic flooding. In order to test these capabilities, a challenging scenario modeled after the 1997 floods was developed by a working group of subject matter experts. The members comprised of Cal EMA, Department of Water Resources, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, NOAA's National Weather Service, California/Nevada River Forecasting Center, and Operational Areas. The scenario working group developed the overall scenario and tailored it to meet the needs of the various GG11 participants and stakeholders. Ultimately, the final scenario required real-time activation of the SOC, the Inland REOC, 18 Operational Area EOCs, and multiple state agency DOCs.

A key component of the GG11 series was to raise awareness of the State's flood plans and procedures for the new Cabinet. Cal EMA hosted Executive Level Flood Response and Recovery Seminars, providing the opportunity for senior level officials to discuss and address statewide strategic response and recovery issues they would face in the event of catastrophic flooding and the cascading effects on the State's economy.

TRAINING AND EXERCISES: WHAT IS IT ALL ABOUT?

The Cal EMA Exercise Program

Cal EMA's Exercise Team consists of professionals from a wide variety of experiences and backgrounds, including individuals on executive loan from the California Military Department, Sacramento County Sheriff's Department, American Red Cross, University of California, Davis and Cal Volunteers.

The purpose of the Cal EMA Exercise Program is to develop, coordinate, and lead a statewide exercise and evaluation program that is all-hazards based yet focuses on California specific hazards and catastrophic incidents. The overarching goals for the program are to:

- Conduct the Governor's Annual Exercise Series, Golden Guardian;
- Continue implementation of HSEEP methodology in California;
- Support regional exercise initiatives;
- Provide exercise support to California state agencies;
- Remain flexible and adaptable in order to conduct functional initiative exercises to meet the emerging needs of California;
- Conduct the annual State Training & Exercise Planning Workshop and produce the Multi-Year Training and Exercise Plan; and
- Provide oversight for the HSEEP toolkit for California which includes the National Exercise Schedule (NEXS), the Design and Development System (DDS), and the Corrective Action Plan System (CAPS).

Golden Guardian Exercise Series

The Golden Guardian Exercise Series was first implemented by former Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger in 2004 and has become an annual exercise series conducted to coordinate prevention, preparedness, response and recovery mechanisms of city, county, and state governmental entities, private sector partners, and volunteer organizations. The goal of the Golden Guardian Exercise Series is to build upon the lessons learned from exercises as well as real world events. Golden Guardian is currently the largest statewide exercise program of its kind in the country.

Each year's Golden Guardian theme is developed with stakeholder input and is designed to assess regional or catastrophic emergency plans for threats and hazards that face California. The themes for future Golden Guardians are as follows:

- 2012: Catastrophic Southern California Earthquake
- 2013: Catastrophic Bay Area Earthquake
- 2014: Cascadia Earthquake and Tsunami
- 2015: Civil Disturbance
- 2016: Terrorism-Animal Disease Outbreak (Proposed)
- 2017: Cyber Attack-State Government (Proposed)

Cal EMA’s Exercise Support Program

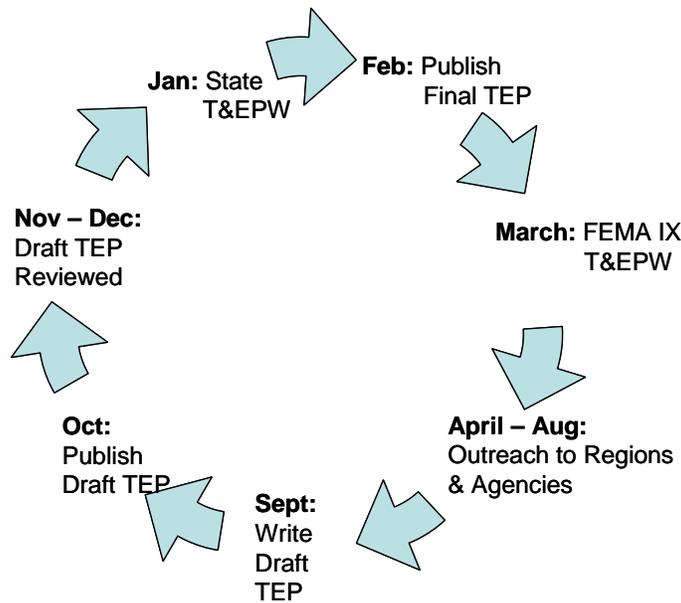
Exercise Division provides exercise support focused on multi-agency/multi-jurisdictional discussion based and functional exercises at the county and regional levels as well as for state agencies and departments. Exercise Support Program materials are designed to be quickly tailored to meet specific requests.

The California HSEEP Training Course

The California Homeland Security Exercise and Evaluation Program (HSEEP) Course for Responders is a 32-hour (four-day) intermediate-level training course that incorporates the HSEEP Toolkit while using HSEEP methodology. Throughout the course, participants learn about topics including exercise conduct, program management, design and development, evaluation, and improvement planning. The course walks participants through the toolkit with an emphasis placed on creating a tabletop exercise (TTX).

The Cal EMA Multi-Year Exercise Plan

Cal EMA, in collaboration with our local, regional, and state partners, as well as tribal nations and private industry partners, develops and revises a multi-year training and exercise plan/program for the State. Each year, Cal EMA conducts a Training & Exercise Planning Workshop (T&EPW) where exercise planners and stakeholders work together to coordinate their training and exercise plans in a three to five year rolling cycle.



California’s Training and Exercise Annual Planning Cycle

The goal of the T&EPW is to align, de-conflict, and synchronize training and exercise opportunities where possible. A three-to-five-year training and exercise plan enhances

communication and coordination among all exercise planners. It also ensures the most efficient and cost effective use of personnel and resources.

The T&EPW process produces the State’s Multi-Year Training and Exercise Plan which includes federal level exercises that affect California, the annual Golden Guardian Exercise Series, other state agency and department exercises, functional area initiative exercises, and local and regional exercises. The plan also coordinates important training course offerings to meet the training of T&EPW participants.

STATE AND FEDERAL STRATEGIES AND PRESIDENTIAL DIRECTIVES

Cal EMA utilizes guidance from the following state and federal strategies and directives in developing its exercise program:

The Standardized Emergency Management System

The Standardized Emergency Management System (SEMS) standardizes response to emergencies involving multiple jurisdictions or multiple agencies. SEMS is intended to be flexible and adaptable to the needs of all emergency responders in California. SEMS requires emergency response agencies use basic principles and components of emergency management including ICS, multi-agency or inter-agency coordination, the operational area concept, and established mutual aid systems.

Cal EMA’s Strategic Plan

Cal EMA’s Strategic Plan outlines the vision, mission, values, goals and objectives critical to protecting lives and property in the Golden State. It is a vision of a safe and resilient California that relies on strong, cohesive leadership and meaningful partnerships. Protecting lives and property in the most populous, diverse state in the nation is not an easy task, but is achievable by enlisting, entrusting, empowering and encouraging state and local partners.

The strategic goals of the plan are to:

- Enhance prevention and detection capabilities to protect our state and critical infrastructure from all hazards;
- Strengthen California’s ability to plan, prepare for and mitigate disasters, emergencies, and terrorist events;
- Effectively respond to and quickly recover from both intentional and natural disasters;
- Streamline the delivery and investment of homeland security and emergency management funding; and
- Strengthen and unify Cal EMA’s operations and management to increase operational efficiency and effectiveness.

A key objective of the strategy is to expand statewide training and exercises across all mission areas, while enhancing professional training for emergency management and homeland security disciplines.

National Security Strategy, May 2010

The National Security Strategy articulates the federal approach to homeland security and provides guidance on how the nation will strive to achieve the goals outline in the Strategy. Exercises are an important component of the National Strategy:

“We are building our capability to prepare for disasters to reduce or eliminate long-term effects to people and their property from hazards and to respond to and recover from major incidents. To improve our preparedness, we are integrating domestic all hazards planning at all levels of government and building key capabilities to respond to emergencies. We continue to collaborate with communities to ensure preparedness efforts are integrated at all levels of government with the private and nonprofit sectors. We are investing in operational capabilities and equipment, and improving the reliability and interoperability of communications systems for first responders. We are encouraging domestic regional planning and integrated preparedness programs and will encourage government at all levels to engage in long-term recovery planning. It is critical that we continually test and improve plans using exercises that are realistic in scenario and consequences.” *Reference Page 19.*

Homeland Security Presidential Directives

The President uses Presidential Directives to provide guidance on priorities for many issues, including homeland security. Two Homeland Security Presidential Directives are highlighted here, as they provide guidance to states on the importance of preparedness and exercises.

Homeland Security Presidential Directive 5: On December 17, 2003, the President issued HSPD-5, "Management of Domestic Incidents." This Directive identifies steps for improved coordination in response to incidents. It requires the United States Department of Homeland Security (USDHS) to coordinate with other federal departments and agencies and state, local and tribal governments to establish a National Response Framework (NRF), and a National Incident Management System (NIMS).

Homeland Security Presidential Directive 8: On March 30, 2011, the President issued the new HSPD-8, “National Preparedness.” This HSPD-8 establishes a new approach to national preparedness focusing on the country’s security and resilience. The directive is aimed:

“...at strengthening the security and resilience of the United States through systematic preparation for the threats that pose the greatest risk to the security of the nation, including acts of terrorism, cyber attacks, pandemics, and catastrophic natural disasters.”

HSPD-8 directs a national system that includes guidance for planning, organization, equipment, training, and exercises to build and maintain domestic capabilities. It also directs all executive departments and agencies with roles in the national planning frameworks to develop department-level operational plans to support the interagency operational plans, as needed. Each national planning framework will include guidance to support corresponding planning for state, local, tribal, and territorial governments. Finally it directs a national preparedness system that provides

guidance for a national training and exercise program that facilitates the nation’s ability to build and sustain the capabilities defined the national preparedness goal and evaluate progress toward meeting that goal.

Draft National Preparedness Goal, August 22, 2011

The Draft National Preparedness Goal builds on previous achievements and presents a unified, nationwide vision of preparedness; identifies the necessary conditions for its realization; and couples this vision with a system for its employment, maintenance and sustainment. The Draft National Preparedness Goal is:

“A secure and resilient Nation that has created the capacity for the organized commitment of the whole community, in the shortest possible time and under all conditions, to successfully prevent, protect, mitigate, respond, or recover from the threats that pose the greatest risk to the nation.”

National Incident Management System (NIMS)

NIMS provides a consistent framework for incident management at all jurisdictional levels regardless of the cause, size or complexity of the incident. Building upon the Incident Command System (ICS), NIMS provides the nation’s first responders and authorities with the same foundation for incident management for terrorist attacks, natural disasters and other emergencies. Exercises are vital to ensuring that NIMS is effective.

National Response Framework (NRF)

The National Response Framework was published in January of 2008 and is a guide to how the Nation conducts all-hazards response. It is built upon *scalable, flexible, and adaptable coordinating structures* to align key roles and responsibilities *across the nation*. It describes specific authorities and best practices for managing incidents that range from the serious but purely local, to large-scale terrorist attacks or catastrophic natural disasters.

Homeland Security Grant Funds

Federal Homeland Security Grants provide the funding for many of California’s exercise initiatives. Exercises utilizing these funds are posted on the National Exercise Schedule (NEXS) and produce After Action Reports (AARs) and Improvement Plans (IPs). AARs and IPs are formatted according to HSEEP guidelines and posted on the Corrective Action Plan System (CAPS) portion of the HSEEP Toolkit. A password-protected copy is also emailed to hseep@dhs.gov.

A BACKGROUND TO EXERCISES

Exercises allow personnel charged with public safety, from first responders to senior officials, as well as tribal and private sector partners, to train and practice prevention, protection, response, and recovery capabilities in a risk-free environment. Exercises are also a valuable tool for assessing and improving performance, while demonstrating community resolve to prepare for

major incidents. Through exercises, Cal EMA aims to help entities validate training and equipment obtained based on their organizational mission. This helps ensure that gaps, deficiencies, and vulnerabilities are resolved prior to a real incident, all while identifying best practices and strengths.

Well designed and executed exercises are the most effective means of:

- Assessing and validating policies, plans, procedures, training, equipment, and inter-agency agreements;
- Validating training personnel on their roles and responsibilities;
- Improving inter-agency coordination and communications;
- Identifying best practices;
- Identifying gaps in capabilities;
- Improving individual performance; and
- Identifying opportunities for improvement.

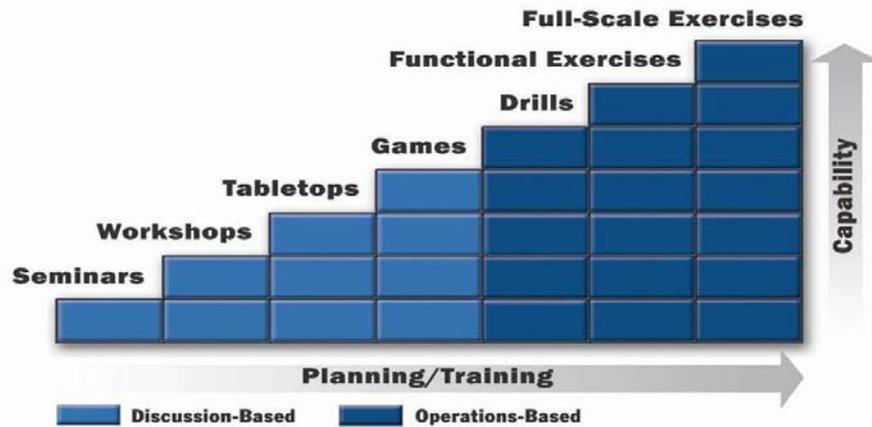
The Homeland Security Exercise & Evaluation Program (HSEEP)

Cal EMA uses the U.S. Department of Homeland Security’s HSEEP doctrine in conducting its exercise programs. The purpose of HSEEP is to:

“...provide common exercise policy and program guidance that constitutes a national standard for exercises. HSEEP includes consistent terminology that can be used by all exercise planners, regardless of the nature and composition of their sponsoring agency or organization. In the spirit of NIMS, all efforts should be made to ensure consistent use of the terminology and processes described in HSEEP.”

Exercise Planning and Execution – A Building Block Approach

The HSEEP exercise design model is the crawl, walk, run or “building block” approach to exercise planning and execution. The building block approach ensures successful progression in exercise design, complexity, and execution, and allows for exercise objectives, scope, and scale to be tailored to the specific community while maintaining a consistent delivery method. California’s response entities possess different levels of preparedness regarding catastrophic events. Therefore, Cal EMA uses the baseline exercise progression which is to move from a seminar, to a tabletop exercise, to a functional exercise, and finally, to a full-scale exercise. This allows for a logical progression of regional and jurisdictional preparedness by increasing in size, complexity, and stress factor, while allowing for significant learning opportunities that complement, build upon, and directly lead into one another effectively.



Exercise Development and the Planning Cycle

Exercise planning should not exist in a vacuum and should be integrated into an overall community preparedness program. The following cycle is conducted annually:

- Conduct Assessment/Re-assessment;
- Identify Vulnerabilities/Targets (Critical Infrastructure);
- Align Missions with National Preparedness Goals;
- Identify Current Target Capabilities;
- Integrate Plans, Policies, Procedures, and Protocols;
- Conduct Training;
- Conduct Exercises;
- Evaluation of Exercises/Training; and
- Track Improvement Plans.

The Exercise Planning Team

An exercise planning team is responsible for the successful execution of all aspects of an exercise, including exercise planning, conduct, and evaluation. The planning team determines exercise objectives, tailors the scenario to jurisdictional or agency needs and develops documents used in exercise simulation, control, and evaluation. The exercise planning team also incorporates representatives from each major participating jurisdiction and agency, while keeping the planning team to a manageable size. The team is managed by an exercise planning team leader and is most effectively structured using the principles of the Incident Command System (ICS), as stated in SEMS and NIMS as referenced in the figure below.



The team’s project management principles reflect SEMS/NIMS, with clearly defined roles and responsibilities and a manageable span of control. Planning team members also help develop and distribute pre-exercise materials and conduct exercise briefings and training sessions.

Planning Meetings: There are six basic exercise planning conferences utilized in HSEEP doctrine. Some can be combined or deleted in planning for less complex exercises. The six basic conferences are:

- Concept & Objectives Meeting (C&O): The C&O Meeting is the formal beginning of the exercise planning process. It is held to agree upon already-identified type, scope, capabilities, objectives, and purpose of the exercise. For less complex exercises and for jurisdictions/organizations with limited resources, the C&O Meeting can be conducted in conjunction with the Initial Planning Conference (IPC).
- Initial Planning Conference (IPC): Lays the foundation for exercise development and is typically the first step in the planning process. Its purpose is to gather input from the exercise planning team on the scope, design, requirements and conditions, objectives, level of participation, and scenario variables.
- Mid-Term Planning Conference (MPC): A working session for discussion of exercise organization and staffing concepts, scenario timeline development, scheduling, logistics, and administrative requirements.
- Master Scenario Events List Conference (MSEL): Develops the Master Scenario Events List; a chronological list supplementing the exercise scenario with event synopses, expected responses, capabilities to be demonstrated and responsible personnel.
- Final Planning Conference (FPC): The final forum for reviewing exercise processes and procedures.
- After Action Review Conference: The forum for analyzing the outcome of the exercise to identify strengths and challenges and for developing corrective action plans.

Exercise Types

There are seven types of exercises utilized under HSEEP methodology. They are divided up into two broad categories, discussion-based and operations-based.

Discussion Based Exercises:

Seminars: Generally orient participants to authorities, strategies, plans, policies, procedures, resources, concepts, and ideas. Used by jurisdictions developing or making major changes to existing plans or procedures.

Workshops: Focus is on achieving or building a product; such as plans or policies.

Tabletop Exercises (TTX): Involve discussion by key staff, decision makers, and elected and appointed officials and are used in the application of group problem solving and to prepare for a more complex exercise.

Games: A simulation of operations that often involves two or more teams and uses rules, data, and procedures to depict an actual or assumed real-life situation.

Operations Based Exercises:

Drills: A coordinated, supervised activity usually employed to validate a single, specific operation or function in a single agency or organization entity.

Functional Exercises (FE): Test and evaluate individual capabilities, multiple functions or activities within a function. The focus is on exercise plans, policies, procedures, and staff that direct and control functions within the Incident Command and Unified Command Systems. These are also known as Command Post Exercises.

Full-Scale Exercises (FSE): Response elements are required to mobilize and deploy to a designated site or location in response to a simulated attack, generally for an extended period. Actual mobilization and movement of personnel and resources are required to demonstrate coordination and response capability. EOCs and field command posts are activated. The FSE is the largest, costliest, and most complex exercise type and may involve participation at the state, local, regional, and federal levels. Although pre-scripted events may be used, the exercise is primarily driven by player actions and decisions.