

Tips For Conducting a Disaster Drill

Disaster drills are used to improve your organization's response to a particular emergency, such as extreme weather, earthquake, flood, threat of violence and lockdown.

According to FEMA, an effective disaster drill should be realistic and interactive. The goal is always to test the plan and not the participants. The planning stage of the exercise or drill varies with the scale and goals of the event. It may take you a few days to plan a drill or, in some cases, a few months. At the end of the drill, employees should better understand their roles and responsibilities in a disaster, and as a byproduct, have greater confidence in their performance should a disaster happen.

DRILL DESIGN

The components of a disaster drill are:

1. Your organizational structure.
2. Your emergency operations (i.e. management) plan.
3. A master sequence of events; The Master Scenario Events List (MSEL) provides a timeline and location for all expected exercise events and injects (actions that push the scenario forward).
4. Clearly set objectives to evaluate the outcomes of the drill.
5. Equipment and resources to simulate a realistic drill.
6. Having a safety plan in case real danger arises during the drill.

The simulation should also include details, like the number of victims, the severity of injuries, and the extent of damage to the facility.

The goal of the drill needs to be SMART (specific and measurable) with a clear objective describing the necessary steps to be completed within a specific time frame. Simulation example below:

Goal of the Drill → Evacuate the entire building within 7 minutes of the time a bomb threat is reported.

- A bomb threat is phoned in.
- A Titan HST Broadcast Message with instructions is sent to employees.
- A Safety Status Request is sent to employees.
- Document the amount of time it took to evacuate the building.

PLANNING WITH CRITICAL PARTNERS

Identify critical partners and invite them to help plan and participate in your drills.

Key partners usually include local public safety and emergency management agencies, first responders, as well as neighboring offices or businesses. Since an effective drill simulates damage and injuries, the presence of public safety officers helps the drill be realistic. In addition, working with these public agencies during a drill helps to build relationships that will make both parties more efficient during an actual disaster.

ASSIGNING ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Assign roles for all participants to play at a pre-drill briefing.

- Designate a controller who will manage and direct the exercise,
- Participants who will respond as they would in a real emergency,
- Simulators which will deliver Broadcast Messages and present unexpected problems,
- Evaluators who will observe the drill and assess everyone's performance,
- A safety officer who is responsible for implementing a medical safety plan and shutting down the drill if a real danger occurs.

THE KICK-OFF

Initiate the drill by introducing the prepared mock situation that mimics a potential natural hazard or vulnerability. Consider gas leak, external threat, lockdown, or power outage as potential scenarios.

Instruct everyone to follow the procedures outlined in your existing disaster preparedness plan through Titan HST broadcast messages and Files. Test your participants' real-time reactions by adding unexpected obstacles to encourage your team to make critical decisions under pressure. For example, a normal evacuation route might now be blocked.

FINISHING STRONG

Once the drill is finished, give a big thank your team and all participants! Notify your partners, neighbors, or surrounding businesses that the disaster drill has ended.

Evaluate the drill to assess the effectiveness of your written procedures and address any shortcomings. Gather feedback from participants with a Titan HST Poll or hand out anonymous evaluation forms to encourage honest assessment.

A team is only as strong as their weakest link. Remember that routine communication and drills can set a tone of confidence within your organization, workplace, or campus that builds trust which extends beyond emergency preparedness.

References:

<https://training.fema.gov/is/courseoverview.aspx?code=IS-139.a>

<https://www.fema.gov/emergency-managers/national-preparedness/exercises/tools>