

2010 ACP Earthquake Exercise

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Overview

The following information has been created to help you design your own exercise when you return to your workplace. The most important elements when designing an exercise are to clearly define the purpose and objectives of the exercise.

For example, below are the Purpose and Objectives of the exercise you attended:

Purpose of the Exercise:

To provide a simple framework that exposes attendees to potential issues they should be prepared to address at the time of a disaster.

Objectives:

- Get people thinking “what if” this happened to my organization?
- Provide attendees a way to take this information back to their own organization, and actually do the ABCs of a tabletop at their own school or company.

Most tabletop exercises should last no longer than about 2 hours. Participants tend to get burned out if they go any longer. It's better to schedule multiple exercises, concentrating on different elements of your program, than to try to cover everything in one exercise. Keep the pace lively. Don't get bogged down in discussion. If a question cannot be answered quickly, move on to the next, and record the question for further follow-up.

Developing the Scenario and Asking The Right Questions

We have provided you with a series of four scenarios that provide information about the event as time goes on. If you need to adapt those scenarios to your own situation, just change the information to stress the portions of the external environment or your own location you want to have impacted. Remember to keep the scenario reasonable.

After each scenario, ask the appropriate questions, based on your own business continuity plan. Look for elements your plan does not address, and ask questions that will require the participants to address those areas.

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Below are the scenarios we used, and a list of questions you can ask after each. This list is greater than the one used in our actual scenario, and can be expanded depending on what you are emphasizing. It is important to pick the right questions, and allow enough time for the attendees to discuss the answers, but not too much time for the pace of the exercise to slack off. Always ask open-ended questions! If you find your participants don't quickly come up with a solution, record the issue for future action, and move on.

Initial Situation:

It's 8:30 AM, and you are all here at the conference when you suddenly feel the floor moving and walls begin to shake. Someone yells "Earthquake!". The shaking lasted 30 seconds, but it seemed much longer. Once the shaking stopped, you could hear others in the room disoriented and frightened. Ceiling tiles have fallen and some light fixtures came down, crashing onto the tables and floor. There is no power. The conference leadership team, after seeing the extent of damages to the room, requests everyone to evacuate.

Suggested Questions (These should be life-safety oriented):

- What will be your next actions?
- Who will determine whether you need to evacuate? (Remember: In an earthquake, it is safer to remain indoors than to evacuate, unless you suspect structural damage or life-safety issues.)
- What directions will the emergency response team give?
- What, if anything, will employees be directed to take with them?
- If some are injured, where should they go?
- Who will contact their families? What will they say?
- Who will care for them there?
- If they are transported elsewhere, who will know their status?
- What actions will you take to make sure everyone is accounted for? If someone is missing, what do you do then?

Update 1:

You've been outside the building now for about 45 minutes. Several people turned on their auto radios, and have found out the following:

- *A magnitude 6.7 earthquake has just struck. It's too early to know the extent of the damage, but callers have been reporting widespread power outages. Freeway overpasses are down, and hospitals are reporting that many injured are streaming in. CalTech is stating that the epicenter was in Irvine.*
- *Reports of the extent of damage indicate that the hardest hit areas are those within 20 miles of the epicenter. The death toll is expected to be high.*

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Suggested Questions:

- By now, what damage information do you have about your own location?
- Who performed the damage assessment?
- What did you ask them to check?
- What is the status of your buildings, equipment, systems, telecommunications, and utilities?
- Once you know this information, what decisions does your executive team need to make?
- What information will you tell your employees?
- If you send them home, how will you have them learn about the evolving situation?
- What critical functions must continue today to keep your organization functioning? Who will do them? Where will they go?
- Employees are asking if they'll get paid for today. What will you tell them?

Update 2:

It is now this afternoon. The Governor has proclaimed a state of emergency and requested a Federal declaration of emergency.

Schools in Orange and L.A. Counties will all be closed at least through the end of the week as damage assessments are made. The 5 Freeway at 22 has buckled; the 405 and 5 exchange has damage; and overpasses on the 57 Freeway have been damaged. There are large power and water disruptions throughout the affected area. The telephone companies are reporting heavy congestion in the network, and are encouraging everyone to use their phones only for emergency calls.

The petroleum companies have reported that their gas production facilities have been shut down, but there is a strong odor in certain areas. The John Wayne Airport is closed and incoming flights have been diverted to LAX and Ontario.

Suggested Questions:

- How will you care for the employees who can't get home?
- What emergency supplies do you have?
- What alternative communication resources will you rely on?

Update 3:

Your Building Manager has reported that there is a lot of non-structural damage and some water damage from broken pipes in your building, which will take at least a week to clean up before anyone can be allowed back into the building.

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Suggested Questions:

- Where will your executive team or EOC team assemble?
- What will they need to accomplish before tomorrow morning?
- What and how will you tell the employees about the situation?
- How will you assess the status of your employees?
- How will your critical functions be recovered?
- What is your plan if key employees are not available either because schools are closed or they have other personal situations they must attend to?
- How will you pay employees who are asked to stay home?
- How will you pay employees that you need to work, but now they must work longer hours?
- How will you pay employees whose homes are damaged, and they request time off?
- Some key employees have damage to their homes, and need emergency funds. What will you arrange?
- They also need temporary housing. How will you help?

Update 4:

It is now next Monday. The Building Manager has reported that the damage was more extensive than they originally expected. Broken water pipes will need to be repaired, and the HVAC system will need to be replaced. He is estimating that it will be at least 3 more weeks before you can return to the office.

Suggested Questions:

- What will you do if vital paper records and equipment are damaged?
- What systems and network connectivity do you need?
- How soon will they be available?
- How will critical functions be performed before systems are available?
- Where will you have your people perform critical functions?
- If the alternate work location is out of town, who will coordinate their lodging, transportation, and other logistical arrangements?
- Once systems are recovered, how will your employees know what data has been lost?
- How will they reconstruct the lost data?
- How will critical customers be kept informed?
- How will other key stakeholders, like shareholders, owners, suppliers, and vendors be notified?
- What will you tell them?
- Where have your telecommunications been rerouted?

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Conclusion

As you can see, the questions can be endless. We've only given you a sample so that you can think about what is important to your own organization. Look for gaps in your current plans. Tabletop exercises are a wonderful way to uncover missing elements before a disaster occurs.

Remember, each time you practice, you should discover new ways your plan will be more effective. The objective is NOT to get 100%!

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