



# Preparing for Emergency Drills and Exercises



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Emergency drills and practice exercises are important for preparing for emergency situations. Unfortunately, many organizations and local emergency responders aren't ready to conduct these events. An organization should follow these six steps to successfully conduct emergency drills and exercises:

1. Develop emergency plans
2. Train employees
3. Conduct tabletop exercises
4. Conduct drills
5. Conduct functional exercises
6. Conduct full-scale exercises



## Step 1: Develop Emergency Plans

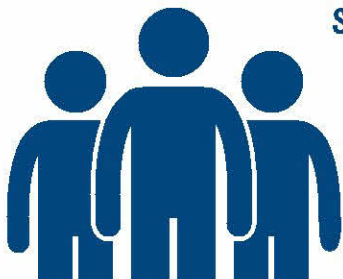
Drills and exercises test an organization's written emergency plan. Do not hold a drill or exercise until you have:

- A comprehensive emergency/crisis master plan
- Position-specific emergency response guides for employees with critical roles
- Emergency quick response guides

Since it is virtually impossible to identify and plan for every possible or potential hazard that could impact your business, emergency plans should be response-based instead of hazard-based. This means the emergency plans should be based on the actions you want your employees and visitors to perform regardless of the emergency. These 10 responses will cover 99% of all the emergencies an organization may face:

1. Evacuation
2. Reverse evacuation
3. Lock out
4. Lock down
5. Clear the halls
6. Shelter-in-place
7. Medical emergency
8. Closing or cancelation
9. Death
10. Vehicle accident

Your organization's comprehensive emergency/crisis master plan should include variations on each of these 10 responses based on site-specific hazards and explain when each response is necessary.



## Step 2: Train All Employees

All employees should be trained at least annually on the emergency response plans and guides and on their roles within the plans. All plans should be shared with your local emergency responders, but not made publicly available.

## COMMON EXERCISE MISTAKES

When organizations rush into performing emergency exercises, they often encounter the following problems:

- Exercises are conducted without any defined objectives
- Scenarios are too complex to manage successfully
- Inadequate time is allotted for exercise interaction
- An accurate critique of the exercise is not completed afterwards
- Emotional impact on the participants is not considered
- Safety of participants is not addressed properly
- Exercise is planned and initiated too quickly
- Some critical agencies are not included
- After-action recommendations are not implemented

## EVACUATION EXAMPLE

An organization may evacuate for reasons such as fire, a gas leak or lack of power. The master plan should detail the organization's response and recovery for each of these hazards, but the immediate response by all employees and visitors is to safely evacuate the building and, if necessary, seek safety at another location.



### Step 3: Conduct Tabletop Exercises

Tabletop exercises allow organizations to test their emergency plans and individuals' knowledge of their roles and responsibilities using hypothetical situations, without causing disruption to the business day. These exercises should be very limited in scope, covering a specific aspect of your emergency crisis plan.

Tabletop exercises are similar to a scenario-based board game. The facilitator presents a scenario to the "players" around the table, who verbally respond what actions they would take, based on the available information. Additional information is provided to the players over the course of the exercise, similar to the way new information emerges during real emergency events. The group must adjust and respond as the new information becomes available.

A recorder makes notes of items that need to be changed or added to the plan, based on the responses and other suggestions for improvement verbalized during the event. These exercises usually last between one and two hours.

Successful tabletop exercises help identify weak points in your emergency plan and employee training so you can address it as necessary. It is much better to find out your limitations in a controlled environment than during an actual emergency.

Tabletop exercises are a continual process. Even when you believe your plans are well tested, you should continue to hold tabletop exercises at least annually to help employees retain knowledge about their roles. You should also conduct tabletop exercises after you make employee changes, building changes, equipment changes or after you adjust your emergency plans.

### TABLETOP EXERCISE PLAYERS

The people involved in your tabletop exercise will vary depending on which section of your emergency plan you are testing. When you first facilitate tabletop exercises, it's helpful to include only a small group of employees, adding local emergency responders later in the process. Example participants may include:

- Management
- Employees
- Maintenance staff
- Transportation staff
- Safety/Security personnel
- Fire department/EMS
- Law enforcement
- Emergency management
- Crisis team members
- Nurse



### Step 4: Conduct Drills

Many organizations already conduct drills during the year, including those for fire and tornados, but conducting other emergency drills is just as important, even if not mandated. Emergency drills for responses such as lockdown, shelter-in-place or employee injury provide the training and route memorization of the skill sets necessary for emergency situations.

All emergency drills should be highly controlled, test a single procedure and involve all employees. Drills should be unannounced and performed under varying and nonideal conditions (e.g., different times of day, different weather conditions, different times during the year or during absence of key personnel). All employees should be trained prior to any drill to make sure they know what is expected. Invite local emergency responders to observe the drill.

