



Presentation Materials

- Communication Exercise Webinar Outline
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Presentation – Introduction

Georgia's Communication Exercise Webinar: Presented by Nick Brown, Georgia SWIC

Jessica Kaputa welcomed participants, informing them this is the first webinar in a series hosted by NCSWIC's Training & Exercises and Standard Operating Procedures (T&E and SOPs) Committee showcasing best practices for state and local training and exercise programs. Jessica recommended those interested in presenting on successful training and exercises in their state, region, or community contact her directly at jessica.kaputa@hq.dhs.gov. The T&E and SOPs Committee plans to capture themes throughout the series to develop a best practices document for states and local communities.

Nick Brown, Georgia SWIC and presenter, thanked everyone for participating in the webinar and explained its focus: current information regarding Georgia's May 2015 mobile communication vehicle functional exercise.

The creation of Georgia's mobile communication exercise began after personnel in the state of Florida invited Nick and his team to observe a communication focused functional exercise at Camp Blanding, Florida. This exercise was coordinated by the Florida Division of Emergency Management with the assistance of the Florida National Guard for the use of Camp Blanding. Florida personnel shared information and documentation on exercise design and assigned tasks. Impressed with Florida's event, Nick and his team adapted the exercise to fit Georgia's needs. Ultimately, Nick's team focused its exercise on communications and mobile communication vehicle interoperability.

Nick's team modified the exercise by removing more traditional emergency response scenarios. Nick reminded participants that scenarios are beneficial when the goal is to test communications and examine operational response components of a traditional public safety agency. Scenarios reveal whether firefighters truly can handle a hazmat situation or if law enforcement can handle certain threats, such as a barricaded subject or an active shooter. Georgia's communication exercise is unique because it was adapted to focus directly on the capabilities of the vehicles without the use of a scenario. The tasks assigned in the exercise are designed in such a way that the type of emergency being supported does not



make a difference, because tasks remain the same across scenarios. Georgia found by removing the scenario, participants did not get caught up in the operational functions of a traditional exercise, and instead focused directly on communications aspects of the equipment being used. From a conceptual standpoint, removing scenarios helped to focus on improving capabilities.

Presentation – Incident Action Plan

The Incident Action Plan outlines Georgia's Statewide Mobile Communication Vehicle (MCV) functional exercise.

Page two of the Incident Action Plan provides an overview of the exercise design. The document states, "This exercise brings together communication vehicles throughout Georgia to test and evaluate functional components of each MCV. The exercise is not designed as a pass/fail test, but provides a learning opportunity to demonstrate operable and interoperable capabilities as well as identify areas for improvement for the performance of the vehicle." The exercise is not a competition or used to grade participants; but instead, acted as an opportunity to practice a series of tasks as a team.

Typically, 25 to 30 vehicles come to the exercise. Individuals are paired into teams of three to five vehicles and together they must work under the direction of one Communications Unit Leader (COML) per team. At the end of the exercise, if a team has only completed half of the assigned tasks, the exercise is still a victory because the goal is to gain proficiency. Following the exercise, participants can take the uncompleted tasks back to their agency and work on those tasks further to become more proficient and discuss how to become more efficient overall.

In terms of logistics, it is important to hold an exercise of this scale at a large venue for several reasons. First, a sizable parking lot is needed to park the large number of vehicles in attendance. Second, space is needed for lodging, meals, and facilities. By having enough space, the exercise will be able to run more smoothly and participants will be happy.

Team assignments are known prior to exercise deployment. This information is sent to participants a week in advance. Therefore, upon arrival, participants already know who they will be working alongside, who their evaluator will be, and with which vehicles they will be paired during the exercise. Teams are chosen by pairing participants with people with whom they have never worked in the past. While it is fine for participants to want to work with their neighbors or the people closest to their community, their neighbors will most likely not be the personnel supporting them in the event of a catastrophic disaster. A wildfire, hurricane, earthquake, or other major event would likely leave both areas in need of external assistance, so by pairing personnel on opposite ends of the state new relationships form that become



beneficial during major disasters. This may be the only time personnel get to work with one another outside of a real deployment or major disaster.

One of the first tasks each team must complete is to determine the radio channel they will use to communicate as a team. All vehicles within each team should operate on the same channel. Later in the exercise, a helicopter is flown in to make contact with the team to provide air support. The team is not told ahead of time a helicopter will be arriving on the scene. Furthermore, the helicopter is not given information as to which channel the team is using. The team must find a way to communicate the channel to the helicopter without damaging the facility grounds. In past examples, teams have spray painted the channel onto a large tarp or have pieced together caution tape to indicate the channel to the helicopter. The task is staged this way because in most real-life events a helicopter coming to the scene does not know what channel ground units are using to communicate. This task demonstrates a team's ability to visually communicate channel usage to air support. This has become a popular task among participants.

On a logistical note, first responders would typically use the VCALL10 or the 8Call90 to communicate. However, those channels are already fairly congested in the Atlanta area with other repeaters and infrastructure on the air, 24 hours per day. To avoid further congesting, short-range exercise channels for the portable repeaters were set up to cover the area.

Pages three through seven of the Incident Action Plan outline the itinerary for the week. It is important to make sure everyone knows the time and location of the activities taking place. Having a schedule available not only cuts down on the number of questions asked by participants, but increases participants' activity attendance.

The remainder of the Incident Action Plan outlines the Incident Command System (ICS) Forms. These forms include an initial briefing form to let exercise participants know the layout of the park, team locations, access information, exercise command location, and mobile communication vehicle assignments for each team. A form offering a more condensed version of the week's schedule with details on what participants can expect throughout the exercise is also provided, as well as a form specifying objectives and goals.

In addition to this information, one of the forms also provides information on safety and security. Being that this exercise takes place on public property, the public could easily tamper with the vehicles. If a perpetrator wanted to commit a terrorist activity against public safety personnel this would be a prime location. The same is true when a team is deployed to respond to a real-life threat. Committing this type of crime would disrupt public safety operations. Therefore, an impromptu task was injected into the exercise, placing a suspicious device at each team location. Teams were not asked to respond to the device from an operational standpoint, but instead from a reporting and communications standpoint. Therefore, the task was put in place simply to see if the COML from each team recognized the risks and



the threat of a suspicious device on scene. Then, the way in which the device was reported to exercise command, the incident commander, and the rest of the way up the chain was evaluated. It is important to make sure people are always aware of their surroundings.

The exercise did not run a 24 hour shift during the exercise. While there has been feedback in the past to run 24 hour shifts through the duration of the exercise, Nick and his team have found that it does not help support the mission of the exercise, which is to learn as much as possible and work as a team. The concept of running 24 hour shifts is great, but in reality personnel get tired quickly and it becomes counterproductive to learning. In addition, twice as many exercise facilitators would be needed to run continuous shifts for the duration of the exercise. It would be difficult from a logistical standpoint.

Additionally, it is essential to have evaluators present to capture all information from the exercise. For example, evaluators should not only capture how teams complete tasks, but they should also make sure tasks are completed in the most sensible way. There is not right or wrong way to do a task, but it is important to make sure it is the most practical.

During the exercise, it is valuable to have a platform in place for distributing information between the command post and each team. The exercise design team has found the easiest thing to do is set up a Gmail account for each team. Gmail has proven to be the most effective platform because it is simple to use, most people have used it before, it is free, and it is easy to access from almost any device.

The Exercise Staff Assignment List catalogued in the Incident Action Plan includes all of the personnel that make up the exercise design and planning team. This list provides information on the functions of each position to help people better understand their role. It is imperative to have subject matter experts from both the state and local level who have either been a COML in the past, or are currently responsible for running a mobile communications vehicle or leading a communications teams. From a design standpoint, it is important to have enough people with experience to brainstorm tasks to put into the exercise, as well as enough people to fill the positions needed for running the actual exercise.

Next, the Incident Action Plan includes a medical plan. It is important to have this information because people can still get hurt going through the exercise.

Lastly, the Incident Action Plan includes ICS Form 217, which lists the available frequencies that can be used during the exercise.



Design of the Exercise Using the Master Scenario Events List (MSEL)

The Master Scenario Events List (MSEL) used in this exercise varies slightly from a traditional MSEL. As you review the MSEL and Task Injects, you will see that specific time and operational response components are not included. The MSEL should be considered as a list of tasks.

The MSEL starts out with small and easy to complete tasks that allow the team to begin building its team structure. Tasks get progressively harder as teams work through the MSEL. For example Task #1 of the MSEL reads as such:

TASK #	Assign task to:	Task	Task clarification/explanation	Start Time	End Time	Evaluator Observations
1	General	Assemble ALL team members and select the most appropriate team member to serve as the team COML.	COML should have previous communication leadership experience it is recommended but not required that the COML has previously attended a COML course.			

Once a COML has been established in Task #1, the team moves on to Task #2 to appoint the remaining positions. For example:

TASK #	Assign task to:	Task	Task clarification/explanation	Start Time	End Time	Evaluator Observations
2	COML	COML: Establish Incident Command Staffing for your team and appoint the following positions: ·Deputy COML (required) ·COMT (required) ·Team Radio Operator-	Create a simple Incident Command Structure chart. ICS chart should be printed and posted in the primary coordination MCV used by your team (if completed electronically, ensure a way of future updates throughout the duration of			



		RADO (required) ·Safety officer (required) ·Scribe/record keeper (required) ·Auxcomm coordinator(optional) ·Runner/messenger (optional)	the exercise) A dry erase board version is allowable, in which case a printed and/or electronic version is not required. Team RADO is required to monitor the exercise command channel (GA Interop 1) AND Team command operational channel AT ALL TIMES. RADO and Scribe/record keeper positions can be combined if COML chooses to do so.			
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As teams move through the MSEL, other tasks are assigned. As an example, Task #9 helps teams think through basic responsibilities, such as designating two emergency evacuation rally points for all team members to relocate to in the event of an emergency, such as bad weather moving through the area. Real world situations can still occur during an exercise. It is important for participants to be prepared. These rally points come into play later in the exercise. It is often interesting to see how public safety personnel respond to these types of tasks. Public safety personnel are always the ones telling the public to have a plan for emergencies, working smoke detectors, and fire extinguishers, yet many of the million dollar vehicles and routine planning do not include these basic items. Tasks like these have helped people to better understand some of the deficiencies that still remain in public safety.

Task #17 was included to help personnel familiarize themselves with Web EOC. During real events this is often used heavily. This task gives people a chance to become better acquainted with the platform.

Other tasks were included to help teams prepare for post-exercise deployment. For example Task #20, instructs participants to “check and record the generator run time on all vehicles.” One of the things facilitators have found is that agencies are good at maintaining the engine and drive frame of their vehicles. However, they are not as good at checking the generator run time. It is key to have someone check the generator at both the beginning and end of an exercise. After a generator has run for the duration of the exercise it may be due for an oil change or servicing by the time teams return home. This task was included more as an awareness tool to make sure teams maintain their equipment so it does not fail in the event of a real emergency after returning home.

Following the final tasks, teams are asked to report back for a debriefing. During the debriefing facilitators gather feedback and outcomes from the exercise. Each year new and more challenging tasks



are added to the MSEL as a result of the feedback received. This exercise program has grown significantly since 2010 and it would not be possible with the participant feedback.

Task Injects

Teams work through the MSEL at varying speeds. Team One may be on Task #15 and Team Two could be on Task # 30. This is a big gap, which is fine because they are encouraged to work at their own pace. The purpose of the Task Injects are to bring all players together to work simultaneously on the same task. For example, the exercise design planners wanted each team working on the suspicious device task at the same time. In addition, another task involved bringing each team COML together to solve an antenna problem. This would have been too difficult for each COMT/COML to work on alone, so all of the COMLs were organized to brainstorm the issue together.

Measurements and Outcomes

This exercise program began in 2010 after observing Florida's exercise program. The first exercise was made up of 15-20 vehicles and was a one day event. It was evident a lot of the vehicles in attendance had tremendous capabilities, but few people knew how to run or manage the equipment. This brought to light the importance this type of exercise. This exercise makes it clear there is an expectation for individuals at all levels to know how to use the equipment to its full capability to support an event.

In 2010, many of the personnel in attendance were only considered to be a driver. They did not know how to use any of the equipment. Now, year after year after having returned to the exercise they are considered a driver and an operator. They know everything about the vehicle.

Originally, the exercise was considered a command vehicle rally. It was more like a show and tell event. People often stood around for hours talking about each vehicle without actually accomplishing any skills learning. It became clear this was not effective, so they started organizing the exercise to look more like what it does today. It started out small with eight to ten tasks and has grown each year to the now 83 tasks, and it is often the same people returning each year with a few new faces. As a result from the rally trainings exercises, people are becoming significantly more proficient with handling the equipment.

The great news is that Leadership in the participant's state can see the effectiveness of doing these exercises. It helps to secure the time and some of the funding needed to host the exercise each year.



Contact Information

Anyone interested in learning more about this exercise should contact one of the following individuals:

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