

scenario training without a certain level of forewarning, especially when exercise observers and evaluators suddenly show up at an ECC. Note that for training exercises such as those addressing active shooter or workplace violence it is vital that everyone understands it is a training exercise in order to avoid genuine fear, panic or accidents.

How did the centers perform, what objectives were met and, most importantly, what lessons were learned for improving preparedness for future incidents? Center personnel quickly responded to the first exercise inject to transfer operations from Jackson to Nashville. They did well with delegation of tasks and teamwork during the hand-off.

While phone lines were quickly transferred, there were some questions as to whom and when to send out notifications. The paging notification system used to inform field personnel of the exercise and that operations had been transferred experienced unplanned delays with email delivery notification. This lends support to the identified need for redundant or alternative notification systems. Another identified gap: radio technicians were not included in pre-configured notification groups.

Exercise injects stated portions of the P25 system experienced outages, microwave paths down, site trunking and emergency power operation. To evaluate maintenance response capabilities, players in the TACN Network Operations Center were encouraged to use FirstNet-enabled state-issued cell phones and alternative communications means to communicate with field personnel, such as FirstNet Enhanced Push-to-Talk (EPTT) app to exchange voice, text and pictures. Administrative personnel were re-tasked from daily functions to support maintenance response coordination and complete ICS-205 forms. TACN's maintenance vendor was included to evaluate emergency response support. One area identified where plans were not in place: a process for capturing this type of unconventional data exchange afterwards, and whether recordings are available for records management and incident documentation.

Public safety telecommunicators did look to supervisors for direction when faced with uncertainty about where to find information or whom to notify, which is understandable. During a true emergency of this magnitude, supervisors may be overburdened and unable to provide direction at all times. This is an area where plans are in place, but preparedness is lacking. Follow-up can include skills/knowledge drills, and regular review of existing plans with all personnel.

Jackson Center personnel were prompted to shelter in place in a structurally reinforced break area to further document a component of the continuity of operations plan. The supervisor also sent pictures of the radio tower and building through the EPTT app to simulate a situation report on infrastructure integrity and site security. The capability to exchange this type of data during an emergency could prove vital for helping technicians prioritize their response to outages and repair needs. However, there has to be a process in place for archiving the data.

To simulate the end of an operational period, the Jackson Center supervisor was also prompted to prepare an ICS-201 Incident Briefing, and then brief the oncoming shift of the scenario and hand-off at shift change. This is where training and previous exercises come into play. The supervisors have participated in previous incident tactical dispatch (INTD) training and online incident management classes, giving them a level of familiarity and ease in using these forms to document activities.

Other areas of discussion, which were not tested within the exercise, but deserve planning and preparedness might include: extended operational hours for personnel — how are they housed and fed, how will they be relieved; during prolonged power outages, what is the potential that back-up generator fuel supplies may be stolen (from ECC sites or radio towers); what are site security issues and threats, especially from displaced citizens seeking shelter, resources or supplies; how will infrastructure damage to bridges and roadways delay response and repair of critical radio tower sites; what is the cumulative effect of a prolonged natural disaster on the emotional well-being of personnel?

The after-action review indicated that surprise, short-duration evacuation drills at each ECC would be beneficial for all personnel and give them a better understanding of what is expected of them. In addition to implementing these drills, personnel recall exercises have since been conducted, which help ensure employee emergency contact information is up-to-date. These initiatives help shift employee thinking about their role in emergency management and how they contribute to their agency's overall level of preparedness. Employees recognize their value and take ownership as part of the response, rather than feeling like bystanders waiting for something to happen to them during an incident that directly impacts their ECC. ●

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