

North Carolina Drinking Water Incident Response Toolkit

Pre-Incident Planning Guide

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Contents

Pre-Incident Planning Guide 2

 Introduction 2

 Getting Started..... 3

 Pre-Incident Planning Meeting 4

 After the Pre-Incident Planning Meeting: Next Steps 9

Appendix 1: Using the Sample Agenda 10

Appendix 2: Tabletop Exercises 13

References 15

Pre-Incident Planning Guide

Pre-Incident Planning Guide

Introduction

All local communities in North Carolina are vulnerable to experiencing a drinking water incident. Depending on the nature of the incident, the effects may be felt by residents, businesses, facilities with sensitive populations such as hospitals or schools, and multiple local government agencies.

The Drinking Water Working Group developed this pre-incident planning guide to assist North Carolina local governments in becoming prepared to respond if and when an incident occurs in their communities. The pre-incident planning guide is based on several principles:

- **Local preparation is crucial:** Pre-incident planning is critically important to responding effectively to drinking water incidents. Because any given incident is experienced locally, pre-incident planning needs to be carried out locally as well.
- **Local planning should be inclusive and collaborative:** Communities should identify key local stakeholders and ensure they are included in pre-incident planning processes. Effective pre-incident planning will reinforce intra-local coordination and collaboration, as well as collaboration with other partners who are important to the response, including state government agencies and non-governmental entities.
- **Local issues and needs vary:** Different local governments have different resources, different degrees of vulnerability to the different incident types, and different local needs for their planning processes.

This pre-incident planning guide describes methods, resources, and materials to support local communities in their pre-incident planning effort. The guide is intended to be flexible and should be adapted as needed to support local needs.

Pre-Incident Planning Guide

Getting Started

INTRODUCING DOGWOOD COUNTY



To illustrate some of the processes that this guide describes, we created a hypothetical North Carolina location called Dogwood County. You will find examples using Dogwood County throughout the pre-incident planning guide.

Photo source: www.ncparks.gov

TOOLS FOR PRE-INCIDENT PLANNING

Supporting pre-incident planning is a central goal of this toolkit. While all of the toolkit sections are intended to support the planning process, two sections provide the core tools to which this section will refer:

- **Pre-Incident Planning:** This section contains the Pre-Incident Planning Guide and a set of Pre-Incident Planning Meeting Tools. The guide describes how to use the tools to support a local pre-incident planning meeting.
- **Local Information:** This section provides tools for creating or assembling the local information needed to support pre-incident planning.

Tool titles are identified in this guide by ***bold blue italics***, to assist users in locating the specific tools to use in conjunction with the guide.

THE “LOCAL CHAMPION”

The pre-incident planning process will likely be initiated by a person we refer to as the “local champion.” The local champion might be a local government official or employee who takes the initiative to start the process of pre-incident planning in the community, or it might be a person mutually agreed upon by informal discussions among several local entities that have an interest in assuring the work occurs.

Pre-Incident Planning Guide

Pre-Incident Planning Meeting

The Drinking Water Working Group recommends that local communities plan and hold a pre-incident planning meeting.

PURPOSE AND GOALS

The purpose of a pre-incident planning meeting is to develop plans for responding effectively to local residents' needs when an incident occurs. These plans should reinforce intra-local coordination, as well as collaboration with other partners who are important to the response, such as state government agencies and non-governmental entities.

The goals of a pre-incident planning meeting are to:

- Learn about drinking water in your community: where it comes from, how it is provided to community residents, and how it is kept safe.
- Identify characteristics of your community, both assets and challenges, which may affect your capacity to respond to an incident affecting drinking water.
- Develop or improve working relationships among the individuals and entities (local, state, and non-governmental) that may be involved in responding to an incident affecting drinking water in your community.
- Identify the next steps needed to prepare for future drinking water incidents in your community.
- Learn about reliable resources for further information about drinking water and incidents affecting drinking water.

Local communities may have additional goals that they should feel free to add.

PLANNING A LOCAL PRE-INCIDENT PLANNING MEETING

A pre-incident planning meeting must itself be planned and organized. This guide provides a sample step-by-step approach to planning the meeting. This section describes the process and is intended for use in conjunction with the [*Planning Checklist: Steps to Holding a Pre-Incident Planning Meeting*](#) ("Planning Checklist"), which may be found in the Pre-Incident Planning Meeting Tools section of this toolkit.

Local communities will have different ways of determining whom to involve in this task, but we anticipate all will share the goals of having a collaborative process that involves appropriate local stakeholders. We recommend a small local planning team that meets at least once to plan the meeting. We understand that time and resources may limit the

Pre-Incident Planning Guide

desire to have a meeting to plan a meeting. Users of this toolkit may adapt the suggested steps to meet their local needs, while bearing in mind the importance of working across agency silos and assuring an inclusive process.

USING THE PLANNING CHECKLIST

The planning checklist suggests a step-by-step process. This section provides additional information and instructions for each step.

Step 1: Identify the individuals who will serve as point persons for planning the meeting and for managing meeting logistics. We recommend splitting these tasks between two people: a *planning team leader* and a *logistics organizer*.

The *planning team leader* should be responsible for identifying others to participate on a planning team, leading planning team meetings, proposing a pre-incident planning meeting agenda, and identifying and inviting the appropriate speakers and facilitators. The planning team leader may be, but does not have to be, the same person as the local champion.

The *logistics organizer* should be responsible for scheduling planning team meetings, arranging the pre-incident planning meeting location and support services, and sending invitations to potential participants.

The Planning Checklist includes spaces for the names of the planning team leader and logistics organizer.

Step 2: Identify the appropriate individuals to serve as a planning team for the pre-incident planning meeting. The planning team leader and logistics organizer should serve on the planning team, along with two or three additional individuals who represent local stakeholders, such as local drinking water utilities, public health, emergency management, or local government administration. The planning team should be small and composed only of those individuals who are necessary to assure the pre-incident planning meeting is held. It should not include all of the individuals who will be invited to attend the pre-incident planning meeting. The planning team leader or another team member should ensure that appropriate local officials are informed about the planning team's work.

Pre-Incident Planning Guide



In Dogwood County, the local health director was the "local champion" who initiated the pre-incident planning process. The health director identified a health department employee to serve as the planning team leader, and asked the county manager's office to identify an employee to serve as the logistics organizer. The planning team leader and logistics organizer consulted with the health director and county manager to identify two additional individuals to serve on the planning team, representing Dogwood County's utilities department and its public information officer.

Step 3: Hold a planning team meeting. The sample checklist includes the following matters to discuss and decide at the meeting:

- *Pre-incident planning meeting agenda.* A [Sample Agenda](#) is provided in the toolkit, in the section for pre-incident planning meeting tools. Please see the section of this guide titled "Using the Sample Agenda" for more information about the objectives and recommended contents for each session.
- *Speakers and facilitators.* Effective and appropriate local speakers and facilitators are crucial to the success of a local pre-incident planning meeting. Please see the section of this guide titled "Using the Sample Agenda" for more information about the recommended speakers and facilitators and their roles.
- *Meeting participants.* A [Sample Invitation List](#) and [Sample Invitation Letter](#) are provided in this toolkit. The instructions for the sample invitation list address matters the planning team should consider when it decides who the local participants should be.
- *Using the local information tools.* The Local Information section of the toolkit includes worksheets to assist communities in creating or assembling the local information needed to support pre-incident planning. The [Local Profile Worksheet](#) is a planning tool that asks a series of questions about to help communities identify their own resources and challenges. The [Local Contact Information Worksheet](#) is a tool for collecting and maintaining contact information for local government officials. It may be useful in identifying participants for the pre-incident planning meeting.

Pre-Incident Planning Guide

The planning team should consider how to incorporate these tools in their overall pre-incident planning and how to use them in the meeting. For example, a team may decide to complete the tools before the meeting, or it may conclude that better results would be achieved by discussing them during the meeting, or it may choose to combine both approaches. In any case, it is likely that a post-meeting action item will be assuring that the tools are complete and reflect any changes resulting from the pre-incident planning meeting.

- *Date and location.* The planning team should discuss a date and location for the pre-incident planning meeting. The initial determination of a date and location may need to be tentative so the logistics organizer can check on matters such as other events that may create conflicts for potential participants, as well as the availability of speakers, discussion facilitators, and desired meeting location.

The planning team meeting will likely conclude with a list of action items for the team leader, the logistics organizer, and potentially other team members.



Dogwood County's planning meeting produced action items for each member:

- *Logistics coordinator:* Check tentative date and location with other county departments and events; confirm and reserve after all necessary information is gathered and speaker/facilitators confirmed; communicate with speakers/facilitators about AV and other needs.
- *Planning team leader:* Finalize agenda; invite proposed speakers and facilitators.
- *Planning team member:* Prepare participant invitations and send after date/location are confirmed and agenda with speakers/facilitators is final.
- *Planning team member:* Work to assemble local information with the goal of presenting it in draft form at pre-incident planning meeting.

Step 4: Confirm the participation of the individuals identified as potential speakers and discussion facilitators. The person who contacts these individuals can provide them with information about their role in the meeting and the toolkit items available to support them.

Step 5: Confirm logistics for the meeting. The Planning Checklist includes a partial list of logistical matters to keep in mind. We expect local logistics organizers will be familiar with additional needs and preferences in their communities. For example, depending upon the time of day that the meeting is held, the planning team may decide to provide snacks or a meal.

Pre-Incident Planning Guide

Step 6: Invite the participants to attend the meeting. A sample invitation letter is provided in this toolkit.

Step 7: Hold the meeting. More information about conducting the meeting is available in the next section.

USING THE SAMPLE AGENDA

This toolkit includes a sample agenda for a pre-incident planning meeting. The agenda may be customized to meet local needs. However, communities should bear in mind that participants will have different backgrounds and levels of experience with drinking water incidents. Beginning with an overview of drinking water as a topic and your community as a location where incidents may occur will help ensure that participants have a common foundation of essential information before engaging in discussion.

The sample agenda assumes a meeting length of about three hours. Communities may want or need to set aside a different amount of time. It is not necessary to follow the timeframes in the sample agenda strictly, but please anticipate that a minimum of two hours will be needed to hold a meeting that provides adequate time for discussing local issues and developing follow-up plans.

Please see Appendix 1 to this planning guide for a description of the recommended content and speakers or facilitators for each agenda segment.

Pre-Incident Planning Guide

After the Pre-Incident Planning Meeting: Next Steps

POST-MEETING REPORT

We recommend that a concise report of the meeting be prepared as quickly as possible after the pre-incident meeting concludes. The report should include information about who attended the meeting, a brief summary of the group discussion(s), and a list of the top priority items that participants in the discussion(s) identified, which they want to know more about or that could become an action item.

This toolkit includes a [Meeting Report Worksheet](#) that may be used to record information to include in the report.

PLANNING FURTHER EXERCISES OR TRAINING

The sample agenda for a pre-incident planning meeting concludes with a “wrap-up” session for participants to plan their next steps. We anticipate that many local communities will be interested in holding a tabletop exercise as a next step. Please see Appendix 2 to this planning guide for additional information on tabletop exercises. A sample exercise, [Sample Tabletop Exercise: Flooding Event](#), is also included in the toolkit, in the section containing pre-incident planning meeting tools.

Participants may need or want additional training as well. The additional resources section of the toolkit includes a section on [Training Resources](#).



Dogwood County held a pre-incident planning meeting that was well attended by key local stakeholders, including representatives of utilities, public health, emergency management, public safety, and the county manager, as well as representatives of the municipalities that are in the county. The meeting resulted in two priority action items:

- (1) Planning a second meeting to hold a tabletop exercise.
- (2) Convening a small group of 3-4 stakeholders and local government staff to complete local worksheets and compile other relevant information for the county's Drinking Water Incident Response Toolkit binders.

Pre-Incident Planning Guide

Appendix 1: Using the Sample Agenda

This Appendix provides additional information and recommendations for each segment of the *Sample Agenda*.

WELCOME

We recommend asking a local government leader in your community to open the meeting and welcome the participants. This demonstrates local commitment to the issue and respect for the time and work that participants will devote to a working meeting.

OPENING REMARKS

The local champion or planning team leader should also welcome the participants, and describe the purpose and goals of a pre-incident planning meeting, as laid out previously in this guide.

INTRODUCTIONS

This part of the sample agenda combines introductions and a simple exercise designed to get participants thinking about the topic and their goals for the meeting. The session may begin with the local champion or planning team leader introducing the facilitator, or the facilitator may choose to give a brief self-introduction. The facilitator then asks each participant to introduce themselves by giving their name, affiliation (such as agency), role or interest in the community's drinking water, and response to the question: what is one thing you hope to achieve from the pre-incident planning process?

PRESENTATION: ESSENTIAL INFORMATION ABOUT DRINKING WATER

The toolkit provides a scripted slide deck for a brief presentation about drinking water. It addresses drinking water sources and suppliers and describes drinking water incidents and their impacts on local government. We encourage communities to identify a dynamic local speaker to make this presentation, preferably someone who works with drinking water issues, such as a representative of the utilities department or the public health department.

Pre-Incident Planning Guide

PRESENTATION/REMARKS: OUR COMMUNITY'S DRINKING WATER AND EXPERIENCE WITH DRINKING WATER INCIDENTS

This portion of the agenda is unscripted and relies on local experts who can address local drinking water sources and suppliers and the area's experience with drinking water incidents. We recommend inviting the local government utilities director or another drinking water utility director, as well as the public health director or emergency management coordinator or both. These individuals should work together before the meeting to coordinate their remarks, avoid unnecessary duplication and assure a shared comfort level with the approach to discussing drinking water incidents that the community has experienced.

GATHERING INFORMATION: GROUP DISCUSSIONS

In this part of the agenda, participants get to work, discussing a set of questions designed to elicit:

- The types of drinking water incidents of concern in the community.
- Information about what happens when a drinking water incident occurs in the community: with a focus on which actions are taken and by whom, who in local government is notified, and how communications with the public are managed.
- Information about which community residents or businesses/facilities may have special needs during a drinking water incident, the nature of those special needs, and which local agencies have information or resources to assist residents or businesses/facilities with special needs.
- The resources the community has for responding to drinking water incidents.
- The challenges the community faces in responding to drinking water incidents.

This toolkit includes [Sample Discussion Questions](#) to assist with this exercise.

The discussions may be undertaken by the group as a whole, or participants may be divided into small groups. In either case, someone should be designated to record the key points made during the discussion(s). Because the answers to the discussion questions may vary by incident type, a group may wish to focus on a single incident type that is of local concern. Alternatively, if small groups are used, each group could be assigned a different incident type.

About five minutes before the planned ending time for the discussion(s), the facilitator should ask the group to stop discussing the questions and use their remaining time to identify the top priority items from the discussion(s) that could become an action item for the community, or that identify a need for further information. If small groups are

Pre-Incident Planning Guide

used, additional time should be set aside for each group to make a very brief report back to the large group, focusing on the top priority items they identified.

Information from the discussions may be recorded on the [Meeting Report Worksheet](#) included in this toolkit, either contemporaneously or after the meeting from notes made by discussion recorder(s).

WRAP-UP AND MOVING FORWARD

The local champion or planning team leader should summarize the meeting and identify anticipated next steps for pre-incident planning. Possible next steps include the development of action items based on the top priority items identified during the group discussions, or making plans for a second meeting or a tabletop exercise.

CONCLUDING REMARKS AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The local government leader who opened the meeting may also wish to conclude it. Alternatively, the meeting may be concluded by the local champion, the planning team leader, or the facilitator.

Pre-Incident Planning Guide

Appendix 2: Tabletop Exercises

A tabletop exercise is a method for generating discussion about what would happen if a community experienced an incident: what issues would arise, and what actions would be taken?

In a typical tabletop exercise, a facilitator presents a hypothetical incident. The initial incident description may be minimal, but the facilitator provides additional facts to develop the scenario further as the discussion proceeds, just as additional facts would develop over time in an actual incident. The points at which additional facts are provided are called “injects.” The exercise concludes with a debriefing session called a “hot wash.” The purpose of a hot wash is to identify specific issues that should be addressed in the local community.

Tabletop exercises may be used to raise awareness about an issue, generate an action list for a community that wants to respond to incidents, or rehearse responses to incidents. This toolkit includes a [Sample Tabletop Exercise](#) focused on raising awareness and generating action lists.

FACILITATORS AND PARTICIPANTS

An effective tabletop exercise encourages participants to explore ideas in the context of a scenario that could actually happen in their community. It is important for all participants to contribute their own ideas and refrain from evaluating or judging others’ contributions. Active facilitation helps assure that participants remain focused on the questions presented and encourages participants to think through the consequences of their responses.

Some local entities are likely to have experience with tabletop exercises, and may be able to provide or identify an experienced facilitator. Emergency management agencies, drinking water utilities, and local health departments are all examples of local entities that are likely to have tabletop exercise experience.

The facilitator is expected to:

- Explain the exercise’s objectives and expectations for participation.
- Present the scenario: the initial description, and then injects as the scenario unfolds.
- Encourage participants to remain focused on the discussion questions and exercise objectives.

Pre-Incident Planning Guide

Determining who should participate in the exercise is a local decision. The list of participants may vary by community. Most likely it will include many or all of the same individuals who participated in the pre-incident planning meeting, but the community may also want to involve others with particular expertise or experience in the type of incident addressed by the exercise.

The participants are expected to:

- Participate actively in the discussion.
- Provide relevant information from the perspectives of their roles in the community and listen when others do the same.
- Participate in the hot wash and development of any action items that may follow.

CONDUCTING THE HOT WASH

A hot wash for a tabletop exercise occurs promptly after an exercise is complete. It may be conducted immediately at the end of the exercise or within a few days. It is part of the exercise program, so completion should not be delayed unnecessarily.

An effective hot wash serves a critical role in promoting action based on lessons learned from the exercise. It is not a general evaluation of the exercise, but rather a tool for determining what needs to happen next. During the hot wash, participants should identify specific issues or problems that require action and make a specific plan for taking action.

The exercise facilitator can ask questions to help achieve these goals. Some questions the facilitator may consider asking include:

- What *should* happen in the scenario that was presented?
- What did your discussions reveal about what *would* happen in your community?
- If there is a difference between what *should* happen and what *would* happen, how can the community address that?
- What else can be learned from the exercise? What went well? What could be better?

If the exercise reveals multiple issues requiring the community's attention, the participants may wish to prioritize the issues and identify one or two priorities for determining next steps.

Pre-Incident Planning Guide

SAMPLE EXERCISE OUTCOME: DOGWOOD COUNTY



As a result of its tabletop exercise, Dogwood County realizes that coordination between local incident response agencies is informal and doesn't always occur as promptly as it should. Dogwood County develops an action plan that focuses on identifying the agencies or officials who should be promptly notified and engaged when an incident occurs.

References

TABLETOP EXERCISES

U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Federal Emergency Management Agency, FEMA Emergency Planning Exercises, at <https://www.fema.gov/emergency-planning-exercises> (accessed June 2019).

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, WARN Exercise Facilitator Guide, at <https://www.epa.gov/waterutilityresponse/water-and-wastewater-agency-response-networks-warn-exercise-facilitator-guide> (accessed June 2019).

TRAINING PROGRAMS & EXERCISES GENERALLY

U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Homeland Security Exercise and Evaluation Program (HSEEP), April 2013, at https://www.fema.gov/media-library-data/20130726-1914-25045-8890/hseep_apr13_.pdf.

U.S. Department of Homeland Security, National Incident Management System (NIMS) Training Program, September 2011, at https://www.fema.gov/pdf/emergency/nims/nims_training_program.pdf.