

North Carolina Drinking Water  
Incident Response Toolkit

Sample Tabletop  
Exercise:  
Flooding Incident

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Sample Tabletop Exercise: Flooding Incident

## Preface

This sample table-top exercise and guide is based on similar exercises used by North Carolina health care facilities to prepare for responding to natural disasters and other emergencies. The Exercise Guide upon which this sample is based was produced with input, advice, and assistance from a local planning team that followed guidance set forth in the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Homeland Security Exercise and Evaluation Program (HSEEP) and the Healthcare Preparedness and Response Capabilities list.

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# Exercise Guide

## Purpose

The purpose of this exercise is to provide participants with an opportunity to evaluate their current response concepts, plans, and capabilities related to a plausible scenario. This exercise will focus on providing a scenario that should stimulate participants to reflect on their own organizations' capabilities and identify local risks and hazards. The exercise will focus on emergency operations plans, policies, and procedures.

## Scope

This Tabletop Exercise (TTX) emphasizes the coordination between community partners in response to, and recovery from, a simulated incident in a controlled, non-threatening environment.

## Exercise Objectives

Exercise design objectives are focused on improving understanding of a response concept, identifying opportunities or problems, and/or achieving a change in organizational culture. This exercise will focus on the following objectives:

- Validate coordination plans for a multi-jurisdictional response to a flooding scenario affecting drinking water utilities and wells.
- Identify or test current internal and external communications plan.
- Identify local government agency roles and effects on daily operations.

## Participants

### PLAYERS

The role of the players is to respond to the situation presented in the exercise based on knowledge of response procedures, current plans and procedures, and insights derived from training.

### FACILITATOR

The facilitator's role is to provide situation updates and moderate discussions, as well as provide additional information or resolve questions as required during the exercise.

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Facilitators may lead the discussion, pose questions to players, and ensure the schedule remains on track.

### EVALUATORS

Participants in a TTX may choose to designate a person or persons to serve as evaluators. These individuals observe players' actions and record how tasks were performed. Evaluators do not prompt players with specific responses or interfere with players. With the exception of drawing attention to a safety hazard for the participants, evaluators should not interfere with exercise play. If they would like to see certain actions discussed, this should be coordinated through the facilitator.

### Exercise Structure

This is a facilitated tabletop exercise. Following injects from the facilitator(s), players will review the situation and engage the group in a discussion of appropriate response issues and potential solutions. Players are expected to participate in and contribute to all areas of exercise "play."

### Exercise Guidelines

- This is an open, low-stress, no-fault environment. Varying viewpoints – even disagreements – are expected.
- Do not fight the scenario! Resist the urge to alter it or read additional information into it.
- Respond based on your current knowledge and insights derived from training. Use only existing resources and assets to plan and manage your incident response.
- Understand that decisions made during the scenario do not set precedents or establish policy. They may not reflect an agency's final position on any issue. This is an opportunity to discuss and present multiple options and possible solutions.
- Focus on problem-solving and not just issue identification. Provide suggestions and recommend actions that could improve preparedness and response efforts.
- Participants are expected to participate in the "hot wash" that follows the exercise.

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### **Assumptions and Artificialities**

In any exercise, a number of assumptions and artificialities may be necessary to complete play in the time allotted. During this exercise, the following apply:

- The scenario is plausible, and circumstances occur as they are presented.
- There is no “hidden agenda,” nor any trick questions.
- All players receive the same information at the same time.
- There is no “right” or “wrong” answer.

### **Logistics**

The exercise should be expected to take two or more hours to complete, though the facilitator may accelerate the timeframe if it appears the group is ready to move along. At least 20-30 minutes should be allotted for discussion of each inject, with an additional 20-30 minutes for the hot wash. Exercise planners should consider when and how participant breaks will be managed.

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## Exercise

### Community Background and Incident Notification

It is mid-August and due to a La Niña weather pattern, the area received well over its normal share of rain during the last 60 days. Creeks and rivers are at capacity and the ground is saturated. Hurricane Zephyr is forecast to make landfall over the Georgia/South Carolina border as a slow moving Category 3 hurricane, and then move north into North Carolina. An additional 5 to 19 inches of rain are forecast to fall throughout the state over the next 5 days.

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### Inject #1

At 7:30 a.m. on Tuesday morning you receive notification that your community has been placed under a flood watch for the next 48 hours, with the expectation of receiving an additional 12 inches of rain.

### DISCUSSION

Based on the information provided, discuss the potential issues raised in Inject #1. Identify any additional requirements, critical issues, decisions, or questions that should be addressed at this time. The following questions are provided as suggested general subjects; these questions are not meant to constitute a definitive list of concerns to be addressed, nor is there a requirement to address every question.

1. How will your agency or organization respond to this information? Does it have a formal plan(s) for response?
2. Which agencies, organizations, or personnel should be notified? If personnel are unavailable, whom do you contact?
3. Is there anyone else you need to notify or coordinate with at this time?
4. What impact would this incident have on your local government's day-to-day operations? What adjustments need to be to accommodate the impact?

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### Inject #2

As of 10 a.m. on Wednesday morning, your area has received 9 inches of rain from the hurricane. Power is out throughout most of the region and has been out for roughly 18 hours. Generators at water treatment plants are beginning to run out of fuel and stop functioning. Storm water and wastewater releases are occurring in the area at significant rates.

### DISCUSSION

Based on the information provided, discuss the potential issues raised in Inject #2. Identify any additional requirements, critical issues, decisions, or questions that should be addressed at this time. The following questions are provided as suggested general subjects; these questions are not meant to constitute a definitive list of concerns to be addressed, nor is there a requirement to address every question.

1. How does this information impact your community? What changes would you make to the initial decisions/response?
2. Which agencies would need to be notified or involved based on this updated information? Consider local and state agencies, including local agencies from other jurisdictions.
3. At this point, what impact do you anticipate this incident will have on drinking water utilities or private drinking water wells?
4. What public messaging would need to take place at this point?

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### Inject #3

At 10 a.m. on Thursday, local officials learn that numerous private drinking water wells in the area flooded and the local utility's drinking water distribution system has been impacted due to the prolonged power outage and numerous broken mains.

### DISCUSSION

Based on the information provided, discuss the potential issues raised in Inject #3. Identify any additional requirements, critical issues, decisions, or questions that should be addressed at this time. The following questions are provided as suggested general subjects; these questions are not meant to constitute a definitive list of concerns to be addressed, nor is there a requirement to address every question.

1. What plans will your agency or organization implement at this time?
2. Which other organizations or agencies will you work with to respond to the current situation?
3. What information should be communicated to the public at this time? What is the messaging process and current message?





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## Player Feedback Form

Exercise Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Exercise Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name (Optional): \_\_\_\_\_ Organization: \_\_\_\_\_

Current Responsibilities: \_\_\_\_\_

- Using a scale of 1 to 5, please assess the exercise by indicating your agreement with each statement that follows. 1 indicates strong disagreement with the statement and 5 indicates strong agreement.

Assessment Factor	Strongly Disagree			Strongly Agree	
	1	2	3	4	5
The exercise was well-structured and organized.	1	2	3	4	5
The exercise scenario was plausible and as realistic as possible.	1	2	3	4	5
The facilitator(s) was knowledgeable about the area of play and kept the exercise on target.	1	2	3	4	5
This exercise allowed me or my agency/organization to practice, identify, or improve our capabilities.	1	2	3	4	5
This exercise helped me / my agency identify strengths and weaknesses in the execution of plans, protocols, and procedures.	1	2	3	4	5
This exercise will allow me or my agency/organization to make needed changes to our current plans, protocols, or procedures.	1	2	3	4	5

- Identify key strengths that you observed during the exercise.
- Identify areas for improvement that you observed during the exercise.
- Please provide recommendations for how future exercises could be improved.

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## Evaluator Feedback Form

Exercise Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Exercise Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name (Optional): \_\_\_\_\_ Organization: \_\_\_\_\_

Objective Evaluated: \_\_\_\_\_

- Using a scale of 1 to 5, please assess the exercise by indicating your agreement with each statement that follows. 1 indicates strong disagreement with the statement and 5 indicates strong agreement.

Assessment Factor	Strongly Disagree			Strongly Agree	
	1	2	3	4	5
The exercise was well-structured and organized.	1	2	3	4	5
The exercise scenario was plausible and as realistic as possible.	1	2	3	4	5
The facilitator(s) was knowledgeable about the area of play and kept the exercise on target.	1	2	3	4	5
This exercise allowed players to practice, identify, or improve their capabilities.	1	2	3	4	5
This exercise helped players identify strengths and weaknesses in the execution of their plans, protocols, or procedures.	1	2	3	4	5
This exercise will allow players to make needed changes to their current plans, protocols, or procedures.	1	2	3	4	5

- Identify key strengths that you observed during the exercise.
- Identify areas for improvement that you observed during the exercise.
- Please provide recommendations for how this exercise or future exercises could be improved or enhanced.

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5. Please identify any major problems with player participation that might have been detrimental to exercise play OR potentially led to poor outcomes.
  
6. Please identify any major problems with facilitation that might have been detrimental to exercise play OR potentially led to a poor learning experience.
  
7. Please provide any other feedback you feel is important and beneficial.