



Safe Exercise Best Practices

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FEMA

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Table of Contents

1. Purpose	1
2. Pre-Exercise Activity	1
2.1. Safety and Security Considerations.....	1
2.2. Venue Access and Validation Considerations	2
2.3. Health Considerations.....	2
2.4. Real-World Incident Considerations	3
3. Exercise Conduct	3
3.1. Safety and Security Considerations.....	3
3.2. Venue Access and Validation Considerations	4
3.3. Health Considerations.....	4
3.4. Real-World Incident Considerations	5
4. Post-Exercise Activity	5
4.1. Safety and Security Considerations.....	5
4.2. Venue Access and Validation Considerations	5
4.3. Health Considerations.....	5
Appendix A: HSEEP Video Series	6
HSEEP Video Series.....	6

1. Purpose

Following the COVID-19 global pandemic, safety remains a concern. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) consolidated the following safe exercise best practices from the whole community to help organizations and jurisdictions maintain safety protocols for in-person exercises.



This guide is organized by exercise phase: pre-exercise, conduct, and post-exercise. It addresses safety and security, venue access and validation, health and real-world incident considerations for each phase.

These lists are not exhaustive. Modify this information as appropriate for your organization or jurisdiction.

2. Pre-Exercise Activity

2.1. Safety and Security Considerations



- Assign a safety officer to collaborate with all exercise safety partners, including local and community partners, as appropriate.
- Include important contact information for local safety resources.
- Include a safety plan in exercise documentation that complies with federal and state, local, tribal and territorial (SLTT) government regulations.
 - Include guidance on the use of firearms, hazardous materials and tools, evacuation procedures and directions for real-world incidents.
 - Include guidance on the location and use of first aid kits and Automated External Defibrillators (AEDs).
 - Include measures to conduct health screenings at check-in.

- Develop plans for individuals who are unable to wear masks due to medical or other conditions or who require the removal of masks to communicate.

2.2. Venue Access and Validation Considerations



- Participate in an exercise venue site visit to assess:
 - Access control measures.
 - Access for people with disabilities and other access and functional needs.
 - Physical security measures and requirements.
 - Evacuation routes and meeting points, considering social distancing measures, as needed.
 - Hazards in and around the exercise venue.
- Develop and manage a registration process that provides exercise staff a list of approved exercise participants, staff and observers.
 - Develop a process to handle unexpected persons and/or security issues.
 - Provide a sign-in sheet, based on exercise registration, for access control and accountability.
- Consider exercise scope to determine occupancy requirements and local and state fire codes.

2.3. Health Considerations



- Emphasize that all participants should comply with applicable environmental, health and safety plans and procedures, per federal, state, and local plans and guidelines.
- Consider the health risks for staff and participants when developing the exercise format and expected player actions. Options to consider:
 - Break the exercise into smaller events.
 - Stagger exercise conduct to spread personnel out in space and time.
 - Use manikins to limit actors.
 - Plan for disinfection of venue and props.
 - Limit or eliminate all nonessential exercise personnel, such as observers.
- Include safety procedures in exercise documentation, such as the following:
 - Face covering and social distancing requirements.

- Pre-exercise medical screening or questionnaire expectations.
- Appropriate input from health and safety or other subject matter experts.
- Consider items to bring to the exercise:
 - Antibacterial wipes and hand sanitizer.
 - Disinfectant.
 - Flashlights.
 - Informational safety cards.
- Prepare participants and actors appropriately.
 - Consider developing waivers and the level of legal review, as required.
 - Complete any consent waivers, as required.
- Consider health measures when determining an exercise evacuation or family reunification point as part of an exercise scenario.

2.4. Real-World Incident Considerations



- Research common weather trends for exercise conduct location and time of year to include in exercise contingency plans.
- Before the exercise, provide participants with information on how to respond when a no-notice incident occurs during the exercise.
- Have an emergency medical services (EMS) team on standby to provide basic medical assistance.
 - Participating EMS individuals may also fulfill this role, if deemed appropriate.

3. Exercise Conduct

3.1. Safety and Security Considerations



- In case of a real-world emergency, assign a **safety word** to pause or cancel all exercise activity.
 - Confirm all participants have clear knowledge and understanding of when to use the word.
- Provide exercise participants with contact information for exercise staff, including the safety officer.

- Participants should include “this is an exercise” at the beginning and end of all phone, radio and written communication.
- Implement a weapons policy, if applicable.
 - Confirm that exercise participants are not carrying firearms or weapons, unless approved to do so, in accordance with exercise safety protocols and applicable federal and SLTT regulations.

3.2. Venue Access and Validation Considerations



- Control access to the exercise venue.
- Use desk or table to check in and check out all participants and register exercise participants who have not registered in advance.
 - Record full names and contact information for all attendees. This list is an accountability sheet should an emergency or need for contact tracing arise.
 - Consider contactless sign-in/sign-out and registration using an online form tool or a QR code generator, with privacy protections as appropriate. Plan multiple personnel and the method for accessing this information in case of emergency (e.g. evacuation).
- Implement measures in the safety plan to conduct health screenings at check-in, including temperature check, medical questionnaire and negative flu or health test (e.g. rapid test on-site).
- Provide hand sanitizer and antibacterial wipes to all participants.
- Provide colored wristbands to visually distinguish participants who have registered, completed a health screening and met other entry requirements.
- Provide exercise staff with reflective vests or equipment to stand out from participants.

3.3. Health Considerations



- Emphasize that participants should comply with specific social distancing, sanitizing and face covering requirements upon arrival at the exercise venue.
- Assign seating when appropriate or block off areas to ensure social distancing.
- Conduct player briefings with participating organizations prior to the exercise date, or in separate rooms, before conduct begins.
- Provide water and “grab and go” food items for actors and participants, when applicable.

- If severe and/or significant injuries occur, request additional EMS personnel by radio or through the activation of the local 9-1-1 system.

3.4. Real-World Incident Considerations



- In case of a real-world emergency, assign a **safety word** to pause or cancel all exercise activity.
 - Confirm all participants have clear knowledge and understanding of when to use the word.
- Use briefings and safety information to provide participants with information on what to do during an incident.
- If an incident occurs, notify each participant's organization after initial lifesaving and accountability measures are complete.

4. Post-Exercise Activity

4.1. Safety and Security Considerations



- Provide participants with contact information for exercise staff.
- Request feedback on how the exercise safety plan may have impacted the exercise.
- Gather all documentation left behind and shred it to safeguard organization plans and procedures.

4.2. Venue Access and Validation Considerations



- Staff at least one controlled entry/exit point to manage participants and observers until all participants have left the exercise venue.
- Conduct a check of the venue to confirm everyone has safely departed.

4.3. Health Considerations



- Disinfect all surface after the completion of the exercise, including manikins and props.

Appendix A: HSEEP Video Series

The HSEEP video series includes a video on Safe Exercise Best Practices.

HSEEP Video Series

[HSEEP Video Series - YouTube](#)