

Essential reading

Jay Levinson reviews a book that aims to help both newcomers and old hands to reap the best results from designing and running disaster planning exercises

Emergency Management Exercises – From Response to Recovery, everything you need to know to design a great exercise

RUNNING A DISASTER EXERCISE CAN be a time consuming effort, entailing extensive cost, a large measure of which is accounted for by personnel hours. Given the large investment, it is certainly worthwhile to design and run the exercise to gain the biggest advantage possible. Regina Phelps has used her extensive practical experience exactly for that purpose – to aid others, both newcomers and old hands alike – to reap the best results from designing and running disaster planning exercises.

As Phelps explains, the first step in disaster exercise planning is orientation, or introducing the disaster plan to the staff. Although orientation takes only an hour or two, the time

taken for preparation should take much longer. This is not simply a matter of standing in front of a group and reading aloud. When done properly, the presentation would include audio-

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visual material and a simple didactic exercise.

This can be followed later by drill exercises to ascertain that the basic material is learnt.

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details of disaster plans. This is the time to teach them! And to get employee feedback.

Table-top exercises are the next step. In its basic variety, a situation is presented and participants are asked to discuss the problem and present solutions. In more advanced scenarios, added information can change a developing situation and a simulation team can be used to take the place of the outside world to give additional input. In a functional exercise, action stays at the table-top level, but its increased sophistication entails more people being involved, a more complicated situation and more complex developments. Equipment and other resources can be ordered, but nothing is actually fielded.

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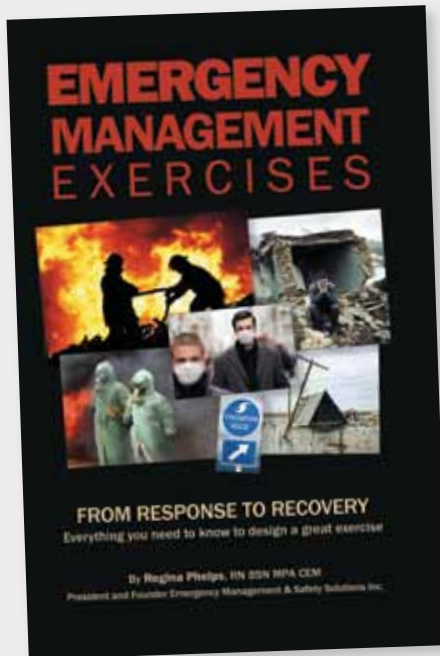


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A full scale exercise is exactly as the name suggests. People are sent into the field and equipment is put into action. A common example is that of an air crash, which aviation rules require to be conducted once a year. A multi-site exercise adds the complication of fielding teams simultaneously at more than one location. These incidents cannot be dismissed as 'exercise only'. There are numerous examples of real multi-site disasters in incidents ranging from aviation disaster, where aircraft have broken into several pieces, to major earthquakes that have left devastation across a wide area.

Does running an exercise, even just a table-top one, sound simple?

As this book shows, nothing could be further from the truth. Conducting a proper exercise that justifies the effort and yields



useful results is a professional endeavour. Phelps explains logistics, the number of participants and critical observers, as well as providing an estimate of the time required. She even gives examples of many of the forms needed to make an exercise a success.

This reviewer has conducted dozens of disaster exercises during a 20-year police career, yet this book has still provided extensive insights. It has also brought into focus many issues, such as the absolute necessity of not deviating from an exercise script and stopping an exercise temporarily to add clarifications. Furthermore, the writing style in this book is flowing and straightforward.

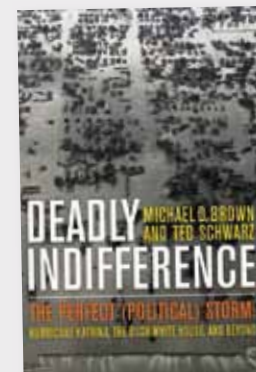
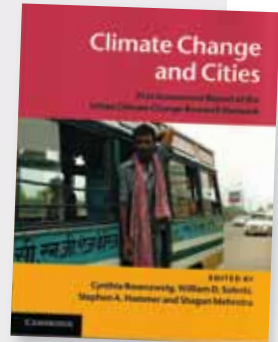
This book is certainly worthwhile reading when contemplating running an exercise. It could well mean the difference between ticking a box to have run a required exercise, and: "Now we are much better prepared if something happens."

■ **Emergency Management Exercises – From Response to Recovery**, everything you need to know to design a great exercise, by Regina Phelps, ISBN: 978-0-9831143-0-7 is available at www.chandimedia.com and www.amazon.com

Future reviews

Next issue we will be reviewing *Climate Change and Cities, the First Assessment Report of the Urban Climate Change Research Network*, edited by Cynthia Rosenzweig, William D Solecki, Stephen A Hammer and Shagun Mehrotra.

We are also planning to review *Deadly Indifference, the Perfect Political Storm: Hurricane Katrina, the Bush White House and Beyond*, by Michael D Brown and Ted Schwarz.



CRJ welcomes reviews from outside reviewers and suggestions of books to review – please contact the editor for more information. **CRJ**

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