

IDPH Drop-Site / POD Set-Up Virtual Training

Situation Manual (SitMan)

Adapted from Homeland Security Exercise and Evaluation Program (HSEEP), Volumes I - IV:
HSEEP Overview and Exercise Program Management, revised February 2007¹



Introduction

This exercise covers the logistics, communication, set-up and design of Illinois Drop-Sites / Points of Dispensing (PODs) by allowing participants the opportunity to conduct a Drop-Site/POD deployment in a virtual environment.

I. Background

Terrorism

Of the many potential disasters faced today, terrorist attacks in particular have become an increasing concern. The bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City dispelled the myth that domestic terrorism could not occur in America. The attacks on September 11, 2001 brought national attention to the threat of international terrorism. Since then, communities have improved preparedness for an array of terrorist attack scenarios including chemical release, biological and agricultural attacks, and bombings of every size. Though no attacks on American soil have occurred since September 11, 2001, attacks in Spain and England, as well as throughout the Middle East, are stark reminders to remain vigilant in the fight against terrorism.¹

¹ Homeland Security Exercise and Evaluation Program (HSEEP), Volumes IV, HSEEP Overview and Exercise Program Management, revised February 2007, pg. 1

Bio-Terrorism

In 2001, US educated al-Qaeda and Jemaah Islamiya (JI) operatives attempted to cultivate anthrax spores in a laboratory near the Kandahar Airport in Afghanistan. The cultivation of anthrax spores requires minimal equipment and level of knowledge on par with a first-year collegiate education in microbiology. However, to make an aerosol or 'weaponized' form of anthrax that is suitable for biological warfare requires extensive training and highly advanced equipment. However, this additional degree of difficulty does not preclude terrorists from obtaining weapons grade anthrax, as evidenced by its use in the 2001 anthrax mail attacks against U.S. Senators in Washington, DC. Lacking the ability to produce the weapons grade anthrax themselves, the possibility remains that terrorists could steal or purchase on the black market weaponized anthrax. Weaponized anthrax was produced in huge quantities by the biological weapons programs of many nations around the globe, most notably the U.S. and the former U.S.S.R., and securing these stockpiles from theft or illegal sale is a serious concern worldwide.²

Public Health Response

Because of the nature of their work, it is often healthcare professionals who are the first to recognize that a public health emergency has occurred. They have become true first responders. Success in saving lives and mitigating disasters depends on their level of preparedness. Plans alone are not enough. The new force of public health first responders must practice and exercise to test plans and discover better practices.

The ability to identify an incident and rapidly set in motion a response is a key factor in an effective plan. The clinical features of the next influenza pandemic cannot be predicted. Even as the next pandemic begins and spreads, the characteristic features might change, particularly if successive waves occur over several months. Given this potential for a dynamic clinical picture, it is even more important for clinicians, public health, and their partners to work together to develop a strategy that extends well beyond health and medical boundaries. Response to a public health emergency must also include a sustainable critical infrastructure, private-sector activities, the movement of goods and services, and economic and security considerations.

This will involve various agencies that may have little experience working together. Coordination among these diverse entities is a critical challenge that must be met. Well-planned integration among health agencies, emergency management, hospitals, law enforcement, local authorities, and other entities that may be called on will help ensure a timely and appropriate response.

The POD is one of the key operations that can be used as a rapid response to many public health disasters. Biological agents may change, the medicines may change, locations may change, and even the items distributed may change (drugs, food, clothing, etc.) but the processes implemented in this exercise will remain true to the protocols developed ahead of time.³

² Homeland Security Exercise and Evaluation Program (HSEEP), Volumes IV, HSEEP Overview and Exercise Program Management, revised February 2007, pg. 1.

³ (Taken from Homeland Security Exercise and Evaluation Program (HSEEP), Volumes IV, HSEEP Overview and Exercise Program Management, revised February 2007, pg. 2).

Simulations

Wikipedia defines a Virtual World as “A computer generated simulated environment intended for its users to inhabit and interact via avatars. This habitation usually is represented in the form of two or three-dimensional graphical representations of humanoids (or other graphical or text-based avatars). Some, but not all, virtual worlds allow for multiple users.”

A simulated environment, such as a virtual world, is a method for implementing exercises in a computer generated environment. For example, once participants are presented with a scenario, players can electronically manipulate their “replicated” environment to achieve their desired decision-making processes. Simulation tools can incorporate built-in responses to players’ decisions, providing players with instant feedback on the outcomes of their choices and the underlying reasons for those results.

Benefits of Simulations in Exercises

The importance of exercises is inherent to the successful outcome of an actual emergency response. A well prepared public health emergency staff can only be achieved with thorough use of multiple training exercises, planning, and preparation practices. Simulations and modeling can help identify problems before conducting a live exercise. One of the most effective simulation tools is the virtual environment. Virtual environments can be invaluable in allowing participants to extensively contemplate the numerous details for preparation of methods, availability of resources, and planning procedures for a live drill and/or actual emergency situation.

Simulations vs. Live Drills

Live drills are time-consuming and do not allow the flexibility for accurate planning that a simulation can provide. In a simulated environment, using virtual resources can greatly reduce actual costs and expenses.

Some of the most valuable benefits to simulations vs. live drills are:

- Consideration of the details in planning
- Time-saving and cost-savings of live exercises
- More accurate predictions of SNS Distribution capabilities
- No need for actual “bodies” for simulating flow in a POD (PPH)
- Evaluation of existing plan

Although live exercises are an irreplaceable component of any preparedness program, simulations are a cost effective way to understand the resources available. Not to mention how difficult, if not impossible, it is to get the number of volunteers necessary to simulate a live event.

SNS simulations can work hand-in-hand with live exercises. One doesn't replace the other. There is a clear and invaluable role for SNS simulations in the training and evaluation process. Best used before an exercise, a simulation's versatility allows participants to stress the exercise to reveal the breaking points. Afterwards, with the use of data collection, whether it is audio/video or other visual method, to project a drop site or dispensing center's capabilities and existing plan. Once you have completed and revised your existing plan, you can conduct new exercises virtually to evaluate that plan with minimal effort.

II. Exercise Objectives

Purpose

(Command Benchmark Exercise) The purpose of the Drop-Site/ POD Exercise is to evaluate current response concepts, plans, and capabilities for responding to an anthrax event in Illinois. The Virtual World simulation can provide immediate feedback to players within the context of a given scenario. Goals include identifying any flaws and/or benefits to your existing plans and afterwards, reviewing and re-evaluating the inherent outcomes.

(Coordinator Staff Exercise) The purpose of the Drop-Site/POD Exercise is to practice implementing concepts, plans, and capabilities for responding to an anthrax event in the Chicago area. The Virtual World simulation can provide immediate feedback to players within the context of a given scenario. Goals include understanding protocols, applying them to a given environment and situation, identifying any confusing instruction materials, and taking ownership of the coordination plan so that it can be implemented in a real situation.

Scope

The scope of this exercise will focus on public health staff roles in response to a large airborne anthrax bio-terror attack. The exercise focuses on the transport of SNS stockpile medications to the various drop sites in Illinois, the handling, security and storage of these materials, the transport of the medications to the PODs, and the setting up of PODs. More important than minute details are decision-making processes and implementation procedures effecting functionality. The emphasis should be on coordination, integration, problem identification, and problem resolution.

III. Exercise Guidelines

- This is an open, low-stress, no-fault environment. Varying viewpoints, even disagreements, are expected.
- Respond based on your knowledge of current plans and capabilities (i.e., you should use only existing assets) and insights derived from training.
- Decisions are not precedent setting and may not reflect your organization's final position on a given issue. This is an opportunity to discuss and present multiple options and possible solutions.

- Problem identification is not as valuable as suggestions and recommended actions that could improve response and preparedness efforts. Problem-solving efforts should be the focus. Look for best practices and recommendations to help in improving the simulation or the applied plan.

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 events occur as they are presented.
- There is no “hidden agenda”, nor any trick questions.
- All players receive information at the same time.
- The tools are standardized but evolving.

Rules of Conduct

- Respond based on your own knowledge and training of your current plan and capabilities.
- Elements not present in the simulation can be added later upon recommendation.
- Virtual environments allow for quick implementation of anything you can imagine. If you choose to add an asset not currently in your actual plan, make sure to make a note to consider adding it to your plan.
- Make decisions based on the circumstances presented.
- Assume the cooperation and support of other exercise players/responders and other agencies.
- The written material (provided by the facilitator) should serve as a basis for discussion.
- Make notes of any areas that are confusing or may require additions.