



Top Five Lessons Learned from Exercises

- 1. Testing your communication methods is essential to ensure all pieces are operational.**
 - In many cases, the methods of communication that an organization was counting on using were not available or operational at the time of the exercise. For example, batteries in the walkie talkies reserved for emergencies were depleted, or the walkie talkies were not located where they were supposed to be, etc.
 - Critical decision-makers were not notified in a timely manner; therefore, they were not available to participate in some of the first and most important decisions in the emergency response process. These decisions had to be made by the charge nurse instead.
 - Delivering a consistent message utilizing the existing plans proved to be difficult – most often the situation turned into a game of “telephone” and the message got diluted or changed as it moved throughout the organization – especially when phone trees, or other similar communication methods were used.
- 2. Incident Command Teams (ICT’s) are key components to successful emergency response.**
 - This model of managing an emergency event marries communication plans with the efficiency and effectiveness of checklists and creates a built-in hierarchy of decision-making, regardless of who is filling each role at the time. Utilizing ICT’s has proven to set the stage for effective emergency response time and time again.
- 3. Our drills shined light on significant inefficiencies requiring review and discussion.**
 - Searching rooms/areas multiple times
 - Redundancies of who people report to – creating many “bottle-necks” of information
 - Staff were found standing around not knowing what they were supposed to do or who they were supposed to report to
 - Multiple people contacting various agencies or vendors with no clear direction of who was supposed to contact who, etc.
- 4. Evening and weekend emergency plans were lacking.**
 - Many organizations were not prepared or had not adequately trained staff on how to handle emergencies during “off” times when the normal chains of command were not available or present. Much of this was because a majority of the night/weekend staff were new to the organization and had not received the training that other employees had.
- 5. Emergency response checklists provide value over those written in paragraphs.**
 - The use of checklists fits hand-in-hand with the use of the Incident Command System as well as an efficient communication process, however, those who have seen the most improvement and successful exercises, have created and utilized checklists much more effectively than those who have relied on their policies and procedures written in paragraph form.