

Partners in Preparedness

ICF International has collaborated with a number of states to develop and test components of their emergency management portfolios. For example, ICF has partnered with one Midwestern state in the creation, conduct, and evaluation of tabletop and full-scale exercises, including the nation's first comprehensive, near real-time test of the Strategic National Stockpile (SNS).

In the first year of this partnership, ICF assisted in a two-day Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) exercise, followed by a one-day evaluation conference. The primary objectives were to test newly developed procedures to receive, distribute, and dispense SNS supplies in response to a statewide bioterrorism incident.

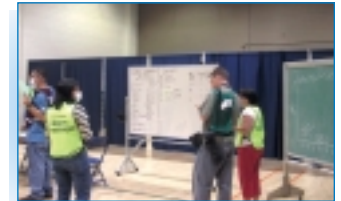
The next year, ICF provided technical support for the development and execution of a two-phase tabletop and functional exercise simulating mass casualties from a WMD chemical-biological agent. The purpose was to test local public health plans for deployment of SNS supplies.

The following year, the state needed assistance in conducting a virtual functional exercise in six health regions over a three-week period. The goal was to test the state and local public health and medical plans for response to pandemic influenza. Representatives from local public health departments, emergency medical services, hospitals, and emergency management agencies from across the state participated. The "virtual" nature of the exercise allowed participants to work from their normal place of businesses by responding to e-mail, telephone, or fax messages through a simulation cell. A multifaceted, Web-based software package was used in the exercise and is now being implemented for regular and emergency use by state and county agencies. The exercise was followed by a comprehensive, one-day evaluation conference.

The most recent project was designed to incrementally test the advancement of state and local pandemic influenza

plans to the point of making a formal request to the SNS. Major objectives of the exercise series included testing the SNS process and the state's incident command structure under the National Incident Management System (NIMS). Additional goals included tests of communications technologies, public information/risk communication capabilities, and health and medical surge issues.

A major component of this project was an avian influenza pandemic tabletop exercise, which involved more than 700 representatives from multiple emergency response disciplines in five consecutive regional exercises. A subsequent full-scale exercise was designed to involve more than 200 emergency responders and pick up the scenario from the end of the tabletop exercise. It included opening multiple emergency operations centers in counties around the state and the activation of the state-level emergency operations center. The exercise design also included establishing a single SNS distribution node for vaccine distribution.



Tests and exercises using tabletop or virtual functional techniques are essential components of a successful planning process. In addition to the personnel training benefits related to the exercise of a plan, a good exercise provides an essential mechanism for discovering and correcting deficiencies in the plan. Because of our ongoing partnership, this state's effort in all-hazards preparedness, including pandemic plans, continues to evolve with lessons learned.

For more information on ICF's homeland security and emergency management exercises, contact info@icfi.com or 1.703.934.3603, or visit homelandsecurity.icfi.com.

Perspectives™

